

Helle Vandkilde review of Simonsen 2017 for submission to *Antiquity*

John Simonsen. *Daily life at the Turn of the Neolithic. A comparative study of longhouses with sunken floors at Resengaard and nine other settlements in the Limfjord region, South Scandinavia*. 2017. Aarhus. Jutland Archaeological Society, Museum Salling and Aarhus University Press. 978-87-93423-14-5. £48.00.

Simonsen's book is the pinnacle of almost forty years of archaeological research scrutinising final Stone Age and earliest Bronze Age longhouses and settlements in the Limfjord region of Denmark c. 2600-1500 BCE. This extraordinary achievement is entrenched in years of fieldwork campaigns led by Simonsen himself. The scientifically, and literally, heavy milestone was defended successfully September 2017, for the Danish higher doctoral degree in philosophy at Aarhus University. The habilitation comprises five lengthy chapters in addition to appendices and catalogues.

Chapter 1 sets the scene with aims, methodologies, and research history. It is remarkable how two-ailed longhouses occur throughout and beyond Scandinavia whilst the characteristic sunken-floor variety with turf-built walls is a Jutlandish invention apparently changing very little over several centuries. This tradition likely commenced during the Single Grave Culture 2800-2350 BCE (= Corded Ware) and flourished during the Beaker Period (the Late Neolithic) until 1600-1500 BCE when the rise of the Nordic Bronze Age introduced three-ailed longhouses standing tall and impressive in the landscape. Sunken-floor longhouses are known from 200 sites so far and predominantly from Jutland. *Chapter 2* is the engine of the entire study, with a core of 26 houses from Resengaard and 17 houses from the central Limfjord area including the Beaker period. The fulcrum is indeed the fully excavated settlement at the low hill of Resengaard, which due to unusually well preserved house constructions has provided much new knowledge about daily living and the maintenance and rhythms of tradition. The life-cycle biography of major longhouse plots is in clear suggestion of an intrinsic cycle of abandoning the old house and building a replica house elsewhere on the hill with generational intervals of c. 25 years. Simonsen convincingly argues that only one household (one major longhouse and 1-2 attached small-houses) existed at a time. This means that we can follow generational shifts, cycles and continuities on the same hill over three centuries. Based on abundant pottery in each longhouse and coupled to 14^C , *Chapter 3* makes a case for a three-phased pottery-based chronology applicable to post-Beaker settlements c. 1800-1500 BCE (albeit with clear threads back into the Beaker Period) valid mostly for Jutland. In concert with the demonstrated life-biography of each longhouse, the pottery chronology in fact supports the recurring movement of longhouses along the perimeter of the Resengaard hill, approximately twelve times until around 1500 BCE when the hill seems abandoned temporarily. *Chapter 4* dives into the daily life activities of the households inhabiting longhouses spread across the archipelago of the central Limfjord region. Many details make it possible to chart both seasonal and all year activities, indoor and outdoor. The detailed spatial analysis of house finds and their contexts reveals well-ordered communities engaged in a wide array of indoor activities allocated particular spaces on the floor whilst the fertile hill also accommodated crop agriculture and with nearby meadows serving as grazing for livestock. *Chapter 5* is devoted to social interpretations of longhouse economies in terms of an exchange system linking the many single farmsteads spread across the archipelago. Due to differences among the region's longhouses in regard to the attached activities it is argued that household production worked in a tiered manner. All households did basic activities such as agriculture, livestock herding, and making simple flint tools. Relatively many households produced woollen textiles, leatherwork, coarse pottery

and small-scale beer brewing (based on moderate quantities of charred cereals), whilst only a small minority of households produced exquisite flint daggers, metal items, fine ware pottery, large-scale beer brewing (based on large amounts of charred cereals on floors) or collected and worked amber for trading. Surely, the system of single farmsteads must have necessitated strict rules for social interaction and biological reproduction. Inspired by anthropological classics such as notably Malinowski (1922), Mauss (1954), and Bohannan (1955), Simonsen advocates a non-hierarchical albeit highly competitive social system.

The book comprises a number of highlights and achievements related to those already mentioned. A great strength is the rich nuanced documentation that the characteristic sunken floor area occupying the eastern half of the two-ailed longhouses were dwelling spaces for humans and not meant for stabling of livestock. Remnants of activities pertain *only* to the sunken floor area whereas the western ground-level floor part might have contained storage of leaf fodder, hay and heather. The function of these sunken-floor spaces has been discussed throughout the history of research since the seminal discovery of the Myrhøj houses (Jensen 1973), but it is only with the latest contributions that living space has been opted as the most likely explanation (Sarauw 2006). Simonsen moreover makes a case for turf-built walls as an integral part of a building tradition for sunken-floor houses and numerous other observations not previously made. The best preserved fossil floors show a subdivision of domestic space, which tallies with well-ordered daily routines in a small-scale peasant economy with long-term continuity; i.e. a robust tradition maintained by a number of in-house activities: flint-working, and polishing/grinding, drying-roasting-charring of cereals, cooking-heating (scorched stone patches), cooking-pottery handling, scraping, hammering-crushing, cutting with knives, and weaving, presumably in addition to storing stocks in pit cellars. Heating through scorched stones is preferred to open hearths, which are rare or non-existent. Handling of manifold cereals *inter alia* relates to beer brewing on quite a large scale taking place in floor pits. Besides, the seeds of weeds, hazelnuts and heather sprigs formed part of the diet and economy.

The large amounts of pottery at Resengaard form the scaffold of a pot-based chronology, which is a much needed instrument to date other settlements more precisely. At Resengaard pot assemblages are uniquely tied to individual longhouses, hence suggesting a sequence of houses replacing each other in time. It requires however a well trained eye to actually recognise the flow of the pot sequence and to distinguish diagnostic pot profiles. For this reason one might have wished the chronology of pottery profiles much more integrated with the well-established sequence of flint dagger types, ^{14}C dates and the introduction of a copper-based metallurgy; apparently a late occurrence in this region datable to just prior to the closure of two-ailed long-house tradition around 1500 BCE (ignoring scanty evidence for a Bell Beaker derived production of copper and gold items). By comparison, metallurgy was established already around 2000 BCE in eastern Denmark and Scania where the social structure appears to have been markedly different on a number of parameters (Vandkilde 2017). In addition, multivariate statistics would have done wonders to document, rather than describe, developments over time. Nonetheless, this pot-based typo-chronology moves research well beyond the state of the art with value for future archaeological investigations.

Short- or long-range movements of Bronze Age farmsteads within restricted geographies are very often assumed (e.g. Bech et al. 2018), but Simonsen is the first to actually document and detail such a system of rotation. At Resengaard few longhouses could have existed at the same time. In all likelihood it was, as Simonsen argues, one and the same household which reproduced itself over

twelve generations on the hill in this coastal and rather densely inhabited landscape. The organisation of the Resengaard farmstead and its reproduction over time – in some sort of a systematic alternation with fields and grazing areas – probably was a widespread model for dwelling in and occupying a landscape c. 2400-1500 BCE, and even later. This implied that abandoned houses decayed and became part of an integrated and coherent socio-economic system which comprised – apart from the location of the old and the new dwelling – strategies for rubbish disposal, agriculture, and livestock. This makes me wonder which kind of kinship system facilitated the maintenance of such a single farmstead, which must necessarily have been socially and biologically interlinked with other farmsteads, nearby and perhaps farther away. The book does not seek to clarify reasons for the onset of the two-ailed sunken-floor tradition, nor how it may have responded to the overriding phases of metallurgical implementation, such as notably c. 2000 BCE and again 1600-1500 BCE when the Nordic Bronze Age had its final breakthrough. Perhaps the interruption of the centuries' long habitation on the Resengaard hill and elsewhere, and the onset of an entirely new housing tradition, the three-ailed longhouse, should be considered in this light? One can always wish for more and great results merit new research questions.

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