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# The Study of the Agrarian History of Denmark: a Brief Introduction to the Literature

By CLAUS BJØRN

WITH the growing interest in comparative history, and the important connections between this country and the changes in Danish farming, readers of THE AGRICULTURAL HISTORY REVIEW may find the following brief discussion of the literature on Danish agrarian history of value.

The study of the history of Denmark in the last half-century has shown a turning-away from the state-centred political and diplomatic history towards a growing interest in the history of the different elements of Danish society. It is a natural consequence of this development that a number of historians in recent decades have taken up the field of Danish agrarian history. A break-through took place in the late 1930's and early 1940's when a considerable number of books and important articles were published. Hans Jensen (1890–1945) concentrated on the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—the period of the great land reforms. The major contribution of Hans Fussing (1897–1956) was his treatises of manorial farming, and the relations between squire and leaseholders in the seventeenth century. F. Skrubbeltrang (1900–) has studied the history of the cottagers between 1660 and 1800, and in several articles he treated methodically the quantitative sources of eighteenth-century agricultural history. C. A. Christensen (1906–) is a specialist of the agrarian history of the Middle Ages, while Gunnar Olsen (1910–62) studied the seventeenth century, his principal work being a study of the balance between manorial and peasant farming from 1525 to 1774. C. Rise Hansen (1911–) also studied seventeenth-century peasant conditions, and Sigurd Jensen (1912–) concentrated on the economy of the peasants in the late eighteenth century. In this context Axel Steensberg (1908–) should be mentioned as a stimulating force in the study of the technical–ethnological aspects of past Danish agriculture.

Peasant economy and the peasant community from the late Middle Ages to the beginning of the nineteenth century have been the prevailing interests of the historians mentioned above. Their approach—though of course there were many differences—might be described as more sociological than economic. A review of some of the important contributions of this generation from the 1940's is given by Axel Steensberg in *Modern Research in the Agrarian History of Denmark* (L.A.O.S., Stockholm, 1951, pp. 187–201). A number of younger historians have taken up the field of agricultural history, many of them taught by F. Skrubbeltrang, who was associate professor of agrarian history at the University of Copenhagen from 1956 to 1971. In general, the younger historians have concentrated on what more precisely should be defined as the study of the history of the different elements of agrarian society in Denmark.

As an introduction to the review of literature of Danish agrarian history in other languages than Danish—predominantly English—I should add a little information about publications on Danish history in general. Since 1953 the review periodical *Excerpta Nordica Historica* has published the titles, and in many cases also a summary, of all books and articles of some significance. In 1950 *Historisk Tidsskrift*, the leading periodical of historical science in Denmark, began to present summaries of published articles. The German-reading public will find many Danish historical publications competently reviewed in *Zeitschrift für Schleswig-Holsteinische Geschichte*. Today summaries are published of most doctoral theses and many other publications of scientific interest, and as in the two periodicals just mentioned, English is the language normally used. There are examples of summaries guiding the reader not only on the main points of the book or article but also on the documentation. *The Scandinavian Economic History Review* (abbreviated *S.E.H.R.*), founded in 1952, has included some articles of agrarian history and several instructive reviews. However, though since 1952 the editing of this periodical has been in Danish hands, Danish historians are not the most numerous among the contributors. Povl Bagge, 'Die Lage der Geschichtsforschung in Dänemark', *Historisches Zeitschrift*, 1970, Heft 211/1, is relevant to mention here as giving a bird's-eye view of the study of history in Denmark since the 1930's.

In spite of the date of publication, A. Nielsen (ed.), *Dänische Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, Jena, 1933, is still considered a good introduction to the agrarian history of Denmark. The Middle Ages are treated by Erik Arup, and the period from about 1500 to the late nineteenth century by O. H. Larsen. This publication should be supplemented by F. Skrubbeltrang, *Agricultural Development and Rural Reform in Denmark*, F.A.O. Agric. Studies no. 22, Rome, 1953, describing the history of the agrarian society of Denmark from about 1750—the beginning of the great land reforms—to the middle twentieth century. The book consists in part of a general historical description, together with a fairly detailed history of a typical rural community. Though meant for a wider public, it has been written with full regard to recent research in the field of agricultural history, to a great extent carried out by the author himself. For the period from 1750 to 1940 this book should be regarded as the standard text on agricultural conditions of Denmark. Einar Jensen, *Danish Agriculture*, Washington, 1937, is as the subtitle indicates "a description and economic analysis centring on the free trade epoch, 1870–1930," and bears the stamp of the author's profession as an economist.

Though not purely agricultural in scope, attention should be called to two publications concerning Danish prices. Astrid Friis and K. Glamann, *A History of Prices and Wages 1600–1800 I*, London, 1958, is an important contribution to the economic history of Denmark, and contains an elaborate introduction to the price material. Jørgen Pedersen and O. Strange Petersen, *An Analysis of Price Behaviour 1855–1913*, Copenhagen and London, 1938, is also a valuable source to mention here. The gap between the periods covered in the two publications, from 1800 to 1855, still remains to be filled.

An aspect of Danish agrarian society widely known outside Denmark is agricultural co-operation. A book written by Harold Faber, the long-time Danish state adviser in London, *Agricultural Cooperation in Denmark*, 2nd edn, London, 1931, is a sober and well-balanced description. The Central Committee of Agricultural Cooperation in Denmark is now preparing a publication in English with a historical introduction taking the account up to date.

The trade in agricultural products is one of the main themes in Birgit Nüchel Thomsen and Brinley Thomas, *Dansk-engelsk samhandel 1661-1963/Anglo-Danish Trade 1661-1963*, Aarhus, 1966. The part of the book written by Professor Thomas, treating the period since 1914, is in English, and there is also a very detailed summary in English of the discussion by Mrs Nüchel Thomsen covering the rest of the period. This summary will enable the English reader to understand the tables and figures in the text, as well as the development of Anglo-Danish trade relations since the seventeenth century. Attention should be called to a competent review by E. Helmer Pedersen, *S.E.H.R.*, xviii, 1970.

The founding of the Danish village system is treated by F. Hastrup, *Danske Landsbytyper [Danish Village Types]*, Aarhus, 1964, having an English as well as a German summary. The agrarian crisis of the late Middle Ages can be studied in articles by C. A. Christensen in *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 11. række, 6. bind, 12. række, 1. bind, 1962-4, both with summaries. The main thesis of Erik Ulsig, 'Danske Adelsgodser i Middelalderen' ['Great Danish Estates in Middle Ages'], Copenhagen, 1968, is summarized in English in pp. 373-90 of the book. The agricultural history of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is dominated by the nobility and their economy. E. Ladewig Petersen has produced *The Crisis of the Danish Nobility 1580-1660*, 1967, published by the Odense University Press, and a translation into French can be found in *Annales*, 1968, pp. 1253 ff. Svend Gissel, *Landgilde og Udsæd [Manorial Rents and Crops]*, Copenhagen, 1969, has a German résumé, and in *Geographische Zeitschrift*, Beihefte 1968, the same author has published 'Die Dreifelderwirtschaft auf Seeland bis 1700'. Gunnar Olsen's *Hovedgaard og Bondegaard [Manor and Peasant Farm]*, Copenhagen, 1958, centring on the seventeenth century, has an English summary and is reviewed in *S.E.H.R.*, viii, 1960. An English summary is included also in H. Fussing, *Stiernholm Len*, Copenhagen, 1951, a study of the local administration of the seventeenth century, which has much information about the conditions of farming and the rural population.

C. Rise Hansen and Axel Steensberg, *Jordfordeling og Udsifting [Land Distribution and Enclosure]*, Copenhagen, 1951, covering the period from the land taxation in 1682 to 1770, has an extraordinarily long and instructive summary in English, pp. 423-85. This summary contains in fact a vocabulary of Danish agricultural terms translated into English. The social development of the tenancy system in the eighteenth century has been studied by F. Skrubbeltrang, who has published a survey of his research in 'Developments in Tenancy in the 18th Century as a Move towards Peasant Proprietorship', *S.E.H.R.*, x, 1962. Recently H. C. Johansen has written about the population structure in the rural communities in 'Some

Aspects of Danish Rural Population Structure in 1787', *S.E.H.R.*, xx, 1972, based on the first detailed census in Denmark. Holger Munk has studied the social and economic conditions of a special group of peasants: *Rytterbonden* [*The Cavalry farmer*], Copenhagen, 1958, also with an English summary.

For the nineteenth and twentieth centuries there are but few studies to mention. The history of heath cultivation in Denmark has been treated by F. Skrubbeltrang, *Det indvundne Danmark* [*The reclaimed Denmark*], Copenhagen, 1966, reviewed in *S.E.H.R.*, xv, 1967, and in *The Economic History Review*, xxi, 1968; and also by E. Helmer Pedersen in *Hedesagen under forvandling* [*The Heath question under Transformation*], Copenhagen, 1970, the latter volume having a résumé in English. Holger Gad, *Befolkning og arbejdskraft-problemer i dansk landbrug I-II* [*Changes in Population and Labour problems in Danish Agriculture*], Aarhus, 1956-7, is an economist's view of this aspect of agrarian history since the late eighteenth century and is also summarized in English.

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NOTES AND COMMENTS *continued from page 49*

6 March Mr T. A. B. Corley (University of Reading): The British biscuit industry, 1800-1970.

13 March Mr A. Pittwood (University of Reading): Rural industries in England and Wales since 1920.

THE WINTER CONFERENCE

The one-day conference of the B.A.H.S., was held at University College, London, on Saturday, 1 December 1973, on the subject of 'Changing patterns of diet since 1800'. The subject was introduced by Professor John Burnett (Brunel University) who spoke on 'The nineteenth century: general influences on dietary change', in which he discussed the major determinants affecting the gradual improvement in diet during the century. He was followed by Dr D. J. Oddy (Ealing Technical College) who considered 'Trends in working-class food consumption, 1790-1913', based on the analysis of diets by calory, protein, and other nutritive components. This showed that even by 1913 the poorer sections of the working-class still had diets deficient in many respects, especially women and children. There was a marked absence of fresh fruit and vegetables in all working-class diets. After lunch Dr E. J. T. Collins spoke on 'Old wine and

new bottles: cereal consumption in Britain in the twentieth century'. He showed that contrary to the expected trend the proportion of income spent on cereals has not declined owing to new and attractive ways of processing and marketing them. He illustrated this from the history of the Hovis flour firm and the various (mostly American) breakfast cereal firms. Studies of old advertisements were skilfully used to embellish a paper which was amusing as well as informative. This was followed by a lively panel discussion which showed that there is much interest and research in this expanding subject.

FUROR HORTENSIS

*Furor Hortensis* is the title of a volume of essays on the history of the English landscape garden to be published in memory of H. F. Clark, the distinguished landscape architect. The book will be published early in 1974 in a limited subscription edition, and proceeds will be devoted to the establishment of an H. F. Clark Memorial Prize in Landscape Architecture at the University of Edinburgh. The essays will deal with Switzer, Bridgeman, Sir John Clerk, Kent, Gilpin, Repton, and Loudon; the editor is Peter Willis. Subscriptions (£6 per copy) should be sent to Elysium Press Ltd, 24 Castle St, Edinburgh EH2 3HT.