

From Jutland to Jordan

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Peder Mortensen's contribution to Near Eastern archaeology is, no doubt, familiar to the authors and readers of this volume. In order to fully appreciate his archaeological work, I find it necessary first to examine another aspect, namely what he has done for Prehistoric archaeology in Denmark.

His road from Jutland to Jordan has been neither straight nor narrow. His deep fascination with the Near East and his unquenchable quest for insight into its material culture have drawn him to research topics ever further from each other and from his original introduction to the Bronze Age of Bahrain.

Born and bred in Jutland, his home for the first 20 years, he began already in his student years to journey to the Near East. He worked in the Gulf with P.V. Glob 1956-62 and, in connection with trips home, took advantage of the opportunity to visit other Near and Middle East countries, finding his future love for their Prehistory and Islamic Past in this way. Iran, Iraq, Palestine and Syria became familiar environments; he lived for periods (with his family) in the village of Kahreh in Luristan and has studied at the various Foreign institutes in Amman, Baghdad, Beirut and Jerusalem, and with the Franciscans at Mount Nebo.

After an interlude in Copenhagen at the National Museum Peder returned to Jutland and stayed there for nearly 30 years, giving some of his best years to university teaching and to the Prehistoric Museum at Moesgård. The Near East was, however, always present in his mind and plans. Time and again he returned for fieldwork or periods of study. That Jordan should become the latest location for Peder's fieldwork was the result of having found a congenial environment (and of course because of the political development that he, as well as so many of his contemporaries, have had to cope with).

Peder began in Århus as a student of Prehistoric Archaeology in 1953 and has described his experience and first encounter with the charismatic if rather unorthodox professor (even by the standards of the time), P.V. Glob, who, having told the freshman what to read, disappeared immediately to the Gulf, only to return months later (Mortensen 1981a). And in this case the method worked!



Fig. 1. First dig abroad, at Kvamsøy, Norway 1954, unknown photographer.

This was indeed a somewhat ‘special version’ of how archaeology professors tended to receive their new (and few) students who had turned up at the beginning of term in early September with great expectations only to be told that September was for digging and that teaching would first begin in October.

Well, we either followed our masters into the field or busied ourselves other-



Fig. 2. The Danes are coming, albeit upheld en route. The Bahrein team of archaeologists waiting in the Oriental Palace Hotel, Kuwait in 1959, from left Knud Riisgaard, Harald Andersen, Hellmuth Andersen, Peder and at the far end P.V. Glob and the ethnographer Klaus Ferdinand, unknown photographer.

wise. Exams were only taken when student and professor agreed that now was the time – perhaps after eight years, but often after many more years. Peder set the record at seven years, taking his MA in June 1960.

During those seven years he managed to excavate a Neolithic barrow in Denmark with the by then earliest traces of ploughing with the ard – still used in the Near East when we began to work there. He typically let another publish this important novelty (Kjærøum 1954). Poul Kjærøum was in charge of another excavation in which Peder participated, the megalithic complex at Tustrup. Another excavation, in which Peder was in charge and directed a group of amateurs during three periods, was an Iron Age village that contained well-preserved house remains (Thomsen 1959). Bahrein, which entered Peder's 'constellation' in 1956 (Mortensen 1956), continued for decades to be the annual focus of a great number of Scandinavian archaeologists and artists. The Barbar temple, for example was where Peder did his main work with Hellmuth Andersen (Mortensen 1971b-c).

Peder Mortensen was exceptional in another way. He moved to the University of Copenhagen in 1956, and studied there for a couple of years. The collec-

Fig. 3.

Showing the Barbar temple, Bahrein. December 1961, unknown photographer.

**Fig. 4.**

Studying the section in the trench at Tepe Guran, a favourite occupation. He is wearing the Luri felt coat which had its use in the wet early spring. Photographer: Jørgen Meldgaard, April 1963.



Fig. 5. Tea on the mound, morning break on Tepe Guran, from left Peder, the author, Erik Ejrnæs and Erik Brinch Petersen. Photographer: Jørgen Meldgaard, May 1963.



Fig. 6. A contemplative Peder Mortensen above the Hulailan plain, enjoying the beauty of the Luristan landscape or planning future fieldwork? Photographer: Jørgen Meldgaard, May 1963. Note the bridge over the Saimarreh – the Kampsax road that brought us to Luristan.





Fig. 7. A rare occasion – not to be repeated – Peder mounted for the return trip from the excavation of Tepe Guran to the expedition house. Photographer: the author, May 16th 1963.



Fig. 8. Lecturing at Teheran University, 1977. Unknown photographer.

tions at the National Museum offered a much better opportunity for the study of artefacts than the provincial museums. He took his MA examination at the University of Aarhus with Professor Glob. After his exam he became an Assistant Curator at the Classical and Near Eastern department of the National Museum, but this proved not to be his happiest period.

When Peder finally returned to Århus in 1968, at the request of Glob's successor, Ole Klindt-Jensen, it was as a teacher of Theory and Near Eastern Prehistory at the University of Aarhus. This subject was obligatory for the students, who otherwise were taught European and, especially, Danish Prehistory. The introduction of agriculture was a favourite topic, after his own work on Tell Shimshara (Mortensen 1970) and his excavation at Tepe Guran 1963. In 1978 he became Reader in Near Eastern Archaeology – the first full time teaching post in this field in Denmark. When the Carlsberg Foundation asked this young Magister to publish the material from the Danish salvage excavation at Shimshara, it involved him in what was to become central to his research for many years – the incipient agriculture of the foothills of the Zagros mountains.

He was Dean of the Faculty of Humanities from 1978 – 1981 and for eight years represented archaeology in the Danish Research Council for the Human-

ities. In 1982 he succeeded Ole Klindt-Jensen as Director of the Prehistoric Museum at Moesgård (Mortensen 1981b).

During the period from 1979 – 1996 Peder also managed to keep the Near Eastern side going, working hard to ensure the publication of, among others the Danish expeditions to the Gulf. His ability and his connections – as well as his will to assist others, made him a valued fund-raiser and organiser for the Danish Hama excavations, the publication of which had been underway so long that a serious impediment arose with regard to extra financial assistance from the otherwise generous Carlsberg foundation. Peder also did a lot of work to help Diana Kirkbride and further her work on Beidha (Bird 1989). He also began his latest fieldwork, the survey on Mount Nebo in Jordan (Mortensen 1995; Mortensen & Thuesen 1999).

His interests have gradually expanded – from the Neolithic to the Palaeolithic – the earlier the better! He seems to run across hand axes and chopper tools whenever he takes a stroll, be it in Jordan, Luristan or on Crete. Flintwork is indeed one of his special fields of interest, no doubt inspired by his Danish background (Mortensen 1971a & d; 1973b; 2002). It is a clear recognition from his colleagues that Peder has been asked to study the “chipped stone industry” of several of the great sites like Hacilar (Mortensen 1970b) Beidha (1971d), Chogha Mami (1973a) Tamerkhan (2002 – *cf.* Oates this volume). At the other end of the scale, Peder’s fascination with Islamic art changed from the amateur to the professional level with his involvement with the board of the David Collection and with the Damascus Institute.

Moesgård

As director of the Moesgård Museum he managed to produce some spectacular exhibitions where his sense of coordination and cooperation served him and the exhibitions well. Just to name the most spectacular: The dresses and mosaics of Palestine and Jordan (Mortensen 1991), The Silk Road (Mortensen 1996) and the biggest, which joined three major museums in one project, on the Islamic world and involved the National Museum, the David Collection, and Moesgård, with three heavy catalogue volumes (v. Folsach, Lundbæk & Mortensen [eds.] 1991)

In this way he succeeded, to an extent unknown before, in making Moesgård an international museum, in spite of it being a provincial museum – albeit with a special license to work all over Denmark and beyond.

Expeditions to the ever-widening field on the south shores of the Gulf continued to 1989 under the directorship of Karen Frifelt, one of the few Aarhus students from before 1953.

It was only natural that Moesgård should become involved in the creation

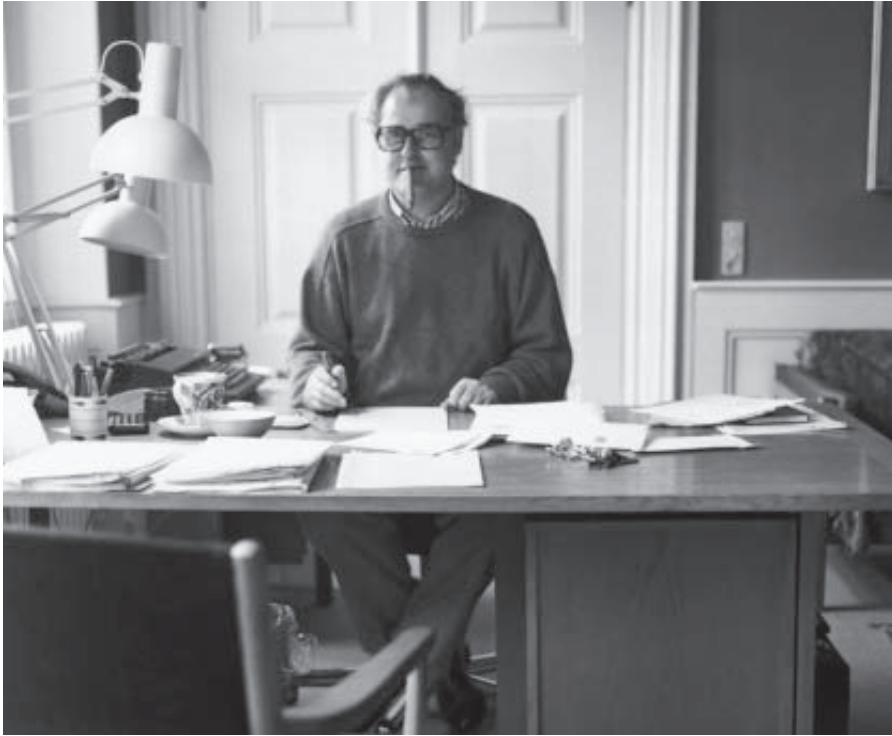


Fig. 9. The museum director in his office in the manor house Moesgård, before he surrendered to the PC, which took its time. Photographer: Jens Velle, 1990.

of the National Museum of Bahrain, where Peder played a key role in the planning and coordination of this highly modern creation which was opened in 1988. Later, at a more modest level, he was able to repeat the success and collaboration with the local authorities when the Syrians asked the Danes to round off their early involvement with Hama with a new museum there – opening 1999 (Mortensen 1999).

Thus Peder managed to keep his interest in the Near East alive and to expand his own experience in later and earlier periods.

Being what is was, most of the daily activities at Moesgård were directly concerned with the archaeology of the immediate region, as well as selected excavations on Funen. University lecturers and the Museum archaeologists worked at Kjøkkenmøddinger, Neolithic causewayed camps, dolmens and Iron Age settlements. The Museum's archaeologists also transcended the national borders, excavating at Danevirke and Alt Lübeck. The dominant project was the resumption



Fig. 10. Dwarfed by classic Islamic architecture – Inge and Peder in Shakhrisabz, Uzbekistan. Photographer: the author, Oct. 3rd 1990.

of the excavation of the large complex weapon deposit of the Late Roman period in the valley of Illerup 26 km southwest of Aarhus, where Peder had participated in earlier campaigns under the great excavator Harald Andersen. Peder's father wrote a letter urging the field director to take his son on even before he entered university.

When the excavations finally ceased in 1985 because a solution had been found to the preservation of the water level, an even bigger project had its beginning. The magnitude of the problem will be realized by the fact that by 2003 10 volumes, 34 cm have been published and at least one more is still to come before the end of the project in 2004 when 50 years of Illerup work will come to an end. Peder has attended countless meetings and completed innumerable applications for funds in order to provide a situation of continuity for the researcher and draughtsmen employed.

That he also managed to do the same for the Gulf expeditions and to keep the publication work going can almost be taken for granted. Although this kind of operation may not appear as a major feature on a cv, it can exhaust even the most enthusiastic director. Now, fortunately, the books are coming, which is the main thing.

Danish Protohistory

The Danish Research Council for the Humanities had a tradition for research programmes designed by its individual members. Peder was a member for eight years and his project was rather different from those of his two archaeological predecessors. The first was the Settlement Research Programme and the second the Medieval Town Project. Both were directed at saving and studying chosen settlements and towns, very much in the Danish positivist tradition. Peder chose a field which he had become familiar with at Moesgård through the Illerup, Danevirke and the earliest Ribe and Aarhus excavations.

No doubt the idea stemmed from the renewal of archaeological theory of the 1960s, encountered for example, when Peder was Kevorkian lecturer in the U.S. in 1966. The orientation towards neo-evolutionism was a prominent feature in Danish Prehistory of the 1970s. Peder saw to it that prominent figures in the New Archaeology were invited to Moesgård for periods of teaching and debating: Lewis Binford, David Clarke, Patty Jo Watson, Bob Adams, and Kenneth Flannery were all here.

Thus, the renovation of archaeological theory was introduced to a Danish archaeology which had been completely a-theoretical, not to say anti-theoretical, at least in the generation of professors who taught Peder and me.

Out of this lively intellectual discourse, figures like Kristian Kristiansen and

Torsten Madsen, and several others, emerged who introduced new attitudes, new questions and new methods. The conflict between the university departments at Copenhagen and Aarhus, manifested mainly by the professors' personal dislikes and very different tempers, spread to their candidates with some rather silly antagonisms as a result.

Peder saw the opportunity of introducing the new theoretical frame to a wider Danish society and at the same time open up a fresh debate on issues which were simmering during the 1970s. The large scale mechanized area excavations had uncovered whole structures of complete villages and settlements, mainly Iron Age. Instead of spending money on new fieldwork, he used the money for a series of symposia held in an old manor run by modern nuns. The atmosphere was far from monastic though. It was highly enthusiastic and positive with lively discussions in fora with a broad range of disciplines and persons from all corners of the archaeological establishment.

At Sostrup Manor, Peder with his well developed tact gathered people who had not spoken with each other for years, and a new working climate was created. This in itself had a profound effect on research over the following years and may in itself be seen as a worthwhile investment. As a non-combatant in this field he was able to direct his colleagues – old and young – to a much more cooperative spirit.

The immediate product of the *Stamme – Stat* (tribe – state) project were two volumes containing the proceedings of a selection of lectures (Mortensen & Rasmussen 1988 & 1991). Modestly, he didn't even sign the forewords. The first volume was sold out completely and had to be re-printed – a rare success for an archaeological book in Danish.

Part of the reason was that the project was well timed. In Sweden and Norway people worked on similar lines and for them the *Stamme – Stat* volumes became a source of inspiration because of the inter-disciplinary and new theoretical approach.

I think these volumes perhaps were the first to employ this approach on such a national scale and without the authoritarian pressure which somehow marked similar German programmes – laudable as they were.

Thus, behind the scenes, as with Illerup, and on stage, as with the *Stamme – Stat* project Peder Mortensen has contributed significantly to research in Danish Pre- and Protohistory during his Moesgård years. This aspect should be remembered when we celebrate his other – main – field of interest.

As the first academic with a permanent job in Near Eastern Archaeology, and thanks to the foresight of Ole Klindt-Jensen at Aarhus University, it was inevitable that Peder was the person who carried enough clout to ensure the future

of the discipline at the University of Copenhagen, and at the Carsten Niebuhr Institute which has proved so worthy of the trust placed in it in 1982. It seems historical justice that Peder was chosen on his retirement from the Damascus Institute in 2002 as the Institute's first *adjungeret professor* (Honorary Professor) in Near Eastern archaeology.

Fieldwork

Peder's list of publications is rather different from those of many of his contemporaries. That is not caused by any lack of enthusiasm or by declining energy. I see it rather as a result of his perfectionism – and as the result of his involvement in others' work, some of which I have mentioned above.

When, after many years of intense study he felt that he could not produce the new work on Childe and his Neolithic revolution that he had intended – partly because of the flood of books at that stage – he just dropped it, which is a pity. I am sure that his study would have been well worth reading (Mortensen 1973a; and 1978a give a glimpse).

Peder is a planner, his agenda is well prepared and the list of tasks is still long enough to keep him busy through a long otium. May he succeed. We look forward to important studies on Luristan, Jordan, and much else.

That same perfectionism explains two of his main contributions to Near Eastern Archaeology, as I see them.

The first was his approach to the Tepe Guran sounding. I think we were two days late compared to the original timetable, but virgin soil was reached and there was no lowering of the standard during those last hot weeks deep down in the mound.

The method of a trench that functioned as a guide to the layers and levels – and at the same time eased the disposal of the soil from the main square – was simple but elegant and efficient (Meldgaard, Mortensen & Thrane 1964). With the knowledge gained in the trench, the square could be documented in every detail, whereas the traditional approach does nothing to alleviate your doubts and difficulties because you have no idea of what is coming next.

I think that Kent Flannery at least will agree with me that it is a pity that many distractions have kept Peder from finishing his report on Tepe Guran. It became a *locus classicus* immediately and deserves the final monograph to keep this position.

The second example is Peder's Hulailan survey. I suppose that all of us who have ever tried a survey in the Near East, realized sooner or later how far from being complete our efforts were, regardless of whether air photography (satellite now) or other wide-cover were available or not. The representativity of certain

types of (esp. non-tell) sites and periods was, mildly put, uncertain. No one ever had sufficient time to carry out a thorough survey, somewhat along the lines of what was seen as necessary and practical in temperate Europe where field walking at close and regular intervals had become the normal procedure during the immediate pre- and post-war period. Peder took his time over the Hulailan area, surveying the plain and its immediate surroundings with caves and open air sites and was able to demonstrate different settlement patterns for different periods. The differences reflected important changes in subsistence economy and are rather relevant for vital periods of the Stone and Metal Ages. His survey gave a solid background for the Tepe Guran sequence – being the reverse use of surveys from the normal one. It also carried knowledge of the settlement of the

Fig. 11. Peder Mortensen doing the field photography at his trench into the Neolithic Tepe Guran May 1963. No wonder archaeologists complain about their sore backs. Photographer: Jørgen Meldgaard.





Fig. 12. In the field again – Mount Nebo. Photographer: Ingolf Thuesen.

valley far beyond anything our half-hearted efforts in 1962 – 64 had ever led us to suspect (Mortensen 1974a – 1979).

Now Peder has continued this approach in the Mount Nebo area, with a very different environment and different cultures. The level of refinement and coverage is the same, as was his partner in the field – Inge (Mortensen & Thuesen 1993).

These two cases illustrate Peder's well prepared, carefully planned and scrupulously executed approach to archaeological fieldwork.

I hope that his example may inspire widely – beyond the immediate circle of contemporary field directors.

Damascus

That Peder should finish his career as a diplomat and creator and restorer of one of the fine old hidden palaces of Damascus must have been the fulfilment of a dream. He was familiar with the city from the 1950s. Here he was able to combine his inborn sense of diplomacy with his long standing knowledge of the



Fig. 13. With the indispensable attributes, at Mount Nebo monastery, 2003. Photographer: Ingolf Thuesen.

old city and its souk and treasures from the Islamic period. The result speaks for itself (Bredal & Lange 2003) but not about the meetings, set-backs and planning and waiting that were involved. That Peder Mortensen should finish his official (paid) career as the first director of the new Danish cultural institute in the Near East seems, in retrospect, somehow fitting.

Recent books bear witness to a lifelong love of the arts that is symbolically expressed in Bjørn Nørgaard's series of prints from Syria (Nørgaard 2002). Peder came from a home full of art and art talk. His father was a prolific freelance art historian and critic, the author of a series of books on Danish artists, several of whom Peder met in his home. Peder no longer plays the violin but has kept



Fig. 14. The enthusiastic director explaining the restored Danish Institute in Damascus to i.a. the artist, Bjørn Nørgaard (left). Photographer: Steen F. Lindberg, May 2001.

his keen ear for music. The many colleagues who visited Peder and Inge in one of their hospitable homes will know that the visual arts play an enormous role in their daily lives, modern Danish Art hangs next to Islamic good bits, competing for the limited space. His membership of the board of that great Danish Oriental collection, David's Samling, unites his insight and knowledge in a fruitful way. In other words, Peder is a bit of a polyhistor combining very detailed research in special fields with a widely ranging encyclopaedic knowledge. His excellent memory and love of telling anecdotes and reminiscences from his travels is enjoyed by all of us, some of us with some envy. I have had the pleasure of having Peder as a close friend for nearly 50 years, and whether in the field, travelling, visiting, or discussing research policy it has been a very good time. There was always a cup of Nescafé, a piece of advice and fresh information available in his office.

All we have done is to scratch the surface of the vast range of Near Eastern Prehistory with which Peder has been involved. Peder's work has been continuous and successful, done with minimal resources, and in environments which were not always congenial to his ideas. I have only sketched some aspects of his work here, hoping that he will not disagree too much with my presentation.

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