

## **Plant finds as a source of information on gardening in Denmark 700-1200 A.D.**

Garden cultivation in Scandinavia has for more than a century been considered an occupation brought to the area with the monasteries. In the past decade new attention as well as evidence hints at gardening traditions having roots in the Iron Age soil. Furthermore it is argued, that horticulture involves a series of techniques and methods, which may have been incorporated into subsistence strategies through thousands of years. In the Iron Age an increasing number of garden plants from the Mediterranean region are introduced into the roman provinces of northwestern Europe. Perhaps some of the plants and food traditions even traveled beyond the Limes and became incorporated into the gardens of southern Scandinavia. As we reach the centuries around the beginning of the Viking Age, Scandinavia is experiencing a growing interest in foreign affairs and trade, and in Denmark a number of trading places appear. Because of the lack of written and iconographic sources about horticulture at this time, plant finds are central artifacts in the examination of the horticultural sphere. Records on macrofossils of garden plants, dated to the period 700-1200 A.D., from Denmark, Scania and Schleswig have been collected, and information on dating, location and feature type, as well as preservation conditions has been noted in order to be able to discuss the issues of reliability related to preservation of plant material. The picture emerging from the macrofossil record first of all shows that the greater part of garden plants has been found at trading places and in urban contexts. It appears, however, that the picture could be biased mainly by the low number of preserved plant species from the rural locations, because few features, containing favourable preservation conditions for the fragile remains of garden plants at rural sites, have been examined. As a result the picture of gardening in the agrarian environments remains elusive. In addition, the rapidly growing urban cultural layers and features such as latrines work to seal and preserve plant material, and the macrofossil record related to urban environments shows a greater variety of garden plants. It is argued, that trading places and the royal area of interest are connected to a central European elite culture in the Viking Age, and that trading places function as gateways for new species of cultivated plants, a role that the urban locations begin to undertake with the development of urbanization in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. In the beginning of the examined period some of the most common garden

plants occur naturally in southern Scandinavia and may be a sign of a fairly localized horticultural routine, perhaps including cultivated plants introduced in earlier times. Gradually new species become available, and especially in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries a greater variety of garden plants emerge.