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978-0-521-38787-3 - The First Millennium AD in Europe and the Mediterranean: An
Archaeological Essay

Klavs Randsborg

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KLAVS RANDSBORG



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UNIVERSITY PRESS**

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521387873

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First published 1991
Reprinted 1993
Re-issued in this digitally printed version 2009

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Randsborg, Klavs.

The first millennium AD in Europe and the Mediterranean : an
archaeological essay / by Klavs Randsborg.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0 521 38401 X. – ISBN 0 521 38787 6 (pbk.)

1. Europe – Antiquities. 2. Mediterranean Region.

3. Rome – Antiquities. I. Title.

CC 165.R36 1990

930 – dc20 89-22310 CIP

ISBN 978-0-521-38401-8 hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-38787-3 paperback

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PREFACE

Limit time to the present
Marcus Aurelius (AD 121–180)

This book has given me the opportunity to draw on much archaeological and personal experience – from my early student days, extensive travel and study abroad, library research, and meetings with colleagues – and the scientific view of the world that this experience has instilled in me. Central to the book's approach is my view of the material archaeological sources as testimony not only to techniques and economy but also to interpersonal relationships ranging from the exchange of products to the communication of norms and ideas. Behind their physical reality, it seems to me, breathe invisible forces – desire for self-expression through movement, language, and symbols, social competition, and the various processes that govern society. The humanities and the social sciences seem inclined to let abstract phenomena produce the physical world, and this view certainly underlines many of the ideas I deal with in this book. Nevertheless, we must also allow the physical world a measure of autonomy: we see, we choose, and we take action. These processes are determined not only by a logical universe, a Newtonian sociology, but also by chance and, in the final analysis, perhaps by man's ability to act independently.

My own inclinations have carried me far from my original starting point and continually led me into new worlds. Thus, chance discoveries have often proved to lead to problems on which – sometimes despairing – I have had to spend much time in order to come to a better understanding. My work has chiefly been carried out at the Archaeological Institute of the University of Copenhagen, an establishment that I have the pleasure of administering. In addition, I have held posts as visiting professor at Washington University in St Louis and at the University of Amsterdam. Some years ago American contacts revived an interest in archaeology and society, first aroused by travel, for example, in the Mediterranean area, and by fieldwork in the Sudan. My time in the Netherlands also gave me the

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opportunity to build upon earlier experience, while knowledge of modern provincial Roman archaeology acquired through contacts with foreign colleagues inspired me to turn my own Northern European perspective upside down. In the same period I was able to pursue some of the studies to which my interest in the emergence of states had led me and to develop a general archaeological methodology acquired through studies focused on the Stone, Bronze, and Iron Ages.

In acknowledging my debts, besides my students and university colleagues, mention must be made of the archaeologists in the admirable museum circles of Denmark and especially the National Museum, whose library, archives, and collections are invaluable for a study such as this one. To a great extent I have relied on surveys – sometimes virtual commando raids – of the museums and libraries of many institutions in several countries. Two periods of study in the friendly atmosphere of the Accademia di Danimarca in Rome led, through collaboration with this institute, to an international symposium on the subject of this book held in 1987 and supported by the British and Swedish institutes in Rome. All this bears witness to the debt I owe to colleagues both in the Nordic area and elsewhere in Europe, where I particularly appreciate the hard-working and imaginative British archaeologists. I must acknowledge too my relationship with the broad-based, sober work and results of German archaeology. My confrontation with classical archaeology has also been of special significance.

Mention must also be made of the many colleagues and others who have shared their knowledge with me. I am grateful for all the support that I have received on innumerable journeys to almost all of the countries of Europe and the Mediterranean and to a multitude of museums, libraries, and other institutions, particularly those in Rome. I am also indebted to Poul Christensen, whose professional skill has helped me with the illustrations, to Jennifer Paris for translation, to Siri Louekari and especially to Dr Barbara Metzger for further linguistic and other assistance, to Deborah Hodges for the index, and to Richard Hodges, director of the British School at Rome, for friendly advice and support. Finally, I am grateful to the Danish Research Council for the Humanities, to the Carlsberg Foundation, and to Copenhagen University for financial support for the translation of this book, for a number of travel grants, and for the production of the figures.

The book is dedicated to my little daughter: she may well have more pleasure in seeing it today than she will when she is able to read it in some ten years' time. By then it will probably betray its origins as a product of the mid-eighties; but by then, too, we may hope to have moved with the times and gained new inspiration and pleasure from identifying and attempting to interpret the patterns and structures in the archaeological record.

Copenhagen, August 1987

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author and publisher gratefully acknowledge the permission of the following to reproduce their illustrations in this book: Akademie-Verlag, Berlin (East): figs. 16 and 36; Geuthner, Paris: figs. 22, 24 and 57; drawing by Howard Mason in M. G. Jarret and S. Wrathmell, *Whitton: An Iron Age and Roman Farmstead in South Glamorgan*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff: fig. 31; Joachim Werner and Eugen Ewig, *Von der Spätantike zum frühen Mittelalter*, vol. 25 in the series 'Vorträge und Forschungen', Jan Thorbecke Verlag, Sigmaringen 1979, p. 152: fig. 34; after K. Weidemann, in *Ausgrabungen in Deutschland*, Köln, Monographien des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums 1/2, 1975, p. 439: fig. 39; Paul Elek Ltd, London: fig. 41; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Verlag, Göttingen: fig. 47; Konrad Theiss, Stuttgart: fig. 68.