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978-0-521-44267-1 - The Danish Revolution, 1500-1800: An Ecohistorical Interpretation
Thorikild Kjaergaard

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This book tells the story of how a fertile European country, as a result of overpopulation and military armament, overexploited its fields and forests in a nonsustainable fashion. By the eighteenth century Denmark, along with other European countries, found itself in an ecological crisis caused by clear felling of forests, sand drift, floods, inadequate soil fertilization, and cattle disease. The crisis was overcome by a green biotechnological revolution that changed the whole pattern of agriculture, and by the abandonment of wood as a raw material and source of energy in favour of coal and iron. This development had wide, unexpected consequences for the landscape, patterns of disease, politics, social structure, art, and literature. The book outlines the background of the present-day ecological crisis, both in the industrial world and in developing countries, and is the first attempt to understand early modern Europe from a consistently ecological viewpoint.

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Translated by David Hohnen



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Frontmatter

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Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Thorkild Kjærgaard

First published 1994

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kjærgaard, Thorkild.

[Den danske Revolution 1500–1800. En Økohistorisk tolkning.]

The Danish revolution, 1500–1800 : an ecohistorical interpretation

/ Thorkild Kjærgaard; translated by David Hohnen.

p. cm. – (Studies in environment and history)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-521-44267-2

1. Natural resources – Denmark – History. 2. Conservation of natural resources – Denmark – History. 3. Human ecology – Denmark – History. 4. Environmental policy – Denmark – History. I. Title.

II. Series.

HC353.5.K5713 1994

93.46320

CIP

A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 0-521-44267-2 Hardback

Cambridge University Press

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS

List of Illustrations	<i>page</i> vii
Preface	xi
Introduction	1
Part I Denmark, 1500–1750: A Country in an Ecological Crisis	
1. The Road to the Crisis	9
1.1 Population Growth	12
1.2 A Fiscal-Military State	13
2. The Anatomy of the Crisis	18
Part II The Ecological Revolution	
3. The Green Revolution	33
3.1 Sand Drift Is Arrested	33
3.2 Land Reclamation	39
3.3 Control of the Water Level	40
3.4 Control of the pH Balance of the Soil: Marling	49
3.5 Addition of Plant Nutrients through Better Utilization of Existing Resources	57
3.6 Nitrogen from the Sea	64
3.7 Nitrogen from the Air	65
4. The Energy and Raw Materials Revolution	88
4.1 The Energy and Raw Materials Crisis	88
4.2 Relieving the Energy and Raw Materials Crisis by Economizing	92
4.3 Increased Production of Energy and Raw Materials	106
4.4 Use of Wood Substitutes	116
4.5 Stabilization of the Forests, 1763–1805	129
Part III The New Denmark	
5. Landscape	135
5.1 The Denmark Facing East	135
5.2 The Denmark Facing West	142

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-44267-1 - The Danish Revolution, 1500-1800: An Ecohistorical Interpretation

Thorkild Kjaergaard

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

vi	<i>Contents</i>	
6.	Labour Burden and Social Structure	145
6.1	Labour Burden and Working Hours, 1500–1800	145
6.2	Falling Marginal Production and Changes in the Social Structure, 1500–1800	157
6.3	Factors behind the Rising Influence of the Farmer Class during the Last Half of the Eighteenth Century	173
7.	The Disease Pattern	179
7.1	Plague	179
7.2	Malaria	182
7.3	Tuberculosis	185
7.4	Smallpox	191
7.5	The Changing Pattern of Disease and Its Impact on Social Life	192
8.	Power	198
8.1	The Danish Power Structure from the Viking Age until 1766: The Rule of the Aristocracy	198
8.2	The Breakthrough of Centralistic Government, 1766–1814	216
8.3	Conditions that Paved the Way for the Breakthrough of Centralistic Bureaucratic Government	228
8.4	Winners and Losers	242
	Part IV The Driving Forces behind the Danish Revolution, 1500–1800	
9.	Agrarian Reforms	247
10.	Technology and Communication Systems	253
10.1	The Danish Revolution, 1500–1800: A Chaotic Process	256
	Part V The Inheritance	
11.	The Social and Political Inheritance	261
12.	The Ecological Inheritance	265
	Appendix 1: Currency, Weights, and Measures	268
	Appendix 2: Reigns of Danish Kings and Queens	270
	Sources and Bibliography	271
	Index	303

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-44267-1 - The Danish Revolution, 1500-1800: An Ecohistorical Interpretation

Thorkild Kjaergaard

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

ILLUSTRATIONS

1.	The Danish States: Denmark, Norway, Schleswig, and Holstein in the eighteenth century.	<i>page</i>	ix
2.	Denmark in the eighteenth century.		xii
3.	Agricultural prices and population. 1650–1800. On the basis of <i>Statistiske Meddelelser</i> , 4th series, 15, 1st fascicle, 1904, and Bjørn Matsen 1978, p. 61.		17
4.	Areas afflicted by sand drift in the eighteenth century. Mainly on the basis of Palle Friis 1967, p. 16.		20
5.	Soil map of Denmark. Prepared by Knud Rosenlund.		55
6.	Use of seaweed as fertilizer in Denmark. On the basis of Holger Rasmussen 1974, p. 397.		66
7.	The expansion of cultivated clover in Europe ca. 1250–ca. 1750. Partly on the basis of Gertrud Schröder-Lembke 1978, p. 168.		73
8.	Domesticated clover in Denmark, 1775. On the basis of the Danish edition of this book, pp. 270–4.		77
9.	Domesticated clover in Denmark, 1785. On the basis of the Danish edition of this book, pp. 270–92.		78
10.	Domesticated clover in Denmark, 1795. On the basis of the Danish edition of this book, pp. 270–309.		79
11.	Domesticated clover in Denmark, 1805. On the basis of the Danish edition of this book, pp. 270–336.		80
12.	Crop rotation in the village of Køng, Zealand, 1780–8. <i>Avis for Bønder</i> 1780–1, cols. 115–16.		81
13.	Instructions for training tree growth according to the needs of the shipbuilding industry. Engraving by J. G. Fridrich. H. F. Becker 1804, facing p. 155.		107

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-44267-1 - The Danish Revolution, 1500-1800: An Ecohistorical Interpretation
Thorkild Kjaergaard

Frontmatter

[More information](#)viii *Illustrations*

- | | | |
|-----|---|-----|
| 14. | Coal and iron imported into Denmark during the period 1722–1986, converted into forest equivalents. | 126 |
| 15. | Areas covered by forest in Jutland, ca. 1800 and ca. 1950. On the basis of Jette Hellesen and Ole Tuxen 1988, p. 107. | 132 |
| 16. | Change in garden styles, 1740–1820. Ledreborg Park, Zealand, in the 1740s. Engraving by I. Haas. The Royal Library, Copenhagen. | 140 |
| 17. | Change in garden styles, 1740–1820. Ledreborg Park, Zealand, in the 1820s. Engraving by Søren Henrik Petersen. The Royal Library, Copenhagen. | 141 |
| 18. | Haymaking festival in June. Overdoor. Rydhave Manor, Jutland. Photo by H. H. Engqvist, Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen. | 153 |
| 19. | Amalienborg. Drawing by Steen Eiler Rasmussen. | 215 |
| 20. | Number of pages of law texts per year, 1683–1800. On the basis of <i>Forordninger og Aabne Breve 1683–1800</i> . | 230 |

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-44267-1 - The Danish Revolution, 1500-1800: An Ecohistorical Interpretation

Thorkild Kjaergaard

Frontmatter

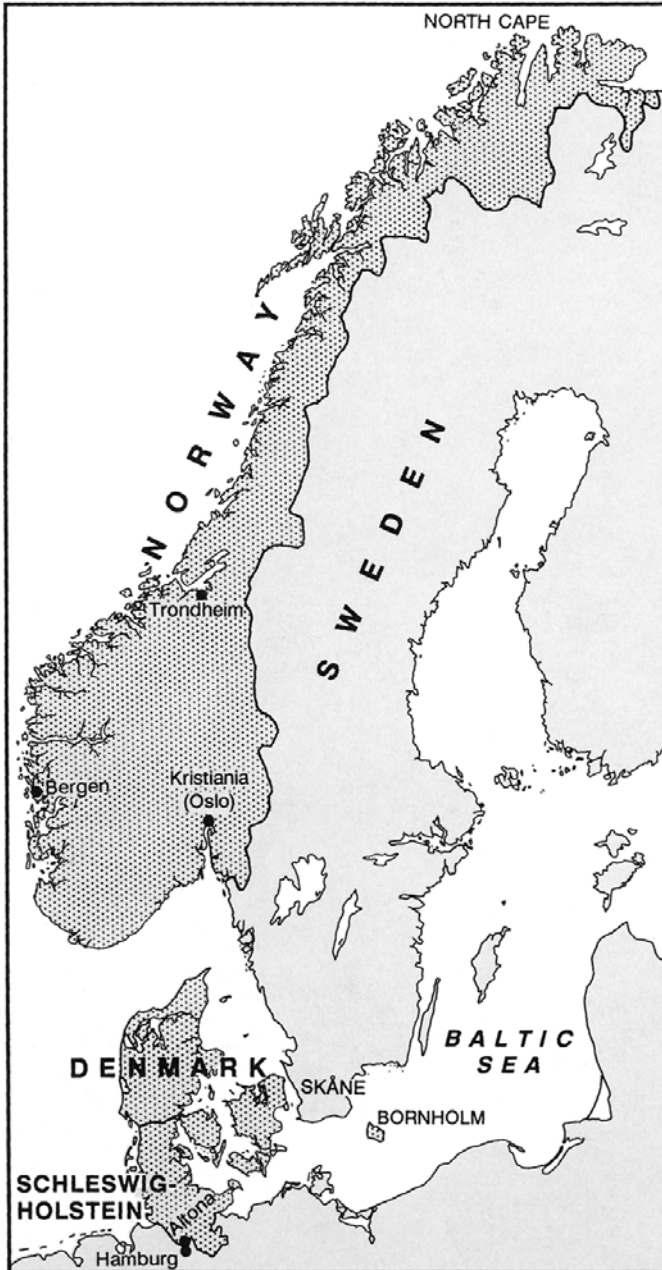
[More information](#)

Figure 1. The Danish States: Denmark, Norway, and Schleswig-Holstein in the eighteenth century.

Cambridge University Press

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE

The first draft of this book was made during the winter of 1984–5, when I held a scholarship at the European University Institute in Florence. In its original form it was inspired in important respects by the Danish economist Ester Boserup, particularly by her pioneering work *The Conditions of Agricultural Growth* (1965). In 1987 I was in the United States as a Danish Fulbright guest lecturer at the University of Kansas in Lawrence. Here I met Wes Jackson, director of the Land Institute in Salina, and Professor Donald Worster, Brandeis University (now at the University of Kansas). They – and their books – opened my eyes to fundamental ecohistorical correlations. Donald Worster also drew my attention to the great American pioneer in the field of environmental history, James C. Malin (1893–1979). This encounter with American historiography caused me to revise many of my ideas, and I rewrote the whole book.

The Danish edition, *Den danske Revolution 1500–1800. En økohistorisk tolkning*, was published in 1991 (reprinted twice in 1992). A sixty-seven-page appendix entitled “Domesticeret kløver i Danmark 1749–1805” [Domesticated clover in Denmark, 1749–1805] has been omitted from the present English translation. Elsewhere a number of factual errors have been corrected, and in some places the text has been slightly shortened or rephrased.

In connection with the publication of the English version I should once again like to thank Wes Jackson and Donald Worster, who paved the way for the book to be published by the Cambridge University Press. I also extend my thanks to Professor Arnold H. Barton, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois. Finally, I thank Professor Ole Feldbæk of the University of Copenhagen for his never-failing interest and inspiring cooperation for more than fifteen years.

I am grateful to the Aage Krarup Lind Foundation, to George and Emma Jorck’s Foundation, to Queen Margrethe and Prince

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-44267-1 - The Danish Revolution, 1500-1800: An Ecohistorical Interpretation

Thorkild Kjaergaard

Frontmatter

[More information](#)xii *Preface*

Figure 2. Denmark in the eighteenth century.

Henrik's Foundation, to L. Zeuthen's Memorial Foundation, and to Georg and Lole Malling for grants towards the cost of the English translation and new maps and diagrams for this edition.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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