

Power, Grace, and Authority

The Cultural Landscape of Danish Estates c. 1600-2000

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Entrance

As is true for most European countries of today, Denmark overwhelmingly features a cultural landscape. People have made their mark everywhere to the degree that undisturbed, wild landscape is almost not to be found. This cultural landscape is not least marked by the manors (herregårde); Danes even speak of a distinct manorial landscape different from, for instance, agricultural landscapes, industrial landscapes, forests or cityscapes. These manorial marks are especially clear in the eastern and southern parts of the country and are all-encompassing. The manorial quality of the Danish landscape is obvious on account of the symbolic (and also very real) signs of the (often noble) masters, such as splendid residential buildings and parks. However, the same goes for the many smaller houses and cottages of the estate too – both subaltern and noble at the same time – and it is also true of features made by agricultural and other production in the wider landscape. The manorial landscape is a colourful bouquet composed of the manors themselves, their people and their history.¹

Manors are thus not just large houses, but form central points in wider environments. This chapter will provide an introduction to this totality. The totality of the manorial landscape can be divided into four principal branches: the main building with its interior; the mighty home farms and their immediate surroundings; the well-kept parks and pleasure woods; and an extensive production landscape including villages, forests, hunters' lodges and much more. Seen in greater detail, the manorial landscape is characterized by the open space of vast fields, huge forests, hunting grounds and pathways, streams and rivers, lakes and ponds, alleyways,

Tranekær Castle, seat of the counts Ahlefeldt-Laurvig on the Island of Langeland, lies atop a medieval mound. Between 1859 and 1865, the castle was restored and given a historicist-medieval appearance, with crow-stepped gables and a prominent stair tower with a spire. Gardens, lake and some home farm buildings surround it. The estate's arable land and forest extend for miles from this centre. In the background the strait of Svendborg Sund. (Photo: Tranekær Castle)

2.1 | Map showing places mentioned in the chapter In Denmark, manors are abundant to the east and south, from the middle of the Jutland peninsula eastwards. In the western and northern most parts of Jutland, manors are scarce. The Duchy of Schleswig towards the German border, to the south, holds its own particular story, presented in chapter 5. The Islands of Funen, Zealand, and the major islands to the south have large numbers of manors.



moats and bridges, gatehouses, barns, granaries, mills, dairies, smithies, the homes of stewards, those of managers and tenants, summer cottages, arbours and hermits' caves, grave sites, mausoleums and memorial stones - and more besides. Earlier landscapes play a role too, if not for any other reason than for the often great continuity of the siting of manors. Barrows, moats and churches from the Middle Ages are elements in more recent lay-outs and confirm the ancient roots of the place – and hence the stature of the lord, especially important to those whose noble descent rests on the qualities and deeds of forefathers. This suggests that many manor owners, more consciously than often realized in research, almost 'furnished' their landscapes, guided by their own ideas of how the world ought to be in the small part of it that they ruled.2 What motives, strategies and perceptions lay behind this? How was it perceived by their peers and the people of the manor? And, quite prosaically, how did production and nature fit into this scheme?

A place and a space

It is well established that landscapes exist on at least two different levels.³ In part, there are physical elements, traits and structures: bushes, trees, streams, dikes, bridges, buildings, and so on. But a landscape exists on an interior, mental level as well, dealing with the symbolic meanings attached to a certain landscape. Together these form the spatial construction of a place.4 However, a hierarchy exists between the two levels. A fence or a dike has to be there, have a Dasein, a presence, before it may express something else; for instance, borders, nobility, or power. For human beings, however, such landscape elements will almost always contain such an additional dimension - man is a symbolic creature - and it can prove difficult, and perhaps not even productive, to separate the elements from their cultural values: it may be that we can only really perceive them through our culturally informed perception. In other words, and in the present context, is it the forester's eye for timber value, the gamekeeper's concern for the deer, the lord's wish for keeping his ancestors' trees and inherited alleyways, a modern jogger's appreciation of fresh scenery, an entomologist's interest in rare insects, or an estate salesman's appreciation of monetary value that is most real? These different ways of looking at a landscape come together and form a whole, inseparable from the actual landscape features, naturally differing according to historical period and situation, but nevertheless crucial to recognize.

While this may be true in general, the manorial landscape more specifically engages with the history of society at large. In research, this holistic quality of the manorial landscape has sometimes been expressed through the analogy that the landscape may be understood as a scene, as in the tradition of theatre historians and sociologists such as Erwin Goffmann.⁵ The Renaissance thought expressed in several of Shakespeare's plays, and famously phrased by Jacques in As You Like It, that "All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players" is certainly useful when dealing with early-modern social phenomena. Highly ceremonial set pieces were a feature of court life and the bigger manors, where events had to be performed according to ritualized rules expressing the societal order of kingship and nobility, of power, of the exercise of authority and, occasionally, grace. As Mark Girouard articulated, the big houses were power houses — and they needed a wider landscape to fully establish their role.⁷



2.2 | Tree at Gisselfeld, Zealand The Danish manorial landscape is one of large fields and a marked boundary towards the forest. In the noble estate landscape space was found for small ponds, old trees and clumps of trees, across the fields. At Gisselfeld, for example, these ancient oaks have been preserved in the arable fields. Today, around 85-90% of land under the Land Protection Act (Naturfredningsloven) in Denmark is held as part of an estate. (Photo: Roberto Fortuna, National Museum of Denmark)

Yet, however helpful such a view may be, in many ways it only reveals part of the story for scholars of the nobility, their manors, and their landscapes. The metaphor of scene and scenery reveal the master's version, and while this version may be important, even paramount, there were other figures present in the manorial landscape: subalterns, passers-by, as well as the manorial lord's equals and betters. Together they not only interfered with the performance of the play, but in the writing of it as well - in the possible sets of behaviour and, therefore, in the landscape itself.8

In order to accommodate the agency of actors and participants it is perhaps more helpful to conceive a manorial landscape as an arena, in the sense of a Roman circus battleground. This shift from scene to arena opens up the possibility of conflict and disagreement: it allows for the spectators to have a say in the end – shall the gladiator live or die? – and permits the presence of the master, the emperor, both when he was actually there or symbolically present through his empty chair on the first balcony. Victor Turner further developed this metaphor for human presence and action in



a spatial framework: landscape as an arena enabling and framing a human social drama, in his performative terms. This metaphor, through which we may understand a manorial landscape as a whole is useful, because in the manorial landscape different views and perceptions met – and meet – with a real existing landscape; landscape's Dasein, its presence, meets its phenomenology, so to speak.

Landscapes are thus both something real and tools of communication through which the reproduction of meaning, values and social order is mediated. The cultural landscape is part of a larger socio-cultural framework, and must also be understood in concordance with practices of interpretation and understanding within this framework, which, in most manorial landscapes, for the masters means a noble and public pursuit of moral supremacy, social status, and political power, hence the three concepts in the present article's title: power, grace and authority, which compose the main aspects of the Weberian concept of Herrschaft. As such, a cultural landscape is not only important as a result of the social acts of different people, but

2.3 | Hunseby Almshouse,

Lolland Part of being a noble landowner is to exercise power and grace. The master's obligations towards subalterns could take many forms, some of which left marks on the landscape. After the Reformation in 1536, the catholic church's poorhouse facilities vanished and the estate masters took over. As late as 1874, Count Knuth of Knuthenborg in Lolland built Hunseby Almshouse in an English Tudor-inspired architectural style, a choice mirrored in the newly-built manor house itself. (Photo: Roberto Fortuna, National Museum of Denmark)

is part of the action itself: it has a role in the arena, a place in the practice of life.11 That the masters and subalterns - and/or his equals and/or his betters, for that matter - may have read and acted in the landscape in different and disruptive ways is an important aspect of this conceptualisation of landscape.

In other words, the place itself can be understood as a very important arena for noble and other manorial manifestations. Place is a crucial field for the creation and continuity of power, status, and hierarchy; of authority, punishment and grace. For the public manifestation of elite status, symbols of great power were (and are) always needed. These symbols must be both popularly understood and, to a certain extent, long lasting both in form and in content.¹² This can be difficult to ensure in practice, but for noble families of early-modern Europe, for example, the built environment, such as castles, manor houses, parks and perhaps even small towns, served this purpose par excellence, not least through their durable qualities and immediacy: a big house means power. However, more subtle readings are required to fully understand a power house and its environment in all its implications of style and lay-out, and this underlines the fact that it can be seen as a symbol on many levels and in several dimensions, each equally potent for numerous people at any one time.¹³ For subalterns, the quality of scale perhaps sufficed. For equals and betters, who would have known the more subtle signals embedded in architectural styles or landscape fashions, a broader and more detailed story unfolded, which could be understood, accepted or contested, or perhaps even denied. Ideally, landscapes and houses had to work simultaneously for all groups at many levels.

This is easy to accept when dealing with a house. However, the same argument can be made for a landscape. The landscape of the masters is perhaps most fully expressed by the manor house itself, with its park and alleys stretching sometimes for miles – one of the first signs of a manorial presence in the Danish landscape. But the manorial landscape is a political landscape too, implied by the word arena, which suggests perceptions of legal and societal order. When one moved from estate (gods) to estate in manor-rich areas of Denmark in times past, transitions were marked in the landscape by marker stones, gateways, road bars and stone walls. One passed from one manorial jurisdiction to another, and the masters used this relationship to mark that it was their domain and not somebody else's lands. Power and authority had to be made manifest, even with the help of an otherwise modest stone or a heraldic mark on a bridge or pillar.

Another sign could be the presence of an almshouse, in itself an expression of lordship and ideas of paternalism for those under the master's wings: as Max Weber would say, to be master is to rule and to take care of the ruled, to simultaneously exercise authority and grace. On estates, this relationship could create sturdy, solid buildings placed out in the landscape. The almshouse, the blacksmith's forge, the church, the tenant farmstead and the gamekeeper's cottage in the woods all became markers of the lord in the landscape, even if they were far from the manor house itself. Often, they were marked either by coats of arms, with certain building details painted in the family's colours, or with architectural embellishments that were foreign to local traditions. The masters were, symbolically speaking, present in their landscape even when they were not there in person, much as the Roman emperor was present at the circus through his chair.

Productive landscape

The manors made their mark on and through the productive landscape as well, though the situation was quite different before and after the wide-reaching agricultural reforms in Denmark in 1788. In reality the reforms had some precursors from the 1750s onwards, and they lasted until the lifting of the entailment of estates in 1919.

During this period of roughly 150 years, peasant land and estate land had extricated themselves from each other. Before the reforms, villages were part of the estate system and landscape. Villages consisted of tenant farms, houses and the occasional blacksmith, with an only partially free peasantry bound together in agricultural co-oporation and all having labour and monetary obligations towards the manor and the crown. The inhabitants of a village may have been subject to a single master or more than one, in which case the villagers would enjoy slightly different rights and bear somewhat different duties in their tenancies. In the villages, sets of small stones could show the boundaries between one manor jurisdiction and another. Inhabitants shared horses and agricultural tools, and their fields were distributed in long, narrow strips stretching out from the village to the open land, aiming for an equalization of land-quality for each tenancy, and in effect making fieldwork manageable only through collective



2.4 | Tamdrup Bisgaard, Jutland

When visualizing a manor, most Danes imagine huge houses with spires and moats, situated in a big park cut by alleys stretching from the house away to the forest. However, many Danish manors were more modest, like Tamdrup Bisgaard in East Jutland, which contains a half-timbered single-storeyed building from 1784 — still impressive to modern eyes — placed on an old mound and with the hint of the old moat surrounding this ancient place of a master's dwelling. Past and present are often built into the manorial landscape, underlining or even creating the manors' ancient heritage, along with that of their owners.

(Photo: Roberto Fortuna, National Museum of Denmark) work. In between the villages lay meadows and pastures for the purpose of grazing cows and horses and between the villages, or along the streams in bogs and fens, the villages' communal peat-bank was to be found.

The Danish agricultural reforms (landboreformerne) of 1788 covered a wide range of initiatives including school reforms, tests of new crops, and much more besides. In 1788, the four most important initiatives on the subject of landscape use and design were given by the king: these are the reforms referred to in Danish historiography when speaking of the agricultural reforms of 1788.¹⁴ The peasantry was 'set free' from being tied to their village and manor, a fact commemorated on the Liberty Column (Frihedsstøtten) in Copenhagen. The old village communality was ended and tenancy duties were regulated. Peasant ownership of land was introduced, though not least due to the effects of the Napoleonic Wars on Denmark, peasant ownership of land after the first wave of self-ownership only really took off in the 1820s. Most important for the landscape layout was perhaps that in reformed villages, farmsteads could and would usually be moved from

their former position in the villages to become more distant neighbours, on their own consolidated landholding comprising approximately 40 to 50 barrels (tønder land) each, roughly 25 hectares of land. In short, the 1788 reforms ended the old manor-dominated model of agriculture in Denmark to the benefit of freehold farms and paved the way for Danish peasants to become independent farmers during the nineteenth century. This remained the Danish agricultural structural model until a second wave of market-driven reform in the 1970s, supported by Denmark's accession to the EEC (later the EU) in 1973, created even larger units of land, and saw the establishment of new market-oriented ways of organizing agriculture and the sale of produce.

The manor and estate, by contrast, was and is marked by an almost empty exclusivity. Its landscape is one of vast fields, separated from the tenant farms' smaller plots with solid stone walls and tall hedges that follow the twists and turns of the country roads. These fences and hedges continue and turn into boundaries for the woods, or open up into small groves interspersed with shooting hedges, behind which the huntsman may sit with his dog at his side: hunting was until shortly before the democratic constitution of 1849, a Royal Regale – a royal prerogative handed over to the first noble, and from the 1660s to all manor owners. In the manorial landscape, there was room for Bronze Age burial grounds as well, and for small ponds with rare species of frogs, and in the middle of the field perhaps an ancient oak tree. Even today there is an ethos, embedded in the management of a manorial landscape, to keep the pond or preserve the tree. In the distance, one may see alleys leading to the main building, intercepted by a gate, a gatehouse or a whole street with houses for the manorial officials. On the way there may also be small settlements of houses with only a little land; these are state smallholder plots created on government land to provide a living for the rapidly growing population and – in the decade following the lifting of estate entailment in 1919 - carved out of estate lands by legal decree.

The estate owner, his steward and the peasant (or later farmer) from the village looked at the fields differently, and held different opinions on what they saw. Until well into the nineteenth century, peasants were still obliged to honour labour dues (hoveri is the term used in Danish, similar to corvée used elsewhere on the continent) on the manor farm fields, and often employed extra hired help at their tenant farms in order to be able to perform this duty – most of Denmark's estates were run in a mix of Grund-



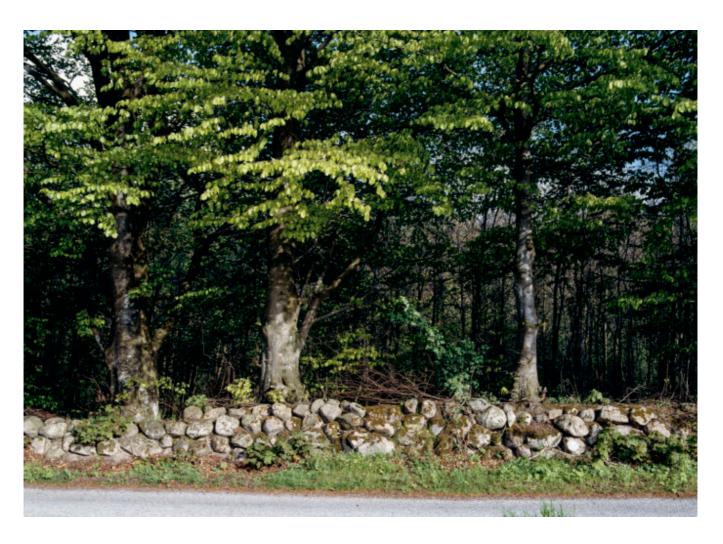
2.5 | Carved stone, Pederstrup,
Lolland Stones marked an estate's lands
and its boundaries of ownership or duties
for the peasantry. On many manors, the
obligation to keep a stretch of public road
was part of the peasants' tenancy. At
Lolland-Falster, this public road was systematically marked by stones such as this
one, number twelve of in total of forty
stones per old Danish mile (around 7 kilometers). These stones can be seen at Pederstrup in Lolland, now a museum dedicated
to the Danish agricultural reformer, Count
C. D. F. Reventlow. (Photo: Roberto Fortuna, National Museum of Denmark)

herrschaft and Gutsherrschaft, with a tendency towards the latter. Sometimes a tenant's duties included keeping extra horses and wagons for transport duty along roads that the peasant had an obligation to maintain himself (originally a part of a manor's liability towards the Crown). A small stone by the roadside with mileage number on it could mark which stretch of road the individual peasant was responsible for, whereas border stones marked the estate's boundaries at large. Where the master may have seen planned layouts and expressions of status directed at his peers and betters, the peasant may have seen obligation and hard labour when looking at the same stretches of manorial farm land.

At the same time, the peasant's own tenant land had to be ploughed, sowed, and harvested; however, it was a tenancy and therefore these fields were also part of the greater manorial landscape, distinct from the home farm or manor park. With the possibility for a freed peasant to buy and own farmsteads from 1788 onwards, the farmstead and land became the farmer's property, frequently bought with money lent by the manor owner. With these agricultural reforms and changes, peasant land became distinct from the remaining estate land. The innovations of semi-industrialized agriculture meant, for example, that hedges and fences were moved, roads rerouted and land reclaimed from the sea and turned into fields. In the present, it takes yet another turn. Danish estate lands eventually became part of large-scale agricultural enterprises and cooperation between manors, at times showing an almost astonishing desire for modernization, new methods and crops, and once again setting apart the estate lands from peasant fields. In the present day, the characteristic trait of vast open fields with only few buildings again tells of estate lands, when during the harvest one may see two or three combine harvesters on a field taking the harvest to the manorial barns. Yet still it is part of manorial identity, of being a proper master, of Herrschaft, that there are slopes of land kept untouched. It is a splendour heavily lost.

Forest and hunt

The forest was and is a major element of the manorial landscape. In the forest, trees made up a timber resource for building purposes and firewood, tax-wood for the Royal Danish Navy, and much more besides. The woods were also where game lived and usually where the best fishing waters were to be found. Ever since the power of kingship grew strong enough to effective to the power of the power



tively govern the use of natural resources — which in Denmark was during the twelfth century — this power was exercised. The peasant could have access to the so-called "low forest" and had the right to release pigs and cows into the forest for pannage; in other words, they usually had the right to gather fallen firewood and to feed their animals from the forest floor and litter. But the upper forest — the trees themselves and the organization of the woods — belonged to the manor. So too did the hunt.

With the introduction of modern forestry in the early-nineteenth century, this double quality of trees and game of the upper forest created constant disputes between masters and subalterns (poaching was a capital offence), between masters neighbouring each other, and not least between foresters and gamekeepers, both of whom were employed by the manor, but with inherent conflicts in the pursuit of their tasks. Hunting was both a way of providing the master's table with food, and one of the most conspicuous ways in which to demonstrate social superiority. Mounted high on a horse with hounds following, riding over fields and through hedges, commanding perhaps hundreds of peasants serving as beaters, establish-

2.6 | Forest Stone Wall at Skjoldenæsholm, Zealand

In 1805 the Danish State implemented a forest conservation act, which is still in force. This act covered both public and manorial woods, and has resulted in an increase in forested land in Denmark from about 5% in 1805 to 20% today. According to the act, fenced forests were to have permanent fences in order to keep pigs and livestock out. In most places stone walls were erected, such as this one at Skjoldenæsholm in Zealand. Another sign of a well-kept estate was introduced, and stone walls became yet another area in which owners would compete for status. (Photo: Roberto Fortuna, National Museum of Denmark)

2.7 | Gateway at Halsted Monastery, Lolland Hunting in Denmark was originally a royal prerogative, but the crown could – and increasingly did - grant estate owners the right to hunt on their own land, especially after the introduction of absolute monarchy in 1660. At many estates, fenced deer parks were created, such as here at Halsted Kloster in Lolland, where a gateway marks the boundary between the deer park and the manorial grounds. The gateway is painted in the family's heraldic colours, with a crested monogram. (Photo: Roberto Fortuna, National Museum of Denmark)



ing deer parks and feeding facilities, masters positioned themselves almost without equal in the landscape, although this noble pursuit could prompt insubordination and social uprising.16 It is not without reason that in 1840 the right to hunt was changed from a Royal Regale to a condition of the ownership of land, making it accessible to farmers of peasant origin. The same was true for fishing rights, which throughout history had been just as closely regulated and was an equally important part of most estates' economy, though not with such obvious symbolic qualities.

Thus, the hunt provided many possibilities for establishing the masters in the landscape and exercising Herrschaft. Hedges were planted, fences were erected, and roads were laid out in the woods, creating a master-dominated landscape far away from the manor house itself — something which was not always to the liking of the peasantry. With the introduction of modern forestry and modern agriculture, conflict was introduced, first in the woods, then on the fields. In order to obtain a better yield from modern forestry, the hunt had to make way for protected areas with newly planted trees, and the head forester would negotiate the appropriate amount of game, usually suggesting figures well below those of the head gamekeeper. The manor owner had to listen to both sets of recommendations, and one seldom found approval from the other. From around the middle of the nineteenth century, an increasing interest in mechanized agriculture supported by drainage, marling, and new crops fuelled this conflict between forest and hunt, between modernity and the old expression of nobility once again. Now, the hunt had to take modern farming into consideration as well as forestry. The contemporary changes in landownership involving the introduction of independent peasants' areas multiplied the antagonistic interests in the landscape. New actors in the arena were introduced, and additionally, the manors themselves introduced new elements, such as railway tracks, harbour facilities and minor industry in order to support new production methods and to further sales of produce. Taken as a whole, this all underlines the often-contradictory modernizing process of manorial estate lands.

Administration and Government

With the introduction of absolute monarchy in Denmark in the 1660s, estates became an important administrative part of society. This new role was marked in landscape too. The estate office became an important place, which the inhabitants of an estate often visited. The district office (Herredfogedri), something like a municipal office, police station, and courthouse combined, became another important building, one which symbolized the conflation of Crown and local authority. The estate courthouse (on noble estates the manor had its own jurisdiction and policing under the Danish General Law Book of 1683) was yet another such place.

By contrast, parish churches had been there long before the seventeenth century; most Danish parish churches were built in the Middle Ages and are still standing today. But in the 1640s, the crown began to sell parish churches to manors in order to finance the wars against Sweden during the rise of the 90 years of the Swedish Empire (Stormaktstiden). This meant that manors bought the right to church taxes and revenue alongside a duty to maintain the church buildings and facilities. Usually the owner had the right to appoint the pastor as well, meaning that in many places, both the church buildings and God's word became part of the estate build-

2.8 | Gammel Estrup, Djursland

In Denmark, most manor houses are old and stand in close proximity to agricultural production. Though there were also newly-built houses in baroque, rococo and classical styles, most families had to make do with alterations of their inherited site until the construction boom of the latter part of the nineteenth century. For many Danes, Renaissance-style buildings, as here at Gammel Estrup in East Jutland (which now houses a museum), still represent the archetypal manor house; its closeness to forest and arable land convey the same message. For the family, an old house could signal their inherited right to rule and be an asset in a hierarchical struggle among equals. (Photo: Morten Pedersen)

ings and an important element in the manorial landscape. At least one church would be chosen as burial ground for the manorial family; other masters would erect magnificent mausoleums in the graveyards. With the Romantic movement in the early-nineteenth century, burial grounds in the open land or in a forest became fashionable, introducing yet another element in the manorial landscape. In the church interior, coats-of-arms and a multitude of other tokens of noble presence would influence both the congregation and the words of the pastor.

Envoi

Life happens somewhere: culture is situated and life is an ever-ongoing practice.¹⁷ All stories, narratives and occurrences have a spatial aspect which can serve as an entrance for studying it, demanding both a keen observation of facts - landscape elements which are physically present - of embedded meanings, and of the battle over them. For the masters, manorial landscapes act as a sort of public stage, and by controlling it masters can create an appearance that approximates both what they themselves wish to be the case and, ideally, what they would like others, subalterns, equals, and perhaps even betters to see. However, this is not always easily ensured. A landscape is not a text or a play with one author. It may perhaps be more appropriate to see it as an arena with a multitude of voices and meanings, and to regard the master's task, then, as an ongoing contest to exert dominance and to ensure that their version is seen and followed.¹⁸ In the bedchamber, this may work without difficulty; in the parlour too. Already in the corridors of the house, one is less certain. And, despite all efforts and a multitude of elements that present the master and his world, in the bigger landscape of manors, one is not sure at all. While it is important to know the master's script of power, grace and authority, and its agents in the shaping of buildings, hedges, and memorial stones, it is also crucial in the understanding of a manorial landscape as a totality to be aware of competing scripts.19



Notes

- This article stems from the opening keynote of the conference 'European Encounters. Estates and Landscapes' in October 2015 at the Danish Research Centre for Manorial Studies, Gammel Estrup. The empirical information of the article derives from many years of work with Danish and European manors and elite culture and can, apart from in numerous articles, be found in two works and one exhibition catalogue, namely Erichsen, John and Mikkel Venborg Pedersen: The Danish Country House. Copenhagen. 2014; Erichsen, John and Mikkel Venborg Pedersen (eds.): Herregården. Menneske Samfund Landskab Bygninger. Vol. 1-4. Copenhagen. 2004-06; reprinted Copenhagen. 2009 (Volume 3, in particular, deals with the manorial landscape of Denmark); and Kjær, Ulla and Mikkel Venborg Pedersen: Herregården 500 års drøm og virkelighed / The Danish Country Manor 500 Years of Life and Dreams. Catalogue for an Exhibition of the Same Name. Copenhagen. 2004.
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- 13 Venborg Pedersen 2005, Hertuger.
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