

# ICOMOS DENMARK



## **Jelling Mounds, Runic Stones and Church**

**World Heritage Site  
Denmark**

**Periodic Reporting on application of the 1972 World Heritage Convention.**

**Copenhagen June 2004**

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#### SECTION II: STATE OF CONSERVATION OF SPECIFIC WORLD HERITAGE PROPERTIES

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## SECTION II: STATE OF CONSERVATION OF SPECIFIC WORLD HERITAGE PROPERTIES

### II.1 Introduction

**State Party:** Denmark

**World Heritage property:** Jelling Mounds, Runic Stones and Church

**Geographical Location:** Northwest of Vejle City, Central Jutland  
N55 45 23 E9 25 12

**Date of WH List inscription:** 1994

#### **Organization responsible for the preparation of this report:**

ICOMOS Denmark has carried out the periodic reporting for 'Kulturarvsstyrelsen', The National Cultural Heritage Agency, Ministry of Culture.

The report is prepared by Flemming Aalund, architect MAA, PhD., after consultation with all bodies responsible for management and up-keep of the property.

**Date of report:** Copenhagen,

#### **Signature on behalf of State Party**

**Signature:** .....

**Name:** .....

**Function:** .....

## II.2. Statement of significance

The application for nomination of Jelling Mounds, Runic Stones and Church was prepared in 1993. The site was subsequently included in the World Heritage List in 1994 as the first Danish cultural heritage site according to criteria (iii) ‘.. bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared’.

The justification as presented by the State Party is formulated as follows:

‘The complex of Jelling mounds, runic stones, and church is a unique illustration of the transition between the old Nordic religion and Christianity; lied with this is the creation of the national state of Denmark. One of the two large grave-mounds lying on either side of the church was probably the burial place of King Gorm the Old; however, his body was removed, most likely by Gorm’s son, Harald, for Christian reburial in the church.

The two runic stones by the church are connected with the burial mounds. The smaller was erected by Corm as a memorial to his queen, Thyra. The larger depicts a Nordic dragon on one side and on the other there is the earliest image of Christ in Scandinavia. The runic text describes how Harald brought Denmark and Norway together and christianized the Danes’.

The inscription is recommended by the ICOMOS advisory body on basis of criterion (iii).. ‘The Jelling complex, and especially the pagan burial mounds and the two runic stones are outstanding examples of the pagan Nordic culture’.

Since the inscription in 1994, changes to the Operational Guidelines imply, that justification for inclusion in the World Heritage List now requires a Statement of Significance. The recent UNESCO International Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) further emphasises the immaterial value judgements.

In view of these changes it is recommended that National Cultural Heritage Agency (Kulturarvsstyrelsen) considers whether the original justification should be redrafted as a ‘Statement of Significance’, including more emphasis on the intangible heritage values associated with the site. In this context it may also be argued that criteria (ii) is relevant for the Jelling Mounds, the Runic Stones and the Church .. ‘exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design’.

## II.3. Statement of authenticity/integrity

Urban encroachment had seriously diminished the cultural heritage values of the site at the beginning of the last century and a general understanding of the unique

archaeological and historic importance of the place was hardly existing at that time. An Improvement Society was formed in 1913 at a local initiative, leading to a national initiative in 1917 by formation of ‘The Committee for Clearing the South King’s Mound in Jelling’<sup>1</sup>. This initiative established a precedent to the creation of similar *ad hoc* committees during the subsequent decades, whenever the need for an extraordinary effort was required.

The history of reshaping the dignity and integrity of the Jelling Mounds and the Runic Stones embodies the history of the creation of awareness of cultural heritage values in Denmark.

Knowledge about the most important historical monument in Denmark is now widely communicated. The site is being associated with the shaping of a national identity and the runic stones have become a national symbol of Denmark by depicting the figure of Christ, that is carved on the largest runic stone, in the Danish passport.

The nomination to the World Heritage List in 1994 of the Jelling Mounds, the Runic Stones and the Church can be seen as a culmination of the effort of preserving and transmitting this heritage to future generations. After inclusion on the WH List further initiatives have been taken to enhance the quality of the place and improve the presentation and communication of the values of the place to the visitors.

These initiatives includes:

- Construction of a new stone wall around the churchyard on the south and east.
- Demolition of one of the remaining houses disturbing the view to the mounts.
- A new interpretation centre and museum ‘Kongernes Jelling’ was completed in 2000. The exhibition areas covers a total of 2000 sq metres providing for a display of the history and archaeology of the place with bilingual text in Danish and English.
- The interior of the church was completely refurbished and reconditioned according to a design by the Danish sculptor and artist Jørn Larsen in celebration of the new millennium 2000. As a result the church interior has a purified and artistic appearance of very high quality in material and craftsmanship. The work is an example of a contemporary artistic interpretation of the spiritual feeling of the place.
- The tile roofing on the church porch has been renewed in lead.
- An improvement scheme of the road circumventing the site to the South and West is under execution and completion is expected in June 2004. The work includes speed restrictions of motor traffic and improved security to pedestrians.
- A new signboard scheme is under preparation by the Municipal Council in close co-operation with the National Museum. It is expected that the design of the boards and the new text will improve the presentation and enhance interpretation of the site.

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<sup>1</sup> Steen Hvass, *De kongelige monumenter i Jelling, deres historie, forvaltning og formidling*, Fonden Kongernes Jelling, 2000, with English summary.

The delimitation of the property is defined by the Local Preservation Plan no. 104 of 31 May 1989 including the archaeological site, the churchyard and the immediate environment.

The view to the rural landscape located to the north of the property is protected by a preservation regulation dating from 1947. The parking area for busses and cars is located within this area, including a visitor amenity building.

A 100 meter buffer zone is established around any ancient monument pursuant to the Protection of Nature Act. This zone includes most of the private property facing on to the roads Vejlevej and Gormsgade, circumventing the WH Site on the south and on the west. However, no normative directions have been produced as yet to guide the change of private property in the immediate vicinity of the site.

The Local Plan stipulates that change of buildings within 20 meters along Gormsgade require special consent by Vejle County. This requirement has possibly been included with a view to widen the road at some later time, but this option must be considered outdated.

Several recommendations set out by the then Board of Heritage Planning in an overall plan of 1983, have not as yet materialised, including the following proposals:

- removal of ‘ the Uffe Stone’ and another memorial to a former head of the Teachers Training College to another and more appropriate place, arguing that these memorials relate specifically to the history of the Teachers Training College and should be removed in an effort to clear the site of disturbing elements.
- the flagpoles at the top of the mounds are considered out of place and another and more appropriate siting is proposed. A special royal permission is granting Jelling the privilege of flagging with the split flag, but this should not necessarily mean that the flagpole be located on top of the burial mounds.
- it is especially argued that the growth be subject to a systematic analyse and treatment. The subsequent Local Plan of 1989 includes a reference to the preparation of a Management Plan for up-keep and maintenance of the area (Lokal Plan, note 7).
- The misconceived interpretation of the heathen sanctuary, as proposed by Ejnar Dyggve in the 1940s has been abandoned. It is now generally accepted that the misplaced stones, that form part of a historic reconstruction, are a falsification and they should be removed in order to restore the integrity of the site.

## **II.4. Management**

The World Heritage Site is composed of the archaeological site including the two mounds and the runic stones, as well as the church building, which is in continuous use as the parish church of Jelling.

The shared ownership to the property and related administration of the site is resting with different stakeholders:

- The overall state responsibility in view of the World Heritage Convention rests with the National Cultural Heritage Agency (Kulturarvsstyrelsen) in the Ministry of Culture after transfer of competence in 2002 from the former, the National Forest and Nature Agency (Skov- og Naturstyrelsen) of the Ministry of the Environment. The agency is also the appropriate department for the protection of the mounds and the runic stones under the provision of the Protection of Nature Act 1992. For further details cf.: [www.kuas.dk](http://www.kuas.dk)
- The church and the churchyard with the runic stones is owned and administered by the Evangelian Lutheran Danish Church. The congregational council of Jelling Church under the supervision of the Haderslev diocesan authority carries out the day-to-day administration of the site. The church and the churchyard, including the runic stones, are protected under the Churches and Churchyard Consolidated Act of 1992, which requires any alteration to be approved by the diocesan authorities after consulting the National Museum. For further details cf.: [www.jellingkirke.dk](http://www.jellingkirke.dk)
- The church, the monuments and the surrounding area come within the provisions of the Local plan no. 104 of 1989, which have mandatory status under the Planning Act 1991. Jelling Municipality has the overall responsibility under this act, including all matters of urban development and building activity. An area of 40 ha to the north of the monument is protected by special Preservation Order from 1947, which is recorded on the respective title numbers in the Land Register. For further details cf.: [www.jelling.dk](http://www.jelling.dk)
- The mounds and surrounding area are designated as an environment of special cultural interest in the Regional Plan of Vejle County. For further details cf.: [www.vejleamt.dk](http://www.vejleamt.dk)
- Presentation and dissemination of knowledge about the history of the site is delegated to the new museum and visitor centre called Kongernes Jelling. The building and the exhibition was inaugurated in 2000. For further details cf.: [www.kongernesjelling.dk](http://www.kongernesjelling.dk)

During the years various *ad hoc* co-ordination committees have been formed to take the lead, whenever a major intervention was required.

In 2000 on the occasion of the millennium a special committee took the initiative to refurbish the church interior on behalf of the Government and the Parliament.

The construction of the visitors centre, Kongernes Jelling, was initiated by a committee established at the initiative of the mayor of Jelling Municipality with a broad representation of bodies, who have vested interests in the development of Jelling. This committee is still functioning, but may be dissolved as soon as an appropriate alternative organisation has been established. At present the Centre is established as an independent foundation affiliated with Vejle Museum and having Jelling Municipality as the main stakeholder. As a partly autonomous institution its mandate remains uncertain and its official status is disputed.

In sum, management of the heritage values of the property is distributed at local, regional and national level with operational responsibility created through an established practice that is generally accepted by the involved parties.

The General Plan for the property originating from 1983 has not been followed up by a management plan, which is reflecting the current situation and the mandate of the visitors centre requires clarification.

In view of the complexity of the management structure there seems to be a need for establishing improved procedures for co-operation between the involved parties. Several models could be relevant to serve the purpose. A constructive approach could be that The National Cultural Heritage Agency assumes this responsibility and acts in a co-ordinating capacity.

The bilingual guidance of visitors in Danish and English language is providing an informative introduction and interpretation of the site. However, there seems to be a discrepancy between the estimated yearly number of about 150.000 visitors to the Mounds and the relatively small number of entries of about 20.000 to the visitors centre. Probably the entrance-fee is discouraging many potential visitors, who may have less opportunity to interpret and understand the complexity of the site.

Most likely the price is inversely proportional to the number of visitors and the admission should be considered in relation to the obligation of presenting and interpreting cultural heritage to the public. In several cases expectations of the visitors are frustrated, when the church is closed because of religious ceremonies, and the cost of visiting the interpretation centre is considered too high.

There is a potential conflict between the interest of the church with a legitimate claim of spirituality and the visitors centre's interest of presenting the history of the site and achieving a sustainable income. A similar conflict is created by the keen competition between the café at the centre and the local inn and public-house.

Only minimal reference is given to the status of the Mounds, the Runic Stones and the Church as a World Heritage Site. The official UNESCO certificate is on display at Kongernes Jelling, whereas the church maintains the same right. It is anyhow to be expected, that the new signboard scheme makes use of the official World Heritage sign and the text be prepared to give a comprehensive understanding of the history of the site in Danish and English.

## **II.5. Factors affecting the property**

The general state of preservation is considered to be satisfactory.

The mounds serve as a popular playing ground for the children right in the middle of the town, the church serves as the parish church of the local congregation and the burial ground is in continuous use. From the cradle to the grave heritage is directly present to the minds of the local population and the historic site forms an integrated part of daily life in the community.



So far, the double function of the site as a parish church and a tourist destination seems to function well with priority on the religious life, which needs to take place undisturbed by visitors. The obtrusive scheme for the construction of experimental viking centres in the immediate vicinity of the monument as propagated in 1989 was abandoned in favour of the present visitor centre. After a series of modifications to the original design the present building is adapted as a relatively unobtrusive in-fill in the row of modest houses facing on to the road circumventing the site to the south and west.

Jelling has a stable population and well-established infrastructure. The municipal policy to development opportunities for employment and housing is now mainly directed towards an urban extension of the town in south-east direction. The expected growth is not considered to have an adverse impact on the World Heritage Site.

Plans for a new ring road to the north of Jelling passing through the rural area is apparently abandoned after consultation with the National Cultural Heritage Agency. The rural zone is protected by the 1947 preservation regulation encompassing 40 ha of land, but it may still be questioned, whether part of the scheduled industrial development to the north of Vejlevej may compromise the free view in this direction (cf. 'Perspektivplan' 1996-2004).

A parking lot and visitor facilities is located to the north of the monument within the protected area to the north. The 1983 plan proposes that visitor facilities be established in connection with the inn, Jelling Kro. The background for this assumption has changed, but the plan has not been revised according to the current situation. Neither has the preparation of a management plan materialised.

A revision of the Local Plan should include an up-date of the situation and a strategy for future management, including improvement of visual appearance of neighbouring property. New stipulations are especially relevant for establishing and maintaining a view to the rural landscape to the north possibly resulting in the removal of the present amenity building. Also an improvement scheme of buildings with poor visual amenity is desirable.

Traffic pressure is contained through a new pavement, reducing speed of vehicular traffic and improving security to pedestrians. As part of this effort the Municipality is encouraged to keep the number of intrusive traffic signs to a minimum. It is understood that the hearse is not permitted to drive close to the runic stones, and that all other cars are prohibited from the burial ground.

Of minor consequence a number of individual issues can be put under consideration:

- . are the decorative flower decorations, mounted by a crown, relevant in the context of the historic monument ?
- . will the possible substitution of ash trees to the west of the burial ground in favour of linden trees have an adverse effect on the visibility of the church and the mounds ?
- . are the three iron crosses, which are standing next to the runic stones, disturbing the perception of the more important stones ?

The main information facility at Jelling is the visitors centre, Kongernes Jelling, located near the site with large windows, from where the mounds and the church can be overviewed at a glance. The location close to the monument strikes a balance between the wish of providing the interpretation as close to the site as possible and still maintaining the integrity of the site.

It is a public responsibility to provide adequate and relevant information about the site and to communicate its historic values. Admission to 'Kongernes Jelling' is considered too expensive to many visitors and a reduction of the entrance fee is recommended.

Considering that only a limited number of visitors to Jelling actually enter the centre, it seems necessary that the signboards provide the relevant and consistent information on site in both Danish and English language. As a basic service to foreign tourists, it might be expected that comprehensive information is available on the Internet in several languages.

In any case, monitoring is required to ensure that the delicate balance, between the needs of the local community and the demands imposed by an increased number of tourists, is being maintained.

### The cultural landscape

The World Heritage Convention has introduced concepts of a common world heritage of outstanding universal value, including the duty for the international community to cooperate to ensure its protection and transmission to future generations. The convention also emphasises the interdependence of cultural and natural heritage, as symbolised by the World Heritage emblem. Heritage values in Jelling is depending on the close relationship between the Mounds and the surrounding cultural landscape, which is maintained by the free view to the north.

The presence of a large number of burial mounds in this areas named '*Mangenhøje*' give reason to serious concern. Only a few are listed and protected according to the Preservation of Nature Act, but the majority of these mounds have been ploughed up. Further destruction of archaeological evidence will inevitably result from intensive farming and deep ploughing. This concern is expressed by Vejle County in the inventory of cultural heritage sites. However, the intimate relation between this necropolis and the Jelling Mounds is not clearly established, even less investigated and preserved as a continuous cultural landscape.

Extension of the borders of the World Heritage Site to include the *Mangenhøje* area to the north of the Jelling Mounds would enhance the protection of the cultural heritage property and make the whole archaeological context of the site more easily understood.

This extended protection would possibly include restrictions to the farming and improved access to this area through the creation of walking itineraries through the cultural landscape.

## II.6. Monitoring

The present Periodic Monitoring Report is the first one produced according to the stipulations in the Operational Guidelines for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention. The General Plan for the area dating from 1983 is formulating the intentions of future development and provides the basis of the Local Plan adopted in 1989.

A review of the history of recent research and planning for the preservation, interpretation and presentation of the monuments is provided by Steen Hvass, *De kongelige monumenter i Jelling – deres historie, forvaltning and formidling*, Fonden Kongernes Jelling, 2000.

The Jelling mounds and archaeological site have been subject to a large number of archaeological investigations, research and planning for improvement in recognition of the unique national importance of the site. Part of this information is interpreted and presented at the visitors centre, but no documentation archive is available for more detailed studies of the site.

Formulation of an explicit mandate of 'Kongernes Jelling' seems to be a matter of priority in order to define its future role in relation to the other parties concerned with the management and up-keep of the monument.

A regular monitoring regime needs to be established, that will ensure an adequate communication of all matters of common concern between the concerned parties. Re-establishment of a permanent Co-ordinating Committee for Jelling World Heritage Site should be considered.

The actual condition of the runic stones is not investigated and key indicators for measuring the rate of surface disintegration of the stones are not established.

## II.7. Conclusions and recommended action

Having studied the relevant documents provided, visited the site and discussed various issues with representatives of the responsible institutions, it is obvious that the importance of the site has generated much attention and concern.

This interest has secured generous funding of a number of important initiatives during recent years culminating in 2000 by the inauguration of the visitors centre, Kongernes Jelling, and the refurbishment of the interior of the church.

The many initiatives during the years have helped to establish a new dignity and integrity to the monument and its surroundings in keeping with its international status as a World Heritage Site. However, connection between the monument and the many burial mound immediately to the north in the area called *Mangehøje* is missing. The concept of the cultural landscape does not seem to be well incorporated in the interpretation and presentation of the site.

The exhibition at the visitors centre, Kongernes Jelling, supplemented by the numerous articles and booklets about the history of Jelling now allow a general and rich appreciation of the historic environment.

ICOMOS Denmark is, however, concerned that a number of recommendations put forward in the General Plan of 1983 and the subsequent Local Preservation Plan of 1989 do not seem to have been followed up, and there are other pending issues in need of consideration and possible action.

The different issues outlined under the previous headings may lead to the following specific recommendations:

- **Statement of Significance**

A statement of significance should be drawn up as part of the requested baseline information, in accordance with the statements by the World Heritage Committee Meeting in 1998 and the current format of the WH Nomination Form.

Knowledge of the values of the site is important and the statement of significance should form part of the general information material. The Internet should also be used more actively in terms of information of the site.

- **Management**

The management structure and division of responsibilities need to be reviewed. The Local Preservation Plan needs up-dating and revision, including considerations for the possible extension of the boundary to include the cultural landscape of *Mangehøje* to the north of the World Heritage Site.

- **Visitors Centre and/or museum**

The organisation, mandate and administration need careful analysis in the process of possible change from a private foundation to a possible status as an officially recognised museum with the responsibility of documentation, research, interpretation and presentation of the World Heritage Site.

Education, information and awareness building is a major obligation of the State Parties to the Convention in order to strengthen appreciation and respect of the heritage values and to keep the public broadly informed of the dangers threatening their heritage.