

The Army in the Lake: Deposited human remains at Vædebro/Alken in Central Jutland, Denmark from 1st century BC/1st century AD

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For more than a century human skeletal remains have been recovered from the wetland area of Alken at lake Mossø in Central Jutland. It is estimated that the remains found so far, represent about 200 individuals, though only a minor part has been preserved until today. New investigations of the find material show that the bones were deposited in a lake at around 1st century BC to 1st century AD. The anthropological analyses reveal a male population within the age range of 15-50 years. There are several examples of unhealed sharp edge injuries, and there are abundant traces of gnaw marks from minor rodents presumably reflecting that the bones were deposited in the lake after having lain exposed on the ground elsewhere for some time. The find is interpreted as the remains of a ritually deposited defeated army. Dispersed artefacts in the wetland may be related to ritual activities both in connection with the deposition of the human remains and in the centuries before and after. The finds at Alken seem to anticipate the later large scale weapon depositions in wetland areas in Jutland in the following centuries, among which the famous Illerup Ådal site is located within the same valley system as Alken just four km further to the northeast. However, the contents of human remains are unique to Alken and may be seen as related to another, older ritual tradition.

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