

**Identification**

<i>Nomination</i>	Jelling mounds, runic stones, and church
<i>Location</i>	North of Vejle, Central Jutland
<i>State Party</i>	Denmark
<i>Date</i>	30 September 1993

**Justification by State Party**

The complex of Jelling mounds, runic stones, and church is a unique illustration of the transition between the old Nordic religion and Christianity; linked 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 Gorm as a memorial to his queen, Thyre. 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.

**History and Description***History*

Many of the early Danish records relating to the Viking King Gorm and Queen Thyre are recognized by scholars not to be based on reliable tradition. There is no direct evidence that the two large grave-mounds at Jelling were those of the two monarchs. The only irrefutable link is that provided by the two runic stones.

Nonetheless, certain facts are incontrovertible. Jelling was a Royal manor in the 10th century, during the reign of Gorm and his son Harald Bluetooth. Gorm erected a stone here in memory of his wife Thyre, and the royal couple ruled a realm known as Denmark.

The first wooden church built on the site of the present edifice was the largest of its kind anywhere in Scandinavia. Archaeological evidence suggests that it was built in the later 10th century, during the period around 960 when Harald Bluetooth introduced Christianity into Denmark, as he proclaims on the larger of the two runic stones. A large timber-lined tomb of 10th century type, containing high-status artefacts, was an integral feature of the design of this first church.

The larger of the two runic stones bearing Harald's inscription is located symmetrically between the two burial mounds, which has been shown by archaeological excavation to be its original location.

The north mound was constructed over an impressive burial chamber of oak, cut into an earlier Bronze Age barrow of much smaller dimensions. This chamber had been opened before the first excavation took place in 1820. The greater part of its original contents had been removed, but the few remaining items showed that it had been a high-status pagan burial of the mid 10th century. It is uncertain whether this was a single or double burial.

The south mound contains no burial chamber. Excavation has revealed that it is built over a stone alignment (possibly a ship-setting of Viking type), precisely orientated towards the Bronze Age barrow underlying the north mound.

The hypothetical reconstruction of the sequence at Jelling is as follows. After the death of Queen Thyne, her husband raised a stone in her memory and laid out a joint funerary monument consisting of two very large mounds. On his death he was buried in the chamber of the north mound, which may already have contained Thyre's remains. After bringing Denmark and Norway together and introducing Christianity into Denmark, their son Harald Bluetooth set up a stone proclaiming his achievements between the two mounds and built an impressive wooden church, in which the remains of his father were re-interred.

### *Description*

The two flat-topped mounds are almost identical in shape (a truncated cone) and size, with diameters of *c.* 70 m and up to 11 m high. Excavation has revealed that their construction is identical, being built of turves carefully stacked with the grass side down in even layers.

The larger runic stone is located exactly midway between the two mounds. Its inscription reads "King Harald bade this monument be made in memory of Gorm his father and Thyra his mother, that Harald who won for himself all Denmark and Norway and made the Danes Christians". Most of the inscription is on the east face of the stone, and is surmounted by a carved depiction of a typical Nordic dragon in interlace ornament. The remainder of the inscription, relating to the Christianization of the Danes between 953 and 965, is on the south-west face, which also bears the earliest depiction of Christ in Scandinavia.

Alongside it is the smaller runic stone. This is not in its original position, which is not known; it has been at its present location since about 1630. The inscription reads "King Gorm made this monument to his wife Thyra, Denmark's ornament".

The present church, which archaeological excavation has shown to have been preceded by at least three churches built of wood, all of which were destroyed by fire, is a simple whitewashed structure built of calcareous tufa, an easily quarried local material. Its reconstruction began around 1100, when it consisted of a chancel and nave; the tower at the west end was added in the early 15th century. Mural paintings dating from around 1100 (and thus the earliest in Denmark) came to light on the walls of the chancel in 1874-75.

### **Management and Protection**

#### *Legal status*

The mounds are owned by the Danish state and the church and churchyard, together with the runic stones, by the Evangelical Lutheran Danish Church.

The mounds and the runic stones are protected under the provisions of the Protection of Nature Act 1992, which prohibits any activities which may damage or disturb the monuments and provides for a buffer zone of 100 m radius round them, within which nothing other than normal agricultural activities may take place.

The church is surrounded by a buffer zone of 300 m under the same statute which prohibits the erection of buildings over 8.5 m high. A conservation order is in force for the area to the north of Jelling for a distance of 1000 m to prevent the erection of any building or afforestation, so as to provide an uninterrupted view of the monuments from this direction.

The church and the churchyard, including the runic stones, are protected under the Churches and Churchyards Consolidated Act of 1992, which requires any alteration to the church or churchyard to be approved by the diocesan authorities after consulting the National Museum.

The church, the monuments, and the surrounding area come within the provisions of the Local Plan of Jelling Municipality, which has a mandatory status under the Planning Act 1991. Jelling and its environs, especially to the north, are designated an area of special cultural interest in the Regional Plan of Vejle County, which is also backed by the 1991 Act.

## *Management*

The National Forest and Nature Agency of the Ministry of the Environment is responsible for the management of the mounds.

The church and churchyard, including the runic stones, are administered by the congregational council of Jelling church, under the supervision of the diocesan authorities, who are advised by the National Museum. The land immediately surrounding the site is owned and managed either by the National Forest and Nature Agency or Jelling Municipality.

Management of the area is coordinated by a committee composed of representatives of the National Forest and Nature Agency, the congregational council, Jelling Municipality, Vejle County, the National Museum, and the rural deanery. The committee is also consulted on all restoration projects and site interpretation facilities.

## **Conservation and Authenticity**

### *Conservation history*

The mounds have been in the care of the Danish state for over a century and have been carefully maintained throughout that period. Scientific excavations have been carried out during that period on both mounds, the results being published in learned journals.

The church has also been assiduously maintained and conserved by the congregational council, advised by the National Museum. Scientific excavations were carried out in the interior of the church in 1948-51 and again in 1976-79, in both cases by the National Museum.

### *Authenticity*

The authenticity of the mounds is not in doubt: they preserve their original form and dimensions, apart from some inevitable weathering over one thousand years. Of the two runic stones, the larger has been shown by excavation to be in its original location; the smaller is known to have been moved from another site, probably nearby, in the early 17th century.

The church and churchyard preserve their original form and materials, though some modifications have been made since their original construction.

## **Evaluation**

### *Action by ICOMOS*

The property was visited in April 1994 by an ICOMOS expert mission in April 1994. Both members of the mission, who were familiar with the monument, were impressed by the improvements to its setting carried out in recent years, notably the removal of later buildings from the immediate vicinity of the mounds and the designation of a stretch of open countryside to the north-east.

### *Qualities*

The complex of monuments at Jelling represents an event of exceptional importance, the beginning of the conversion of the Scandinavian peoples to Christianity. The transition is vividly illustrated by the pagan burial mounds, the two runic stones, one pagan and the other commemorating the Christianization of the Danes, and the church representing the triumph of Christianity. It should perhaps be stressed that Jelling was not the first Scandinavian settlement to adopt Christianity: it is known that it was brought to Birka (No. 555) by Ansgar in the mid 9th century. However, Jelling was the place where Christianity was first officially adopted (by Harald Bluetooth) in the mid 10th century, an act whose significance may be compared by that of Constantine the Great in AD 312.

### *Comparative analysis*

There is no other monumental complex in Scandinavia which is comparable with that of Jelling for its symbolic value.

### *ICOMOS recommendations for future action*

The protection afforded to the monumental complex by national and local legislation and regulations and the management systems in place, involving obligatory consultation of professional and scientific bodies, is of the highest order and ICOMOS has no suggestions to make regarding their improvement or amendment.

It is to be hoped, however, that the project for site interpretation facilities and a visitors' centre will be submitted to ICOMOS and the World Heritage Committee for comment when it is formulated.

### **Recommendation**

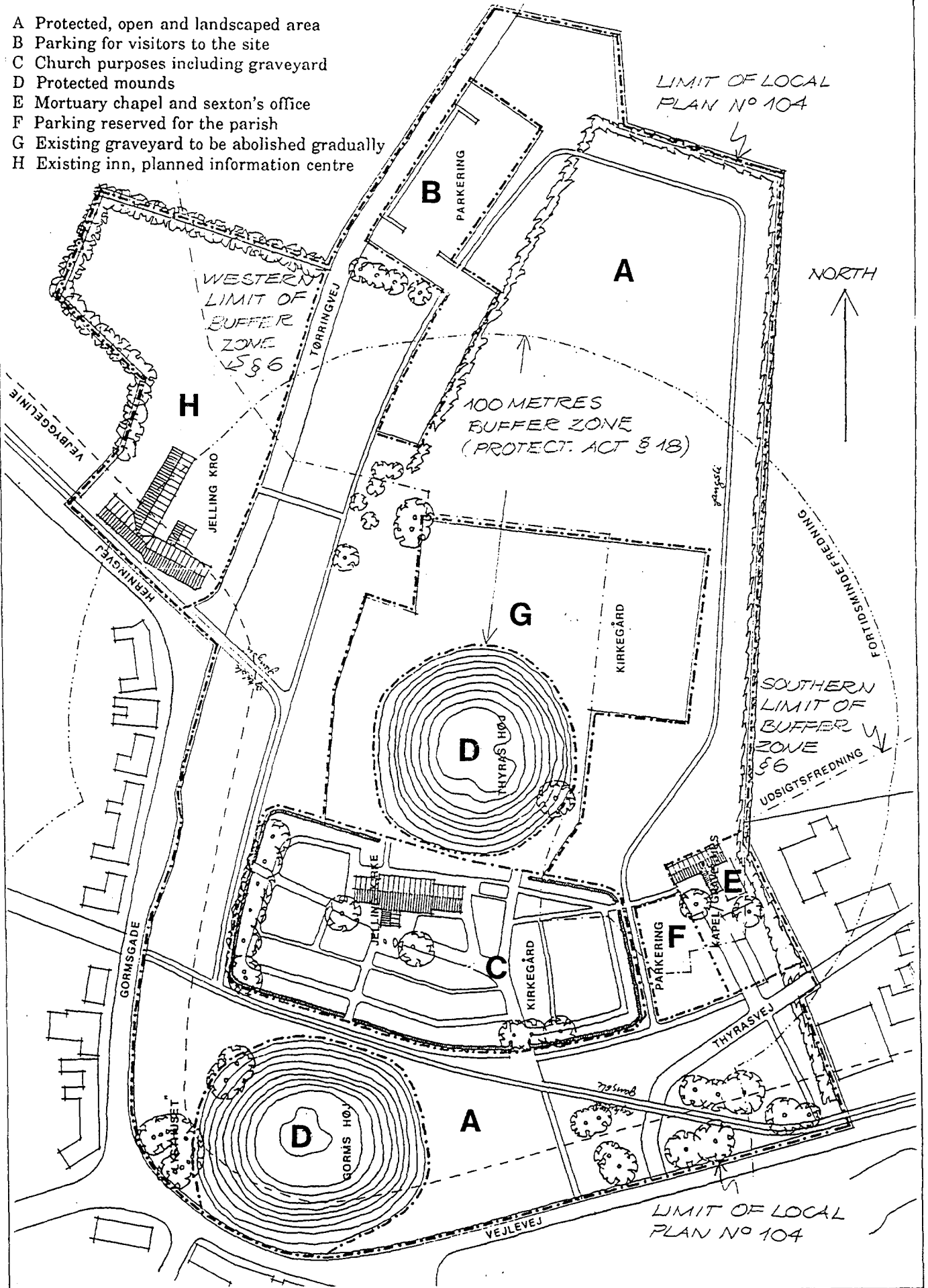
That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of criterion iii:

- ***Criterion iii*** The Jelling complex, and especially the pagan burial mounds and the two runic stones, are outstanding examples of the pagan Nordic culture.

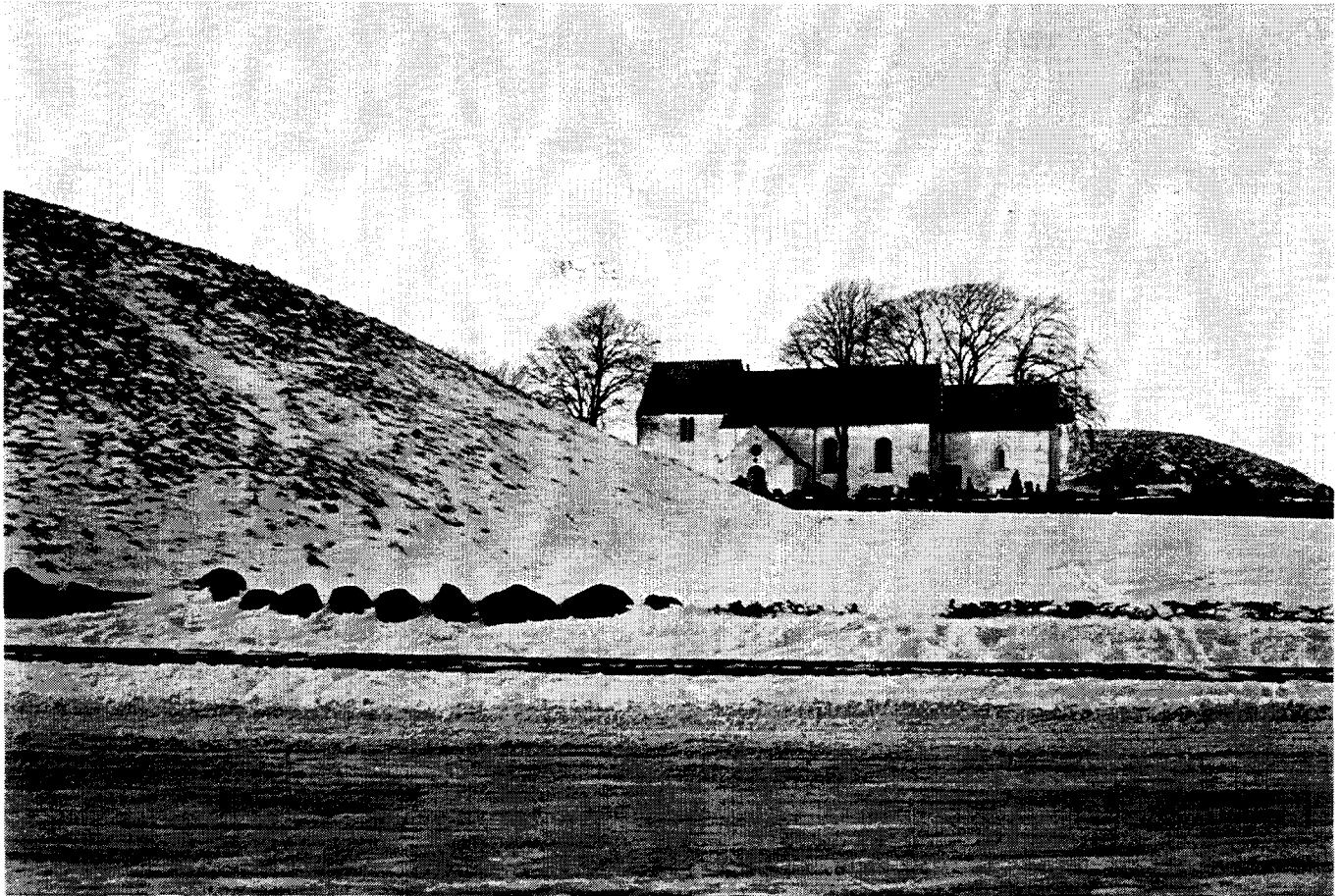
ICOMOS, October 1994

ZONES OF THE LOCAL PLAN

- A Protected, open and landscaped area
- B Parking for visitors to the site
- C Church purposes including graveyard
- D Protected mounds
- E Mortuary chapel and sexton's office
- F Parking reserved for the parish
- G Existing graveyard to be abolished gradually
- H Existing inn, planned information centre



Jelling : plan local N°104 /  
local Plan N°104



Jelling : tumulus sud et église, vus du sud /  
south Mound and Church, seen from the south



Jelling : les deux tumulus et l'église, vus du nord /  
the two Mounds and the Church, seen from the North