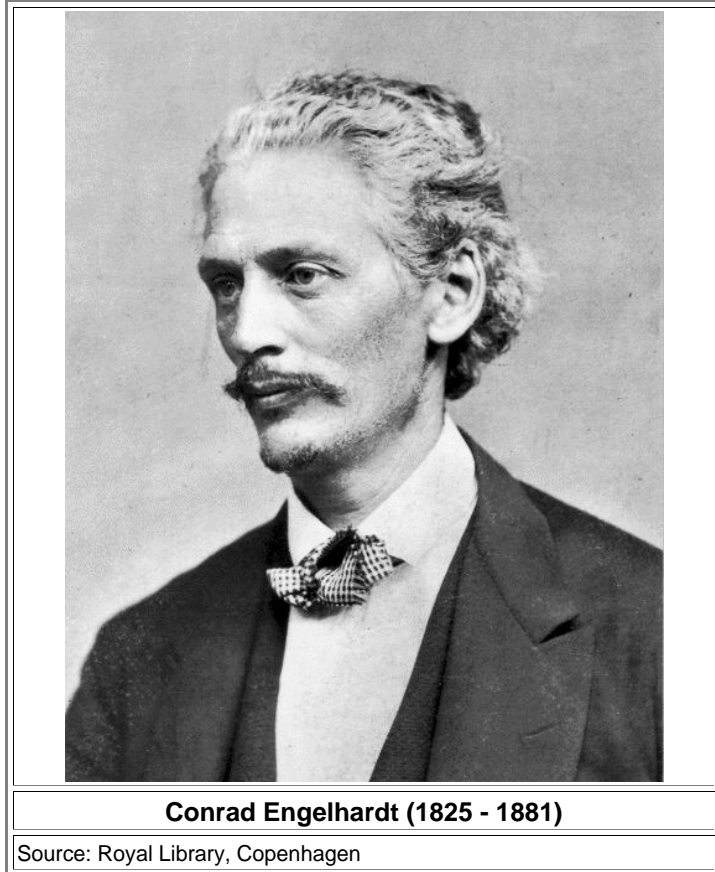


Nydam

The History

Nydam Mose or Nydam Bog is just [North of Flensburg](#), the northernmost German city of today. It was among the first bogs where digging was done relatively systematically and for scientific reasons, starting around 1859. One person stands out in this context: The Danish subject **Conrad Engelhardt**.

Advanced



The prelude to Engelhardt's digging in Nydam is complex and utterly confusing and I will give only a very brief account.

Farmers and peat diggers had found plenty of old objects long before 1859, especially in what we now call [Thorsbjerg](#), but also in Nydam and many other places in the general area. Some people, like one *Jaspersen*, collected these things, and Engelhardt run across the "Jaspersen" collection when he got a job as a high School teacher in Flensburg. The custom of the times was to exhibit such things in schools. The Jaspersen collection still exists in parts (now in the Copenhagen museum); here is one case showing swords among other things:



Part of the Jaspersen collection from before 1850

Source: Adopted from "[Sieg und Triumph](#) - Der Norden im Schatten des Römischen Reiches"

- Conradt obtained his teaching position because the Danish had just won the "1st Schleswig war" (1848 - 1850) and had taken over parts of what is now the German state of Schleswig-Holstein where I live. They kicked out teachers and others who had sympathized with the German side. This opened up positions, and Engelhardt found himself to be the youngest teacher in the Flensburg Gymnasium.

- He was also charged with the responsibility to organize the (Jaspersen) artifact collection already there, and that's what he did. He needed money and submitted a proposal to the ministry in charge, asking for a yearly budget. After a long wait it was finally granted, sort of. He got only half of what he asked for, and only for one year. Some things never change, it appears.

He induced other collectors to donate their treasures (in exchange for a nice title, perhaps), and started a bit of digging on his own. He was successful and eventually, since objects made from precious metals were found, caused a veritable "gold rush" among the local farmers, peat diggers and land owners. Serious money and fame seemed to be around the corner, ensuring nobility interest. Some chaos ensued accordingly, but the number of objects found (mostly without proper records) increased dramatically.

- In 1858 Engelhardt started serious digging in nearby [Thorsbjerg](#). He found many interesting artifacts, including a "[silver](#)" [face mask](#), but no iron since the acidic environment there has left nothing.

A year later in 1859 he finally commenced digging in Nydam where he not only found well preserved iron artifacts but a whole big oaken boat (that was eventually destroyed in one of the many wars since then). Finding preserved old wood was a sensation and fame descended on Engelhardt. Nydam has yielded much more treasures since then, including another big boat; see below.

- Archaeological bliss, however, was sorely disturbed by the next war. Denmark was fighting Prussia / Austria in the "2nd Schleswig war" 1863 - 64. This time the Prussians won (to some extent because they had the better cannons made from [Krupp steel](#)). Denmark lost the duchies Schleswig, Holstein and Lauenburg; much of what is now the German state of Schleswig-Holstein.

- The peace treaty stipulated that the "Nydam treasure" had to be handed over to the Germans. When the Prussians came to Copenhagen to pick up the things, the museum people, to their utmost consternation couldn't find it. "Very strange, was right here as of yesterday; no idea where it is now". Try as they might (including sending spies), the Prussians could not find the objects. Finally, a still unknown Dane betrayed his country and offered the Prussians to lead them to the secret place - for an outrageously large sum of money! The Prussians

paid, the guy lead them to Korsør, and the Nydam treasure was moved to what is now the [Landesmuseum Schleswig-Holstein](#) in Schleswig. There it still resides even so the Danes have tried to get it back ever since.

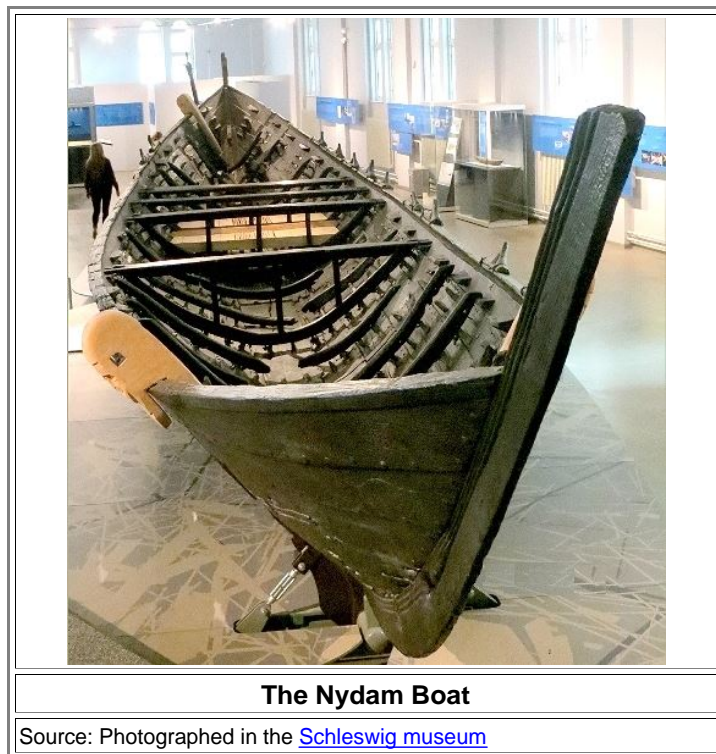
The Treasure

Conrad Engelhardt excavated the Nydam bog in a first campaign from 1859 to 1863. The second excavation campaign had to wait until 1989 when the National Museum of Denmark took the bit into its teeth. While it was debated for a long time how all these things ended up in the bog, it is quite clear by now that the stuff was sacrificed. This has happened on six to eight major and separate occasions. Major sacrifices were made in

- Phase 1 or Nydam A around **240 AD**. Mostly weapons and personal things.
- Phase 2 or Nydam B around **300 AD**. Mostly weapons and personal things.
- Phase 3 or Nydam C around **350 AD**. The boats (plus the usual swords, lances, spears, bows, arrows and round shields). One boat was made of made of oak and one of pine. Under these finds were the remains of a third boat, which apparently had been demolished already during the sacrifice. The oak wood was cut between 310 AD - 320 AD as could be demonstrated by dendrochronology. Since the boat was used for some time the date of the sacrifice is accordingly later around 350 AD.
- Phase 4 or Nydam D around **400 AD**. This phase has seen more than one deposit but the final word is not yet in.

Both excavations unearthed stuff from several phases; sorting it out is not so easy. All three boats were found by Engelhardt. The smaller (19 m) pine boat, however, was hacked up and used as firewood by troops during the 2nd Schleswig war and the third boat was too damaged to be reconstructed, it appears. However, in 2011 a fourth boat was found. It is supposedly about 100 years older than the Schleswig boat and somewhat larger.

The oak boat is now the pride of the [Schleswig museum](#) in Gottorf Castle. It is 23 m long, ca. 4 m wide, of clinker type, and built for 15 pairs of oars. It is considered to be the oldest Nordic ship find and the oldest known clinker built boat. It once weighed over three tons and was rowed by thirty men. Here it is:



As far as swords are concerned, Engelhardt already found "more than a hundred swords in Nydam moss" ¹⁾ and commissioned [two beautiful lithographs](#) (plates) for his publications to be made that are still widely used (if not always properly cited). Engelhardt's plates show in particular two very beautiful swords with unusual (and difficult to make) [palmette and chevron](#) patterns:



● Engelhardt published much about his findings (in Danish) and 1886 a [major book](#) in English. He referred to the swords unearthed in Nydam (unfortunately) as being "damascened". However, with "damascening" [he meant "incrustation"](#) and *not* pattern welding.


▀ By now more than 190 swords have been found ([here are some](#)) and the number is likely to increase since digging has not been finished. 13 swords bear a (Roman) "factory stamp", a few have (Roman type) incrustations. About 75 % are pattern welded and most of them are of Roman origin for (almost) sure. The "Roman origin", by the way, might refer to formerly Celtic areas, e.g. in South Germany, that had long since become a part of the Roman empire. The "[Illerup Adal](#)" [books](#) only list about 40 swords in the [distribution maps](#) for reasons not entirely clear to me.

Nydam Today

▀ What follows is mostly based on an article of Erik Jørgensen and Peter Vang Petersen in the "[Sieg und Triumph](#)" book. It summarizes very briefly the state-of-the-art as far as Nydam finds and their interpretation are concerned

Digging History	
Year	Remarks
1830	A local farmer gives old swords and shields as toys to his children
1859 - 1863	Engelhardt starts digging and finds the three boats (<i>Nydam I</i>). Later it became clear that there are at least 4 different time horizons for his findings and a subdivision into Nydam I(a-d) is made.
1864	Engelhardt's work ceased with the outbreak of the Second Schleswig War in early 1864 and some his discoveries were lost. The smaller of the two boats, perhaps 19 meters long and made of pine, was hacked up and used as firewood by troops. Prince Friedrich Karl and Prince Ahrenberg (Germans) dig a bit during the war; plus presumably many others.
1888	The " <i>Nydam II</i> " find is made. Don't know how and by whom.
1984	The newly founded "Society for Nydam research" prods around a bit and finds iron weapons. The Danish National Museum takes over and unearths <i>Nydam III</i> deposits.
1989	A detailed survey of the area begins; determining, for example the extension of the ancient lake
1992	The places where Engelhardt, the princes and all and sundry did their digging are discovered and identified. Much is found around the old boat places, especially in connection with the pine boat; for example an " hourglass " type silver sword handle. <i>Nydam IV</i> is found.
2011	A new boat is discovered! Larger and older than the one on exhibitions in Schleswig - but torn to pieces before it was sacrificed.

Findings History		
Major Sacrifices	Time	Remarks
Nydam I	a	Early 3rd century (200+ AD)
	b	Early 4th century (300+)
	c	About 350 AD
	d	About 400 + / -
Nydam II	Early 5th century (400+)	Around 100 silver ornaments from sword sheaths; possibly mixed up with Nydam Id
Nydam III	First half 5th century (450-)	Small depositions here an there (about 10), mostly several (up to 20+) lance and spear points, plus a few swords and knives.
Nydam IV	450 AD - 475 AD	One-time depositions of about 1000 objects surrounded by a "fence " of 36 swords


Nydam IV deposit with a "fence" of swords in-situ
Source

It is no longer disputed that more or less ritual sacrifices took place. It must have been for religious reasons but no details are known. While the swords (and much other stuff) was (mostly) Roman and thus produced somewhere in the "South - West", the people who sacrificed it took it from "neighbors" in the South (present day North Germany) or the North (Norway, Sveden). Either they brought it back from a successful raid, or they took it from unsuccessful raiders.

"It has always caused puzzlement that no human skeletons have been found with the sacrificed weapons but only remains of some terribly hurt and cut up horses and dogs" writes [Ulla Lund Hansen](#) in 2003. That seems to support the "sacrificed objects were brought back home from successful raids" hypotheses. Well - in 2009 a mass grave with at least 200 probably sacrificed "Norwegians" was discovered close to the [Illerup Ådal bog](#). I guess the last word about the bog sacrifices is not yet in. We have to wait.