

Reinterpretations of ceramics from Hedegård

- An interdisciplinary approach to Iron Age
pottery based on Nina Lund's ceramics exhibition

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Keywords: Archaeology,
Denmark, Hedegård, Iron Age,
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Abstract

This article explores archaeological ceramic finds from the Hedegård settlement and burial site in Central Jutland, Denmark, dating from the late Pre-Roman Iron Age to the early Roman Iron Age. The site features distinctive pottery used in both daily life and burial contexts. The article highlights the interdisciplinary collaboration between archaeologist Orla Madsen and ceramicist Nina Lund, who interprets and recreates Hedegård ceramics using modern pottery techniques. Lund's work is showcased in an exhibition alongside the original prehistoric vessels, illustrating their functional and aesthetic

qualities. Madsen's archaeological insights into the vessels' historical and cultural context complement Lund's practical approach, bringing new perspectives to the understanding of Iron Age ceramics. This collaboration emphasizes how combining archaeological knowledge with hands-on ceramic reconstruction can deepen our understanding of ancient craftsmanship, daily life, and ritual practices. The article underscores the value of interdisciplinary research in exploring the functionality, social meaning, and artistic expression of ancient pottery.

Introduction

In 2024 the Museum of Central Jutland, Museum of Horsens, and Moesgaard Museum began excavating the Hedegård settlement, where we, two prehistoric archaeology students from the University of Copenhagen, participated during our seminar excavation in August this year.

During the fieldwork, we stayed in the guesthouse of ceramicist Nina Lund. She has collaborated with archaeologist Orla Madsen – who excavated the Hedegård burial site between 1986-93 – to recreate the pottery from Hedegård. The result is a contemporary exhibition where Lund reinterprets the original Iron Age pottery, not by reconstructing the ancient techniques, but by shaping new vessels on a potter's wheel using stoneware, glaze, and modern kilns. Her works give the pottery a contemporary aesthetic and functional character that speaks to modern everyday life.

This article presents an archaeological evaluation of the exhibition and its underlying assumptions. It draws on relevant archaeological literature concerning Pre-Roman Iron Age pottery from Jutland and combines this with our observations and knowledge as archaeology students. In particular, we examine how well the recreated vessels reflect the archaeological record and what interpretative choices are made when historical material culture is translated into modern design. This evaluation is based on an archaeological perspective and includes input from both a ceramic and an archaeological angle.

A central idea behind the exhibition is that form and function are closely linked in material culture. While this may seem straightforward, archaeological theory has shown that the relationship is more complex. Function can include not only practical use, but also social roles and symbolic meaning, and should be understood in relation to context. In our evaluation, we consider how the exhibition presents form and function, and how this representation connects to broader discussions in archaeology.

Hedegård

The burial site and the settlement at Hedegård are located on an elevated and demarcated area by the upper course of the Skjern River in Central Jutland (fig. 1 and fig. 2). At the edge of the slope lay a distinctly fenced settlement area, and 30-40 meters north of the settlement was a large burial site (Olesen, 2019: 247). They are contemporaneous, and they are dated to the late Pre-Roman Iron Age and the beginning of the early Roman Iron Age.



Fig. 1: Central Jutland showing Hedegård and Rosenholmvej (red circle), and Alken Enge (orange circle). Also marked on the map are other simultaneous burial sites, Lønhøjvej and Store Skindbjerg, and settlements, Ørregård and Stenbjergkvarteret (green circle).

The burial site was excavated in 1986-93 and is one of the most extensive sites in the region. It has provided important insights into both burial rituals and settlement patterns in prehistoric times. The most prestigious graves date to the late Pre-Roman Iron Age and early Roman Iron Age, with around 200 graves in total, including cremations, inhumations, and secondary graves (Madsen, 1997: 62). The cremation graves are dated to period II.21 in the Pre-Roman Iron Age and B1 in the Roman Iron Age, whereas the inhumation burials are from B2 in the Roman Iron

Age. With the shift of the burial types, the Hedegård burial site begins to resemble the vessel grave sites in Eastern Jutland (Olesen, 2019: 261-262, quoting Ejstrup and Jensen, 2000: 104). In addition to these graves, pits containing one to nine whole clay vessels were found, indicating their role in burial rituals (Madsen, forthcoming: 3).

Ceramics in the Pre-Roman and Roman Iron Age

Pre-Roman pottery is very similar to Bronze Age pottery with simple utility techniques. The pottery was heavily burnished and fired, giving it a shiny black surface; we saw this type of pottery at the Hedegård settlement. The earthenware was made by hand, where the clay was rolled into long coils and stacked into a shape, which was then smoothed out. During the Roman Iron Age, the potter's wheel was introduced and became more widespread in Denmark, leading to a faster pottery production and more symmetrical and uniform shapes. The pottery was fired in simple open kilns. In Denmark, one has yet to find a completely preserved pottery kiln. Either wood or peat was used for firing, which lasted about half a day to a full day, and the temperature was between 800-900 degrees (Jensen, 2003: 147-148).

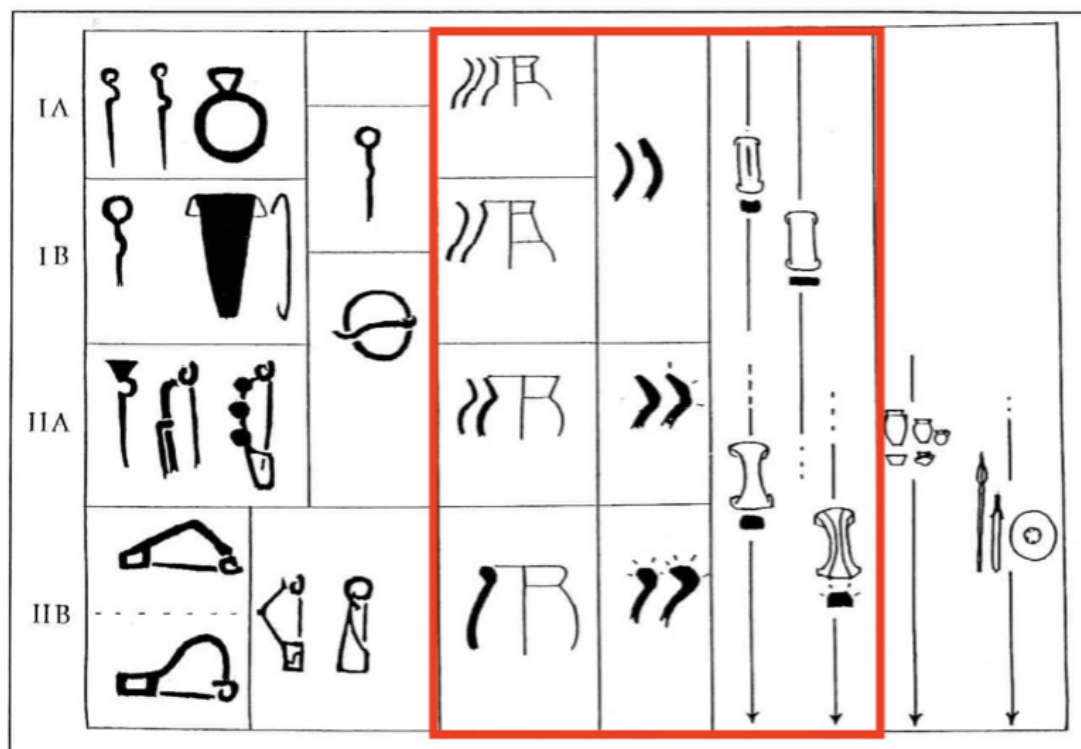


Fig. 2: Suggested chronology scheme of the Pre-Roman Iron Age of Jutland. On the left in the red square are shown the rim types, and on the right in the red square are shown the different handle types.

Somewhere between BCE and CE a shift in the production of pottery happens. This development in pottery shifted from focusing on function over aesthetics to focusing on both. Pottery was one of the most common items in households, but it also had ritual and commercial functions, where different styles and qualities of pottery were used to signify social differences. Ceramics are often dated based on stylistic features, shape, and ornamentation.

Looking at fig. 2 on the left side in the red square, one can see the development of rim types on pottery in the Pre-Roman and Roman Iron Age. The rim played an important role both functionally and aesthetically, as it not only needed to reinforce the vessel's structure but also contribute to its usability, such as for pouring or storage. At Hedegård settlement, we found many examples of thickened rims. This type of rim could be straight or slightly flared and served to strengthen the vessel and make it more durable. The thickening provided a better grip when the vessels were moved or poured from. The flared rim was functional, as it made it easier to pour liquids from the vessel. This type of rim was often used for drinking vessels. Inward-curving rims are often seen on vessels used for food storage.

In the Pre-Roman Iron Age, there were two different handle types: strap-shaped and X-shaped, see fig. 2 on the right side in the red square. The handles in the Pre-Roman and Roman Iron Age depended on the vessel's function and local style. X-shaped handles are the most common type found at Hedegård settlement, and the handles are dated to 200 BCE to 200 CE. X-shaped handles are a special type often used on larger vessels or jars. The function of this type of handle provides a robust construction, making it easier to lift heavy vessels. The design of the handle may have been aesthetically motivated and may also have had symbolic significance. X-shaped handles are often found on somewhat coarser, hand-formed clay vessels. Multiple variations of X-shaped handles appeared, and the handles are a good example of how form and function played a role in the development of pottery in the early Iron Age.

The pottery finds from the Hedegård burial site offer insight into daily life and cultural practices during the Iron Age. Most consist of shards from household items like jars, bowls, and pots used for cooking and storage. Pottery fragments found in graves suggest their use in burial rituals, possibly as containers for offerings or food for the deceased. Some shards appear intentionally broken, which might symbolize the end of life or a transition to another existence, possibly "releasing" the object for the spirit world. The pottery found in graves is often less decorative and shows signs of use, indicating that these items were part of daily life, highlighting a close connection between the living and the dead, where buried items reflected both life and the passage to the afterlife.

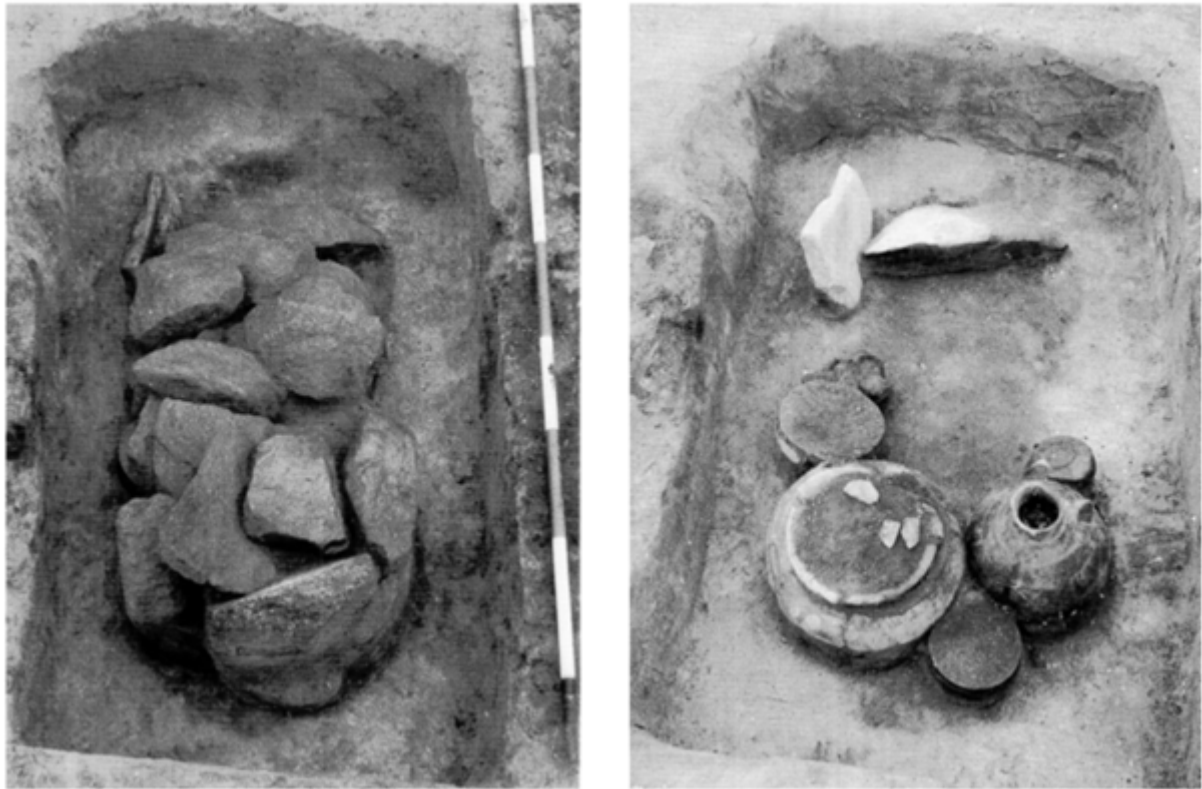


Fig. 3: Ceramics found in one of the secondary graves at Hedegård burial site. To the left the frequently occurring stone packing above and around the vessels. To the right the vessel is exposed in the pit. Feature seen from the south.

Experimental archaeology as a method

Experimental archaeology is a method used to recreate prehistoric constructions, material culture and processes to get a better understanding of a society's technologies. This is done by incorporating analogues in the form of ethnographic studies of contemporary societies and technologies. Furthermore, it is important to understand the degrading processes in the material culture which can affect the quality of the archeological material. Experimental archaeology should be understood as a proposal of how a construction in theory could have looked like and functioned as, rather than a concrete answer (Meldgaard & Rasmussen 1996, 9-12). These experiments can be executed by craftsmen in specific fields in cooperation with an archeologist. When analyzing a society's ceramics, one might get a better understanding of its craftsman traditions, production conditions and social structure. Furthermore, if an excavation contains finds of the original clay material used for the vessels, wood stove, misfired ceramics and tools used for pottery, this will broaden our knowledge of the prehistoric local potter's technology and therefore make experimental archeological reconstructions more accurate (Claudi-Hansen 2014, 3-7).

Nina Lund “Keramisk Formsprog - 2000 år og én kilometer”

Nina Lund is a ceramic artist from Hedegård, Denmark, who specializes in traditional craftsmanship and modern ceramics. She lived in France for several years, where she trained in the field of ceramics. In the late 1990s, she established her own ceramics workshop in Hedegård, where she continues to work today. In 2024 Lund created an art exhibition called *Keramisk Formsprog - 2000 år og én kilometer*¹ which stretched from the 8th of June until 31 of August. The exhibition is an interpretation of the 2000-year-old Iron Age ceramics found at the Hedegård excavation 30 years prior, located only one kilometer from Lund’s ceramics workshop. The archeologist, Orla Madsen, interpreted the composition of vessels as a prehistoric “table setting” of the individual who was buried with the ceramics. Lund used her knowledge as a ceramist together with the method of experimental archeology to recreate the ceramics with a modern interpretation. The focus was especially on the vessel’s attachment of handles, finish of the edges and the functionality. She used different sculpting techniques and firing methods than the prehistoric local potters used at Hedegård. Instead of using the Iron Age pottery techniques such as rolling it into long coils as well as using earthenware, Lund threw the clay and used stoneware. Therefore, the focus is solely on the clay vessels functionality and how it could be applied for both today’s society and the Iron Age society at Hedegård. In the exhibition the original Iron Age vessel borrowed from Museum Midtjylland and Museum Horsens, is shown next to the contemporary version made by Lund. On the sides of each vessel, a sign is placed with both the archaeologist and ceramicist’s interpretation as seen on figure 5 (www.keramik.dk).



Fig. 4: Nina Lund Keramik

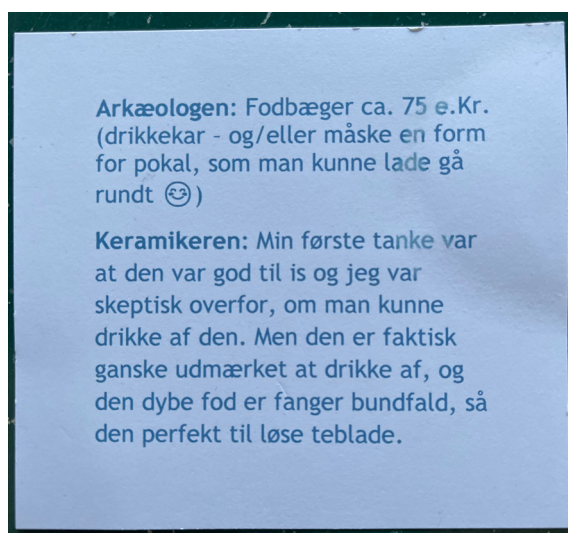


Fig. 5: Example of an interpretation

1 English: *Ceramic Idiom - 2000 years and one kilometer*

Ceramicists and archaeologist vessel interpretations

Interdisciplinary collaboration can yield several important results. By integrating diverse perspectives from various fields, teams can achieve more thorough problem-solving and foster innovation. Each discipline contributes its own methodologies and theories, enhancing both understanding and creativity. Merging knowledge from different areas can stimulate creative thinking, generating new ideas and solutions that might not arise within a single discipline. The combination of concepts and techniques from multiple fields can lead to pioneering innovations that expand the limits of possibility. Furthermore, by tackling issues from various viewpoints, interdisciplinary collaborations can create outcomes with a more substantial societal impact, as they take into account a broader array of variables and stakeholder viewpoints.

At the exhibition at Nina Lund Keramik each vessel has an interpretation of its functionality from an archeologist's perspective as well as the ceramicist's perspective. The archeologist Orla Madsen's perspective is focused on dating the vessel and its primary function seen from its typology. The ceramicist Nina Lund's perspective is focused on function determined by the vessel's form. Furthermore, Lund's perspective is a contemporary view of what the vessel could have been used for in a dining context in the year 2024. Here she includes some new interpretations for the vessel's function which is common knowledge for a ceramicist. Following vessels will not be introduced in chronological order, and it's therefore important to note the shift in burial custom from B1 and B2 that happened in 70 BCE.

Handled vessel (fig. 6) is described as an open vessel, but it's still fairly closed with the opening being 80-90% opened. It's about 8-12 cm tall and only has one handle (Ejstrud & Jensen 2000, 23.) The archeologist interprets this type of vessel as a bowl used to eat from or as a vessel used for storage. The ceramicist describes the handled vessel's function as a vessel for serving liquid food.



Fig. 6: *Handled vessel*

Archaeologist: *Handled vessel. Ca. 75 BCE (Possibly used to eat from, but could also have been used for storage).*

Ceramicist: *Very beautiful well balanced bowl. The handle is exactly at the right place and its possible to serve more liquidy content without spilling. For soups, sauce or strawberries.*

Attachment 1: Translated by Angelyn Sørensen

In one of the East-Jutlandic earthenware graves, this type of vessel has been found with soot residue on the inside of its wall as burned food on the outside. Claudi-Hansen says it therefore had been used as both a serving vessel as well as a vessel for preparation of food (Claudi-Hansen 2013, 195). Looking at the vessel's form it can be decided if the accessibility of the vessel's body is restricted or unrestricted looking at the diameter of the vessel's opening. The criterion for an accessible vessel is that "the diameter of the opening is smaller than both the maximum diameter and the height of the vessel's body". Since the handled vessel's opening diameter is smaller than the maximum diameter but greater than the height of the vessel's body, this is considered an unrestricted vessel. This type of vessel is less suited for storage, and more suited for stirring, mixing and grinding (van der Veen 2018). Therefore, both the archaeologists' and ceramicists' interpretations are right, with the exception of the archaeologists' interpretation of the vessel being used for storage.



Fig. 7: Footed bowl

Archaeologist: Footed bowl ca. 50 BCE (maybe used for storage but can also hold ½ liter beer).

Ceramicist: One almost gets to think about Bjørn Winblad and maybe a small plant. The shape makes you want to hold it with both hands. It's also beautiful for fruit.

Attachment 2: Translated by Angelyn Sørensen

Footed bowl (fig. 7). The archeologist interprets this type of vessel as a form of storage which can hold around ½ liter liquid, possibly beer. The ceramicists interpret the footed bowl as a possible fruit bowl.

Since the diameter of the vessel's opening seems equivalent to the maximum diameter this is an unrestricted vessel form. This indicates the vessel was not suitable for storage, but rather for serving or stirring (van der Veen 2018). Whether it was beer, as the archaeologist interprets, or fruit, as the ceramicist suggests, it cannot be determined by only using this method of analysis.

Archaeologist: Vase ca. 75 BCE (for storage of liquids - water, juice and beer).

Ceramicist: A form that can be used both as a jug and a vase. Very beautiful handle with a good balance.

Attachment 3: Translated by Angelyn Sørensen

Storage vessels (fig. 8) are a vessel with a narrow opening together with one or two handles. This type of vessel can be found in different sizes (Ejstrud & Jensen 2000, 23). The archaeologist describes this type of vessel as storage for liquids. The ceramicists agree but add that it can pour liquid as well.

The maximum diameter and the height of this vessel are both greater than the vessel's opening. Therefore, this vessel can be used for storage (van der Veen 2018). Microscopical analyses were used of the crust located at the bottom of two bronze kettles. These kettles show signs of having contained barley, cranberries, myrica gale and yeast. The ceramic storage vessels could have had the same function as the imported bronze kettles, since they show multiple similarities (Claudi-Hansen 2013, 196-197). These vessels can also be seen in relation to footed beakers and cups.



Fig. 8: Storage vessel



Fig. 9: Footed beaker

Archaeologist: Footed beaker ca. 75 BCE (drinking vessel - and/or maybe a type of trophy, that could be passed around).

Ceramicist: My first thought was that it was suited for ice and I was skeptical whether it could be used for drinking. But it's quite excellent to drink from and the tall feet catches precipitate, making it perfect for loose tea leaves.

Attachment 4: Translated by Angelyn Sørensen

Footed beaker (fig. 9) is referred to as an open vessel that is 10-12 cm tall with a distinctive foot (Ejstrud & Jensen 2000, 23). The archeologist interprets this as a drinking vessel or a form of trophy to pass around. The ceramicist interprets this as a drinking vessel where the precipitate gathers in the foot, making it suitable for tea leaves to fall into. Lund says the function of these vessels could be a cup with a built-in strainer (Hald 2024).

Both the footed beakers height and maximum diameter is not greater than the opening diameter, making it a vessel used for serving rather than storage (van der Veen 2018). The footed beaker can often be found close to the storage vessels, including the bronze vessels. This indicates that the liquid in the storage vessel could have been served in the footed beaker. This means that the drink served in this vessel could possibly have been a fermented drink. Oftentimes a cup can be found inside the footed beaker in a grave context (Claudi-Hansen 2013, 196-198).

The cup (fig. 10) is an open vessel with a height of 5-7 cm, often with a handle. Often found inside of the footed beaker or close to it (Ejstrud & Jensen 2000, 23). The archeologist interprets this vessel as a cup you can drink out of. The ceramicist has recreated this vessel as bigger than the original Iron Age cup as well as changed the rim edge so it's more convenient to drink from.

The cup's opening is smaller than the maximum diameter while the height is smaller than the diameter of the opening, making it unrestricted (van der Veen 2018). This vessel can be seen in relation to the footed beaker, as well as the storage vessels. Findings from two drinking horns indicate that the footed beaker contains a fermented drink while the cup could contain a honey drink. Another interpretation of this cup is that it could have been used as a ladle to transfer liquid from the storage vessel into the footed beaker (Claudi-Hansen 2013, 198).



Fig. 10: Cup

Archaeologist: Cup ca. 50 BCE (to drink from).

Ceramicist: A small whimsical and almost cute cup. I've sized it up a half time and made the edges more fit for drinking, so it could be usable for today.

Attachment 4: Translated by Angelyn Sørensen

This interpretation would correspond with the ceramicist's choice of changing the original size and rim edge due to the vessel's poor functionality as a drinking cup.

It can be argued if the *Keramisk Formsprog - 2000 år og én kilometer* exhibition is perceived as experimental archeology in the sense that Lund doesn't use earthenware and rolling the clay into long coils as the danish Iron age society did. The focus in this project lies solely on the vessel's form and function with the cooperation between Lund as the ceramist craftsman and Madsen as the archeologist. Furthermore, Lund incorporates her knowledge of modern table setting pottery as analogues that can draw parallels for the prehistoric society at Hedegård.

Further analyses

Ceramic kilns

As mentioned earlier, findings related to the production of ceramics such as tools and kilns can tell us more about the social structure at Hedegård and if the ceramics were local. During the excavation at Hedegård in 2024, at the center of the settlement a feature which looked like a well on the geophysics map, turned out to be a ceramic kiln when it was unearthed. It was a symmetrical circle containing a dark layer of soil as well as a thin line of red clay, creating a more oval line inside the dark soil layer circle. In the dark soil layer, there were pieces of ceramic shards that might have been misfired. Unfortunately, the kiln wasn't fully excavated. If Hedegård gets re-excavated in the future, it would be interesting to finish the excavation of this particular ceramic kiln as well as possible more kilns. Based on the fact that the settlement's cultural layer had a high concentration of ceramic sheds, a large production of clay vessels could have been taking place at Hedegård.

Clay material

A possible large clay production can further be confirmed by a previous excavation in the 1980's-1990's. There the archeologists found a large pit that was dug at the depth of 2 meters north-west of the village. The pit contained clay soil, which indicates that the people at the Hedegård settlement used local clay and therefore had the material to produce the large amount of clay vessels as seen on the location (Madsen 1997, 61-62). When excavating at Hedegård in 2024 the north-western side of the village was reopened, and large amounts of clay was unearthed. Lund got to bring some of the clay back to her ceramic workshop, where new interpretations and discoveries of the Hedegård pottery could take place in the future.

Macrofossils-, pollen- and lipid analyses

To broaden the understanding of the Hedegård vessels' functionality, it would be interesting to look further into what food or beverages the different vessels possibly contained. Some

vessels from the Roman Iron Age have been shown to contain small rocks that are interpreted as symbolic meals. For vessels lacking these rocks, it could be beneficial to use scientific analyses. Those types of analyses could include macrofossils- and pollen analyses of the soil inside the vessel. Furthermore, lipid analysis could be used as well by taking food residue from the inside of the vessel wall. These analyses have previously been taken at settlements contemporary with Hedegård. From those analyses, traces of barley, cranberries, myrica gale and yeast can be indicated from the vessel wall (Claudi-Hansen 2013, 195). Therefore, similar analyses could be used to get an understanding of the vessels' content together with Lund and Madsen's interpretation of the Hedegård pottery to get a more accurate idea of each vessel type's function.

Conclusion

The collaboration between ceramicist Nina Lund and archaeologist Orla Madsen stands out for its innovative approach to understanding Iron Age ceramics. Lund's use of modern techniques, such as the potter's wheel and stoneware, alongside traditional forms, enables a reimagining of the ancient ceramics, emphasizing both their functional and aesthetic aspects. By exhibiting her reinterpretations alongside original artifacts, she effectively bridges the gap between the past and the present, illuminating the evolving relationship between functionality and artistry in pottery. Lund's use of stoneware instead of earthenware and her innovative sculpting methods reflect a contemporary perspective that emphasizes the practical application of these vessels in today's society while honoring their historical significance. By doing this, she narrows down the vessel's functionality by using her background knowledge as a ceramicist. By examining the footed beaker, Lund interprets this vessel as having a built-in strainer which is a new idea of its functionality. By sizing up the original Iron Age cup, she unintentionally confirms the vessel is not suited as a drinking cup, corresponding with Claudi-Hansen's interpretation of the same type of vessel. This confirms that analogues of modern society table settings can help us broaden our knowledge of the Iron Age society at Hedegård's craftsman traditions, production conditions and social structure.

List of figures

Front page: Nina Lund Keramik. *Angelyn Sørensen at Nina Lund keramik.*

Fig. 1: Central Jutland showing Hedegård and Rosenholmvej (red circle), and Alken Enge (orange circle). Also marked on the map are other simultaneous burial sites, Lønhøjvej and Store Skindbjerg, and settlements, Ørregård and Stenbjergkvarteret (green circle). *Olesen, 2019: 246.*

Fig. 2: Suggested chronology scheme of the Pre-Roman Iron Age of Jutland. On the left in the red square are shown the rim types, and on the right in the red square are shown the different handle types. *Martens, 1997: 129.*

Fig. 3: Ceramics found in one of the secondary graves at Hedegård burial site. To the left the frequently occurring stone packing above and around the vessels. To the right the vessel is exposed in the pit. Feature seen from the south. *Madsen, 1996-97: 62.*

Fig. 4: Nina Lund Keramik. *Angelyn Sørensen at Nina Lund keramik.*

Fig. 5: Example of an interpretation. *Nina Lund.*

Fig. 6: Handled vessel. *Nina Lund.*

Fig. 7: Footed bowl. *Nina Lund.*

Fig. 8: Storage vessel. *Nina Lund.*

Fig. 9: Footed beaker. *Nina Lund.*

Fig. 10: Cup. *Angelyn Sørensen at Nina Lund keramik.*

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Attachments

Attachment 1: Lund, N. (2024).

Sign with text about handled vessels. "*Keramisk Formsprog - 2000 år og én kilometer*" exhibition. Nina Lund Keramik, Ejstrupholm.

"Arkæologen: Hankekar. Ca. 75 e.Kr. (Muligvis til at spise af, men kan også bruges til opbevaring)

Keramikeren: Meget smukt og velafbalanceret skål. Hanken sidder det helt rigtig sted, og man ville kunne servere mere flydende indhold uden at spille. Til suppe, sovs eller jordbær."

Attachment 2: Lund, N. (2024).

Sign with text about footed bowls. "*Keramisk Formsprog - 2000 år og én kilometer*" exhibition. Nina Lund Keramik, Ejstrupholm.

"Arkæologen: Fodskål. ca 50 e.Kr. (måske til opbevaring, men kan vel også rumme ½ l. øl)

Keramikeren: Man kommer næsten til at tænke på Bjørn Winblad og måske en lille plante. Formen giver lyst til at holde om den med begge hænder. Den er også smuk til frugt."

Attachment 3: Lund, N. (2024).

Sign with text about storage vessels. "*Keramisk Formsprog - 2000 år og én kilometer*" exhibition. Nina Lund Keramik, Ejstrupholm.

"Arkæologen: Vase. Ca. 75 e.Kr. (til opbevaring af væsker – vand, saft, øl)

Keramikeren: En form, der kan bruges både som kande og vase. Meget fin hank med god balance."

Attachment 4: Lund, N. (2024).

Sign with text about footed beakers. "*Keramisk Formsprog - 2000 år og én kilometer*" exhibition. Nina Lund Keramik, Ejstrupholm.

"Arkæologen: Fodbæger ca. 75 e.Kr. (drikkekar – og/eller måske en form for pokal, som man kunne lade gå rundt)

Keramikeren: Min første tanke var at den var god til is og jeg var skeptisk overfor, om man kunne drikke af den. Men den er faktisk ganske udmærket at drikke af, og den dybe fod er fanger bundfald, så den perfekt til løse teblade."

Attachment 5: Lund, N. (2024).

Sign with text about cups. "*Keramisk Formsprog - 2000 år og én kilometer*" exhibition. Nina Lund Keramik, Ejstrupholm.

"Arkæologen: Kop ca. 50 e.Kr. (til at drikke af)

Keramikeren: Lille finurlig og næsten nuttet kop. Jeg har forstørret den en halv gang og gjort den mere drikkevenlig i kanten, for at vi ville kunne bruge den i dag."