

A Neolithic Causewayed Camp at Trelleborg near Slagelse, West Zealand

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In the 1970's a new type of monument was identified, belonging to the Middle Neolithic TRB-culture in Scandinavia, viz. the causewayed camp. These constructions are characterized by a system of ditches separated by numerous earth bridges. At the present time we know of five such fortifications within the borders of Denmark (1). To these may be added the one at Búdelsdorf near Rendsburg (Schleswig), belonging to the same culture (Hingst 1971).

The causewayed camps of Scandinavia correspond in type and date to those in Central and Western Europe (Boelicke 1976/77: 106–112). So far there is no unanimity of opinion about them, but the excavations of e.g. the Sarup and Toftum camps seem to indicate that these were places of local ceremonial significance where people carried out a single or a few ceremonial activities, after which the monuments gradually disintegrated and were covered up.

Once a structure of this type has become identified as belonging to a culture group, attempts are made to locate more of a similar kind so as to broaden our knowledge of them.

One of the familiar settlements from the Middle Neolithic TRB-culture is Trelleborg. Excavations of the Viking Age ring-fort revealed 125 pits belonging to different phases of the Middle Neolithic TRB-culture (Mathiassen 1944:77–98, Becker 1956:91–108). If we study the published plans from Trelleborg (Nørlund 1948:Table V a), we notice that the south-east square courtyard within the ring-fort contains a row of large pits in a system extending from the south-west towards the north-east. The size and shape of the pits seem to correspond to the ditches of the causewayed camps. The location across a headland agrees with observations at e.g. the Sarup and Lønt constructions (1).

Trelleborg was excavated in such a way that we cannot feel entirely confident that the published ex-

cavation plan is correct in details. The absence of excavation boundaries, for instance, makes it impossible to ascertain whether the above row of pits ceases or whether it continues towards the north-east. In August 1979 a small-scale re-excavation was carried out of the site (2) to establish:

- a) whether the system of pits extended across the headland
- b) the cross section of the pits, since the ditches of fortified constructions are always regularly dug, and
- c) whether, in connection with this construction, there might have existed a palisade which had been overlooked during the previous excavation.

At the re-excavation a test-pit was dug in the area of the north-east square near the east gate where it was obvious that no previous excavation had taken place (fig. 1,A). This test-pit contained two Stone Age pits, one of which (fig. 1,B) was regular in shape and formed an extension of the row of pits mentioned above. Thus it would seem that the pits in question actually form a continuous system across the headland – a system of pits that corresponds to the ditch systems round the fortified sites.

In the newly discovered pit/ditch and in two of those found previously transverse trenches were dug to examine their profile. The trenches show that they were dug to a regular shape in the subsoil, which here consists of a hard, sticky clay (fig. 2). The ditches of other fortified constructions are generally several metres deep (Andersen 1974: figs. 3 and 8, Madsen 1977: figs. 2 and 4), but those examined at Trelleborg showed a depth of only 50–60 cm. The reason for their slight depth may be that when the Viking fort was built the headland was levelled (3), which would have removed a considerable amount of earth from the area investigated. Another reason may be that there was no intention of making them deeper. Obser-

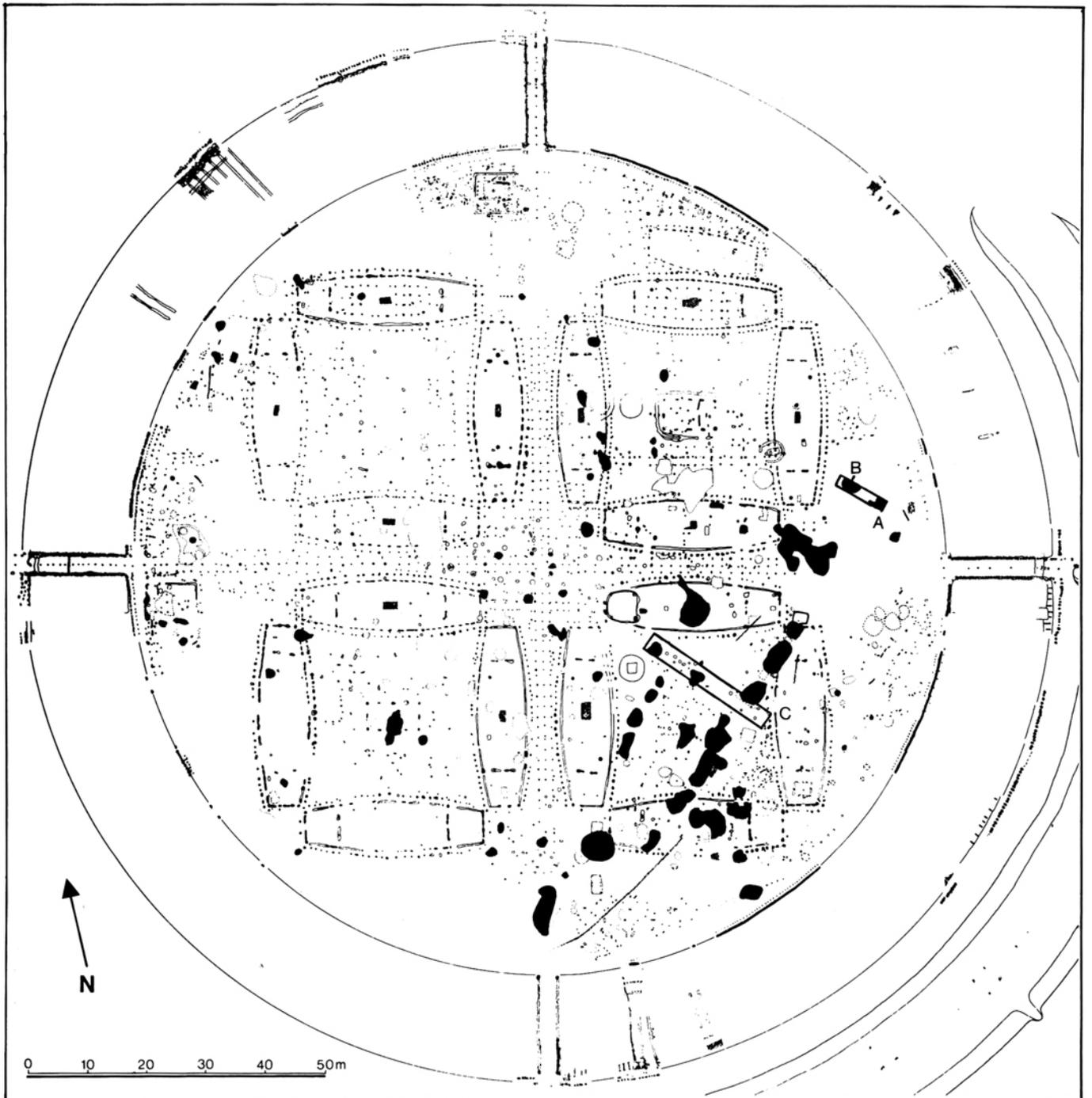


Fig. 1. Plan of the Viking fort of Trelleborg at Slagelse (after Nørlund 1948, Table LVII). Neolithic pits are shaded black. Letters refer to the excavation trenches and pits mentioned in the text.

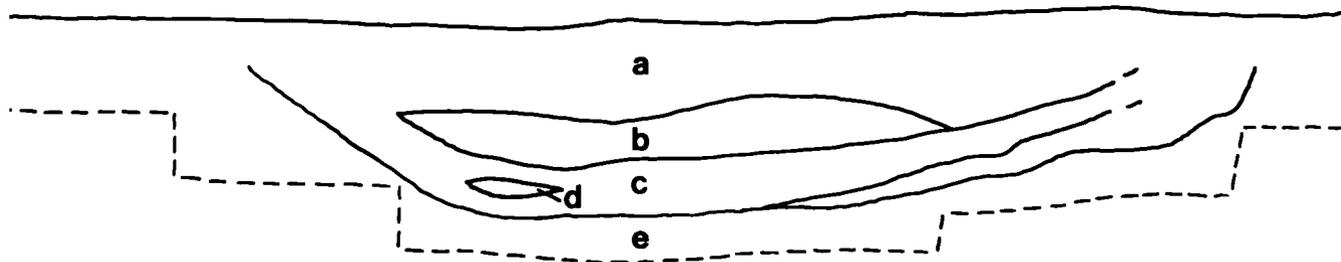


Fig. 2. Cross section of ditch B in test-pit A viewed from the north, scale 1:20.

Description of strata:

- a) light grey, desiccated clay with a few stones.
b) yellowish grey, heterogeneous, dry clay.

- c) brown, heterogeneous clay with charcoal particles, stone, flint and pottery.
d) as c), but with a dense concentration of pottery and flint.
e) yellow, heterogeneous subsoil clay.

vations at Sarup as well as Toftum show that individual ditches may vary considerably in depth (4). The recently discovered pit/ditch contained a culture layer with artefacts from the transition from MN I b to MN II.

Attempts were made to locate a possible palisade by a broad trench across the courtyard in the south-east quadrant (fig. 1,C), but none was found. This may be because no palisade was built, or because the levelling of the headland during the Viking period removed so much earth that the traces of a palisade disappeared as well.

The re-examination at Trelleborg has demonstrated that there is every reason to suppose that there was a causewayed camp on this site during the Middle Neolithic TRB-culture. It must have been in use around the transitional period MN I b/ II, which is roughly contemporaneous with the period when the passage graves were constructed.

Translated by Ole Bay-Petersen

NOTES

¹ Sarup on South-West Funen with two causewayed camps, one from the Fuchsberg phase and one from the Klintebakke phase (Andersen 1974 a and b and 1975).

Toftum near Horsens (Jutland) from the Fuchsberg phase (Madsen 1977), Lønt near Haderslev (Jutland) from the Fuchsberg phase. Personal communication from Erik Jørgensen, Haderslev Museum. Bundsø on Als. Personal communication from Poul Otto Nielsen, Dept. I of the National Museum, Copenhagen.

² The excavation was conducted by the Forhistorisk Museum, Moesgård (Journal No. 2155). The excavation team comprised Jens

Jeppesen, Århus and the present author, together with a team of young unemployed sponsored by Slagelse town council.

³ A study of the contour map in the original publication suggests this (Nørlund 1948: fig. 10).

⁴ At Sarup the depth varies between 30 cm and 180 cm, at Toftum between 30 cm and 230 cm.

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