

A Late Neolithic House Site with Bell Beaker Pottery at Stendis, Northwestern Jutland

by TORBEN SKOV

The discovery was made in connection with Holstebro Museum's excavation of a megalithic site at Stendis in 1973 (Skov 1973). The new discovery lay NW of the megalith in a flat landscape deposited as glacial outwash sand. Trial excavations brought to light sherds giving the profile of a beaker with recurved rim and toothed stamp ornament (fig. 1), after which a systematic excavation was undertaken.

The topsoil was cleared by machine from a ca. 1500 m² area (fig. 2). This revealed a large dark discoloration 15 m long from W to E and 4 m wide at the west and 5 m wide at the east end (fig. 3). In and around it were found post-holes, so it must have been the remains of a house.

The next stage of the excavation was to lay a number of 60 cm wide cuts transversely across the feature (fig. 4). All finds were kept apart by cuts, and in addition rim, base, and ornamented sherds, and also secondarily worked flint were plotted in individually (fig. 3). The feature was deepest in the middle, ca. 25 cm, becoming shallower towards the edges. The fill was humified sand with finds and charcoal. Within the feature were found four stone hearths.

There were post-holes going down into the pale sand over the whole area. Some of these belonged demonstrably to the house, without however allowing us to say much about its construction. It seems that there were several rather small posts near the edge of the dark area, but there was no trace of proper roof-bearing posts along the central axis.

The closest parallels to this discovery, the three Bell Beaker houses found at Myrhøj in Himmerland (Jensen 1973), are characterised by having a sunken floor area at the eastern end, whose shape in plan is that of an irregular rectangle with a diffuse border to the west. That the original buildings were larger than the dark discoloured areas is indicated by the way the post-holes continue further west, but the western

termination of the Myrhøj houses is not clearly defined, so that the total length of the buildings remains uncertain. At Myrhøj the houses had a central row of posts that must have borne the roof. The house remains at Stendis are similar in character to those at Myrhøj, but owing to the many post-holes and the irregular shape of the dark area it is even harder to say anything definite about its shape and dimensions. It

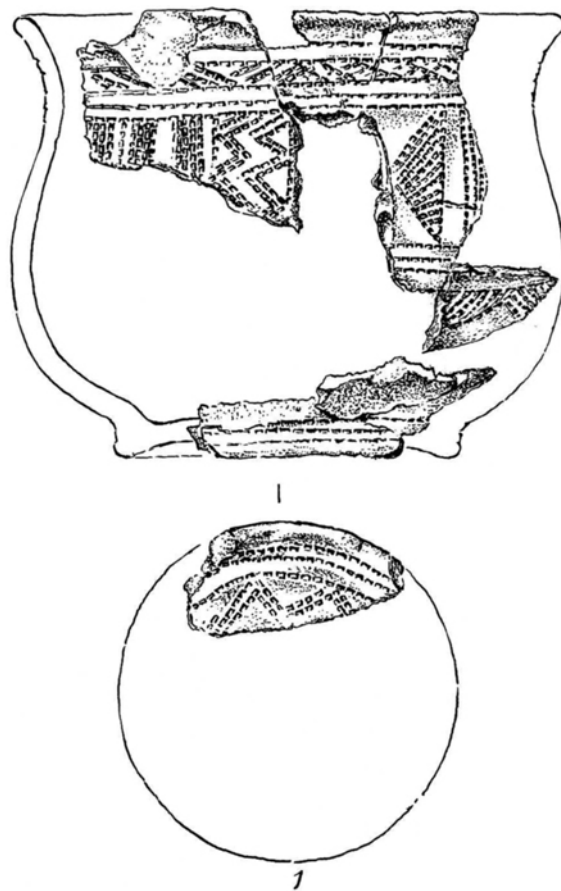


Fig. 1. Sherds of beaker from trial excavation, 3:5.

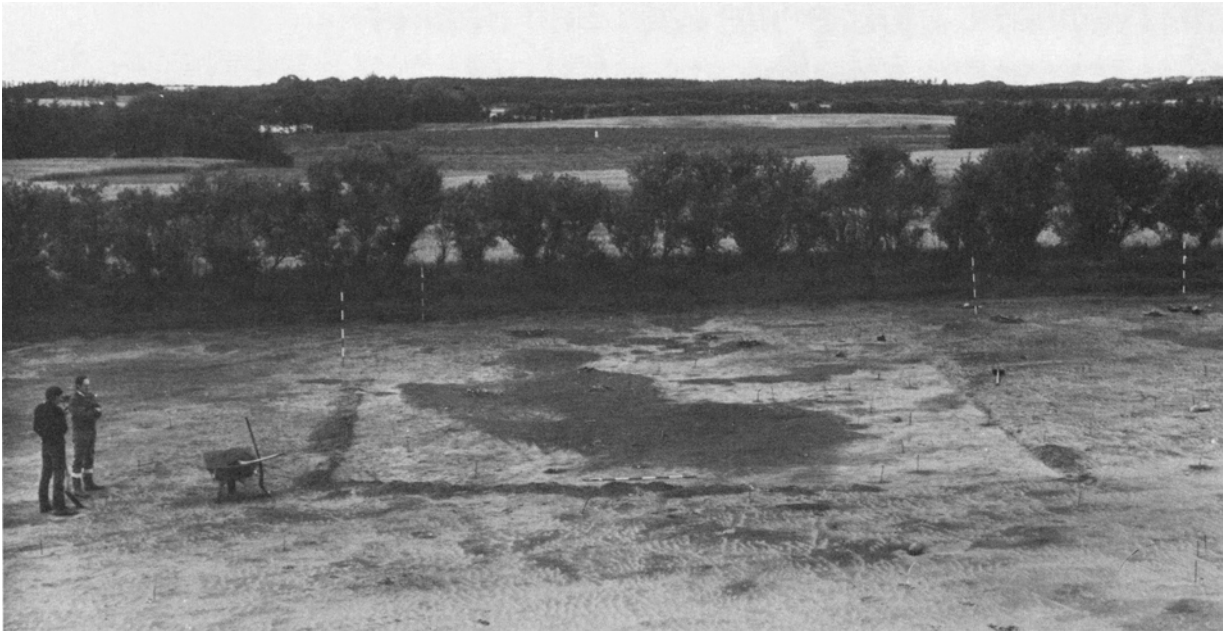


Fig. 2. View of the house-site during excavation, seen from the east.

cannot be excluded that there may have been more than one phase of the same building.

Continued exploratory digging south of the excavated area revealed a number of large, dark features, that may be further houses. Owing to the continued excavation of the Viking settlement at Trabjerg the excavation at Stendis had to be postponed, but it has not been forgotten and will in due course be resumed.

FINDS

There were found altogether 1,445 pieces of flint, of which 24 were secondarily worked, three hammerstones of quartzite, and 308 sherds of pottery, 27 of which were ornamented. The finds were reasonably evenly distributed throughout the fill of the house, but there was a slightly increased density of sherds at the eastern end. The flint implements were more evenly spread over the whole area, but there was a tendency for the southern edge of the feature to produce little flint and pottery.

Flint

In the house there were found 1,421 pieces of un-retouched flint. It was characteristic for a proportion

of the flakes that their breadth exceeded their length, as also observed at Myrhøj (Jensen 1973). The following finished implements may be mentioned.

Four transverse arrowheads made from flakes – a common Neolithic form (fig. 5: 178, 243, 244, 253). Two flat-flaked arrowheads of late Neolithic type with characteristic triangular or barbed form – unfortunately both have lost a barb (fig. 5: 157, 182). There is also a piece showing an earlier stage in the making of a flat-flaked arrowhead (fig. 5: 269).

Of larger implements there is the cutting edge of a thickbutted flint axe, ground on the broad faces, and a piece from one of the side angles of a flint chisel with grinding on both the surfaces present (fig. 5: 246, 231). While describing the flint we may mention three hammer stones of quartzite with battered ends (fig. 5: 289), which were probably used to make the finer flint implements like arrowheads and daggers. No fragments of lanceolate daggers occurred, though their presence could be expected in such an assemblage.

Pottery

The sherds of the beaker, fig. 1, the discovery which inspired the excavation, did not derive from the house itself, but were found north of it.

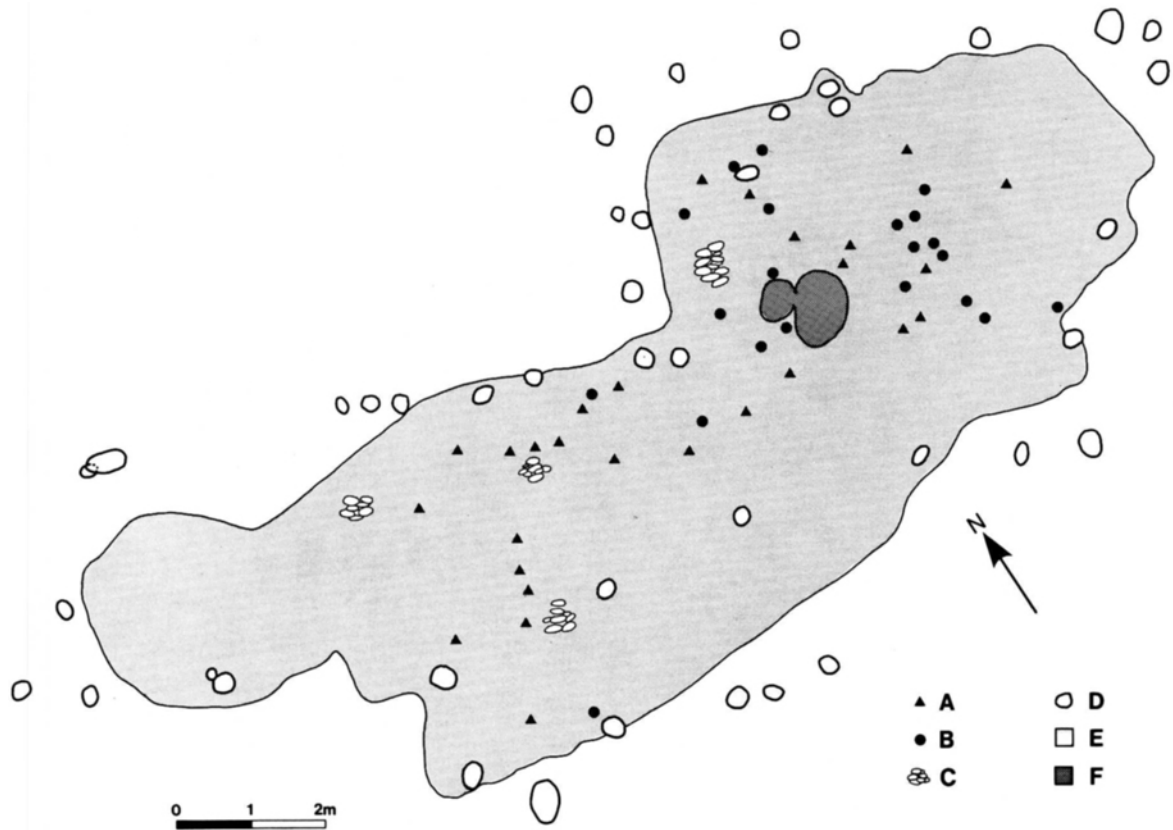


Fig. 3. Plan of the house-site. A, worked flint. B, rim, base, or ornamented sherds. C, hearths. D, post holes. E, dark sand. F, concentrations of sherds. 1:100.

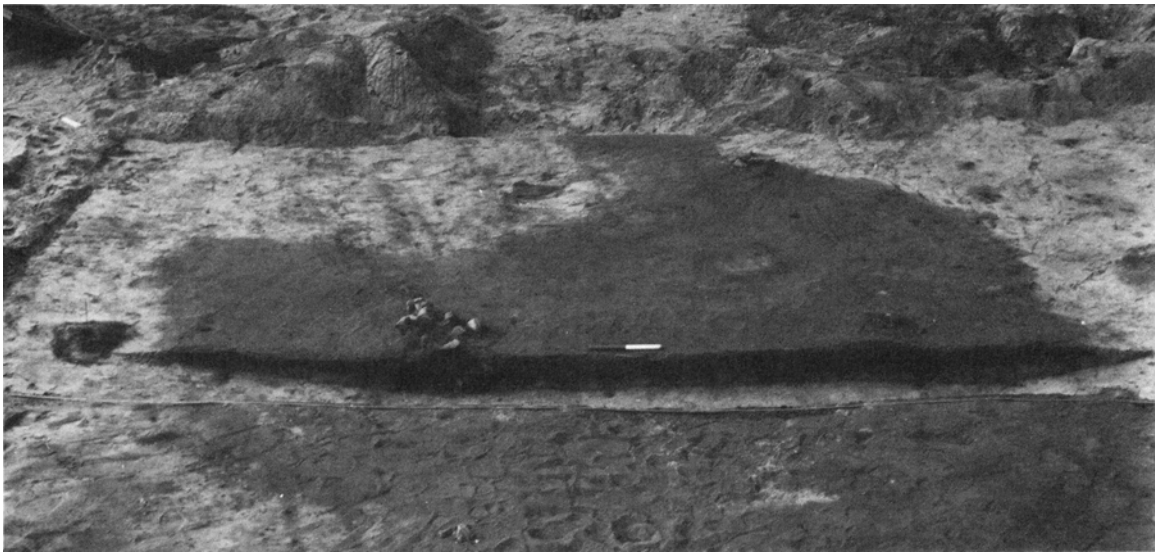


Fig. 4. Section north-south through the eastern end of the feature. Seen from the east.

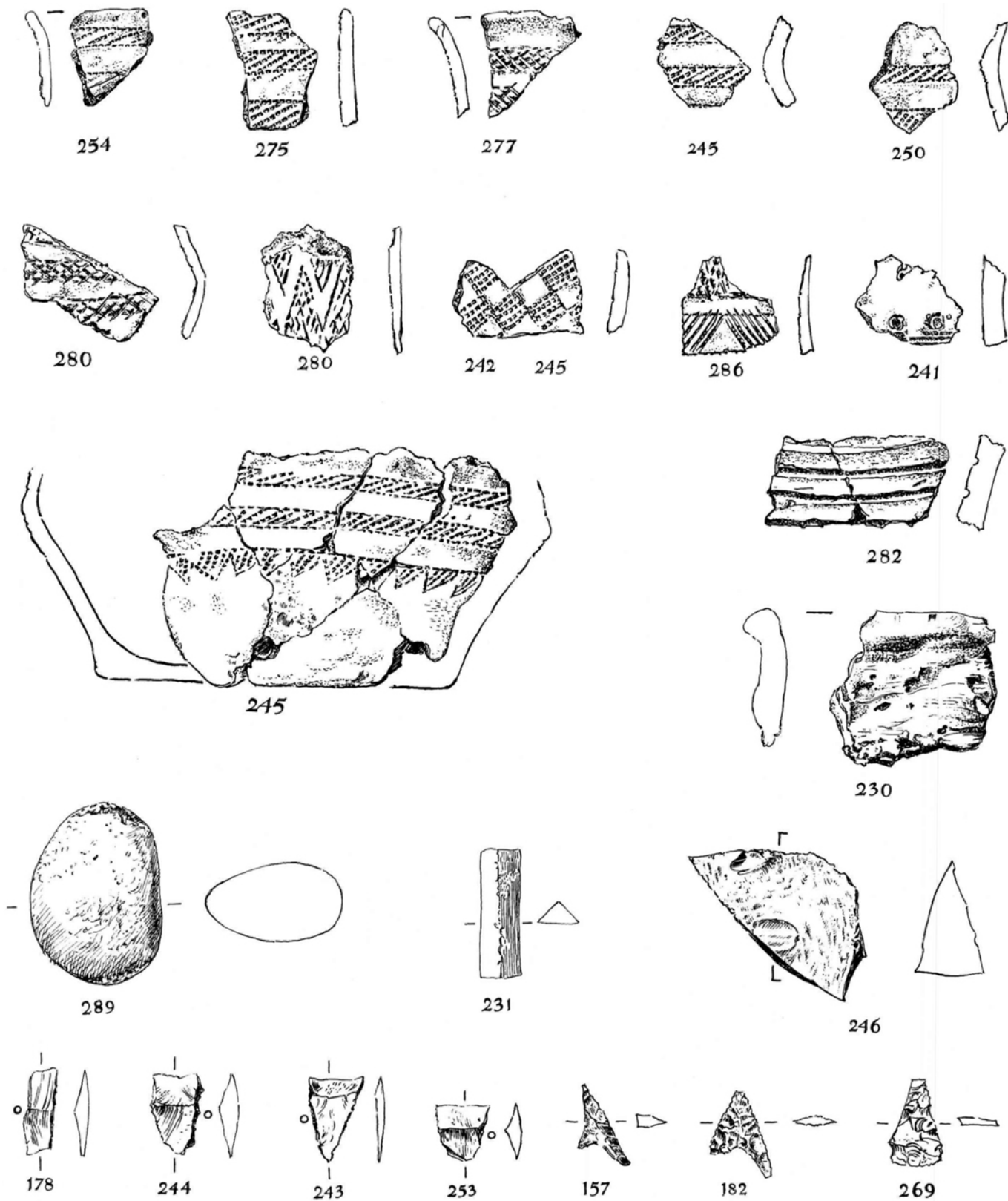


Fig. 5. Finds from the culture layer. 2:3.

An examination of the 308 sherds from the house, 27 of which were ornamented, gave some indication of the pottery forms present, but it must be admitted that the material is very small and fragmentary. The following forms and other details could be noted: –

Beakers with S-shaped profile, ornamented with horizontal bands filled with oblique or cross-hatching – either incised or made by impressing a toothed stamp (fig. 5: 254, 275, 277).

Wider and lower beakers with rounded body separated from the neck by a more or less sharp angle and with distinct foot. Also these are ornamented with horizontal bands of toothed stamp or plain line ornament (fig. 5: 245, 250, 280).

There are a few occurrences of a more lively decoration in the form of vertical bands of toothed stamp rhombs and other geometric figures (fig. 5: 242/245, 280, 286). On this type of vessel the broad horizontal zones are found also low on the body, and not infrequently end with a row of hanging triangles, all in toothed stamp impressions (fig. 5: 245). To somewhat coarser pots belonged three sherds with deep incised grooves, applied cordons, and circular impressions (fig. 5: 230, 241, 282).

By and large the pottery is hard-fired, thin – almost reminding one of eggshell – and it rings when a sherd is laid on the table.

STRAY FINDS

In the topsoil near the house were found flint and pottery presumably from the same settlement (fig. 6). North of the house was found a fairly large material from the final phase of the Funnel Beaker Culture, MN V. This has been published elsewhere (Davidsen 1978: 75 and Pl. 99,a-i).

DATE

The flat-flaked arrowheads and ornamented pottery make a dating to the beginning of the Late Neolithic "Dagger" period seem the most natural. The placing of Bell Beaker stylistic influences in the chronology of the Danish Neolithic has recently been taken up for renewed consideration (see for example Lomborg 1977). It has been attempted to distinguish between

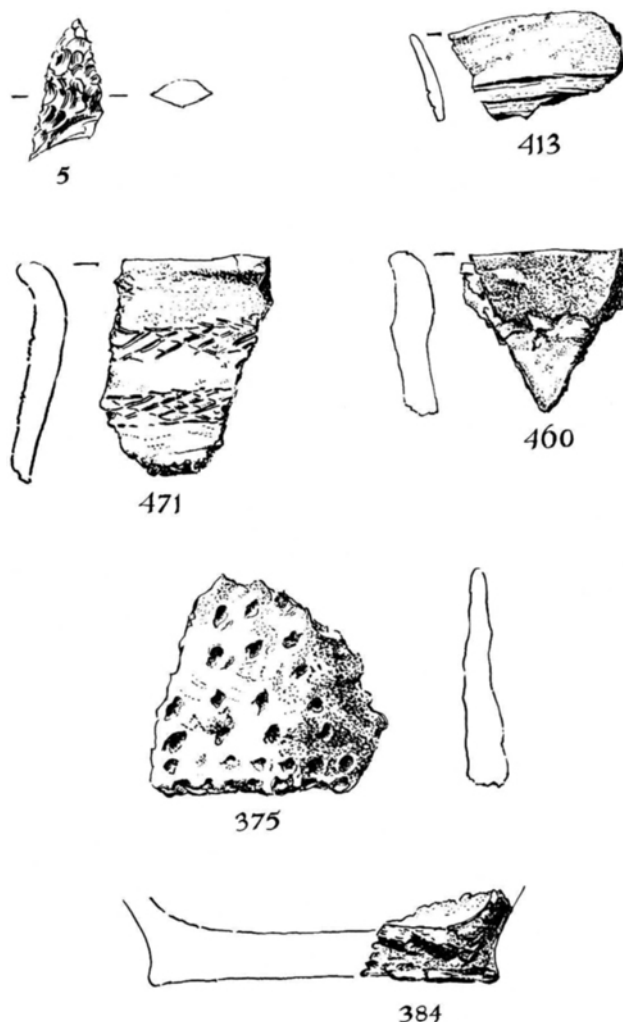


Fig. 6. Stray finds from the house-site. 2:3.

separate appearances of Bell Beaker elements in late Single Graves pottery and in the early Late Neolithic. There are both "pure" Bell Beaker impulses and influences from the pottery styles that developed from Bell Beaker in Holland, NW Germany, and the British Isles. The pottery from Stendis can, like the pottery from Myrhøj, be compared with the late Beaker influences that fall into the first period of the Danish Late Neolithic (SN A of Lomborg, cf. Lomborg 1973).

During the excavation enough charcoal was collected from the lowermost layers of the house to make possible two C-14 datings. These were in conventional C-14 years 1780 and 1510 b.c. (K-2296-97). The dates are younger than expected, as the transition from the

Single Grave to the Dagger period occurred at about 2000 b.c. in conventional carbon fourteen years. Also the large difference between the two dates suggests that the samples may have been contaminated. There is always an element of uncertainty about samples of scattered charcoal from settlement sites, and the remains of a house like this one could have lain uncovered for centuries after being inhabited. It must be admitted, however, that during excavation the sections through the house did give the impression that the house had been quickly covered by blown sand after being abandoned.

Translated by D. Liversage

NOTES

¹ Stendis, Ryde s., Ginding h., Ringkøbing a. – Holstebro Mus. no. 15.117. – Publication in Danish, see Skov 1974. – The excavation was supported by grants from The Research Council for the Humanities.

² K-2296: 3700 ± 100 before 1950
 3750 ± 100 before 1950
 average: 3730 ± 100 before 1950, i.e. 1780 bc.
 K-2297: 3400 ± 100 before 1950
 3480 ± 100 before 1950
 3500 ± 100 before 1950
 average: 3460 ± 100 before 1950, i.e. 1510 bc.

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