

# *Bronze Age Houses at Jegstrup, near Skive, Central Jutland*

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Our knowledge of Bronze Age houses in Denmark is of recent date. The first finds came to light in the mid-1950's and since the late '60's we have had regular opportunity to excavate house-floors dating to this period. A series of excavations in the area between Ringkøbing and Holstebro were particularly productive, though equally significant finds from other parts of the country have since emerged. Over 120 house floors from 30 separate localities have hitherto been recorded (1), but not one of these has been conclusively published. There are, however, a few intermediate notes on the most important of these sites, in which occasional house-floors – but almost none of the artefacts – are illustrated (c.f. the bibliography).

The Jegstrup locality was discovered in 1968 when sherds and dark patches appeared after deep ploughing (2). An exploratory excavation was then carried out by Skive Museum in 1978 (3). At this time the whole area lay under grass and encroached upon military training ground attached to the barracks at Skive.

The place itself is a sandy promontory which juts out into the now drained Lake Tastum (Tastum sø). C 14 determinations on marine shells from test borings into the former lake have shown that as recently as the Late Stone Age this area was still a marine inlet. The transition to stagnant water has been dated at 1470 ±80 b. c. (K-3156) (4).

The examined area is situated upon the summit of the promontory, where it commands a wide vista across the lake and surrounding slopes. Such an elevated site location is typical of Bronze Age house finds.

In the trial excavations of 1978 three 1.75 m wide trenches were dug by machine, their combined lengths totalling 190 metres. Here and there the trenches were expanded. Altogether 568 features were excavated,

including: two complete Bronze Age houses, parts of another three, plus a number of pits from the Late Stone Age and Late Bronze Age. The uncovered area did not contain any culture-layer.

## THE STONE AGE FINDS

The Neolithic pits were small and somewhat lacking in finds. Only six pits contained identifiable pottery (5). These sherds all belonged to the beginning of the Middle Neolithic (period I). The same date applies to all loose finds with the exception of a single rim-sherd, comb decorated with a fish-bone motif and bearing witness to the presence of the Single Grave Culture at the settlement (6). The modest size of the stone age pits can no doubt be attributed to the sandiness of the subsoil, as the great majority of large and rich Neolithic pits are refilled clay pits.

The siting of the Neolithic settlement is identical to other sites where ditch systems have been discovered (as at Sarup on Funen), demarcating the headland settlement. Although no such ditches were seen at Jegstrup, none of the trial trenches were long enough to rule out altogether their existence.

The Neolithic finds comprised sherds of funnel-necked beakers, bowls, shouldered vessels and a single clay ladle (a drilled fragment of the tubular handle). Flint artefacts were few and polished axes were entirely absent. Occasional Neolithic sherds had found their way into Bronze Age pits (7) and the same probably applies to the few flints also within these pits. The stone age pits contained a quantity of fire-charred clay daub while none of the Bronze Age pits yielded unequivocal house daub.

One of the Neolithic pits contained hazelnut shells as well as small fragments of burnt animal bones. This was the only pit on the whole site to yield food remains.

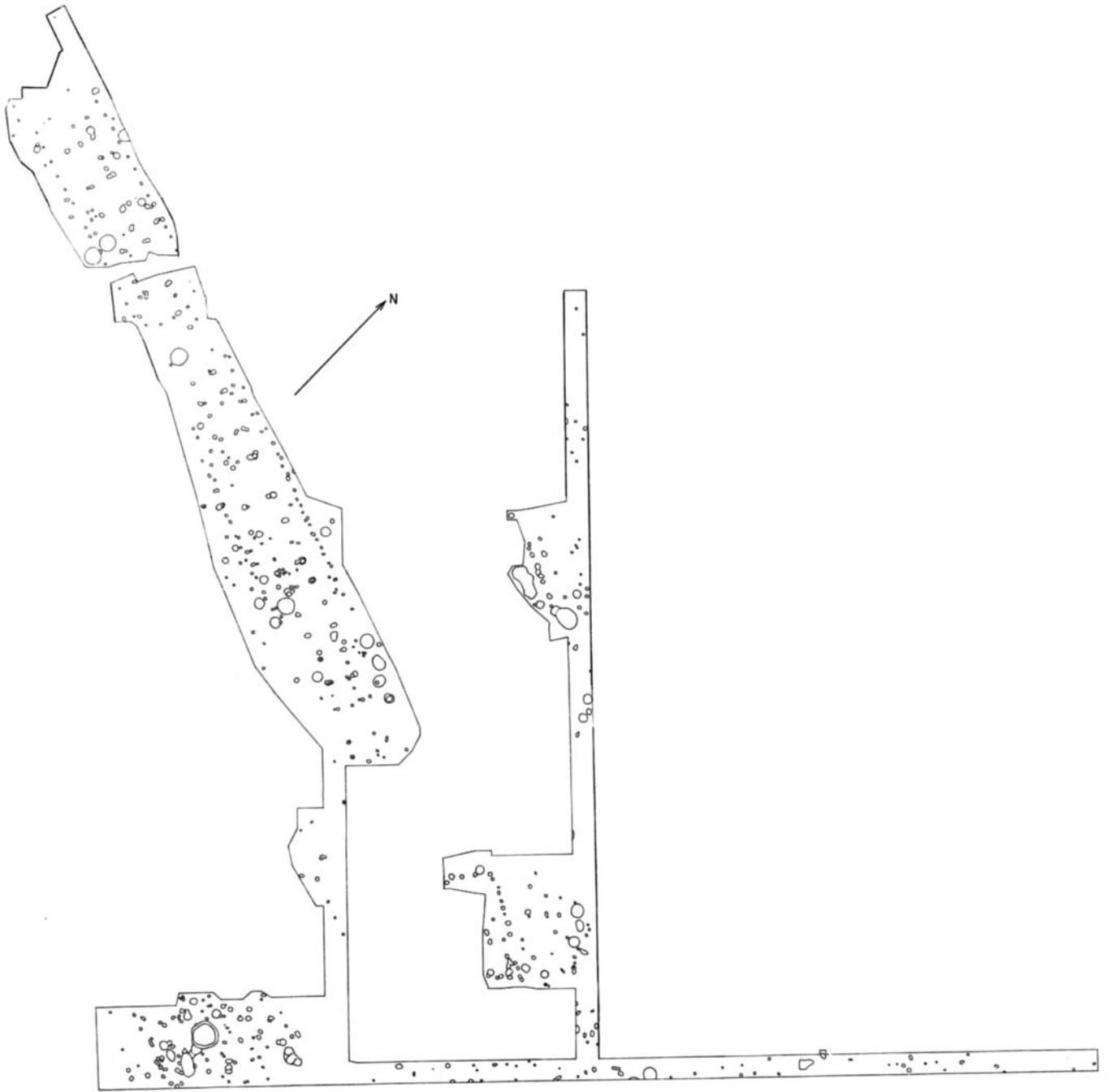


Fig. 1. Plan of the 1978 trial excavation. 1:500.

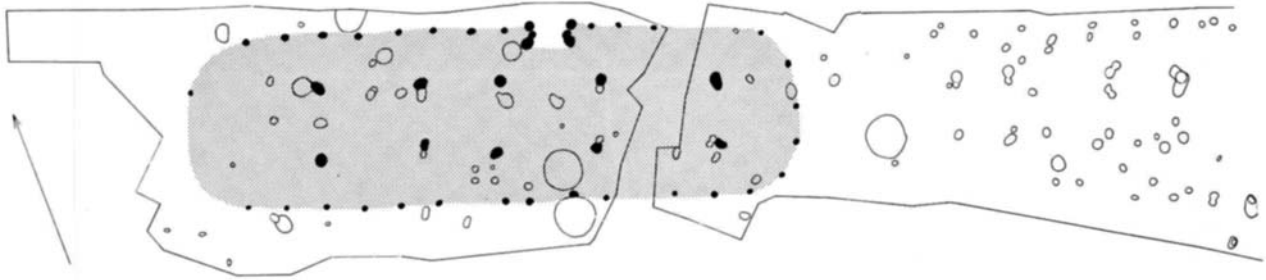


Fig. 2. Plan of house II. 1:250.

### THE BRONZE AGE HOUSES

A plan of the excavation may be found in fig. 1. On it can be seen two complete houses plus conjectured and certain vestiges of three other houses. The two complete dwellings continue along one common line, while a third house may also have stood along this axis.

House II lies westernmost along this line (fig. 2). It is a clear and well-preserved example of the Late Bronze Age house. Such houses feature a double row of roof-supporting posts (in this case, five pairs) and round-cornered walls consisting of a single line of posts. A clear vestibule of three post-hole pairs could be seen along the north wall of house II. One of these pairs was incorporated within the wall-line proper, the remaining two pairs standing inside the house. Such inverted porticoes have proved typical of bronze age dwellings, though usually there are only two internal post-holes. House II was approximately 20.5 m long and 6.0 m wide. The wall posts were 15–20 cm in diameter while the roof-supporting posts measured 30–40 cm in diameter.

In rare instances partition stalls have been located in the eastern end of Bronze Age houses, and the buildings doubtless had separate stable and dwelling quarters, such as also seen in Iron Age houses. Orientation also follows Iron Age houses, i. e. more-or-less east-west. The Jægstrup houses' long-axes follow the contours of the promontory.

House I, lying to the East of house II, seems at first a very large construction, apparently 31 m in length and with 12 pairs of roof-supporting post-holes. It becomes clear, however, that the wall is in fact double, and that at least two phases are represented. In one place it was possible to discern the chronological succession between the posts of the two walls. Only

after a closer scrutiny of the excavation plan could the two phases be distinguished.

Several of the holes are stone age pits, while some are cooking pits of the Late Bronze Age (fig. 3A). In its original form (phase Ia) the total house length was 24.0 m (fig. 3B). There are two clear entrances situated approximately in the middle of the longside walls where, to the north, the post holes are doubled and to the south they are trebled. The distance between adjacent pairs of roof-bearing post-holes is greater between the entrances and at the western end of the house than it is elsewhere. At the eastern end there is a slight narrowing of the span between the post-holes in each pair. Most of the holes for the wall posts are preserved except at the east end, which lay lowest with a thick humus layer, through which some of the posts perhaps did not penetrate.

All post-holes in house I were excavated in section, allowing the detection of original posts and their replacements. Such replacements were indeed noted especially at the eastern end of house Ia, while the east gable wall had been set with two roof-supporting posts in addition to the usual wall posts. These features all suggest that the east end of house Ia was susceptible to collapse (perhaps on account of damp), which in turn might explain why the house was shifted to the west in its ensuing phase.

On building house Ib the four easternmost roof-supporting posts were abandoned while the west end was lengthened by the addition of three further pairs of roof-supports (fig. 3C). House Ib had altogether eight pairs of roof-supporting posts, five of these pairs being reutilized from house Ia. There seem to have been entrances between the two innermost pairs in the western extension. At this point one sees a lengthwise widening between the roof-supports, as could also be

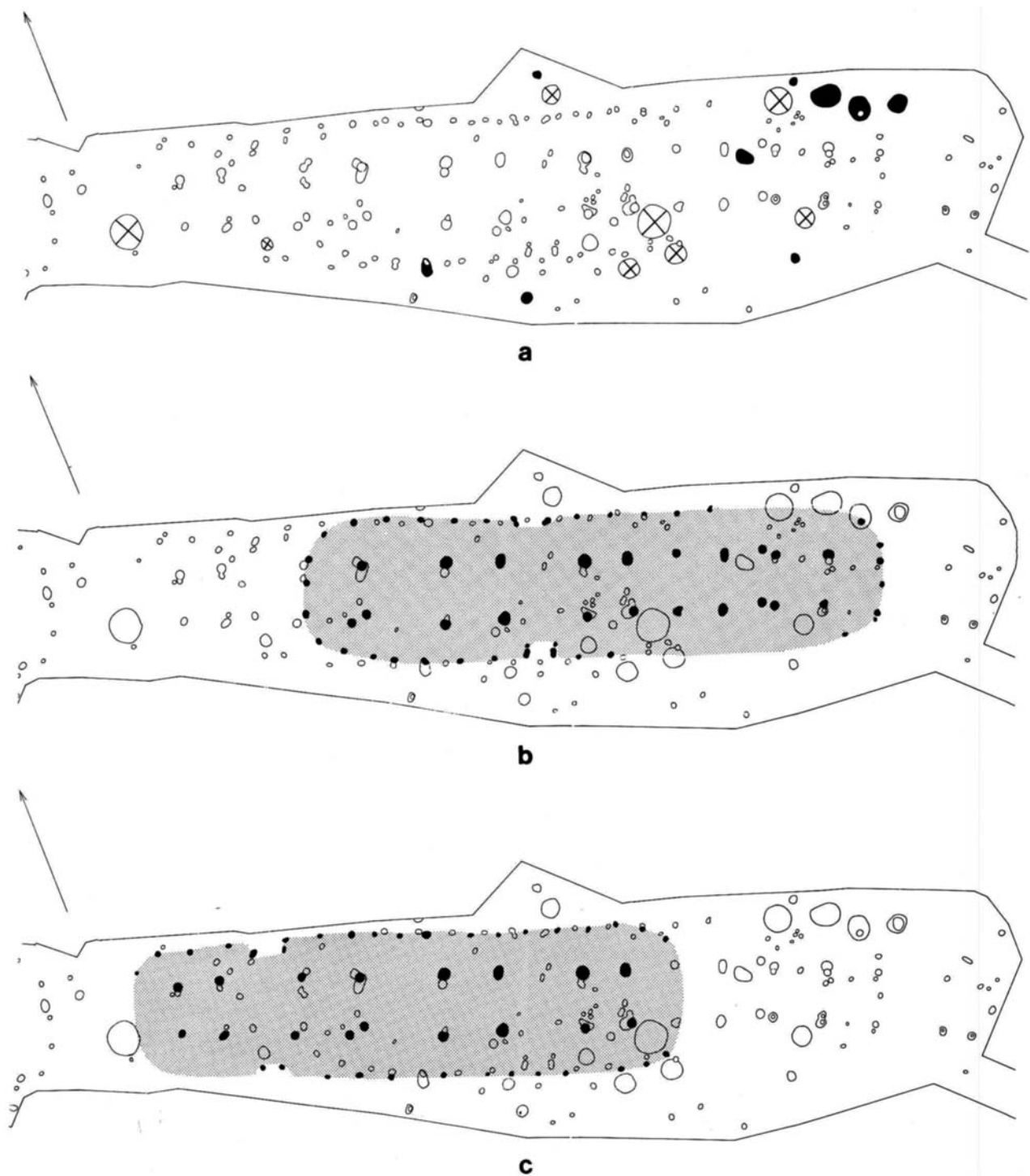


Fig. 3. A: Pits around house I. Stone Age pits in black, Bronze Age 'cooking pits' marked with a cross. – B: house Ia. – C: house Ib. 1:250.

seen by the door to house Ia. The total length of house Ib was 22.5 m, i. e. approximately 2.0 m shorter than house Ia. If we assume that the entrances mark the approximate divide between stable and domestic quarters it follows that the stable end had become approximately 2 m longer in phase Ib, taking up some 16 m of the total house length.

The roof-supporting post holes in house I measured approximately 30–50 cm in diameter and between 24 and 70 cm deep. The largest and deepest of these converged on the entrance to house Ia. Depths decreased towards the gable ends.

The wall posts were relatively slight and were so shallow that they could only be detected through the exercise of great caution when stripping the surface. Occasional wall posts, however, went 20 cm into the ground and the deepest of them were to be seen about the northern door of house Ia. The wall posts were round-bottomed with an average diameter of 20 cm. Both house Ia and Ib were 6 m in width. The respective walls of the two houses could be distinguished with relative certainty since the wall-posts of house Ia were situated a little to the North of their counterparts in house Ib.

Their construction places these houses firmly in the Late Bronze Age. The few finds from the post holes in no way contradict this. Two of the post holes at the western end of house Ia yielded a loom-weight (fig. 5:11) (8) and a body-herd with vertical grooving (9). A bottom-herd of a straining vessel (fig. 4:2) was found in one of those roof-supporting post-holes common to both houses Ia and b (10), while a body-herd with a vertical knob (fig. 5:9) was discovered in a post hole probably relating to house Ia (11).

Publications of Bronze Age houses to date nearly all illustrate uninvolved and easily interpreted constructions such as House II, but the accompanying texts intimate that, more often than not, the true state of affairs is more complex. For this reason we are unable to form an impression of typical house-finds from the existing literature, nor can we find material for comparison with more complex structures such as house I.

Previous writings on Bronze Age houses do, however, allow us to assume that houses were commonly erected over the remains of a previous dwelling. Jørgen Jensen has produced a good example of this at Hover in West Jutland (Jensen 1971: 10). Until now, however, no Bronze Age houses have been published

exhibiting such structural alterations as seen in house I at Jegstrup.

Becker has divided dwellings of the Late Bronze Age into two main groups (Becker 1976: 74f.). The first, considered the older, has widely spaced massive wall posts while those of the second group were slighter and closer together. The Jegstrup houses adhere to the latter type, recalling houses at Ristoft (Becker 1968: 85), dated with certainty to the end of the Bronze Age (period VI).

Thrane has postulated a typological division based on house dimensions, distinguishing between ordinary dwellings (10–20 m long and 6–7 m wide) and "halls" measuring between 25 and 33 m in length and up to 8 m wide (Thrane 1978: 523). Such a division is not upheld by the Jegstrup houses whose lengths range from 20.5 to 22.5 and 24.0 m.

#### THE BRONZE AGE PITS

So-called "cooking pits" – a typical feature of Late Bronze Age settlements – were found in great numbers on the Jegstrup settlement. Approximately 15 such features were excavated, all much alike. Cooking pits were always circular, the majority having rounded bottoms. Diameters varied between 0.5 and 2.0 m, depths between 0.5 and 1.0 m. The largest of these pits exhibited a ledge approximately 0.4 m below the subsoil surface. All other pits, however, were of regular cross-section. In the bottom of each pit was a layer of fire-shattered stones usually covered by a layer of clean subsoil sand totally bereft of extraneous stones or charcoal. This in-fill was so homogenous that one can only conclude that the pits had been rapidly filled. There was generally very little charcoal among the fire-shattered stones, and in only a few cases could a reddening of the pit sides (due to heat) be detected. These features presumably signify that there was never open fire in any of the pits, and that the stones were all pre-heated in some nearby fire. Uppermost in each pit there usually rested a slumped culture-layer in which by far the majority of prehistoric antiquities were discovered.

Cooking pits are common features nevertheless, little is known about them. The term itself reflects their usual interpretation, i. e. that they were used in the preparation of food (12). This view seems justified

for the majority of cooking pits found upon settlement sites. Even so, there also seems evidence for other functions (13).

Only two of the Bronze Age pits at Jegstrup were of a different sort. One of these was 2 m wide and 1 m deep. It contained only a few stones and had filled up slowly, in that 10 consecutive layers could be distinguished. Unfortunately, artefacts from this pit were particularly scarce.

The second pit was circular in plan, with a diameter of 1.3 m and a depth of 0.7 m. It contained three layers, the middle one being yellow clay incorporating many red-fired fragments of burnt clay, most of these lying towards the bottom of the clay layer. These fragments measured 2–3 cm in thickness and up to 12 cm in size. They exhibited two flat surfaces, one smooth and the other somewhat rougher. These rather resembled ordinary clay daub, though lacking the impressions of branches or planks. It seems reasonable to interpret these as fragments of an oven casing. The clay layer thinned out towards the west where the oven mouth was doubtless situated. Beneath the clay lay 30 cm of black mould with scattered fire-shattered stones. Unlike the usual cooking pits, however, this had not been a stone packing, and only two of the stones exceeding 7 cm in size. The subsoil about the pit sides had been burnt to a strong red colour.

## THE POTTERY

The artefactual assemblage pertaining to the Bronze Age settlement is somewhat sparse, comprising almost solely pottery. However, querns, polishing stones and crushing stones were also found. The Bronze Age pits contained neither clay daub nor any evidence for bronze casting. No flint artefacts of a diagnostically bronze-age type were found anywhere on the site.

The dearth of published pottery from Bronze Age settlements makes it difficult to treat this material exhaustively. We can say, however, that there occurs no single example of typical period VI ware (14), for which reason we may place the find within period IV–V. Most features suggest period V, that is, the middle of the Late Bronze Age.

Coarse, slurried sherds are often predominant in settlement finds of the Late Bronze Age (Cf.e.g.

Jensen 1967: 116). In the case of the Jegstrup find, however, slurried sherds are strikingly rare. This may be due to the storage vessel component being relatively small. Figure 4:1 illustrates the only reconstructible storage jar. It lacks slurry and is supplied with vertical knops. These are especially familiar in period V (Jensen 1967: 122, 125), though they are exclusive to no particular period (Jensen 1970: 85). Three such vessels with knops were seen at Jegstrup (figs. 4:1 and 5:9).

Figure 4:3 illustrates a slender bi-conical vessel with a rounded body-angle. Such vessels are well-known in graves, particularly from period V (possibly also period IV) (Bandou 1960: 99, type B 2). A wider, more compressed vessel of this type is illustrated in figure 4:4. This vessel had a maximum diameter of approximately 54 cm while nonetheless belonging to a finer ware with its thin sides and burnished surface. The rounded shoulder suggests a post-period IV date (Jensen 1966: 201). Bi-conical vessels seem quite frequent (c.f. also figs. 5:1 and 5:2) although a closely related shouldered type was absent. However a shoulder zone was often seen. Such decoration indicated purely by the ornament here consists of horizontally incised lines or, more rarely, of hatched bands as in figures 5:1 and 5:2.

Internal facets near the rim are a characteristic feature of bi-conical vessels, though they also occur on other types.

Bowls with funnel-shaped neck form a second major group. There occurred a single piece with a preserved handle looping from the carination up to just over the rim (fig. 5:5). One particular bowl exhibited a peculiar lip (fig. 5:3). Bowls from Bronze Age settlements are difficult to date, but the weak profiles do not suggest that period IV is represented anywhere within the present assemblage (Jensen 1967: 115). The pottery from Jegstrup can be characterised by its altogether gentle lines. Figure 5:8 illustrates the sole example of an angular profile. At its carination this vessel must have exceeded 0.50 m in diameter.

Decoration consists exclusively of the already mentioned 'simulated' shoulder, of horizontal rows of finger indentations, fig. 5:10, and of lines horizontally incised below the rim (as seen on a single rim-*sherd*, find 61 from pit 189). Horizontal lines at the base of the neck are the commonest form of ornament. This pattern was most widely used in period V, occurring

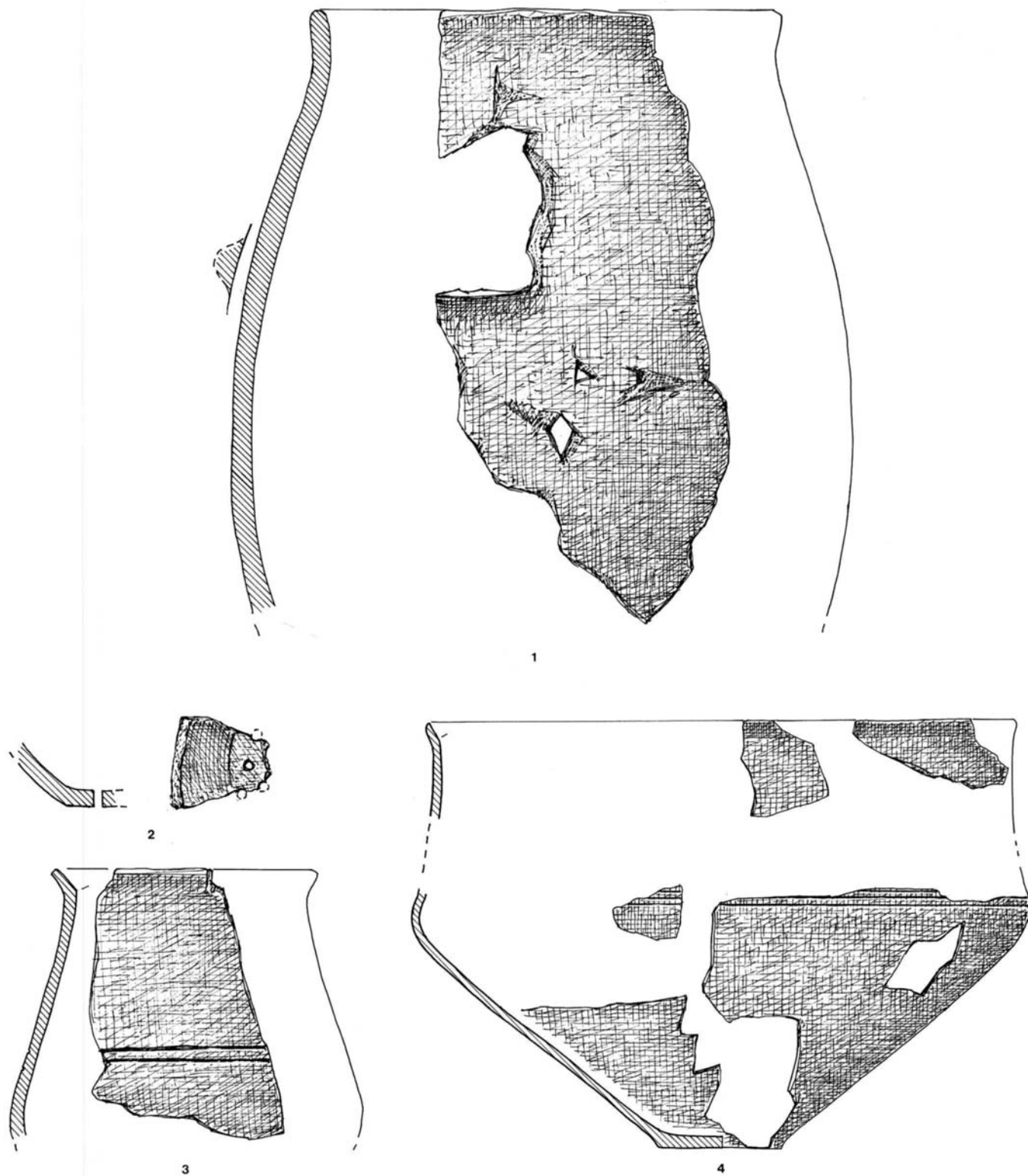


Fig. 4. Pottery. 1,4: sherds from pits. 2: sherds from post hole. 3: stray find. 2:5.

sporadically in both the neighbouring periods (Jensen 1967: 109). Finger-indentations are recorded in both periods IV and V (Ørsnes 1958: 19ff).

One pit yielded three body-sherds with rounded edges, one of these bearing in its centre the impression of incomplete drilling (15).

#### THE LOOM WEIGHT

Most noteworthy of all the artefacts from entire find is the loom-weight, discovered at the western gable end of house Ia (fig. 5:11) (8). This piece was originally circular in form, with a diameter of 10 cm. Its centre (where it was 3.5 cm thick) had been drilled with a hole 2.8 cm in diameter. There are no visible wear-marks around the sides of this hole. The weight was very fragile upon excavation, having almost the consistency of clay daub. It was presumably unfired in its original state, having been preserved by a subsequent fire. It is the first loom weight datable to the Late Bronze Age and one of the very few loom weights to come from a pre-Iron Age site.

No examples of loom weights are known from the Early or Middle Neolithic periods, although mention should be made of one illustrated by P. V. Glob, in connection with his publication of the Single Grave settlement material, from Bjerregård in Skanderborg Amt (16). This specimen was discovered in a fox-hole within a ploughed over tumulus containing a Single Grave. As the tumulus had been ploughed it is possible that the loom weight may have derived from a later phase in the life of the tumulus (Late Neolithic or Bronze Age).

The oldest well-dated finds of loom weights are from the Late Neolithic. In 1976 Silkeborg Museum excavated a tumulus near Tvillumgård in Skanderborg Amt. It contained, among other things, a grave with a type I flint dagger, the in-fill yielding a loom weight fragment (17). Additionally, there are the finds from the settlement at Myrhøj where the majority of one and fragments of six other loom weights were discovered in two of the sunken house-floors (18). This find has been firmly dated to the commencement of the Late Neolithic. "Myrhøj-type" pottery was also found on a settlement at Solbjerg in Ålborg Amt, excavated in 1963–64 by O. Marseen (19). Here they discovered a round loom weight among some fire-

shattered stones of fist size lying in a sunken hearth. Another well-dated Late Neolithic find comes from Birknæs in Skanderborg Amt, where in 1910 T. Thomsen excavated a settlement (20). Pit 5 on this site measured 1.35 by 1.10 m and approximately 1 m in depth. It contained a loom weight, 15 undecorated body-sherds and scattered grain (2.6 litres in all) now carbon dated at 1640 ± 85 (K2926), 1620 ± 85 (K2924) and 1580 ± 85 b.c. (K2925).

Further loom weights have come from the settlement near Egehøj on Djursland (Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age), excavated in 1971–72 by N. A. Boas (21); and also from derived material within a cremation grave at Lilholt in Haderslev Amt, excavated by C. M. Lund (22). The Lilholt grave contained a period II bronze dagger, fragments of three loom weights lying between the stones of the grave lining.

In 1937 C. J. Becker excavated a Bronze Age tumulus at Særslev in Holbæk Amt. In it were four inhumation graves (one of which dating to period II) as well as settlement material from the Late Stone Age / Early Bronze Age period (23). Beneath the tumulus lay a small pit, 30 cm deep and containing traces of charcoal and a loom weight fragment. Its diameter would have been 7 cm, assuming the hole to have been central.

All of these Late Neolithic and Bronze Age loom weights are of the same type: circular with a diameter of 5 to 10 cm and a thickness of 3 to 4 cm. Most examples have rounded edges such as the weight from Jegstrup.

*Translated by Lars Broholm Tharp*

#### NOTES

(The present article was originally published in Danish in *MiV* vol. 10, 1980. Emendations to this text are few.

Abbreviations:

ÅHM – Aalborg historiske Museum

SIM – Silkeborg Museum

FHM – Forhistorisk Museum, Moesgård (Aarhus)

HAM – Haderslev Museum

KHM – Kulturhistorisk Museum, Randers

NM I – The National Museum 1st Dept., Copenhagen

<sup>1</sup> For a distribution map see Thrane 1978: 594, fig. 156; see also Thrane's contribution to the present volume.

<sup>2</sup> Skive Museum j. 270/69 and inv. no. 6063–70. The finds were collected by J. Vester Christensen (who again pointed out the findspot in 1978) and P. O. Gredal.



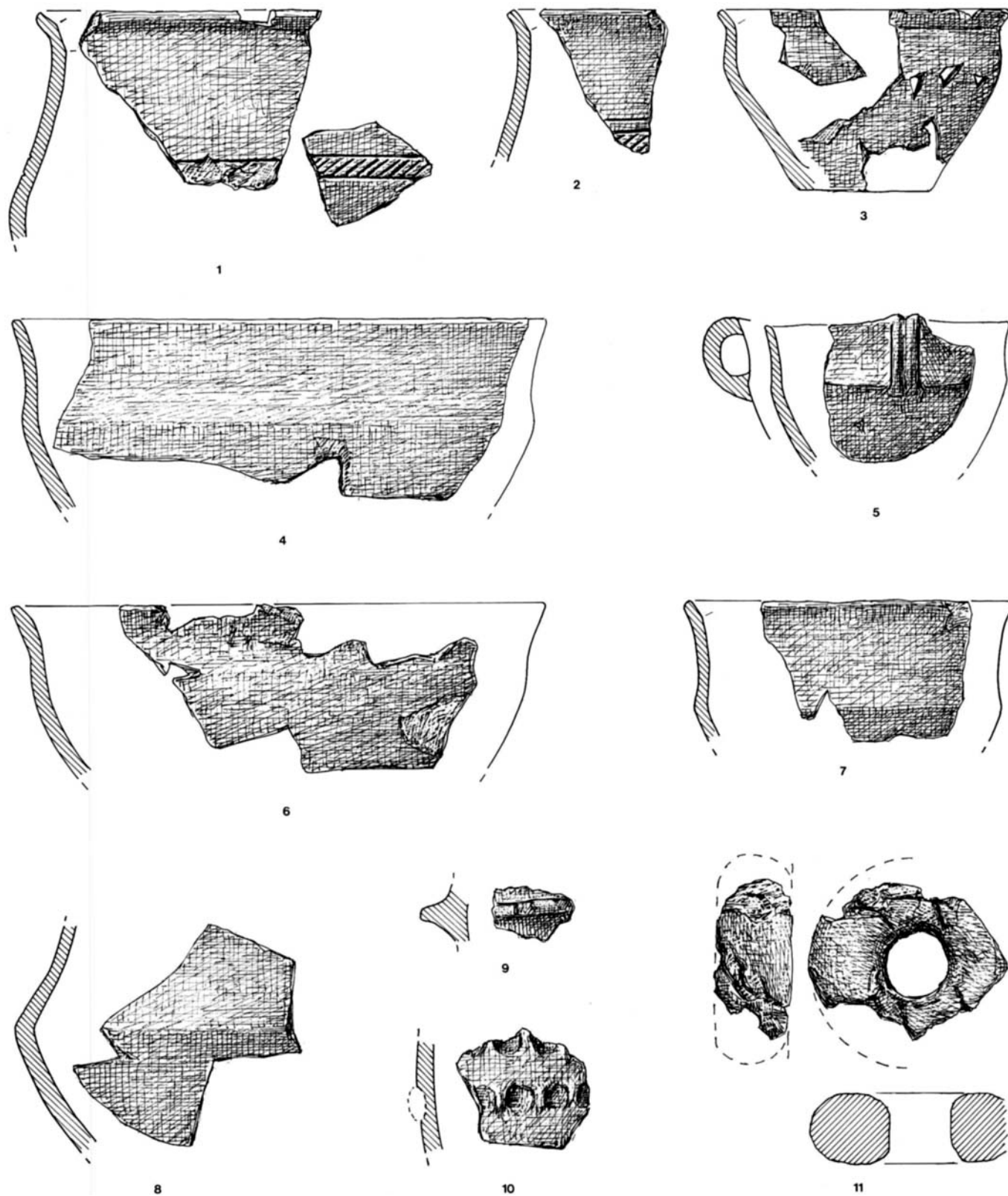


Fig. 5. Pottery and burnt clay. 1: stray find. 2–8, 10: sherds from pits. 9: sherd from post hole. 11: loom weight from post hole. 2:5.

<sup>3</sup> Skive Museum j. 149A, Jegstrup, Dommerby sogn (NM I sb 59), Fjends herred, Viborg amt. A copy of the report may be seen in the National Museum, 1st Department (j. 2836/79). The excavation took place between 16/5 and 10/6, 1978. Only two persons participated, the author and John Simonsen, Skive Museum.

<sup>4</sup> L. Aabo Rasmussen et al. 1978: 115; L. Aabo Rasmussen and Kaj Petersen 1979: 51 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Confirmed stone age pits: 179, 214, 275, 430, 509 and 512; probably stone age: 134, 192, 205, 215, 226, 247, 296, 403, 469 and 486.

<sup>6</sup> Find 23.

<sup>7</sup> Finds 7, 12 and 80 from pits 1 and 431.

<sup>8</sup> Find 46 from post hole 332.

<sup>9</sup> Find 90 from post hole 315.

<sup>10</sup> Find 49 from post hole 263.

<sup>11</sup> Find 37 from post hole 219.

<sup>12</sup> Lerche 1969: 195 ff; Eskildsen 1979: 16.

<sup>13</sup> Levin 1971: 5 ff; Olesen and Seeborg 1971: 48 ff; Thrane 1974: 96 ff.

<sup>14</sup> For example, Kristiansen 1972: 62 ff; and Iversen and Näsman 1978: 46 ff; storage jars of the sort illustrated in figs. 14–15 in the latter article are common in period VI but completely absent in the Jegstrup find.

<sup>15</sup> Finds 34 and 50 from pit 189; cf. Kristiansen 1972: 65, fig. 5.

<sup>16</sup> NM I A 30052, Bjerregård, Ale sogn, Vrads herred, Skanderborg amt; Glob 1944: 247, fig. 114.

<sup>17</sup> SIM 459/75 BX, cf. NM I 1440/75, Tvilumgård, Tvilum sogn, Gjern herred, Skanderborg amt.

<sup>18</sup> FHM j. 1576, Myrhøj, Strandby sogn, Gislum herred, Ålborg amt (Jensen 1972: 90, fig. 24).

<sup>19</sup> ÅHM A 918, Solbjerg, Solbjerg sogn, Helligum herred, Ålborg amt; copy of report in NM I (j. 328/63).

<sup>20</sup> NM I A 26850–51, Birknæs, Østbirk sogn, Voer herred, Skanderborg amt; la Cour 1927: 302, fig. 3; Helbæk 1952: 97 ff; Jørgensen 1979: 140.

<sup>21</sup> KHM j. 160/69, Egehøj, Hemmed sogn, Djurs Nørre herred, Randers amt; Boas 1980, p. 112, fig. 10.

<sup>22</sup> HAM 4607–4608, Lilholt, Skrydstrup sogn, Gram herred, Haderslev amt; Broholm 1943: grave 1109; Broholm and Hald 1935: 300.

<sup>23</sup> NM I B 13037, Særslev, Særslev sogn, Skippinge herred, Holbæk amt; Aner and Kersten 1976: 102 f (and references), Taf. 61.

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