Middle and Late Neolithic Houses at Limensgård, Bornholm

A Preliminary Report

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Traces of Neolithic habitation on the island of Bornholm have most often been found during excavations with remains from the later prehistoric periods as their main objective (1). The first Neolithic house-sites appeared in much the same way being by-products of excavations conducted recently at Runegård, Grødbygård and Limensgård, all in the southern part of the island. The Middle Neolithic houses at Runegård and Grødbygård are dealt with in a separate paper (Kempfner-Jørgensen & Watt, this volume), whereas an account of the Middle and Late Neolithic houses at Limensgård is presented here in preliminary form.

SITE LOCATION

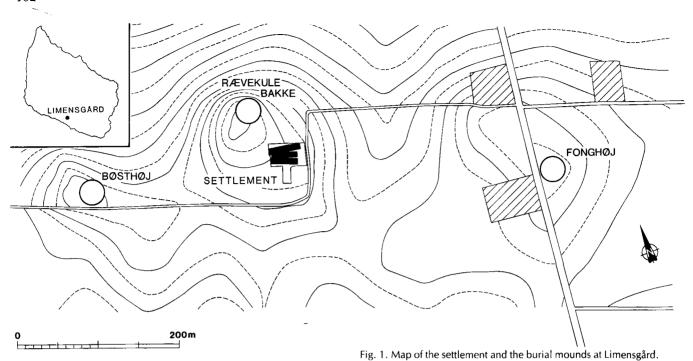
The settlement at Limensgård lies 37 m above sea level on a sandy ridge east of the river Læså c. 2 km from the south coast (2). Burial mounds are situated near Limensgård on both sides of the river. One of these, Bøsthøj, c. 200 m W of the settlement, contained stone cists with Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age burials (Aner & Kersten 1977: 33-44). About 300 m E of the settlement are the ploughed-over remains of another mound, Fonghøj. According to a report from 1880 by the school teacher and archaeologist J. A. Jørgensen, this was the location of the finds from Store Munkegård with flint axes, chisels, and stone battle axes of the Battle Axe Culture, acquired by the Museum of Northern Antiquities (the National Museum) in 1836 (3). The artifacts were reported found in a stone cist. Stone cists have also been located in a now completely levelled mound at the top of the hill, Rævekule Bakke, where the excavation took place in 1984. A number of large cists contained artifacts of stone and bronze (4). Stray finds from the ploughed fields indicate that most of the area between Bøsthøj and Fonghøj was settled in the Neolithic (see fig. 1). The soil is mostly light and sandy but

patches of fine, calcareous clay reach the surface here and there. Within parts of the excavated area the sand only covers the clayey subsoil in a 0.2 - 1.0 m thick layer. Some of the prehistoric features were dug through the sand into the clay below. The local geology offers favourable conditions for the excavators because precipitation is allowed to sieve away from the surface, while at the same time the subsoil keeps moisture longer in dry periods. The naturally drained ground may have been advantageous for the prehistoric occupants as well. The site was settled repeatedly in the Early, Middle, and Late Neolithic, the Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age. North of the settlement lies the Ugleenge, a formerly waterlogged area on a tabular formation of sandstone. The natural environment thus offers favourable conditions for a rural economy: light. arrable land, freshwater, green meadows for pasture.

THE EXCAVATION

When Bornholms Museum in 1983 undertook an excavation to recover a series of cremation graves from the Late Bronze Age – Early Iron Age it was discovered that there were postholes and other features from a Neolithic occupation at the site. Trial trenches revealed that the settlement was extensive and partly exposed to disturbance. In 1984 the investigation was continued jointly by Bornholms Museum and the National Museum, covering an area of c. 1,600 sq.m. (5) (fig. 2).

The topsoil was removed with a caterpillar excavator. A cautious use of machinery was necessary as numerous secondary features appeared, including cremation graves, fire pits from the Bronze Age, and house-remains from the Early Iron Age. Consequently a large amount of topsoil had to be removed with the showel. The absence of any preserved house-floors allowed the site to be cleared to the surface of the subsoil once the



secondary features had been recorded and excavated. All pits, postholes, and remains of structures were drawn and sectioned. Special attention was paid to overlapping features where horizontal clearing and cutting of sections were often repeated. As for the majority of the postholes belonging to the Neolithic buildings there was a clear distinction between the fill of the holes and the imprints of the posts. From the sections of the postholes it was often possible to determine whether posts had been removed or whether they had decayed in their original position. Finds from the fill of the holes and from the back-fill in the cavities after removed posts were collected and recorded separately. The fill of the postholes differed both in the degree of colouring and in their contents of settlement debris. The date of the finds from the fill and the back-fill of the postholes, and the characteristics of the postholes and their intersections, provide the basis for conclusions about the relative age of the buildings.

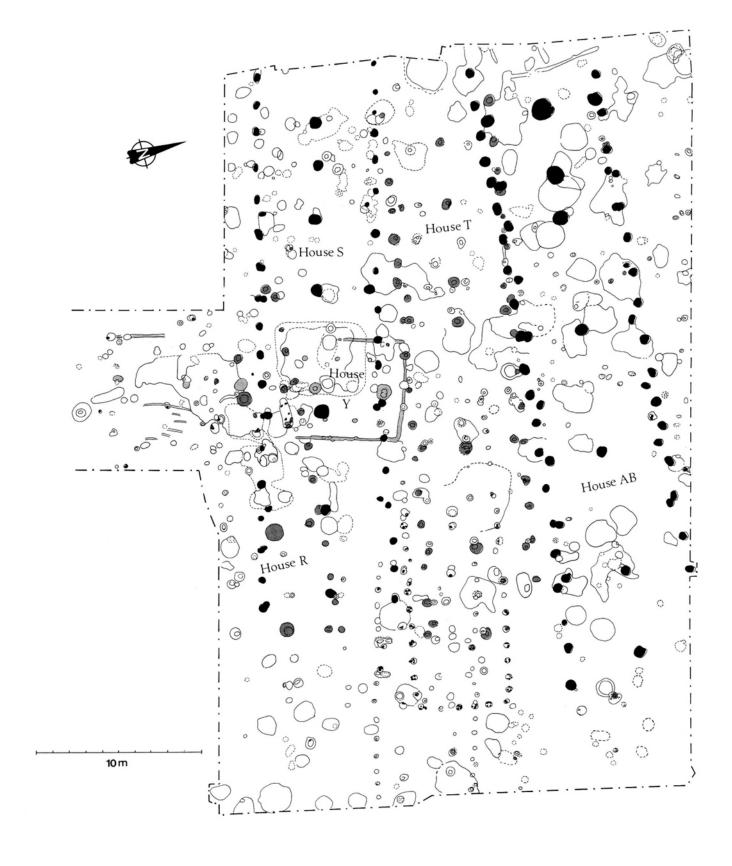
THE MIDDLE NEOLITHIC HOUSE

The stratigraphic position of this building, House Y (fig. 3), is determined by the intersecting postholes and pits belonging to the Late Neolithic Houses S and T and by a small pit intersected by the house and containing

an Early Neolithic cord ornamented potsherd. House Y was badly disturbed by later digging activities, and its southern end had recently been damaged by ploughing. Beside the disturbances caused by modern cultivation more irregular plough-marks were detected over the house-site to the south-east, probably traces of ardploughing in prehistoric time. The full length of the house cannot be determined. In its preserved state it measures 6.2 by 18 metres, being NNE-SSW alligned. The living-floor is confined by a narrow trench best preserved at the northern end and interpreted as the foundation of the walls (fig. 4). The remaining parts of the trench were only a few cms deep. A longitudinal section was made but no stakeholes were detected in the trench. The fill of the postholes and of the wall had a uniform, light greyish colour different from the fill of later postholes and pits at the settlement.

There are five central postholes placed on a nearly straight line along the long axis and spaced with 2.5-3.0 m intervals. They are from 0.2 to 0.5 m deep and the two northernmost holes have a darker core which repre-

Fig. 2. Plan of the 1984 excavation at Limensgård. Beside the Neolithic houses marked on the plan there were numerous secondary features, i.a. 27 cinerary graves of the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age, two Iron Age houses, 27 fire-pits, and a number of pits and postholes, shown on the plan in neutral outline. 1:200.



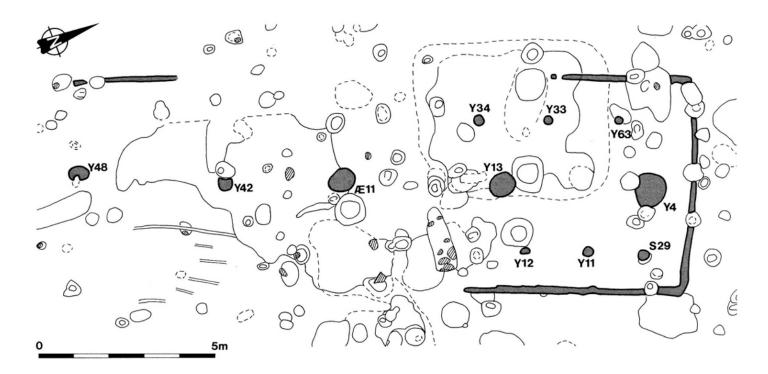


Fig. 3. House Y, the Middle Neolithic house at Limensgård. The postholes and the wall trench are shaded. Secondary features are shown in neutral outline. 1:100.

sents the back-fill from pulling up the posts when the house was abandoned. There were no clearly preserved imprints of posts left *in situ* in the central postholes, so the diameter of the original posts could not be established.

Six smaller postholes were distributed along two roughly parallel lines c. 1 m inside the walls and spaced with c. 1.5 m intervals. The depths of these holes were quite uniform, four measured c. 0.15 m, two only 0.10 m.

It is estimated that the length of House Y cannot have been less than c. 19 meters, and the term 'long-house' should therefore be appropriate. The principal elements of its construction are clear in spite of the many disturbances. The solid central posts would have supported a ridge beam (ås), while the more slender posts parallel to the walls probably carried the weight of side beams (sideåse) supporting the lower part of the rafters of the roof. In this way the roof would rest on the interior posts alone and not on the walls which apparently lacked posts with a solid foundation. The internal posts are not placed opposite each other and could not have been interconnected with tie beams.

However, the supposed longitudinal side beams supported by the internal uprights were possibly connected in some way by transversal beams to sustain the weight of the roof. No further details of the house can be deduced, nor were any doorways, fire-places, or internal partitioning observed.

Finds

Flint. Because of the scarcity of natural flint resources in Bornholm, no great amount of flint tools and waste is usually recovered at the Stone Age settlements on the island. Discarded flint was kept and reused until the flakes and cores were reduced to finger-nail size. Whole tools made from imported flint are likely to be found only when lost by accident or when buried intentionally in the ground. Associated with House Y were only one whole blade and 85 pieces of worked flint, mostly flakes from small flint nodules. No datable artifacts of flint were found.

Pottery. Four of the five central postholes contained pottery fragments:

Major parts of three vessels were found in posthole Y.4: 1) Fragments of the upper part of a vessel with an inward curved profile and decorated with a single row of circular impressions below the rim. The impressions are stamped into the clay with a hollow instrument (fig. 5:a). - 2) The upper and lower parts of a bowl with a wide, in-curving rim and a protruding foot. It has a single line of circular impressions below the rim. The vessel is rather fragmentary, and a full reconstruction is not attempted although the parts illustrated in fig. 5:c and d both belong to it. -3) Sherds of a funnel-shaped beaker ornamented with a horizontal zone of small, square impressions and with fine, parallel lines grouped in bands on the upper part (fig. 5:h). - Nos. 1 and 2 are made from an almost clean clay substance but tempered with very large grains of granite measuring up to 0.5 cm. This tempering is so conspicious that we may speak of a 'stone-tempered' ware. No. 3 is made in a finer technique and the ware is very hard and compact showing no coarse tempering.

Posthole Y.13 contained a small sherd of a vessel (fig. 5:f) decorated like fig. 5:h.

Posthole Æ.11 produced one small sherd with a similar decoration and two fragments of a clay disc with a casual line ornamentation (fig. 6:a-b).

In *posthole Y.48* there was a sherd of a beaker with slightly out-curved rim and decorated with a hanging triangle motif (fig. 5:e).

From one of the small postholes, Y.11, comes the narrow, rounded base of a small beaker (fig. 5:g).

The wall trench contained a small fragment of a clay disc with linear ornamentation and sherds of a beaker-like vessel with bands of fine, vertical lines (fig. 5:b).

Dating

The pottery assemblage from House Y includes shapes, techniques, and ornamental design showing close similarities with the pottery from the two house-sites at Grødbygård (Kempfner-Jørgensen & Watt figs. 6–9). Pottery of this type has not been found before in a clear settlement context in Bornholm and it differs in almost every way from the TRB pottery previously known from the periods I–III of the Middle Neolithic. The dating proposed here therefore has to be of a preliminary nature. There are indications, however, of stylistic connections with both the late TRB pottery and with the Pitted Ware pottery.



Fig. 4. The northern part of House Y with the wall trench seen from the east.

Formerly, pottery of the MN V was assumed not to be present neither in Scania nor Bornholm (Davidsen 1978: 163). But recently Lars Larsson has presented a number of Swedish settlement finds with MN V pottery associated with Pitted Ware Culture material (Larsson 1982). In Bornholm still no pottery is found that shows the characteristic features of the MN V as far as the coarse, bucket-shaped pots with finger-impressions and -grooves are concerned. With the small tulipshaped beakers from Limensgård and Grødbygård we may nevertheless find resemblances with the small, often unornamented beakers of the MN V from western Denmark (i.a. Davidsen 1978 Pl. 76:d, 85:o, and Ebbesen 1975 Fig. 89:9).

If we turn to the Pitted Ware Culture, comparison has to be made with pottery from Swedish sites as we fail to find suitable reference material on Bornholm. First we should mention the only partly published settlement material from Hagestad 7:6 in SE Scania

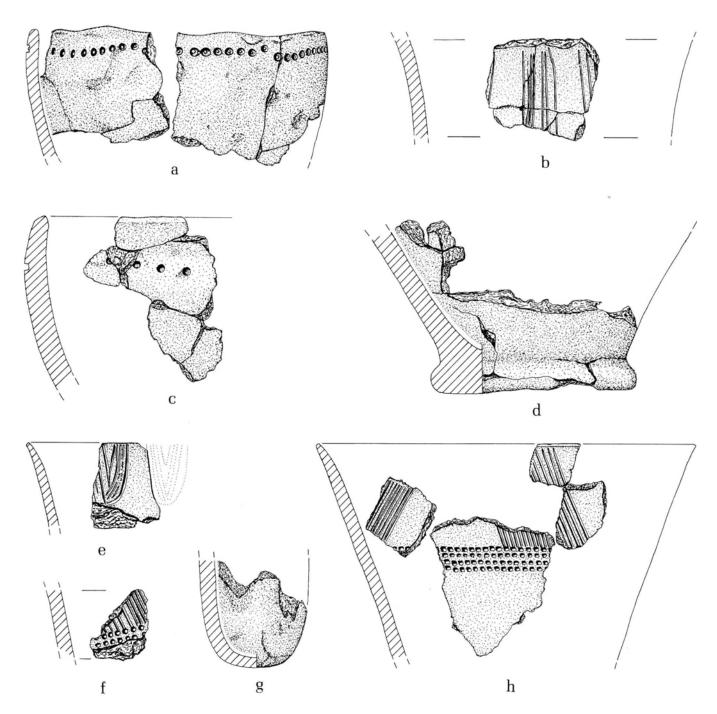


Fig. 5. Pottery from House Y. 1:2 (drawn by Lars Kempfner-Jørgensen).

which has been attributed to the Pitted Ware Culture by Birgitta Hulthén. It includes i.a. sherds of beakers with a hanging triangle motif very similar to the beakers from Grødbygård (Hulthén 1977: 140, figs. 85, 95). Hulthén proposes a Globular Amphora origin for this motif. The beaker fragments from Hagestad 7:6 are otherwise comparable with the Limensgård and Grødbygård beakers having the same profile and a thick, rounded base (cp. Hulthén fig. 84a). A beaker fragment of related form was recently found at Karlsfält near

Ystad. This specimen has a belly-ridge and a decoration executed with a toothed stamp (Larsson & Larsson fig. 33:1). At both Hagestad 7:6 and Karlsfält thick clay discs of the MN V type with concentric arcs are common. The same kind of ornamentation on clay discs is known from Jonstorp M3 and Stävie in western Scania where MN V pottery vessels are also documented, notably at Stävie (Larsson 1982). Vessels with protruding foot like the one from Limensgård (fig. 5:c-d) are also paralleled at Pitted Ware sites in Sweden, i.a. at Jonstorp M3 where, according to Lidén (1940: 170), 50 % of the pottery bases exhibit this feature.

There are a few settlement finds from Bornholm with pottery of the Battle Axe Culture (Becker 1947: 163, Fig. 38; 1982a Fig. 5). They seem to belong to a developed stage of that culture while the early phase is still not documented. It is not irrelevant, therefore, to point out the special character of the cord-ornamented vessel from pit no. 165 at Grødbygård (Kempfner-Jørgensen & Watt fig. 7a) and other parts of vessels from the same pit showing a bowl-shaped profile recalling the pots from the early Battle Axe Culture in Sweden (Malmer 1962, vessel types A and B).

With the Middle Neolithic pottery from Limensgård and Grødbygård we are dealing with a distinctive local pottery manufacture influenced, however, to a certain degree by contemporaneous pottery styles especially in neighbouring South Sweden and maybe on the Continent, too. During the period in question stylistic links with the Danish islands to the west may be less distinct. At the present stage of research we would suggest a date for the Limensgård and the Grødbygård pottery close to the end of the TRB Culture and the start of the Battle Axe Culture. Further research at the Neolithic settlement sites in the island may give an opportunity to observe the changes in material culture that took place during this much disputed transitional period.

LATE NEOLITHIC HOUSES

During the 1984 excavation four partly overlapping, Late Neolithic long-houses were investigated: House R, S, T, and AB (see plan fig. 2). Apart from a depression in House S which is interpreted as a sunken floor, only the postholes of the buildings are preserved. Although the dimensions differ, the houses display striking similarities in construction. This is clearly seen when com-

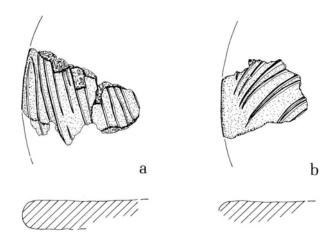


Fig. 6. Clay disc fragments from House Y. 1:2 (drawn by Lars Kempfner-Jørgensen).

paring the plans of the three best preserved houses (fig. 8): the main roof-supporting posts are arranged at irregular intervals along the longitudinal axis, flanked on both sides by lateral supports placed close to the walls. The wall posts are set at 1.5-2.0 m intervals. No doorways were identified with certainty, and the gable-ends were not always clearly defined. As for House S, T, and AB, the distance between the side walls increased by 0.5-1.0 m towards the ends.

House R is situated in the partly excavated area to the south where there were most disturbances. The length of the building is not determined but it is documented over a distance of 28 m. The posts of the southern wall were not identified. The distance between the central posts and the northern wall was 2.0-3.25 m, making the total width no more than c. 6.5 m. House R is determined to be older than the overlapping House S. This conclusion is based on both stratigraphy and on the fill in the postholes.

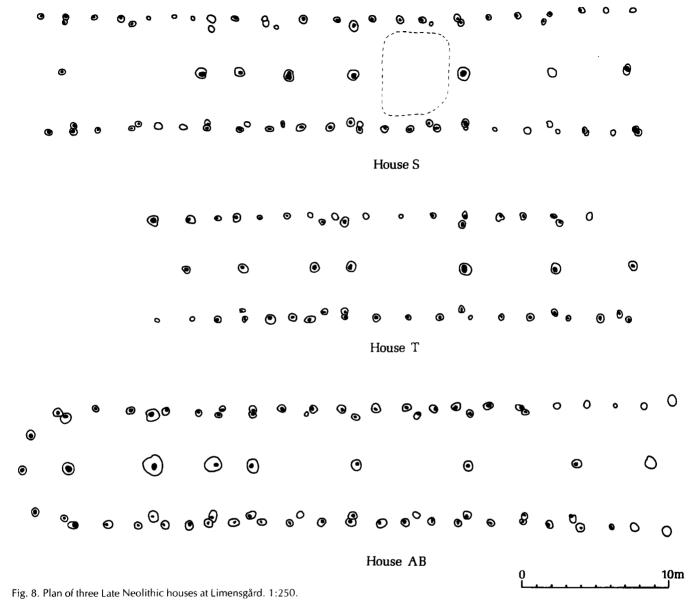
Finds: The central postholes of the house contained sherds of a coarse ware, i.a. fragments of a large vessel with barbed wire decoration (fig. 10), and sherds of pots with condoned rim. The limited number of flint tools include two large, oval flake scrapers of Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age type and a small, 9.4 cm long flint axe.



Fig. 7. Late Neolithic house during excavation, seen from the east (House S).

House S is 40 m long (fig. 7). At the middle it is 7.5 m wide, while at the ends it measures 8.0 m. Between the roof-supporting posts approx. in the middle of the house there was a rectangular depression, 4.5 by 5.5 m, with a dark fill, which we interpret as a sunken floor.

Finds: The depression contained a large amount of settlement debris. Among the finds were hammerstones, an edge fragment of a stone battle axe, and a single handle fragment of a flint dagger, type I. Beside an admixture of earlier Neolithic pottery the depres-



sion contained small fragments of cordoned vessels and barbed wire ornamented sherds. From one of the postholes of House S comes a sherd of a small pot with the unusual combination of a cordon and a lug below the rim (fig. 11b).

House T. The two houses, S and T, are not overlapping but are lying so close together that they could not have been coexistent. House T is stratigraphically older than House AB. Over its eastern end two long-houses were

built during the Iron Age. The later disturbances account for the missing postholes at the eastern end of House T. The house is 32 m long. It is 6.5 m wide at the western end and 7.0 m at the eastern end.

Finds: A modest quantity of flint and pottery was recovered from the postholes of the house. A few potsherds belong to vessels with cordoned rim, and one sherd had barbed wire ornamentation. A fragment of a loomweight of lightly fired clay was found in a posthole at the western end of the house (fig. 11c).

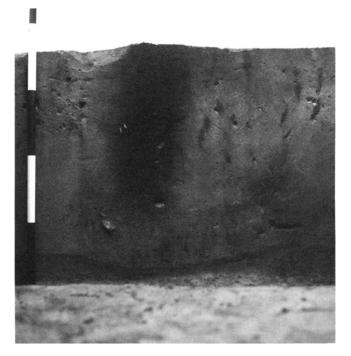


Fig. 9. Section of posthole in House AB. Lateral support no. AB26 inside the northern wall. Seen from the west.

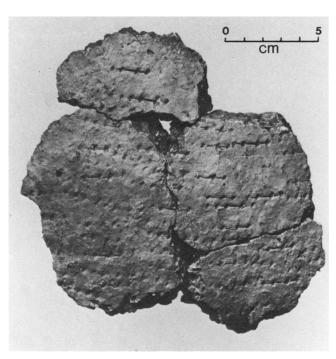


Fig. 10. Fragment of a large vessel with barbed wire ornament from House R at Limensgård (L. Larsen photo).

House AB is the largest and possibly the latest of the four houses excavated. At the eastern end observations were unfavourable due to later disturbances and to a change in the character of the subsoil. The western end has a rounded gable. The length of the house is 44 m. It is 7.5 m wide at the western end and exceeds 8.0 m at the eastern end. House AB is the only house with paired, lateral supports placed inside the walls in the intervals between the central, roof-supporting posts.

Finds: Fragments of a large storage vessel with outturned rim and a cordon was found in a posthole at the western end (fig. 11a).

In all of the Late Neolithic houses, the imprints of the posts offered details about the size and quality of the timber-work employed. All observations, except perhaps at the corner-posts, indicate that the posts had been vertical. However, no remains of the actual posts were left in the sandy subsoil. The reason why the imprints of the posts appeared so distinctly in many of the sections as dark, vertical stripes (cf. fig. 9) may be the result of charring the surface of the wood as a means

of conservation before it was set in the ground. There were no traces of posts being replaced in any of the houses.

In the horizontal cuts the cross-section of the wall posts could often be clearly discerned. In House R, S, and T the posts were either circular, oval, or rectangular in cross-section. In House T rectangular posts were used regularly for the lateral supports. In House AB the majority of the wall posts were triangular in crosssection which is suggesting the use of timber split along the pith. The wall posts were 10 - 15 cm in diameter. The greatest depths of the postholes were measured in House AB where the imprints of the wall posts reached down to c. 70 cm below the surface of the subsoil. There appeared to be a connection between the depth and the diameter of the postholes. As is seen from the plan fig. 2, the postholes of House AB were larger than those of the other houses. The depths of the holes were also clearly a function of the dimensions of the house. The lateral supports that were part of the roof-supporting construction were in general of the same depth as the wall posts. Only in House AB some were slightly

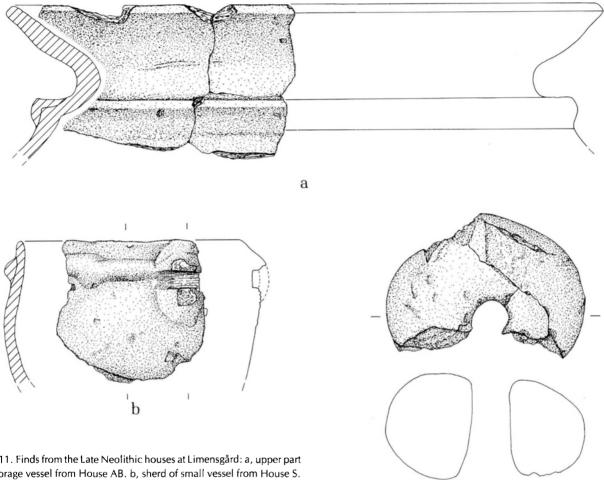


Fig. 11. Finds from the Late Neolithic houses at Limensgård: a, upper part of storage vessel from House AB. b, sherd of small vessel from House S. c, loom-weight from House T. 1:2 (drawn by Lars Kempfner-Jørgensen).

deeper. The central posts were all circular in crosssection and were 15 - 20 cm in diameter. In House AB some of the holes dug for the central posts exceeded 1 m in diameter and in depth.

A reconstruction sketch of House AB is attempted to illustrate the constructional principle of the Late Neolithic houses (fig. 12). This interpretation is, of course, open to discussion, which it is primarily intended for.

Dating. The artifacts of flint and stone from the Late Neolithic houses are too few and uncharacteristic to indicate a more precise date within the time Late Neolithic - Early Bronze Age. Rim sherds with a single or a double cordon found in all four houses speak in favour of a Late Neolithic date, although cordoned rims occur on vessels of the first period of the Early Bronze Age (see i.a. Boas 1983 Fig. 10: 6-7). More conclusive is the pottery with barbed wire decoration which is known

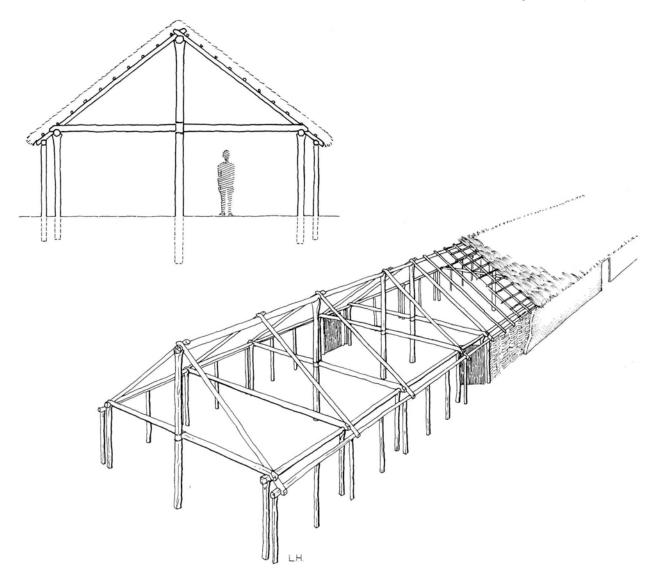
from an early part of the Late Neolithic in Denmark including Bornholm (Lomborg 1973a: 137, Fig. 81; 1977: 32-33). The barbed wire technique is much more commonly found in Sweden (cf. Oldeberg 1954: 35-39) and probably had a longer duration there - which may be relevant to Bornholm as well. At Limensgård the barbed wire decorated pottery was most numerous among the finds from House R. This house is regarded as the oldest of the four Late Neolithic houses. We assume that it was in use during an early part of the Late Neolithic.

C

PERSPECTIVES

In our part of the World the house must be viewed as Man's most important 'artifact'. How and where houses were built shows to what extent people were perma-

Fig. 12. Reconstruction of House AB at Limensgård (drawn by Leif Hammelev).



nently settled in a given environment and reflects priorities towards land use and production. The arrangement and size of the house are functional solutions that fit the behaviour and the social groupings of its inhabitants. House-building also demonstrates the capacity of handicraft and the level of technology. Architectural tradition embodies the cultural heritage of the people and lasts longer than most other traditions. It is therefore equally important to observe the permanence of tradition and the evidence of change and reorganization of house-building throughout Prehistory.

One of the most persistent traditions in South Scandinavia was the building of long-houses with wooden

posts set in the ground. The three-aisled long-house with paired internal roof supports is documented from the Early Bronze Age period II (Lomborg 1973b, 1976; Boysen & Andersen 1983) and can be followed through various stages of development until the early Medieval Period (see i.a. Becker 1982b). Houses different from this tradition and older than period II of the EBA are now known from a number of settlements. The evidence shows that the houses of the Late Neolithic and the first period of the Bronze Age had a single row of roof-supports. This is observed at Late Neolithic settlements in North Jutland where rectangular houses measuring up to 18 m in length and with sunken floors have been ex-

cavated (Simonsen 1983, with references). This house-type is known from South Sweden as well (Strömberg 1971; Calmer 1973) and is regarded as the typical house-form in the Late Neolithic. In most cases details of the construction of these houses are absent or few because postholes are either not found or they seem to be disorderly arranged. Often the sunken floors give the only basis for estimating the shape and dimensions of the building.

As for the EBA per. I the settlement excavation at Egehøj in East Jutland has produced substantial house-remains which prove the existence of long-houses at the beginning of the Bronze Age (Boas 1983). The Egehøj houses have a single row of central roof-supports and partly sunken floors like the Late Neolithic houses. A continuation of constructional principles of house-building is thus apparent from the beginning of the Late Neolithic till somewhere in the EBA per. I–II. It should be mentioned, that claims have been made for long-houses in the Late Neolithic/EBA of Norway (Østmo 1979).

Regular long-houses earlier than the beginning of the Bronze Age were not known in South Scandinavia until recently. In 1979 Late Neolithic long-houses were excavated at the site of Fosie IV near Malmö in Scania (Björhem & Säfvestad 1983). The houses from Fosie IV and from Limensgård have basic features in common, only the Limensgård houses are larger (6).

There is a remarkable contrast between the Late Neolithic long-houses and the hitherto known, smaller buildings with sunken floors. The Limensgård houses can be compared with the largest known Bronze Age houses and their size is really not surpassed until the appearance of the long farm-houses of the Late Roman Period. It raises the question whether the small Late Neolithic houses with sunken floors represent complete buildings at all, or whether they are just parts of larger buildings (compare above, House S) - or they might be interpreted as buildings with special functions within a settlement complex. Alternatively, we have to view the difference in house-size in terms of social or economic differences. To solve the problem we would need more extensive excavations at Late Neolithic sites in the future.

Just as unexpected as the large Late Neolithic houses was the discovery of the Middle Neolithic house at Limensgård. Despite some obvious differences the Middle Neolithic houses at Limensgård and Grødby-

gård share basic elements of construction with the Late Neolithic houses, such as the central roof-supports and the lateral supports. It is anticipated, therefore, that the two house-types may be linked by a continuous tradition through the later part of the Middle Neolithic, irrespective of the cultural changes otherwise observed.

Further investigations at settlement sites of the Single Grave and Battle Axe Cultures may add more substance to this point. Till now one of the most intricate problems in archaeology has been to locate residence sites with dwelling structures of these two culture groups. It may be inferred that occupation left little refuse during that particular period or that settlement was less permanent. The settlement sites that are now being investigated on Bornholm offer the advantage of having been used continuously through periods of the Neolithic including the time of the Battle Axe Culture, as well as through later periods. This creates, however, a complex situation for the excavators.

One of the objectives for future research in the Neolithic on Bornholm is to work out a chronological sequence based mainly on the pottery from the settlements. In this respect the individual Neolithic occupations at Runegård offer certain possibilities (Kempfner-Jørgensen & Watt, this volume). The current pottery chronology and culture designations used for the Middle Neolithic periods in Denmark may be used here only as a reference. For most of the Neolithic, Bornholm follows the development on the Swedish mainland. As shown by the Middle Neolithic pottery assemblages at Limensgård and Grødbygård, we may also have to face local variations due to the geographical position of the island.

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NOTES

Grants for the illustrations were offered by Dronning Margrethe II's Arkæologisk Fond.

- Of the previously known Neolithic settlements on Bornholm we mention the following: Hammeren (Becker 1947: 161-164; 1951: 179).

 Nørre Sandegård (Frödin 1916; Becker 1947: 165; 1951: 179-180).
 Lilleborg (Davidsen 1977: 9-22). Grønnebæk (Becker 1951: 177-178; 1982a: 20-21). Rispebjerg (Ringborgen) (excavated by O. Klindt-Jensen, unpublished). Runegård (Watt 1980: 67-76; Kempfner-Jørgensen & Watt, this volume).
- 2. Sb (Central Register) no. 198, Åker parish.
- Vedel 1886: 250. Malmer 1962: 935, Grab 241. Sb no. 40 = 179, Åker parish.

- 4. Sb no. 44. In 1958 some remains of stone cists were discovered but only a limited excavation took place.
- Financial support was granted by Rigsantikvaren, the National Museum 1st Dept., and Bornholms Museum. Ken Hedegaard, Torben Sode, and Brita Dam assisted at the excavation.
- A house-site at Piledal near Ystad in Scania may be a related structure, see Larsson & Larsson 1984: 38

 –44.

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