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Bellingegård, a Late Iron Age Settlement Site at Køge, East Zealand

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So far there are only few investigations of Iron Age settlement sites in Zealand. The major part of the excavations have been made in the northern and eastern parts of the island, and in the area under Køge Museum three settlement sites (1) have been examined, all with traces of house sites clearly datable to the Iron Age. One of these sites is located at Bellingegård, and so far it is the only thoroughly investigated Iron Age site in Zealand. Prompted by plans for the erection of a large hospital north of Køge, Køge Museum undertook reconnaissance and dug trial pits in the area. On the outskirts of this area an iron comb and a piece of gold had earlier been found (2). The settlement site is situated on a prominent hill-top surrounded by a cultivated bog area intersected by a brook to the north and west, and with bog pools, hillocks, and littoral meadows towards the east and south.

During the eight weeks of investigations in April and May 1983 excavators removed the topsoil from an area of 12000 m^2. The following autumn additional trial investigations were made outside the area in order to ascertain the boundaries of the settlement site. Towards the north and the west four 50 m long ditches were dug, but no further traces of habitation were found. In a 1200 m^2 large area south of the site the topsoil was removed by the builder supervised by the museum. Only a few postholes and five pits were found here.

The Houses

In the excavated area 31 houses of varying shapes and sizes were found along with a large number of pits and traces of stockades. The houses were preserved as traces of the roof-supporting posts. In two instances, a long-house and a smaller house respectively, there were also traces of wall posts. The depths of the roof-supporting postholes varied between 1 m and 35 cm, whereas the other postholes were rarely more than 30 cm deep.

The houses were clustered in seven concentrations (A-G, fig. 2), sometimes enclosed by a stockade. These enclosed clusters must be interpreted as individual farmsteads inside which the houses have occasionally been renewed and rebuilt. The house clusters show up to five replacements of the posts of the central long-house. Several of the farmsteads contain smaller houses that have also been rebuilt at times. The houses, which are all east-west aligned, can be divided into five types according to the shape of the ground plan.

House type 1 (fig. 3) includes 13 long-houses with 4–5 pairs of roof-supporting posts in two parallel rows. The distance between the roof-supporting pairs is with one exception greatest at the west end varying from 5 to 6 m, whereas the distance between the other pairs is 4–5.5 m.

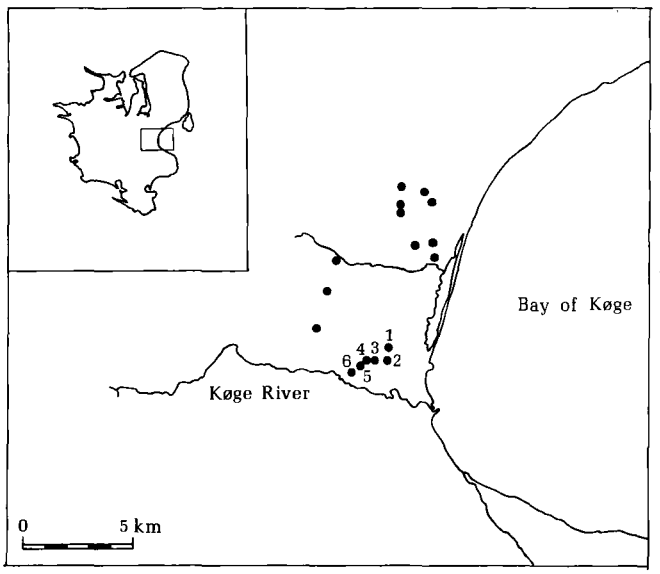

Fig. 1. Map of the Køge area showing registred Iron Age settlement sites. 1. Bellingegård. 2. Settlement site from the late Bronze or early Iron Age. 3. Indeterminate Iron Age settlement site. 4. Early Roman Iron Age settlement site. 5 & 6. Late Roman Iron Age settlement sites.

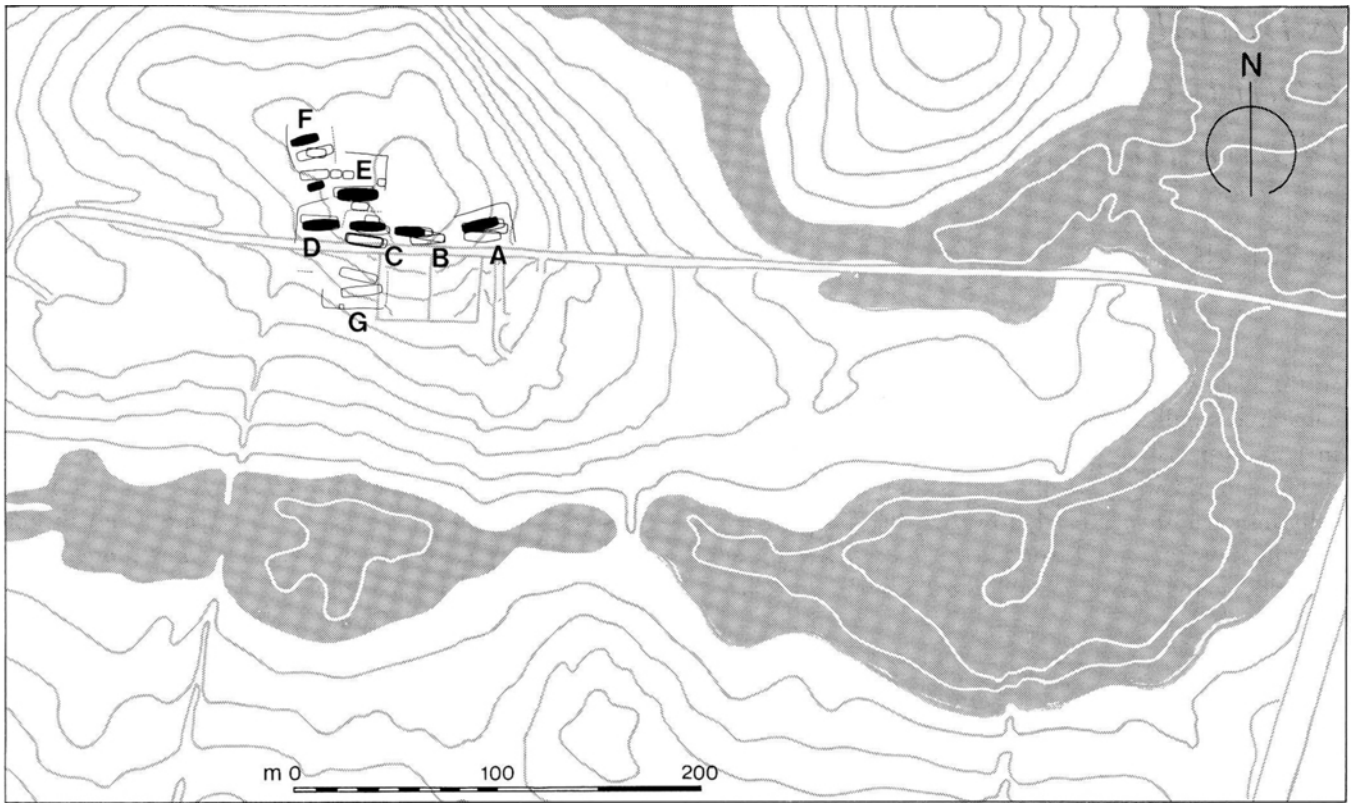

Fig. 2. Map of the settlement site with all houses indicated.

House type 2 (fig. 4) includes 7 long-houses with 4 pairs of roof-supporting posts in two curving lines with the largest transverse measurement at the middle. In this group the distance between the roof-supporting pairs varies a lot more. Thus in three houses the pairs are most widely spaced in the middle, two have the largest distance between the posts in the west end, and two in the east end. In this connection two long-houses should be mentioned that do not fit into either of the two groups, as they have oblique ground plans.

House type 3 (fig. 5) consists of three houses each with 3 pairs of roof-supporting posts in heavily curved lines. The roof-supporting pairs are evenly spaced in each separate house.

House type 4 (fig. 6) includes a total of 7 houses that must be classified as smaller houses. Five of the houses have 2 pairs of roof-supporting posts. The last two have three pairs, but their transverse and longitudinal measurements are somewhat smaller than in house type 3.

House type 5 (fig. 7) includes only one house with no roof-supporting posts. Only a few wall postholes are preserved. This house type may have been more widely used, but under poor conditions of preservation they are hard to find. It may also be interpreted as a small enclosure or a paddock.

A chronological analysis of the house types at Bellingegård can be made either by means of the fill in the postholes or by means of the stratigraphical conditions between the postholes. In the case of *cluster B* both methods can be used. The farmstead consists of four long-houses with partly overlapping ground plans. The fill of the postholes varies a lot from house to house. In one of the houses the fill is almost quite sterile and contains practically no charcoal, burnt clay, or pottery (fig. 8). A post from a later house has been inserted into one of the original postholes (fig. 9), and the postholes of this later house have in turn been disturbed by postholes from an even later house (figs. 9 & 10). The four phases of the farmstead represent two house types. The two oldest houses are of type 1 and the two later houses are of type 3. A similar pattern is repeated in several of the other house clusters. In all cases the oldest houses are of type 1 and have almost sterile postholes, whereas

Fig. 3. House with parallel rows of roof-supporting posts. Type 1. 1:250.

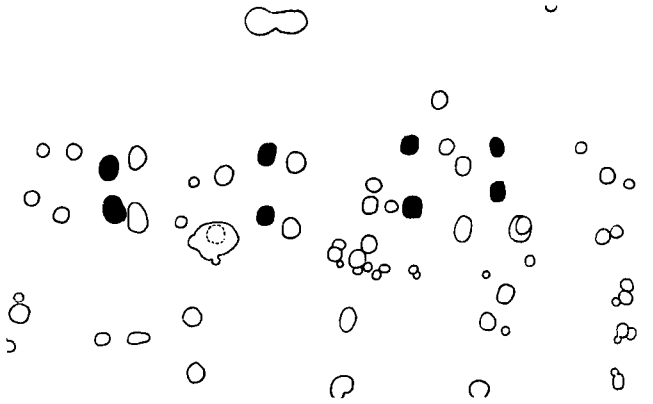

Fig. 4. House with curved rows of roof-supporting posts. Type 2. 1:250.

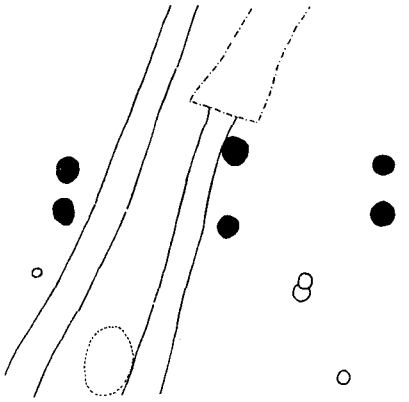

Fig. 5. House with only 3 pairs of roof-supporting posts in heavily curved rows. 1:250.

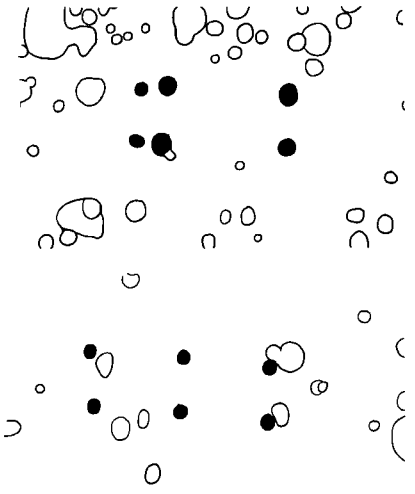

Fig. 6. Small houses with 2 or 3 pairs of roof-supporting posts. Type 4. 1:250.

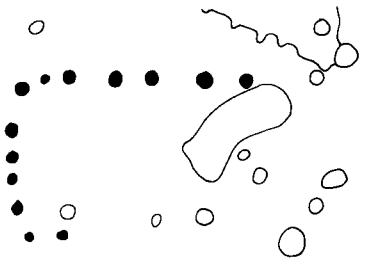

Fig. 7. House with no roof-supporting posts; possibly a paddock. Type 5. 1:250.

the later houses are of types 2 and 3. The distinction between three kinds of long-houses is thus not a functional one, but rather represents a development from the traditional Iron Age house, type 1, to later house types, 2 and 3. These have probably had curving walls like Viking Age houses (Hvass 1981).

The exact dimensions of the houses are difficult to ascertain because of the missing wall postholes. However, farmstead A, where a few wall-postholes are preserved, where among the door postholes located at the middle of the house, suggests a width of approx. 5.5 m (fig. 12). The length, however, is more difficult to determine, but unless the holes from the roof-supporting posts at the east and west ends of the house represent the gables, the house must have been more than 20 m long.

Several of the houses were surrounded by an enclosure preserved as a series of small postholes (fig. 12). Presumably each farmstead has had its own enclosure, as is seen in farmstead A where the stockade is preserved towards the north and east. In the case of farmstead F the stockade is preserved towards the west and partly preserved towards the east, and farmsteads E and G have obvious stockades towards the north and south, respectively.

Along with the renewal of the houses the stockades indicate the changes that have taken place during the life time of the settlement. Farmstead G, where the long-house has only been replaced once, has probably had a shorter life-span than the others and may have been dismantled or moved. Farmsteads D and E have seen two replacements of the long-houses, but contain

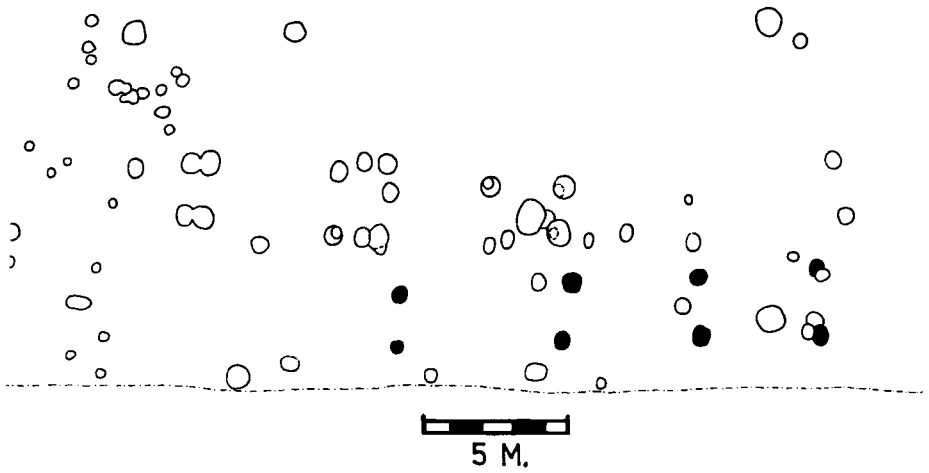

Fig. 8. Farmstead B, the earliest phase with completely sterile fill in the postholes. House type 1.

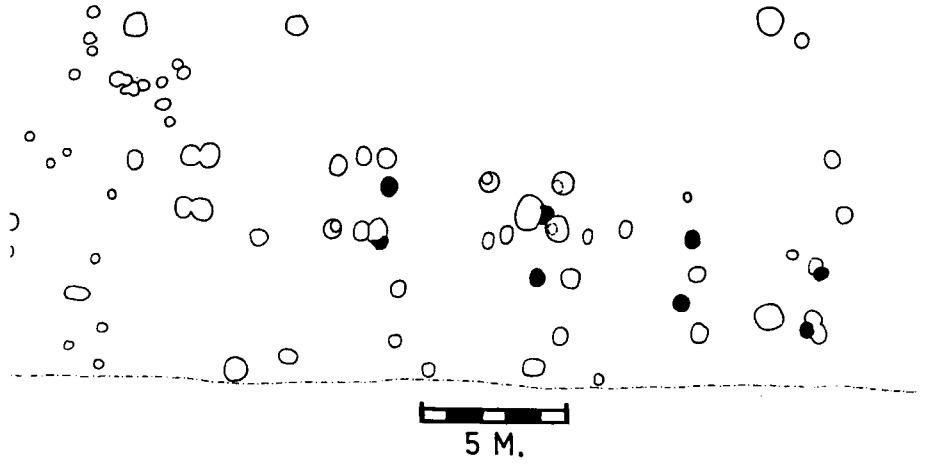

Fig. 9. Farmstead B, second phase. House type 1.

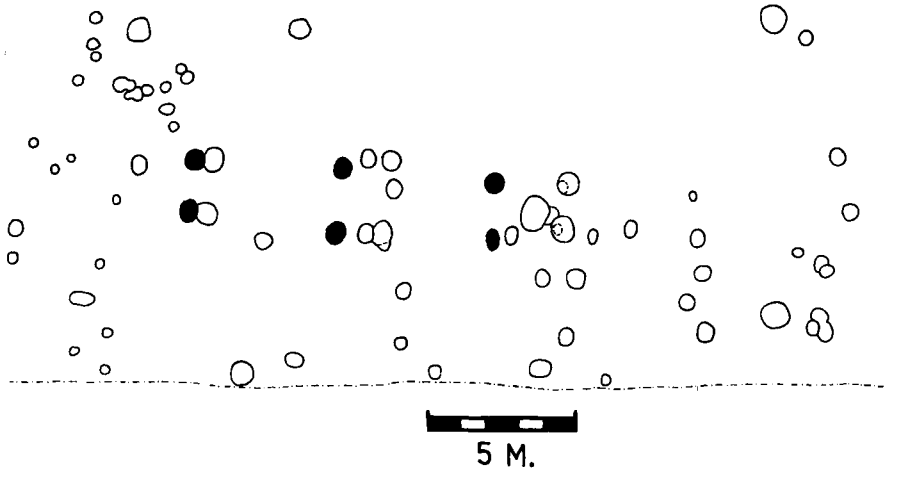

Fig. 10. Farmstead B, third phase. House type 3.

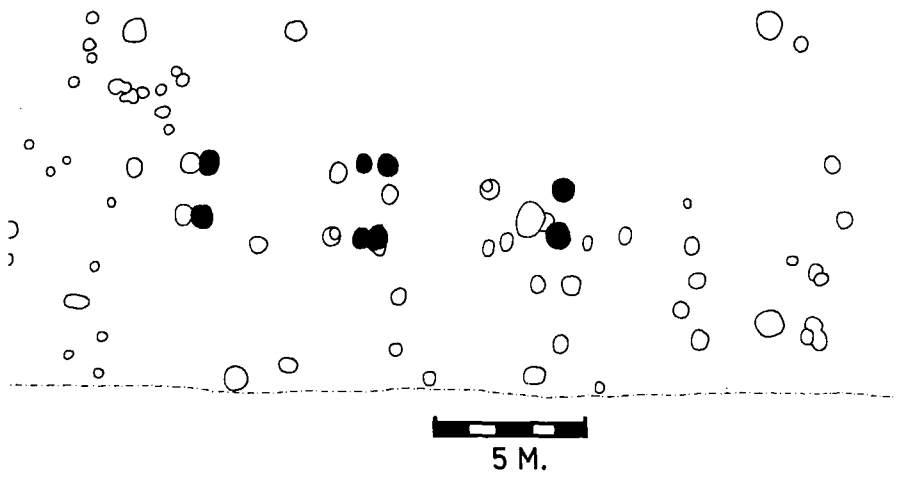

Fig. 11. Farmstead B, final phase. House type 3.

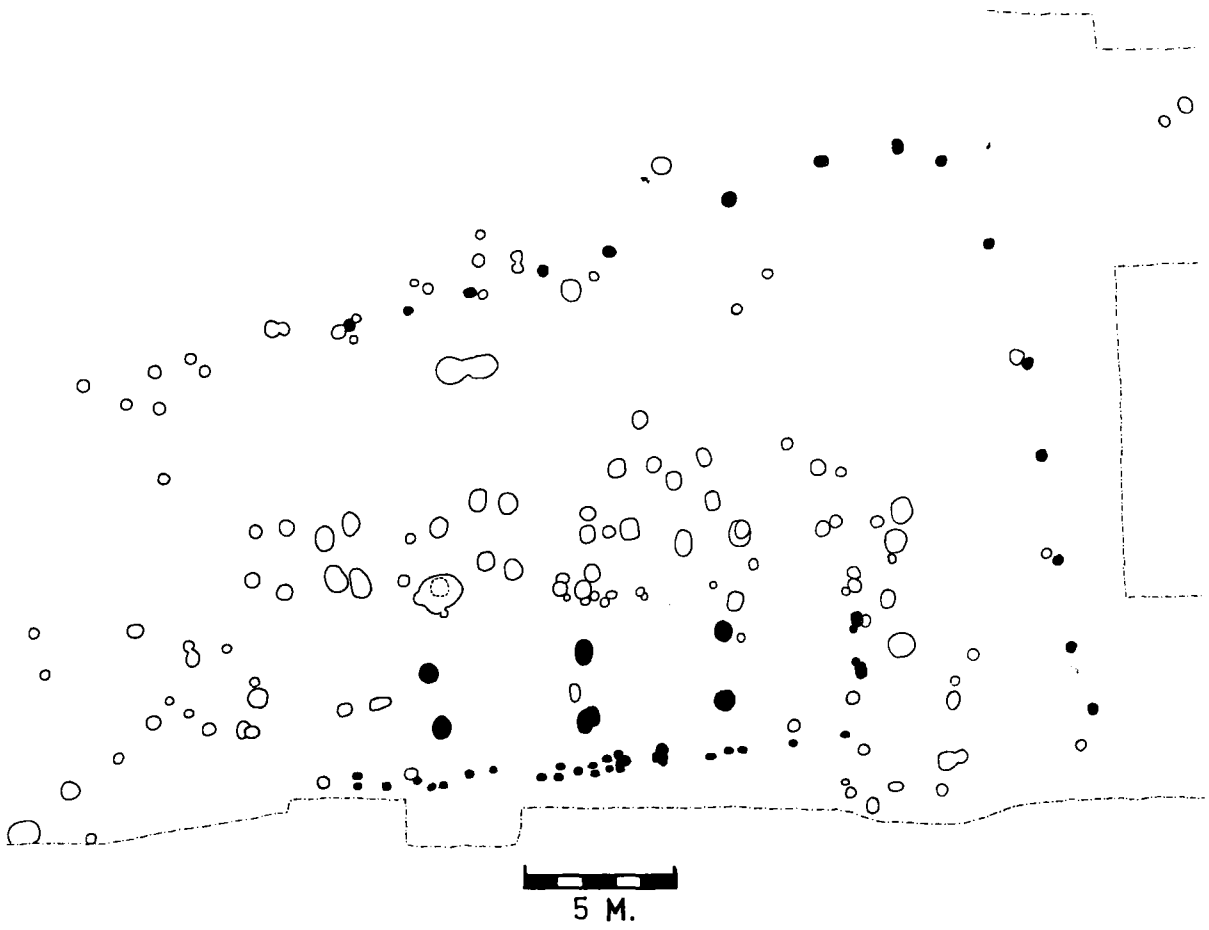

Fig. 12. Farmstead A with remains of the enclosure. The type 2 house has a preserved entrance and remains of the wall along the south side.

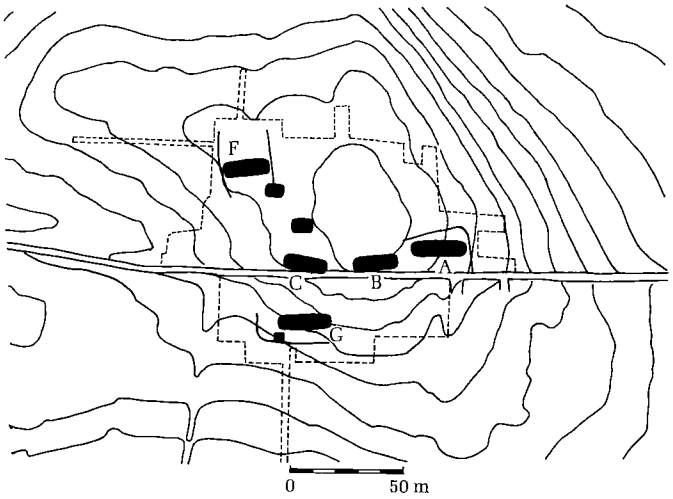

Fig. 13. The earliest phase of the settlement.

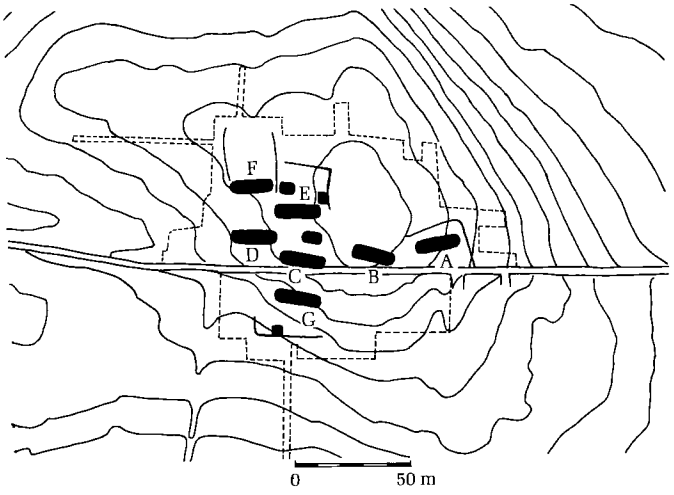

Fig. 14. The middle phase of the settlement.

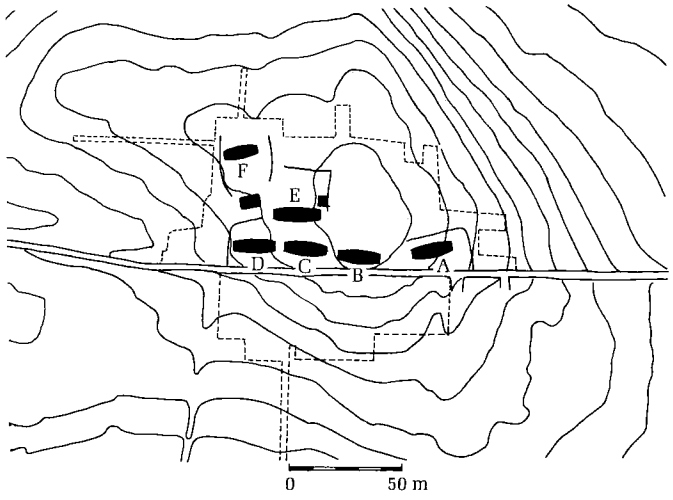

Fig. 15. The final phase of the settlement.

no quite sterile postholes. They have probably been erected at a time when there was much activity in the area. Farmsteads D and E almost appear as additions to the earlier farms C and F, both of which have several replacements of the houses. In both cases one early and two later house types are represented.

So during the earliest period of the settlement there were 5 farmsteads (fig. 13), later the number rose to 6 or 7, and during the final period there were 6 farmsteads (figs. 14 & 15).

Pits

Besides the large number of postholes there were also many pits. The largest ones were probably clay pits whence the Iron Age peasants got the clay for the mud walls of the houses. A few of the pits were fire pits with a layer of charcoal at the bottom covered by fire-shattered stone. Both the clay pits and the fire pits contained pottery in considerable quantities. At the southern end of the excavated area was a large number of pits with a markedly different kind of fill. It often contained flint flakes and in a few cases a little pottery ornamented with needle pricks. These pits should be dated to the Neolithic.

Artefacts

The artefacts found on the settlement site were mainly pottery. The major part was found in the pits, but the holes from the roof-supporting posts also yielded some. Burnt clay from the mud walls appears in considerable quantities especially in the holes from the roof-supporting posts of the late houses.

Farmstead D yielded a large number of warp weights of the well-known type from the Iron Age and Viking Age. Rotating mills of granite appear in the shape of intact underlier and two fragments of 'rubbers'.

In a smallish pit two bluish green cylindrical glass beads were found along with a fragment of an iron bucket handle. Another fragment of an iron bucket handle was found in a posthole from a roof-supporting post in house B. Furthermore there were 9 crushing stones and 3 small whet-stones made of sandstone.

Several of the larger pits contained bones of domestic animals, a.o. cow, sheep, and pig.

The pottery found on the settlement site is best described as rather coarse-grained and at times of

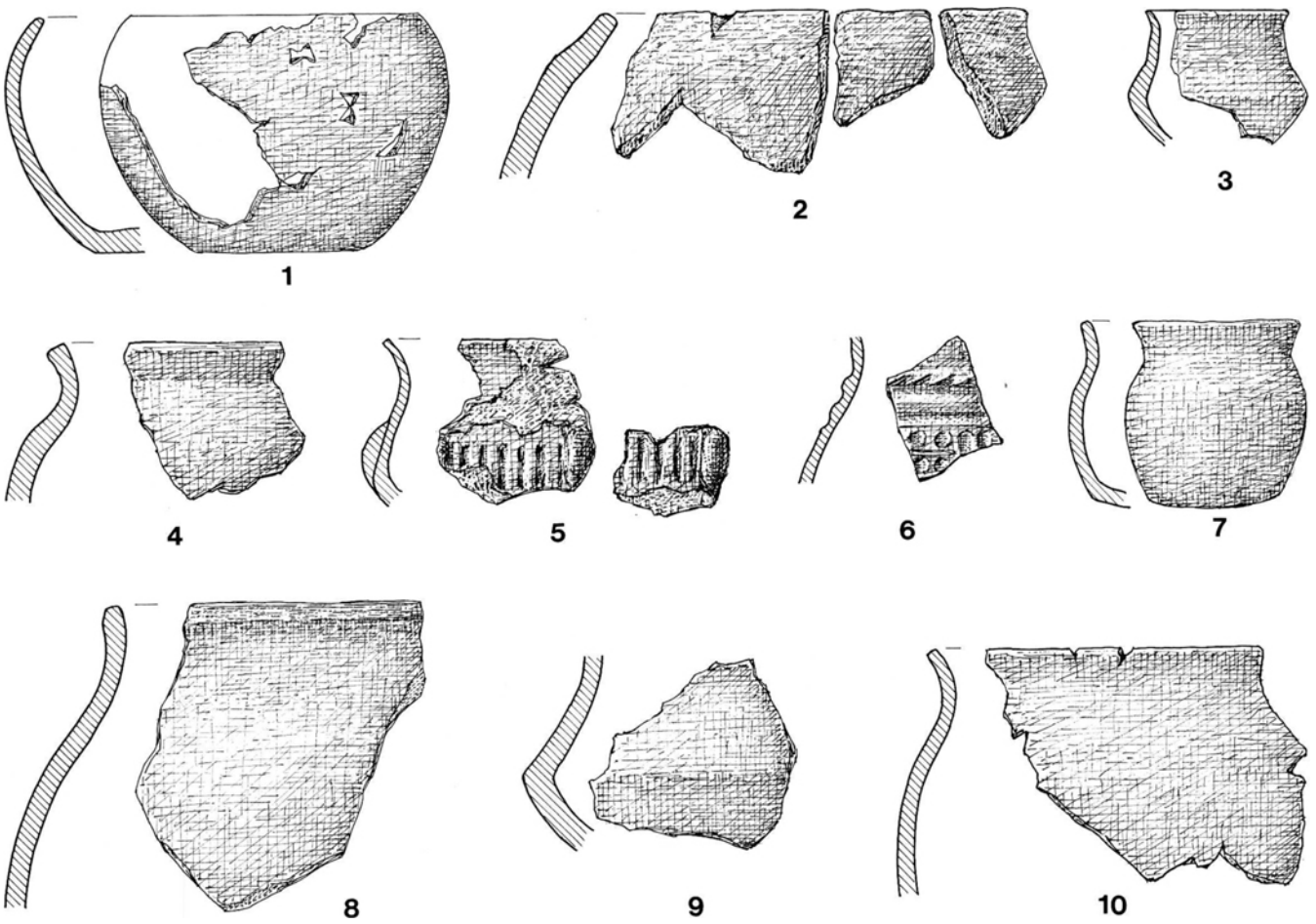

Fig. 16. Pottery. 1 & 2 were found in farmstead F in a stockade posthole and in a pit, respectively. 4 & 5 are sherds found in holes from roof-supporting posts of the later houses of farmstead C. 3 & 10 are from holes from roof-supporting posts in farmstead B. 6 is from a pit with two bluish green glass beads in farmstead A. 7 & 9 were found in holes from roof-supporting posts of an early and a late house in farmstead F. 8 was found in a hole from a roof-supporting post in farmstead D.

rather hap-hazard manufacture. The surface treatment varies, and a few sherds have nicely glazed surfaces. The few ornamented sherds were smoothly glazed, but the ornamentation revealed primitive workmanship.

The rim-sections of the pots were often short with perdendicular or slightly outward-curving lips, though a few had heavily outward-curved lips. Two hemispherical vessels one of which has a preserved base-surface, differ markedly from the others. They show rather coarse surface treatment and recall the hemispherical vessels from the Viking Age (fig. 16, 1 & 2). Both hemispherical vessels were found in farmstead F in a post hole in the stockade and in a pit that is later than one of the type 1 houses, respectively.

The pottery material contained only three fragments of handles. One had a slightly cruciform cross-section (fig. 17:4), and the other two were stout, almost sausage-shaped handles. All three fragments were found in the same pit.

Dating

A precise dating of the Bellingegård settlement site, which has undoubtedly had a long life-span, is not all that simple. The pottery dates the settlement site to the period between the 3rd and 6th centuries. Both the development of the house types and the 4–5 reconstructions of the farms suggest a long life-span.

The pottery material contains no items that can be

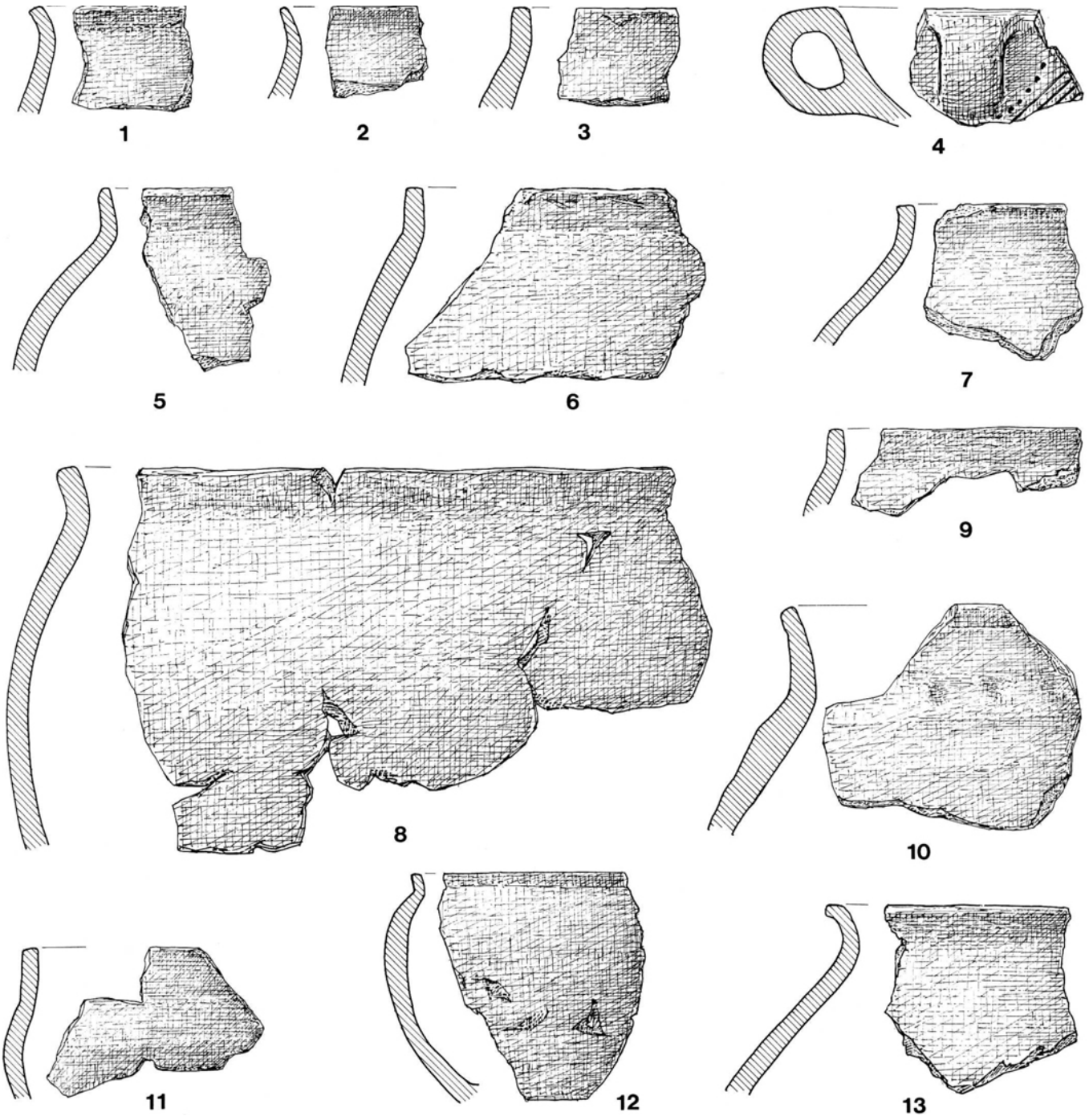

Fig. 17. Pottery found in various pits and postholes. 7 & 8 were found in fire pits. 10 was found in a stockade posthole in farmstead A.

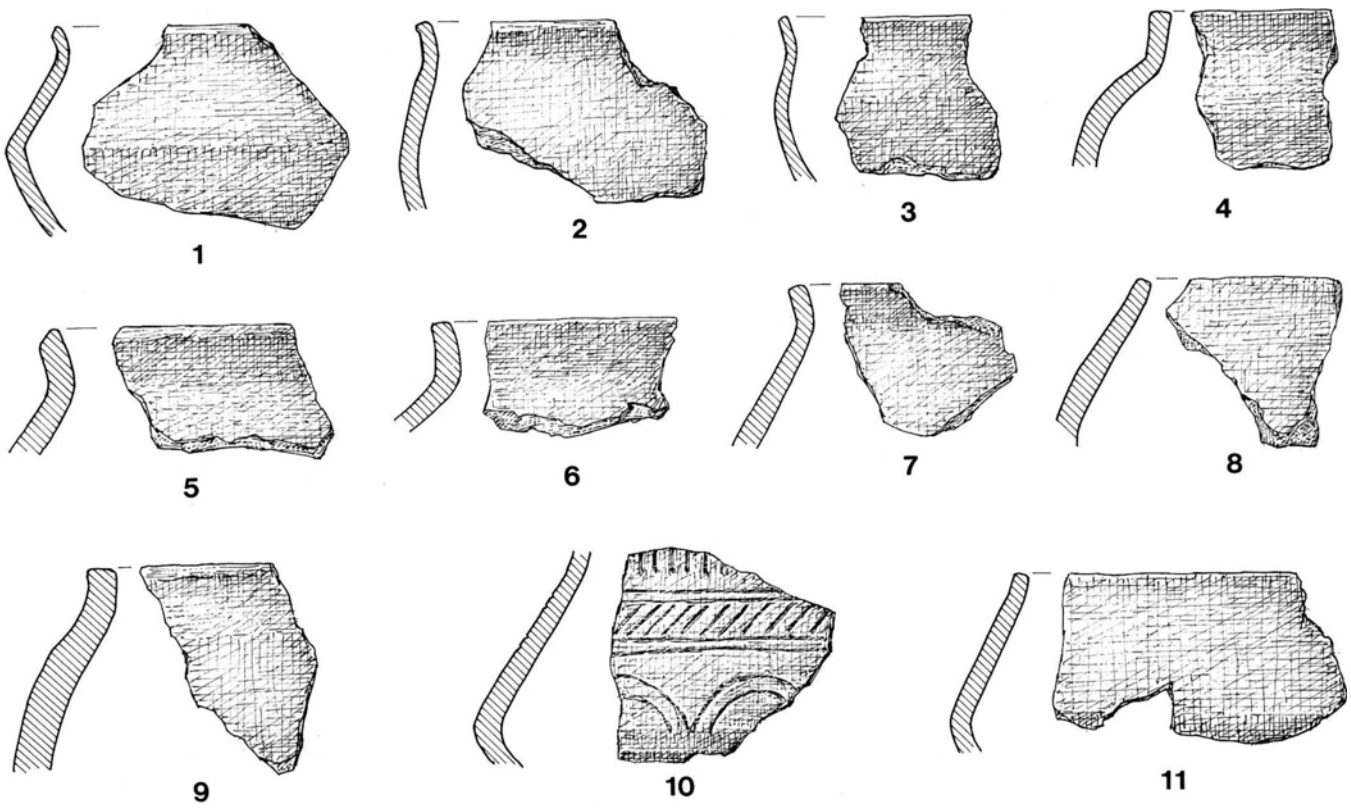

Fig. 18. Pottery from one single pit, which is older than farmstead E.

dated to the early Roman Iron Age. The ornamented sherds should be dated to late Roman or early Germanic Iron Age. The hemispherical vessels should probably be dated to the 6th century.

Some mud-wall fragments from the roof-supporting posts have been dated by means thermoluminescence. So far all results have been between the 2nd and 6th centuries (3).

So in conclusion the settlement site must have been founded during the 3rd or 4th centuries. Originally it consisted of 5 farmsteads, later another two were added only to be dismantled during the 5th or 6th centuries.

The distribution map of Iron Age settlement sites in this area (fig. 1) shows that the Bellingegård site is one out of six settlements inside a limited area. Four of these have been dated on the basis of pottery systematically gathered during reconnaissance. One belongs to the transition period between the Bronze Age and the early Iron Age, and two of them can be dated to early Roman Iron Age. The fourth can be dated to late Roman period and the fifth cannot be dated with any certainty.

Bellingegård may very well represent a period in the life-span of a small Iron Age community that has moved around inside a limited area, a pattern that is known from the extensive village investigations in Jutland (Hvass 1982).

Translated by Ul S. Jørgensen

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NOTES

1. Bellingegård (Højelse s., Ramsø h., Københavns a. *Køge Museum* file no. 1019). – Havbogård (Solrød s., Tune h., Københavns a. *Køge Museum* file no. 1012), settlement from the early Roman Iron Age. – Solvadgård (Solrød s., Tune h., Københavns a. *Køge Museum* file no. 1011), settlement from the late Roman/early Germanic Iron Age.
2. Sb. (Central Register) no. 7, Højelse s., Ramsø h., Københavns a.

3.

Risø TL no.	Feature		TL date
832201	II,8	Farm A	250±100 AD
832204	IV,237	Farm F	530±90 AD
832206	VI,93	Farm C	170±120 AD
832207	VIII,3	Farm D	450±110 AD
832208	VIII,36	Farm D	350±350 AD
842201	II,35	Farm A	320±100 AD
842202	IV,164	Farm F	500±80 AD
842203	VI,72	Farm C	420±80 AD
842204	VI,195	Farm C	340±100 AD

Samples nos. 832201–832208 consisted of burnt daub, samples nos. 842201–842204 of pottery. All tests were performed at the *Nordisk Laboratorium for Termoluminescens Datering*, Risø.

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