

# *Vester Egesborg* – a coastal settlement from the Late Iron Age on Zealand

by *Jens Ulriksen*

## ABSTRACT

*A coastal site on a sheltered fjord in the southern part of Zealand has in recent years been the subject of continuing archaeological investigations. This article is a preliminary presentation of the numerous metal detector finds and their relationship to the results of the excavations so far.*

## INTRODUCTION

In the early 1960s an amateur archaeologist was walking on a field near the coast about 500 m south of the village of Vester Egesborg in Southern Zealand (Fig. 1). He was looking for flint tools from the Stone Age but to his surprise he also found several bronze objects and potsherds from the Late Iron Age. The finds included a couple of fibulae from the Early and the Late Germanic Iron Age respectively, a Kufic silver coin and a bronze key, both from the Viking Age, as well as a quantity of potsherds of Baltic ware, which also fall within the chronological limits of the Viking Age. The find site lies innermost in Dybsø Fjord, in an area with a number of interesting Iron Age finds. Several inhumation graves from the Roman Iron Age have been found alongside the main road running north-south between Næstved and Vordingborg, just south of the village of Vester Egesborg. A Viking Age stirrup was recovered on an area of damp pasture adjoining the landing place which will be dealt with in more detail later in this article, and in 1993 a heavily-profiled bronze fibula from the Early Roman Iron Age was found using a metal detector. A few hundred metres further south secondary inhumation and cremation graves from the Iron Age were found in Bronze Age mounds. The finds here included a stamp-decorated

clay vessel in a stone cist with burnt bones; a belt buckle and a rectangular belt mount were discovered close by (Ørsnes 1966, 254, Figs. 19-20).

Mogens Ørsnes, then curator at the National Museum's Prehistoric Department, became interested in the amateur archaeologist's finds and initiated a trial excavation on the field by the coast<sup>1</sup>. A very limited area was excavated, and as account had to be taken of



Fig. 2. Vester Egesborg. Location map. The landing place is marked with a black dot.

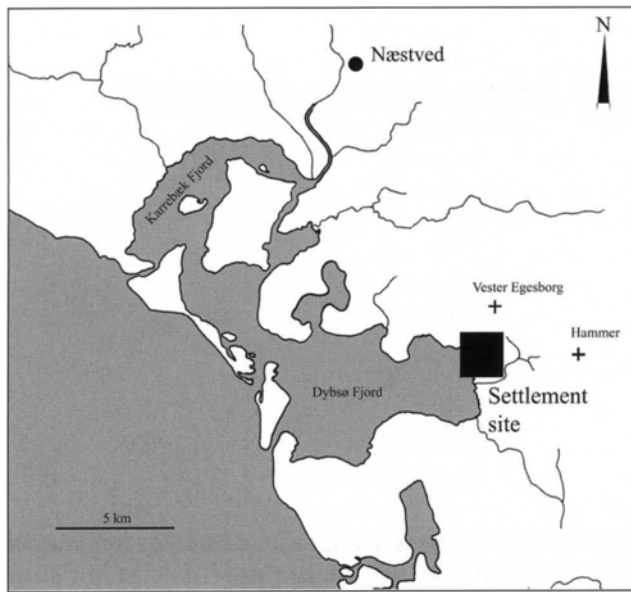


Fig. 2. Vester Egesborg. Karrebæk Fjord and Dybsø Fjord. The landing place (!). Drawn by the author.

the crop on the field, this was therefore concentrated in the southeastern corner. Ørsnes never published the results of his efforts by Dybsø Fjord, but mentioned the site briefly in his thesis (Ørsnes 1966, 262f.).

#### TOPOGRAPHY

Dybsø Fjord is a relatively shallow body of coastal water with several small inlets and a large, now reclaimed, area which runs north towards Vejlø (Fig. 2). About 6 km west of the site, which lies on the absolute innermost part of the fjord, lies the small island of Dybsø, like a cork in the mouth of the fjord; only two narrow channels give access to Karrebæksminde Bay and the Småland Sea. To the northwest there is a connection to Karrebæk Fjord and the mouth of the River Suså at Appenæs. The landing place lies on a sandy area which

slopes evenly westwards, down towards Dybsø Fjord. To the north, the coast is characterised by a broad flat beach with shore meadows and reed swamps, whereas to the south and southeast there is a marked upward slope crowned by the burial mound “Stejlebanken” (19 m above sea level). South of here lies the mouth of a stream, Killebækken, bordered by low shore meadows and wetlands. To the east, the terrain falls towards a small wetland area some 200 metres away.

#### TRIAL EXCAVATION IN 1965

The area investigated measured about 140 x 150 m. To the north lay a spruce plantation, to the south an area of undulating grassland, to the east the neighbouring property and to the west the beach. There were finds from the Germanic Iron Age and the Viking period especially in the northwestern part of the area but here the owner would not permit an excavation. A Kufic silver coin, a spindle whorl and some potsherds were recovered in the southeastern corner of the area and here a field measuring 20 x 20 m was excavated. From this field, a 1.5 m broad trench was laid out extending 40 m to the north. A corresponding trench of the same breadth, but 60 m in length, was laid out to the west. In addition to this, a 1.5 m broad and 32 m long trench was dug in connection with the find site for a bronze key and several potsherds from the Viking Age. In all, an area of about 600 m<sup>2</sup> was opened up with the aid of a bulldozer. Features were registered in plan, and then a small portion was excavated using trowels or, in some cases, shovels, after which the fill was riddled.

Features were generally poorly preserved in the higher areas; the effects of cultivation were less obvious closer to the beach. In the latter area there was a culture layer dating from when the landing place was in function. The sandy subsoil was affected by animal burrows and in many cases it was very difficult to delimit features in plan.

In his report, Ørsnes lists eight features which he interprets as pit-houses, but he stresses the fact that this is very much a presumption. The features were rarely followed beyond the limits of the excavation field and trenches. This explains why the dimensions of the presumed pit-houses are not always clear. For the same reason the postholes from the roof-bearing construction have not always been exposed. There is no doubt that the very narrow trenches combined

<sup>1</sup> NMI 433/65 “Vester Egesborg” 050401-17, Vester Egesborg parish, Hammer district, Præstø county. A trial excavation was carried out between 9th of August and 3rd of September 1965 directed by museum curator Mogens Ørsnes of the National Museum’s Prehistoric Department.

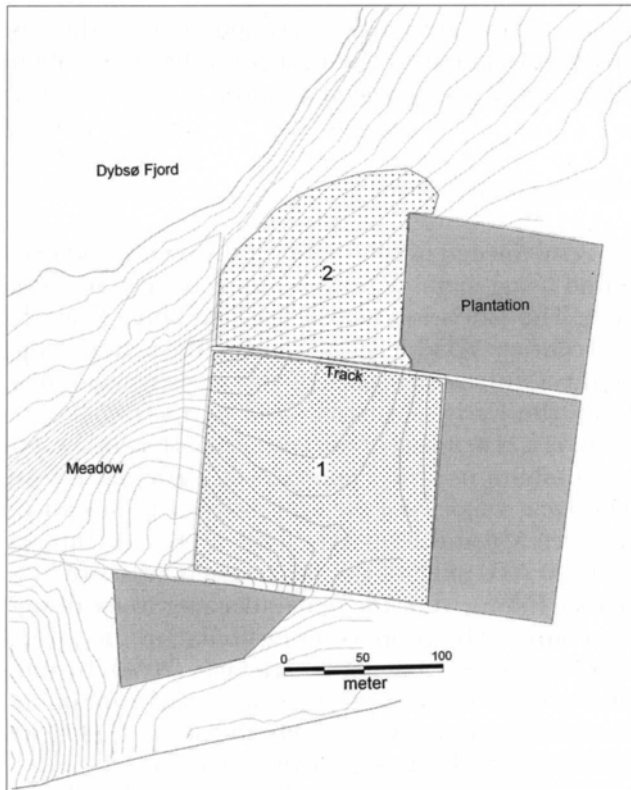


Fig. 3. Investigation area. 1) Intensive metal detector survey, 2) less intensive detector surveys. North to the right. Drawn by the author.

with the difficult subsoil had a negative effect on the conditions for observation. Accordingly, there are only six features from Ørsnes' excavations which can be identified as possible pit-houses on the basis of drawings and descriptions<sup>2</sup>.

#### METAL DETECTOR SURVEYS

30 years were to pass before the site came into archaeological focus again. Næstved Museum carried out a visual reconnaissance of the surface in 1995. Detector reconnaissance of the accessible area by Dybsø Fjord was initiated in 1996 in connection with an extensive investigation of landing places from the Late Iron Age in Denmark and previously Danish areas (Ulriksen 1998, 169)<sup>3</sup>. This involved the area subjected to trial excavation in 1965 and a lower-lying field to the northwest where scattered settlement traces had been found on the soil surface. The survey in 1996 was fol-

lowed up by further metal detector reconnaissance in connection with the trial excavation in 1997 (Gärtner & Ulriksen 1997)<sup>4</sup> and more extensive excavations in 1999<sup>5</sup>. In conjunction with the excavations, searches were always carried out by a team of amateur metal detector enthusiasts.

Between 1996 and 1999 around 150 man-hours, distributed between eight experienced detector enthusiasts, were spent on the almost three hectare area. The searches were not carried out systematically along predetermined transects across the terrain. The intuition of the detector enthusiasts was the main guideline. Not all of the potential settlement areas have been surveyed with equal intensity. Most of the searches were carried out in an area measuring 140 x 150 m east of the track running from north to south (Fig. 3). The searches were less extensive west of the track and in the field to the northwest. Without it being possible to give a precise figure for the hours spent on these less intensive searches, the estimated time used here is only a tenth of that spent east of the track. From the start, iron deflections were discriminated against, whereas all the collected artefacts of bronze, silver and gold were marked on the spot and plotted in on a map at a scale of 1:2000 by a museum employee. It is important to emphasise that the central part of the find area has not been cultivated since 1993, but has lain fallow and as a result has a dense vegetation cover. It was very apparent that the field gave fewer finds during the investigation in 1999 than in 1996

<sup>2</sup> Features E, F, K, M, O and P. In the description below the size and depth below the excavated surface is given, as well as the alignment according to the position of the roof-bearing posts. The distance between the roof-bearing posts is measured from the centre of the posts.

<sup>3</sup> Metal detector reconnaissance was carried out on the 21st April 1996 when a seven-man team searched the area which lay either fallow or as stubble which limited the searching conditions considerably. NÆM 1996:500.

<sup>4</sup> The trial excavation was carried out by Næstved Museum (NÆM 1997:120) and directed by Birgitta Gärtner and the author.

<sup>5</sup> The excavation was carried out by Næstved Museum (NÆM 1997:120) and directed by the author.



Fig. 4. Arabic coins found with a metal detector. Scale 2:3. Photo Jens Olsen.

and 1997. An exception to this were the back-filled trenches. Here the soil had been turned, resulting in the detection of more finds. It is to be presumed that resumed cultivation will result in many new artefacts seeing the light of day.

The finds are very abundant and their density increases steadily east of the track, whereas to the west there are few artefacts and no obvious find concentrations. The number of finds decreases with distance to the west and northwest. This picture is in good agreement with other settlement indicators on the surface of the field, for example fire-shattered

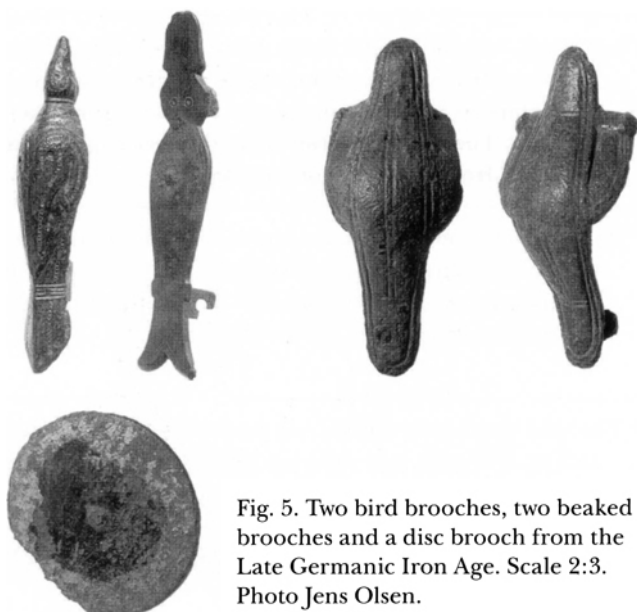


Fig. 5. Two bird brooches, two beaked brooches and a disc brooch from the Late Germanic Iron Age. Scale 2:3. Photo Jens Olsen.

stones. These are particularly abundant to the east and less frequent to the west; they disappear about 20 m west of the spruce plantation.

#### METAL DETECTOR FINDS

Up until the end of 1999 about 150 artefacts had been found using metal detectors within the investigation area. The oldest is a heavily-profiled fibula from the 2nd century AD which was found on the marked slope in the southeastern part of the investigation area. From the Early Germanic Iron Age (375-530 AD) there is a cruciform fibula from the 5th century AD, a gilt mount in Style I and part of a gilt belt mount. The great majority of the finds belongs to the period between 530 and 1000 AD (Table 1). For the interval 530-700 AD, most of the 34 artefacts recovered are fibulae (65%), while the remainder are diverse fittings or mounts. The proportion of fibulae in the period 700-1000 AD is 13 out of 66 artefacts (20%). In addition to these there are fittings, mounts, weapons and coins. The column with the broad dating of 530-1000 AD comprises lead weights and hack silver.

The coins are almost totally dominated by Arabic types. There are 14 whole or fragmented Kufic *dirhems*. At present only eight have been identified and these are dated to the period between 770 and about 900 AD (see Table 2)<sup>6</sup>. Included in the coins is a strange specimen of silver-plated copper which is probably a Volga-Bulgarian counterfeit. The Arabic coins include four *drachmas*, of which only one has so far been identified (Fig. 4). The *drachmas* are markedly different from the commonly occurring Kufic coins in that they have a male portrait on one side and two female figures on the other. According to numismatists at the National Museum, the identified *drachma* is an Arab-Sasanidian coin, struck in Tabaristan south of the Caspian Sea. Here the Sasanidian regime was conquered by the Abbaside Dynasty which retained the old coin types for a while after the conquest<sup>7</sup>. The

<sup>6</sup> The coins were identified in 1997 by Gert Rispling for the Royal Collection of Coins and Medals.

<sup>7</sup> Personal communication from museum curator Jens Christian Moesgaard, the Royal Collection of Coins and Medals at the National Museum.

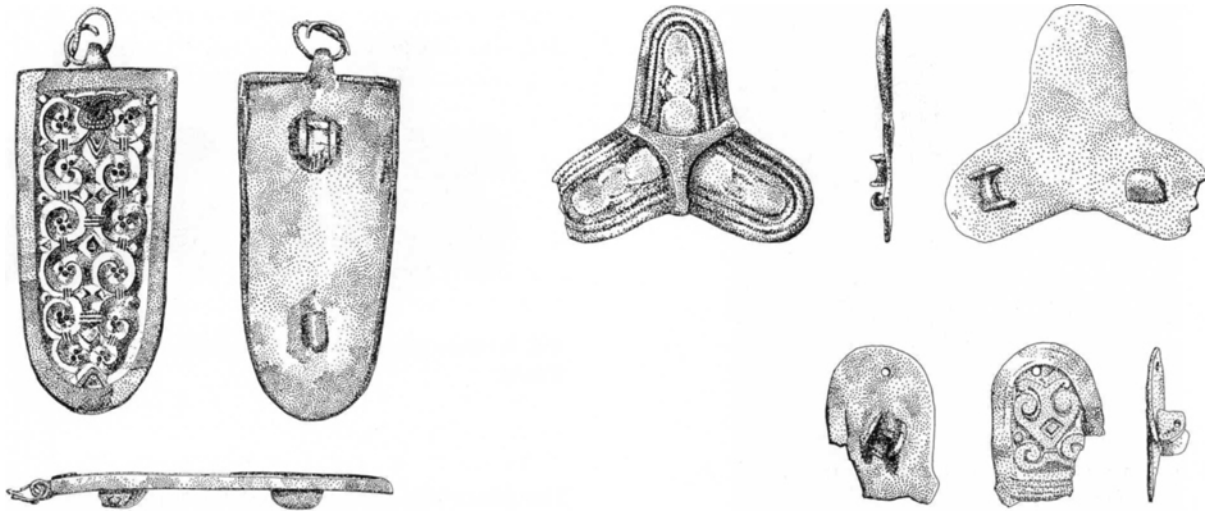


Fig. 6. Tongue-shaped brooch and two trefoil brooches. Scale 3:4. Drawing by Kristian Sørensen.

only Western European example is a *Sachsenphennig* from the middle of the 10th century. It must be stressed that there are no Danish, German or English coins from the 11th and 12th centuries and that the so-called civil war coins from the 13th and 14th centuries are few in number.

Table 3 shows the quite variable distribution of artefact forms from the 6th to 10th centuries AD. As a type, the Late Germanic Iron Age bird brooches are the most common; they occur in both flat and convex versions (Fig. 5). After these come beak brooches and equal-armed fibulae from the same period. The fact that these three types are the most common of the fibulae from the Late Germanic Iron Age is in complete agreement with the picture from the whole of Denmark. Fibulae from the period 700-

1000 AD show a slight dominance of rectangular plate brooches as well as fragments of tortoise and trefoil types, which is also not unusual. Much more remarkable is a tongue-shaped brooch of bronze with gilt acanthus decoration. At the straight end there is a small loop of silver-wrapped bronze. There is no doubt that this magnificent piece comes from the Frankish Empire. Of similar quality are several pendants and mounts from the Viking Age. Two silver pendants and a gilt silver mount were found in the southeastern corner of the site (Fig. 7). The pendants are crafted in the knotted ornamentation of the Borre style and depict a bird seen from above. Both pieces are clearly worn from use, one more than the other. Among the spectacular examples is a very special bronze mount for which there is as yet no parallel (Fig. 8) (Wieczorek

Table 1:  
Stray finds - Absolute distribution of objects

PERIOD AD	NUMBER
375-530	2
530-700	25
700-1100	38
1100-1200	2
1200-1500	1

Table 2:  
Distribution of dated coins

PERIOD AD	NUMBER
10th century	19
11th century	0
12th century	0
13-14th century	3
Post AD 1350	2

Table 3:  
Type distribution and numbers

OBJEKT TYPE	NUMBER
Cruciform brooch	1
Beaked brooch	4
Equal-armed brooch (6th cent.)	4
Oval plate brooch	2
Disc brooch (6-7th cent.)	1
Rectangular plate brooch	4
Bird brooch	7
Equal-armed brooch (Vik.)	3
Tongue-shaped brooch	2
Cross enamel brooch	1
Tortoise brooch	4
Four-headed brooch	1
Trefoil brooch	3
Pendant	6
Ring pin	2
Strap mount	2
Strap buckle	1
Arm ring	1
Key	1
Gold fingerring	1
Sword pommel	4
Scabbard mount	1
Two-poled weight, iron with brass	2
Tablet shaped lead weight	6
Square-shaped lead weight	1

& Hinz 2000, Fig. 09.02.08 and 10.01.10). Parts of this mount were found on two different occasions. The first fragment was one of the masks which at the time was interpreted as a model for producing a mould or a patris due to its very deep relief which appears rather coarse in the absence of further ornamentation (Gärtner & Ulriksen 1997, Fig. 7). The original four crown- or feather-crested bearded heads were cast in one piece within the rectangular frame. The raised centre is topped by three small bronze knobs. Direct Danish parallels for a bronze pendant made in cloisonné technique are also lacking. In the centre is an equal-armed red cross surrounded by two concentric circles in red and yellow enamel.



Fig. 7. Silver pendants in Borre style. Scale 1:1. Photo Jens Olsen.

The piece was possibly produced in Ireland/England and is one of the rarely found cross enamel pieces in Denmark (Ulriksen in print). A model for a mould for the production of a female figurine and two mould models for large beads (Fig. 10) are interesting both as artefacts and with regard to an understanding of the site's function. Silver, bronze and iron ingots occur similarly to a limited extent; there are also finds of melts of lead, bronze and silver. The world of craftsmanship is represented by weights, although these are not very abundant. Tablet-shaped lead weights are most common, whereas iron weights with a brass coating only number one polyhedral and two spherical examples. Finally, mention should be made of one convex and three triangular iron pommels with inlays of brass and babbitt which, together with a lanceolate arrowhead and a scabbard mount, represent weapons in the find assemblage.



Fig. 8. Four-headed brooch, bronze. Scale 1:1. Photo Jens Olsen.

## CONCLUSIONS FROM THE METAL DETECTOR SEARCHES

The picture gained from the finds shows rather unambiguously that the site is from the Late Iron Age. There is a small number of metal artefacts belonging to the 5th century. Otherwise it is the Late Germanic Iron Age and the early part of the Viking Age which dominates. The absence of artefacts with the Late Viking styles of Urnes and Ringerike and of 11th century Danish and other Western European coins is significant. There is no doubt that the site ceased to function prior to 1000 AD.

Figure 11 shows the distribution of dated artefacts



Fig. 9. Bronze pendant, two four-headed bronze mounts and part of a silver belt buckle. Scale 1:1. Drawings by Kristian Sørensen and photos Jens Olsen.

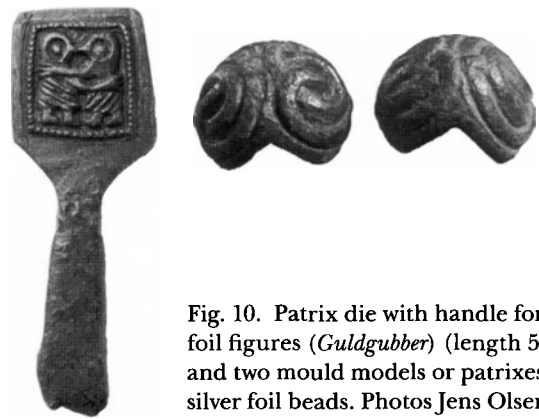


Fig. 10. Patrix die with handle for gold foil figures (*Guldgubber*) (length 5 cms) and two mould models or patrices for silver foil beads. Photos Jens Olsen.

from the Late Iron Age found in the plough soil. It is apparent that the period 530-700 AD is primarily represented towards the southeast. Artefacts from 700-1000 AD have a wider distribution, but here too, it is clearly the eastern, elevated part of the site that contains most finds. The variation in the artefacts is rather great, but a mapping of the distribution of specific types reveals no areas with an over-representation of certain artefact groups.

The site is rich in finds, including several ornaments of a high standard of craftsmanship and also of high prestige value. The relatively large number of coins, and fragments of these, is conspicuous. Similarly, the finds of bronze melt, patrices and form models, suggest that metal handwork was among one of the functions performed at the site.

## EXCAVATIONS IN 1997 AND 1999

The following account of the excavation results from Vester Egesborg is both preliminary and brief. The finds from 1997 and 1999 have not yet been fully analysed for publication and at the point of writing (April 2000) yet another part of the site is under excavation. A final publication will be produced when the investigations of the site have been completed.

The trial excavation in 1997 was initiated because subsoiling was planned prior to a resumption of cultivation after a longer period of fallow. It was known from the investigations in 1965 that there was an intact 10-20 cm thick culture layer below the plough soil. Subsoiling to a depth of 50 cm would turn this layer upside down along with the underlying pit-houses, which in several cases only extended 20-30 cm down

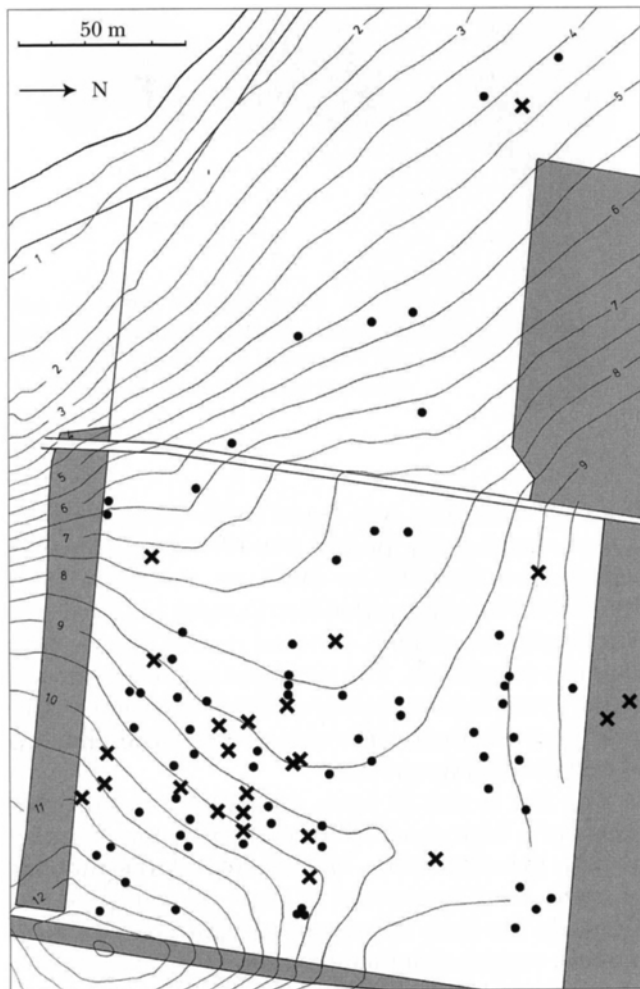


Fig. 11. Distribution of dated objects from the Late Iron Age, AD 530-700 (cross) and AD 700-1000 (dot). Drawn by the author.

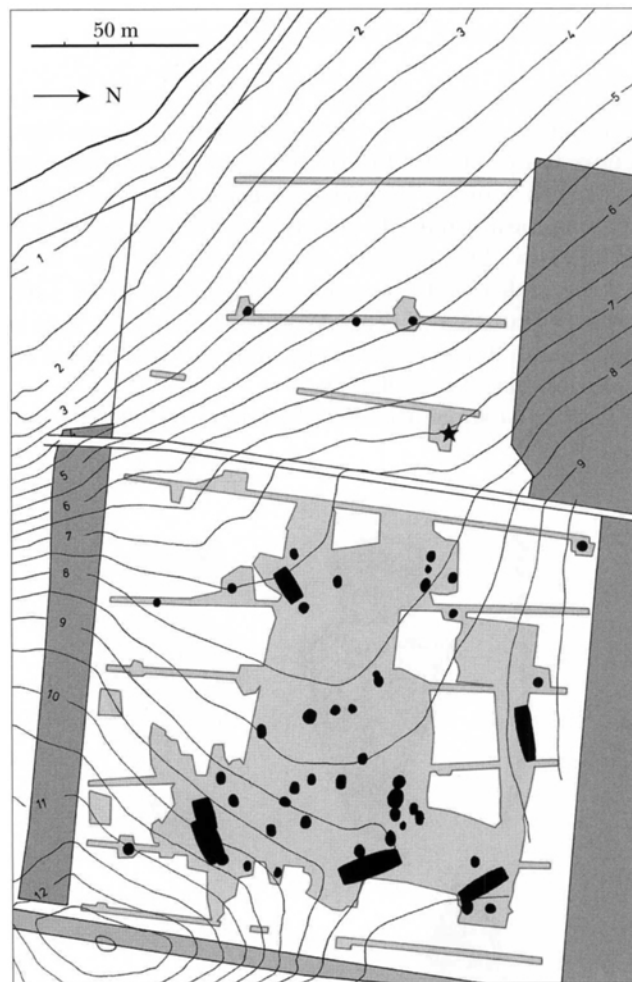


Fig. 12. The excavated area up until 1999 showing the three-aisled houses, pit-houses and an oven (star). Drawn by the author.

into the subsoil. The rich detector finds from 1996 lead to Næstved Museum contacting the Keeper of the National Antiquities and the Danish Forest and Nature Agency for a decision as to whether, in the light of this, the field should be excavated or scheduled. Despite the fact that the Danish Forest and Nature Agency decided at a very early stage that there was no economic basis for scheduling, it was determined by the authorities that a trial excavation, comprising a series of trenches, should be carried out to establish the extent and state of preservation of the site. This took place in 1997, when a three-aisled house, 16 pit-houses, a smithy and an oven were investigated. The pit-houses contained

large quantities of pottery and there were also finds of several exquisite ornaments, Frankish glass, bone combs, glass beads, fragments of basalt querns and soapstone vessels. In 1999 a large area of the site's eastern part was opened up, revealing a further four three-aisled houses and 22 pit-houses (Fig. 12). The features recorded in the system of trenches suggest that there are the remains of further more pit-houses and workshops in the southern and western parts of the investigation area.



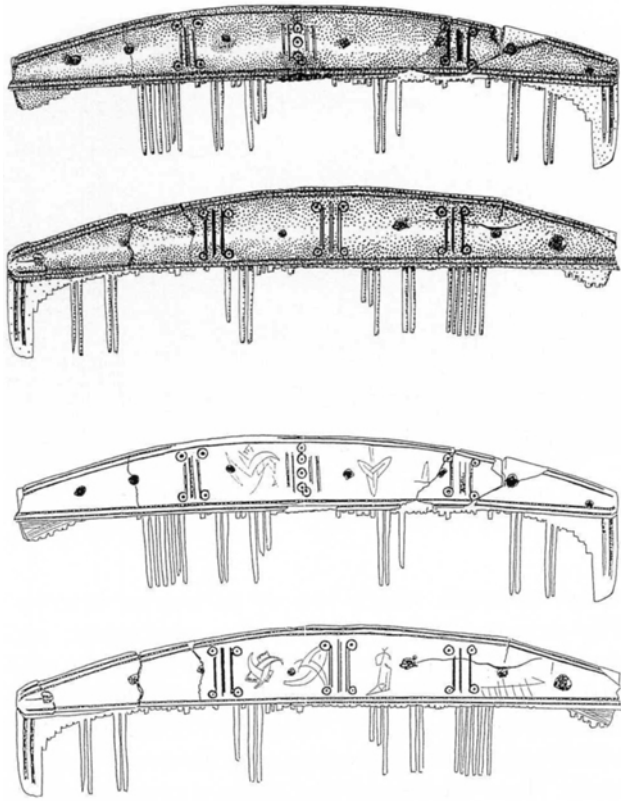


Fig. 13. One comb with decoration and fine, incised graffiti (below). Scale ca. 1:3. Drawn by Kristian Sørensen.

#### SETTLEMENT STRUCTURE AND DATING

The overwhelmingly dominant element in the excavations was the pit-houses which were found over the whole site. There appears to be a tendency for the pit-houses to lie in unstructured clusters, but the degree to which this picture is correct cannot be determined without total excavation of the site. In the central part of the excavated area there are numerous postholes which cannot, however, be linked to give recognisable constructions. Around this "centre", six three-aisled buildings have been found, of which two are aligned more-or-less north-south, while the others have their orientation rotated in a southwestern-northeastern direction. The three-aisled houses lie rather scattered. The two north-south oriented houses lie parallel to each other some 15-20 m apart. The distance from these to the other houses is 40 to 90 m. No fences or other features which could be seen as a physical division or delimitation of the individual building units



Fig. 14. Gilt bronze brooch and gilt bronze mount. Scale 1:1. Photos Helle Ludvigsen.

relative to each other, or to the surroundings, could be demonstrated.

#### THREE-AISLED HOUSES

The three-aisled houses are all of modest dimensions. The largest is house 24, a north-south oriented building, 19 m long and 6 m broad at the middle. The postholes for the curved walls were relatively well-preserved. Traces of six pairs of roof-bearing posts were found, of which the two outermost stood in the straight gable. Another north-south orientated three-aisled house, house 22, with slightly curved walls, a length of about 16 m and a breadth of about 6 m was investigated nearby. There were traces of two pairs of roof-bearing posts and most of the postholes from the western wall were preserved. House 21 was aligned northeast-southwest and had well-preserved traces of curved walls. There were postholes from four pairs of roof-bearing posts, of which the outermost were drawn closer together and placed in the gables. The building was 14 m long and 6.5 m broad (Gärtner & Ulriksen 1997, Fig. 8). One house was oriented northe-

ast-southwest and had one pair of roof-bearing posts in each gable. Postholes from the walls were only sporadically preserved but the walls appear to have been slightly curved. The building was 8 m long and 5.5 m broad. The last three-aisled house was house 23 which was approximately 16 m long and 6 m broad in its oldest version. The roof had been borne by five pairs of posts, of which the outermost were drawn closer together and stood in the gables. The postholes from the south wall show that the walls of the house had been slightly curved. The later phase of the house was about 13 m long and 7 m broad with only three pairs of roof-bearing posts; the outermost pairs stood in the gables. Here too, the postholes of the southern wall were preserved showing that it had followed a slightly curved path.

All the houses can be dated to the 8th-10th centuries but it must be emphasised that all the dates are based on typology.

#### PIT-HOUSES

The 44 pit-houses investigated vary somewhat in size, but they are identical in design, being constructed around rounded flat-bottomed pits with a roof-bearing post in each gable. In several cases the fill was relatively homogeneous and sealed by the ubiquitous culture layer which had sunk down into the top of the pit. In some cases an actual basal layer could be recognised, but this rarely contained diagnostic traces of the activity or activities which had taken place in the house. Mention should be made of a quantity of lenticular loom weights which were largely made of unfired dried clay. The fill from the pit-houses was sieved through a 2 mm or a 4 mm net and contained a large number of finds. Potsherds were clearly dominant. The pottery comprised partly unornamented, flat-based settlement vessels with a convex, straight or flared rim, partly Baltic ware reminiscent of Middle or Late Slavic types in form and decoration. Conical and bi-conical spindle whorls of fired clay were, with a single exception, found together with the Baltic ware. Spindle whorls of sandstone, often with turned grooves, were most commonly tablet-formed, but truncated conical examples were also recovered. There were also several conical and tablet-formed spindle whorls of soapstone. Glass beads were a common find, whereas beads of rock crystal and cornelian were rare. The single combs of bone and antler included an almost



Fig. 15. The oven in feature A77. Photo Jens Ulriksen.

intact example which was of particular interest. The ornamentation used by the combmaker was that which regularly occurs at Vester Egesborg with three to four vertical lines combined with four circles containing dots (Fig. 13). The owner of the comb had added engraved motifs using a needle or a very sharp knife. There are several triskelions of varying quality, a little lady in a dress and some scratching which may (with a little imagination) be interpreted as a ship with oars. Several of the pit-houses were found to contain dress ornaments and mounts of bronze and iron. From house 8 there is a gilt fibula, with the motif of a Nordic version of the Christian legend of "Daniel in the Lions' Den" (Fig. 14, top) (Gärtner & Ulriksen 2000). In house 1 there was a fragment of an originally larger artefact of gilt bronze with Anglo-Irish decoration, and in house 30 lay an intact tortoise brooch with gripping beast decoration. Among the other finds was a bird brooch, a polyhedral weight of iron with a brass coating, a ring-headed pin of iron, fragments of basalt querns, iron arrowheads, sherds of drinking glasses, a tessera, fragments of soapstone vessels and slag from the refining of iron and iron objects. The use of a magnet revealed, furthermore, the presence of large quantities of hammer scales and minute iron spheres, which similarly bear witness to the working of iron at the site.

## OTHER CONSTRUCTIONS

In the northwestern part of the investigation area a large amorphous feature measuring about 5 x 7 m was excavated. The surface of the fill material was very rich in charcoal and also contained many clumps and patches of red-burnt clay. This was found to cover a stone-based oven which had been equipped with an upper part constructed of withes and clay. The inner side was red-burnt, while the outer surface was unfired. The base of the oven was characterised by light orange-red sandy powder (Fig. 15). In front of the oven was a clay floor, covered by a layer of charcoal about one centimetre in thickness. No datable artefacts were found in connection with the oven. Neither were there any remains which could reveal unequivocally the use to which the oven been put. Baking or grain-drying are obvious possibilities. A similar oven containing carbonised rye grains was found at Gl. Lejre (Christensen 1993, 54).

In the middle of the site there were two forge pits. One of these contained abundant hammer scales and forge slags while the other, in addition to the latter two elements, also contained scrap iron and vitrified soapstone.

## CULTURE LAYER

This takes the form of a 5-15 cm thick black-brown sandy layer containing charcoal, innumerable fire-shattered stones and red-burnt clay fragments. Searches with a metal detector during removal of the topsoil with a mechanical excavator showed that it contained, quite contrary to expectations, only very few metal artefacts. The culture layer covers a very large part of the excavated area. Nowhere was it possible to discern any features or structures on the surface of the layer or, on subsequent excavation, within the layer itself. In several cases the layer was left intact for the purposes of sieving. In this way a handful of potsherds, a few glass beads and hammer scales were located. As there were abundant features below the culture layer and the necessary financial resources were not available for a meticulous sieving of the several hectares which it covered, it was therefore largely removed immediately, without excavation, to give an overview over the constructions on the site.

## CONCLUSION

Evidence from the metal detector finds with regard to the age, functions and structure of the Vester Egesborg site can be summarised as follows: The majority of the finds can be dated to the period from the 6th to the 10th century AD, with a very modest contribution, comprising a few percent, from the 5th century AD. Artefacts from the 11th-12th centuries AD are absent. The ornaments and ornaments, mounts and fittings include everything from the common to the spectacular and the unique. There were finds of melted clumps of bronze and silver, whole and fragmented Kufic coins, small pieces of rolled silver rods with punchmarks, in addition to a small number of tablet-formed lead weights, all of which largely bear witness to the execution of fine craftsmanship. There is, furthermore, a good quantity of iron slag from forging processes. Sword pommels and arrowheads have also been recovered. The finds come from an area of about 2-3 hectares with a clear concentration in the eastern half. This impression has been strengthened by the results of the excavations. All of the house remains examined can be dated to the 6th-10th centuries. Traces of ironworking are striking both in the features and in the culture layer, and the many artefacts from the plough layer have been followed-up with similar finds from the pit-houses. The extent of the site has not yet been established precisely. The trenches in the western part of the investigation area also revealed pit-houses and workshop activities even though there so far are very few metal detector finds from here.

The Vester Egesborg site is indisputably located on the coast and therefore distinguishes itself from the majority of the known settlement sites from Denmark's Late Iron Age. Most of the country's coast-based sites from the period 200-1100 AD were dealt with a few years ago within the framework of a research project under the Danish National Research Foundation (Ulriksen 1998). Here the conclusion was reached that activities bound to the coast were not linked to the agrarian economy but instead were established with the intention of taking account of society's maritime interests. The basis of this conclusion was a series of excavations which showed that these landing places are characterised by pit-houses and various craft activities, whereas the typical farm with its long-house and three-aisled auxiliary buildings was absent. When the three-aisled buildings are present at this kind of site, it

is in very modest numbers, i.e. up to two-three examples, and they are distributed in a way that is inconsistent with their interpretation as farm units. Traces of the replacement of the roof-bearing construction were rarely seen. The houses' period of use appears thus to have been restricted to a single phase. From the 11th century onwards this picture changes. Craft activities and pit-houses cease to be dominant features. In some cases the settlement vanishes completely, in others a chieftain's farm with a church is established.

Seen in the light of this, there are many elements of the Vester Egesborg site which correspond to the definition of a Late Iron Age landing site. The decisive point is whether there is evidence of a coastal agrarian farm or not. This question can only be answered on the basis of the evidence from the buildings<sup>8</sup>.

The five three-aisled houses enclose an area of about 100 x 100 m. Both inside and outside this "frame" there are pit-houses. No fences have been demonstrated which can define or connect the buildings as farm units. Neither can the number of houses which have existed simultaneously be determined. Four of the five three-aisled houses show signs of having been repaired with new walls or replacement of the roof-bearing posts, and house 23 has clearly been demolished and rebuilt with a different roof-bearing construction.

Three-aisled houses belong primarily to agrarian farms where, in the Late Iron Age, they served various functions from living quarters to outhouses. During the last 20 years many house remains from the 6th-10th centuries have been excavated on Zealand. In only one instance has such a large area been uncovered that it was certain that all the buildings which could have belonged to an individual farm within a certain time frame were documented. This procedure is essential in order to demonstrate the relationship between the main dwelling house and the auxiliary buildings. It was, for example, possible in connection with the chieftain's or royal farms at Lejre (Christensen 1993; 1997) and at Tissø (Jørgensen 2003) as well as at the

find-rich settlement of Strøby-Toftegård on Stevns (Tornbjerg 1998). This picture can also be recognised at less spectacular sites such as Varpelev-Bøgelund (Tornbjerg 1992, 73ff.). In all cases it is the largest building, relative to the others, which is perceived as the main dwelling house. There are no analyses of the size of a house as an expression of its function and the basis data are still too modest for all too firm conclusions to be drawn. The special sites such as Lejre, Tissø and Strøby-Toftegård should probably not be included in a definition of the average farm on Zealand in the 6th-10th centuries. Varpelev-Bøgelund is, as such, probably more suited. Here the dwelling houses are all more than 30 m long and 6-7 m broad, while the auxiliary buildings are between 13 and 17 m long and 5-6 m broad (Tornbjerg 1992, figs. 16 & 17). At a number of other settlement excavations on Zealand from the period in question, sufficiently large areas have not been exposed to permit conclusion to be drawn as to whether it is the dwelling house or the auxiliary buildings which have been investigated<sup>9</sup>.

Whether Vester Egesborg was a coastal farm or a specialised landing place cannot be decided on the basis of the present evidence. The longest house, with its 19 m, is not impressive relative to the buildings at Varpelev-Bøgelund. Clarification of the circumstances at Vester Egesborg is totally dependant on a total excavation of the site.

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<sup>8</sup> This applies to, for example, the Boeslunde complex (Nielsen 1997), Gershøj (Ulriksen 1998, 78ff.), Sigerslevøster (Kramer 1998), Svogerslev (Ulriksen 1988), Vindinge (Christensen 1992) and Værløse Vest (Nissen 1999).

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<sup>9</sup> For a more detailed discussion of these circumstances see Ulriksen 1998.

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