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THE INTER-RELATIONSHIP OF THE TRB AND BATTLE-AXE CULTURES IN DENMARK

(Figs. 1-4)

Only a few important problems within Danish Stone Age research have been brought forward by fresh material and new excavations during the last five years; one of them is the question of inter-relationship of the two major Neolithic cultures. I refer to the Jutland battle-axe and the TRB culture. Their special problems are broadly speaking the same as we find on the Danish islands with local groups of the same cultures, and also the same as in South and Central Sweden, where the TRB culture faces a third group of battle-axe peoples, this time the rich and important Swedish-Norwegian (boat-axe or) battle-axe culture. Thus the Jutland Neolithic is not only of local importance but is generally considered as having a key-position within the ever-lasting debate on the general problems of Northern battle-axe cultures in relation to TRB culture.

It is not easy to study these Neolithic groups on a truly cultural-historical basis, as we know too little of their settlement-pattern and their social institutions. Regarding the battle-axe culture we do not even know the chief occupation, *i.e.* whether field or animal husbandry was the more important. So far not a single settlement has preserved sufficient animal bones to tell us which of the domestic animals was preferred, or whether hunting played any role in the economy. But the same is the case with most battle-axe cultures in Northern Europe.

On the other hand the Danish, and specially the Jutland, material is well suited as a starting-point for a general discussion of the inter-relationship of the cultures in question. Here we have many finds from a limited geographical area, and here we have been able to set up a detailed relative chronology for both groups. What is more, these relative systems can be expressed by the well-established five sub-periods of the Northern Middle-Neolithic. Even if we consider these periods as lasting a century each – and this is a long time when we are dealing with the history of living peoples – we have to face the fact that shorter sub-periods can never be set up on the basis of a prehistoric find-material from an area like Jutland or Zealand or Holland, not even in the much nearer and much better documented Iron Age.

The chronological frame of our subject is the five sub-periods of the Middle-

Neolithic, based originally on the material from Danish TRB settlements. Ten years ago this system had achieved its main form (Becker, 1954, p. 124), and only small alterations have been added later. Since the last publications (Becker, 1959, p. 79; 1961, p. 592) I have so far nothing to alter. It was natural to use the material of the TRB culture, this group being the only one which could be followed from the beginning right through to the end of the MN. As just mentioned the whole system was originally built upon the pottery-styles, as they were represented in the large settlements in South Denmark. The weakest link in the chain, the period MN III, has since then been strengthened considerably by the exceptional find of a mortuary house at Ferslev near Ålborg in North Jutland (Marseen, 1960); here 36 entire and contemporary vessels were found among the burnt remnants of the house, all of them decorated in the period III-style, which previously was named after the more unreliable settlement at Bundsø.

In 1957 a paper was published on the heavy flint-axes of the Middle-Neolithic TRB culture (Becker, 1957); here it was shown that each of the sub-periods mentioned above had its main type of flint axe, and from now on it was possible to date the material of axes with nearly the same accuracy as the much rarer pottery, thus opening new fields of possibilities in the study of the different Middle-Neolithic cultures.

As one of the first results we are now able to date series of simple flat-graves – the so-called stone-packing graves – from Jutland, a rather new type of Neolithic burial, or more correctly, a type of grave which until quite recently had escaped attention. In 1959 this group was published (Becker, 1959). The graves are always without barrow or any stone monument, being covered solely by a heap or layer of rather small stones. Beneath this is a simple pit in the sub-soil, generally between 1,5 and 2 m. long and half a metre deep. The pit is wholly or partly filled by smaller stones, and in some cases have the grave-goods been placed under or at the edge of the stone-filling. The artifacts associate them with the late TRB culture datable to the latter half of the MN. In this publication 17 localities in Jutland were mentioned, with at least 55 graves. Most of the graves are poorly described, as objects of such a simple character are liable to destruction by farm work. Only very few graves in the 1959-publication had been properly excavated.

During the last four years 40 more burials of this type have become known, and this time the greater part – more correctly 31 graves – were found by archaeologists. In parts of North and West Jutland the stone-packing graves are much more common than we thought of a few years ago, and the type is much more complicated than first believed. As the new material is unpublished, I feel that some details might be of interest before starting the discussion in question.

The stone-packing graves often, perhaps generally, form cemeteries, where the single interments or groups of interments have been placed in long rows. At Nørre

Onsild near Hobro, East Jutland, we know of twelve graves forming a 165 m. long row in the middle of a group of true single-graves of the battle-axe culture. The stone-packing graves were found in four sets, each of two or four graves combined with curious ditches from some wooden construction, of which the ditches and a few heavy post-holes were the only remnants. Unfortunately the soil is unsuitable for preserving bones (like most of the Jutland soil), so that no skeletons were found.

At Bondesgårde in Torsted par., West Jutland, we know a larger cemetery, where excavations have been carried out in 1962–63 but are still not brought to an end. Here the row of graves is more than 150 m. long and lesser than 7 m. broad. So far 24 graves have been found, mainly in two groups, and generally arranged so that two or three graves form a unit together with rather similar remnants of a wooden structure to that mentioned from Nørre Onsild. Most of the arrangements have been covered by flat layers of small stones.

One of the stone-layers at Bondesgårde (Fig. 1) was 10 m. long and about 2,5 m. wide. When it was removed (Fig. 2), we found six stone-filled excavations in the sub-soil, four of a man's length and 40–50 cm. deep. They were filled with stones almost to their bottoms but nothing else was found. The last two were different, consisting only of one single layer of stones, among and beneath which the grave-goods could be found: long thick-butted flint-axes, gouges and a fine blade. Under each stone-covering was a set of two nearly parallel ditches (Fig. 3), 1,70 m. long, 50 cm. wide and up to 35 cm. deep. At the bottom of the two ditches were four large post-holes.

It became clear that we had found a double set of graves, each consisting of two stone-filled excavations of man's length – probably the real graves – and the same curious remnants of a wooden structure, perhaps a mortuary house or a similar arrangement of high importance to the funeral rites: certain details indicated that the timber construction had been taken away, before a single layer of stones was placed here, and before the common heap of stones was put all over the graves as well. Just as at Nørre Onsild the grave-goods were found in or near the wooden construction, not in the graves.

This scheme now seems to be the normal one for the richer stone-packing graves. At Bondesgårde we have so far nine such sets, each with a pair of graves and some ditches or similar remnants of the supposed wooden construction. The graves are exactly similar and vary only slightly in dimensions. But the wooden remnants show greater variety: the ditches are shallow or deep and form in some cases a broad, rectangular excavation, which only at the bottom – about 50 cm. into the sub-soil – are divided into two parallel trenches. Post-holes may be found but in different number and position. Finally it must be added that we know of some graves without wooden structures – the first arrangement excavated nine years ago at Bondesgårde consisted only of three graves and had two flint-celts in one of them; on the other



Fig. 1. Bondesgårde, Torsted, West Jutland. Stone-layer covering four graves and two "mortuary houses". Looking north.

hand we have varying numbers of graves associated with one wooden structure: one, three or four but two is the most common number. So far every new excavation brings us fresh details, and it is certainly too early to say that we know this surprising new type of Neolithic graves well enough.

Otherwise the material is big enough to give a clear picture of the age and cultural affinity of the new graves. From all the finds, old as well as new, we have more than one hundred flint celts, six chisels, five blades but surprisingly few ornaments and pottery -vessels. Here we must remember that a large proportion of the graves have simply been dug away in connection with field work, and generally only flint implements are rescued. But even at Bondesgårde and other excavated sites the two last-mentioned groups are very scarce. From the 24 graves we have only one vessel (a late TRB type of period MN IV) and three amber beads. The beads and flint implements (Fig.4) are all of types belonging to the TRB culture: heavy and thin-bladed axes, gouges with pointed-oval cross-section, long four-sided chisels and club- or axe-shaped amber-beads. From earlier finds there is a second vessel (of MN V type).



Fig. 2. As Fig. 1, the upper stone-layer removed.

As we have only two vessels as real grave-goods, the heavy flint-axes must be more important for the dating of the stone-packing graves. There are 4 such axes of Bundsø-type (common in MN III but known in the following sub-group), 22 axes of Lindø-type (mainly MN IV) and 15 pieces of Valby-type (mainly MN V). Only one thin-bladed axe is older (from the earlier part of MN). This means that practically the whole material must be dated to the latter half of MN, specially MN IV–V. Every determinable piece belongs to the TRB culture. So far not a single type from the battle-axe cultures has been found.

As already mentioned the majority of the stone-packing graves comes from parts of Jutland where the battle-axe culture flourished. For our question to-day it is of minor importance to know, whether the stone-packing graves have been found in the rest of Denmark – there are so far only slight indications – and whether their dominance in Jutland is real or accidental (thanks to much earlier cultivation of practically all soil on the Islands). It is much more important to us that the new graves are found exactly in the same parts of Jutland as the weight of battle-axe settlement.

Thanks to the relative chronology mentioned above we are able to date the first

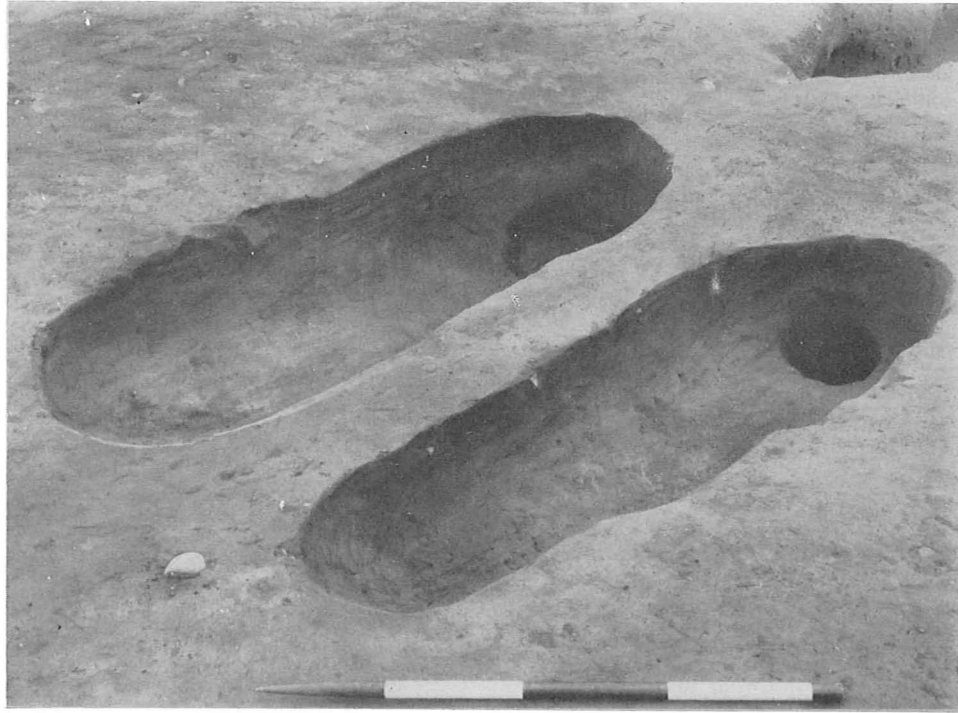


Fig. 3. Ditches and post-holes from the "mortuary house". Bondesgårde, Torsted.

appearance of the Jutland battle-axe peoples to MN III. From this time on we are able to follow them through the periods MN IV and V. This means that the greater part of the single-graves are contemporary with the stone-packing graves. It must to-day be considered a fact that two quite different Neolithic cultures existed side by side in most parts of Jutland, each with its own types of graves, pottery, flint implements, ornaments *etc.* The battle-axe culture is the better known group; the material culture of the other one is exactly the same as we find in the late passage-graves of Eastern Denmark, and only the funeral rites are different. But this is not enough to separate the culture of the stone-packing graves from the TRB culture.

The question of the inter-relationship of the two Middle-Neolithic cultures is – as mentioned briefly in the introduction – one of the more important problems in the Northern Neolithic. It has been under debate during the last fifty years, since the days of Sophus Müller and Gustaf Kossinna. Later on the participants were Nils Åberg on the one side and the majority of his contemporaries on the other.

In the modern phase of the discussion we can use Johannes Brøndsted as the starting-point, with the first edition of *Danmarks Oldtid* (1938). Here the battle-axe

cultures represented new, immigrating peoples (the generally accepted theory), and they ousted the old TRB population, first from Middle and West Jutland, later from the rest of the peninsula; in the eastern parts and on the islands the TRB farmers came under the sway of this and related battle-axe peoples, who as a ruling group made their impress upon developments in both Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age. For details in this and later papers a reference to my paper of 1959 will be enough. The newest view is to be found in Mats P. Malmer's book *Jungneolithische Studien* (1962), where the idea of a native origin not only of the Jutland but of every battle-axe culture is presented with new details. As Malmer – again partly with arguments from West- and Central Jutland – considers the battle-axe cultures as originated from local TRB groups, his theories would solve all questions concerning the conflict or co-existence of two different peoples.

Most of the theories, old as well as new, regarding the inter-relationship of the two cultures in question are built upon the supposition that the TRB culture disappears from the greater part of Central and Western Jutland at the same time as the first battle-axe peoples can be documented. Ten years ago (Becker, 1954, p. 139) it

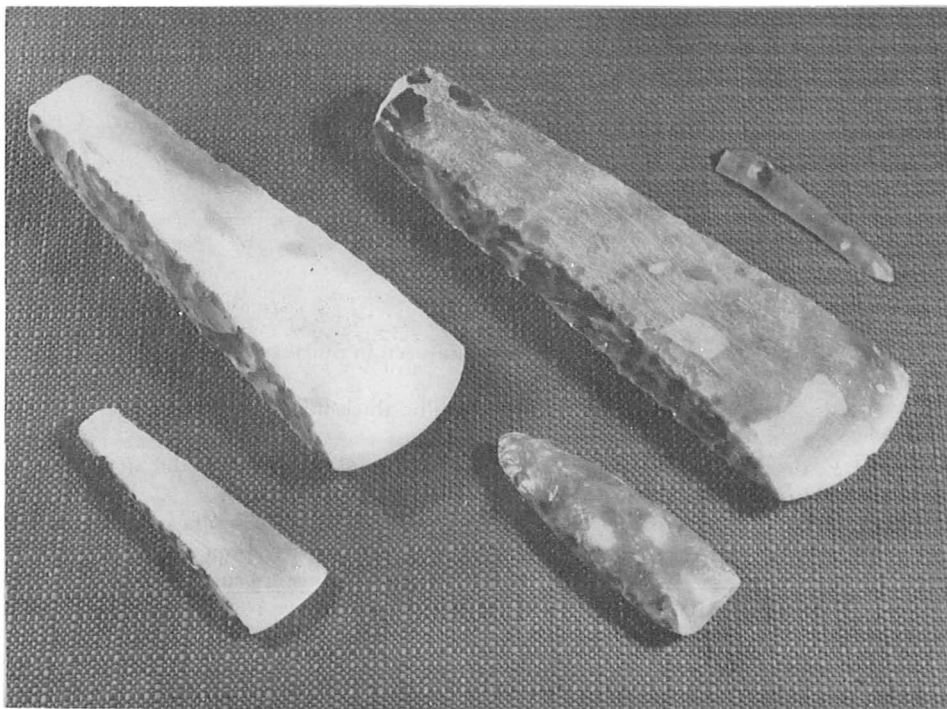


Fig. 4. Flint implements from grave X, Bondesgård. The two heavy axes (Lindø-type) are 23 and 26 cm. long.

was suggested that the greater part of the TRB settlements were abandoned during an early part of the Middle Neolithic, that is to say long before the immigration of the other peoples; further that the surviving remnants of the old farmers were not driven away at the arrival of the new peoples but could still be found here and there in Jutland right to the end of Middle Neolithic time, even in the middle of rich battle-axe settlements. This suggestion has been strengthened, partly because we now are able to use the numerous finds of thick-butted flint-celts, partly because we are rapidly increasing the number of stone-packing graves and are able to date them. Towards the end of the period (MN IV-V) we (at any rate in West- and Central Jutland) find two different peoples living side by side. The flint implements in the stone-packing graves and contemporary passage-graves are bigger and better than the same types from battle-axe graves, (so that the late descendants of the TRB culture were probably the richer and more important of the two peoples). The discussion of the inter-relationship of the two cultures must be based on these facts in the next years.

Manuscript as submitted in 1964. Since 1964 the number of stone-packing graves has augmented considerably.

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