ANNUAL REPORT: DEMARK VASAGARD 2018 FIELD SCHOOL

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Vasagård Vest, Åker on the last day of the excavations in 2018

The Vasagård Archaeological Project Field School was held from June 14th to June 17th at the site of Vasagård in the island of Bornholm, situated within Denmark territory of the Baltic Sea. There were 10 IFR students, 7 participants from the USA, and 3 from Canada. They were joined by a group of local volunteers and other archaeology students from the University of Aarhus and the Saxon Institute of the Netherlands.

The main objective of the Vasagård excavations for the 2018 season was to gain information on one of the causewayed enclosures and circular structures within the site, where we knew that exploratory conditions look especially promising. It was understood from the initial stages of the project that conditions for the preservation of organic material were poor throughout most of the island. Therefore, expectations of being able to shed light on the natural environment and agricultural occupations were not high. Yet, certain possibilities began to emerge even in this field. One of the findings of the ongoing digs at the settlements was that of ceramic vessel which corresponds to the Funnel Beaker Culture in the rest of Denmark, and also overlaps in time with part of the Pitted Ware Culture and the Early Battle Axe Culture that, in turn, corresponds to the Middle Neolithic A V and Middle Neolithic B I.

The IFR participants worked exclusively in the XIII area, centered on the Middle Neolithic MN AIII layer. This area includes the successions of MN AIII and MN AIV, levels identified by stratified debris, difficult to dig even for experienced participants; however, participants quickly learned how to excavate and register, and successfully excavated within an area of approximately 20 sq.m. of the site.

The program followed the standards applied in Denmark for Neolithic sites, and the VAP was interested in obtaining detailed contextual information for the purpose of archaeological recording. Vasagård is a great place for students to practice fieldwork and laboratory activities. Nevertheless, the complex formation processes made the excavation challenging and daily discussions regarding the stratigraphy were an important aspect of conducting the excavation. It is important to mention that during this excavation season new diagnostic materials were discovered (ceramic, lithics and animal bones), and these discoveries lead us to a better understanding of the chrono-cultural sequence of the site and its function.

The field school provided the participants with knowledge of basic excavation and documentation techniques (including 3D) in a contextual approach, as well as an introduction to the history of the Neolithic in Bornholm and Denmark, through practice, lectures and excursions.

Laboratory activities were essential for the orderly development of the excavation. These tasks involved washing, labeling, and initial classification of artifacts, for future database work. The archaeological materials recovered were registered on a daily basis, so that we could have accurate information about the fieldwork progress. This kind of information is basic to make fieldwork decisions and decide whether it is necessary to rectify them.

Lectures on Neolithic enclosures, material culture, 3D scanning, and lab work were given, and focused on the classification of tools and identification of contexts. Within a few days, students were able to discuss object identification, function, and use. They acquired excavation skills, participated in digging, selecting artifacts while screening, cleaning material, with database input.

An additional strong element of the field school was the participation in a seminar and conference held at Bornholm's museum. The seminar was intended to create an opportunity for the IFR students to know more about current research developments on closed enclosures settlements during the Neolithic era, in Denmark and Scania.

We appreciate that the participation of the IFR students was outstanding in the field and during laboratory activities carried out. We can say firmly that the VAP reached its goals. It is worth mentioning the interest of participating students to interact with the local population. Students were invited back to work on artifact analysis and use this season's data for independent research, conference presentations, or theses.

The results of the excavations will be included as part of the season's report, and in future articles, posters, and presentations given by the BM researchers. Credits will always be given to the students through the IFR for their tremendous support.