



ANNUAL REPORT- VASAGÅRD ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT / FIELD SCHOOL 2021 BORNHOLM, DENMARK

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The Vasagård Archaeological Project & Field School was held from August 2nd to 27th at Vasagård on the island of Bornholm, situated within Danish territory in the Baltic Sea.

The main objective of the Vasagård excavations for the season were the following: to pursue the search for information on one of the causewayed enclosures and circular structures within the site, where exploratory conditions looked especially promising. However, right from the initial stages of the project, it was understood 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 ceramics, 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 correspond to the Middle Neolithic A V and Middle Neolithic B I.

In 2021, IFR students took part in the excavation of two of the system graves belonging to the Sarup and the causeways enclosure at Vasagård Vest. A special find from previous seasons was composed of an assemblage



of seeds, “sunstones”, and ceramics, which corresponds to the Funnel Beaker Culture in other parts of Denmark and overlaps in time with the Pitted Ware Culture and the Early Battle Axe Culture (Middle Neolithic A-V and Middle Neolithic B-I). Our interest was particularly focused on completing the excavation of Cultural Layer II (MN A III) and the new section opened at structure XIII.2; and the cultural layers (MN V) in the structure XXXV, where most of the sunstones have been found in Vasagård west. We want to understand the deposition process of the layers and the differences in content in contrast with other layers. It is also of interest to the project to understand the time span of the deposition process of each layer and recover all the archaeological material associated with this layer.

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 understood rapidly 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 worthwhile place for students to practice fieldwork and laboratory activities. Nevertheless, the complex formation processes made the excavation really difficult. Daily discussions about 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 (ceramics, lithics, and animal bones), and these discoveries lead us to a better understanding of the chrono-cultural sequence of the site and its function.

Throughout excavation and post-excavation analysis, students gained experience in detailed recording techniques necessary for optimum information recovery. These included GPS recording of each excavation for digital mapping and the collection of archaeological material.

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 material recovered was registered on a daily basis, so that we could have accurate information about the fieldwork progress. This kind of information is basic in making fieldwork decisions and to decide whether it is necessary to rectify them.

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 and participated in digging, selecting artifacts while screening and cleaning material.

We appreciate that the participation of the IFR students was outstanding in the field and laboratory activities carried out, and that the VAP reached its goals.

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 and the IFR for their remarkable support.