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## Neolithic Timber Buildings in South Scandinavia: A Biographical Approach to Middle Neolithic Post Circles

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In the last few decades, large-scale excavations have identified a number of structures and buildings from the Neolithic period (c. 4000 – 1800 BC) in South Sweden, such as houses, palisades, megaliths, and facades have been discovered and studied over the years. These discoveries have partly been connected to developments in excavation methods and techniques and directed approaches to identifying buildings and structures.

There are many reasons for focusing on built structures from the Middle Neolithic. The number of buildings from this period has increased markedly from the 1990s and onwards. However, the number of buildings is small in comparison with the number of sites where other types of remains from the same period have been found. Many of the features that have been interpreted as buildings – in Scania - are not always entirely convincing in terms of construction type or finds that can be used as a basis for dating. For example, dwellings from this time period have been hard to identify. However, taking seriously the evidence of post circles dating to the Neolithic period can give insight into buildings from this period as well as their effect on them living with these and other buildings.

Furthermore, the distribution of these structures across South Scandinavia is not uniform in terms of space and time. The archaeological evidence from specific periods and regions has led to different interpretations of regional variations in economic and social systems. Furthermore, the different types of structures, such as houses, megaliths, causewayed enclosures and palisades, have aided the interpretation of social differences, social complexities, sedentary or mobile ways of life, and relationships to the landscape. In other words, architecture has played a crucial role in Neolithic research. For example, it has been instrumental in highlighting particular parts of prehistory, such as the shaping of social relations.

In that context, there has been a discrepancy in the focus on monuments in stone/earth and timber/Wood. While stone monuments tend to be highlighted, timber structures have often seen less emphasis. Also, the number of identified timber buildings from the end of Middle Neolithic A – Early Middle Neolithic B (c. 3100-2700 BC) is fewer in contrast to Late Neolithic. In that context, this dissertation focuses on a particular type of structure, post circles, from the elusive period, the end of Middle Neolithic A.

The dissertation's three central research questions are:

- How can the variation and similarities be understood in Neolithic circular timber structures in South Scandinavia? What are the remains of post circles representing?
- How can the relationship to the built environment be understood through the sites with post circles? Where were the post circles built, and what factor affected the placing?
- What can a biographical perspective contribute regarding Neolithic timber buildings and the life involved with them? How can new observations highlight post circles'

relation to social structures and deepen the understanding of building practices during the Neolithic?

This study springs from the belief that materials and things, such as wood and post circles, can contribute to our understanding of human life and experience. This has given rise to a trend in humanities known as the 'return to things'. This trend has attracted attention for several years. Also, a biographical approach has been used to explore the biography of post circles.

The excavation record has been important for investigating post circles, as there are no remains of post circles on the surface. Valuable insights have also been gained from publications documenting the artefacts and materials in post circles. This explorative study aims to analyse post circles in South Scandinavia systematically, which has not been done before. The goal is to identify any recurring patterns across different post circles and sites.

The first step in the analysis has been to systematically explore the context of post circles. Context has been a vital concept for the investigation. Secondly, the architectural elements of post circles were analysed. Specific elements of architecture were chosen to highlight certain phases of the biography of post circles. The analysis has demonstrated both variation and similarities between post circles, which can question an assumption of a single function.

Post circles are found in different contexts, which can be classified into three categories: Settlement, Enclosure, and Burial. The majority of recorded post circles were found in the Settlement and Enclosure contexts, with four examples in each, while two samples were found in the Burial context. This analysis demonstrates the distribution of post circles across different contexts.

It has traditionally been presumed that the diameter of post circles, postholes and the height of finished buildings were correlated. This meant that a post circle with a larger diameter would be constructed with more and/or larger timbers/posts. However, the analysis shows that larger post circles did not necessarily have more posts with a larger diameter. Instead, the increased diameter of post circles was achieved by adjusting the space between posts.