

The Hoby site – a chieftain's community and gathering place?



Hoby on the island of Lolland in the western part of the Baltic Sea is strategically located in a coastal landscape offering abundant resources. Two richly furnished graves from the 1st century BC (*Hoby 2*) and the 1st century AD (*Hoby 1*) prove the presence of high-ranking people in this area.

The settlement associated with the graves was first recognized in 1999. After small investigations from 2000–2005 proper excavations went on during the period 2010–2015.

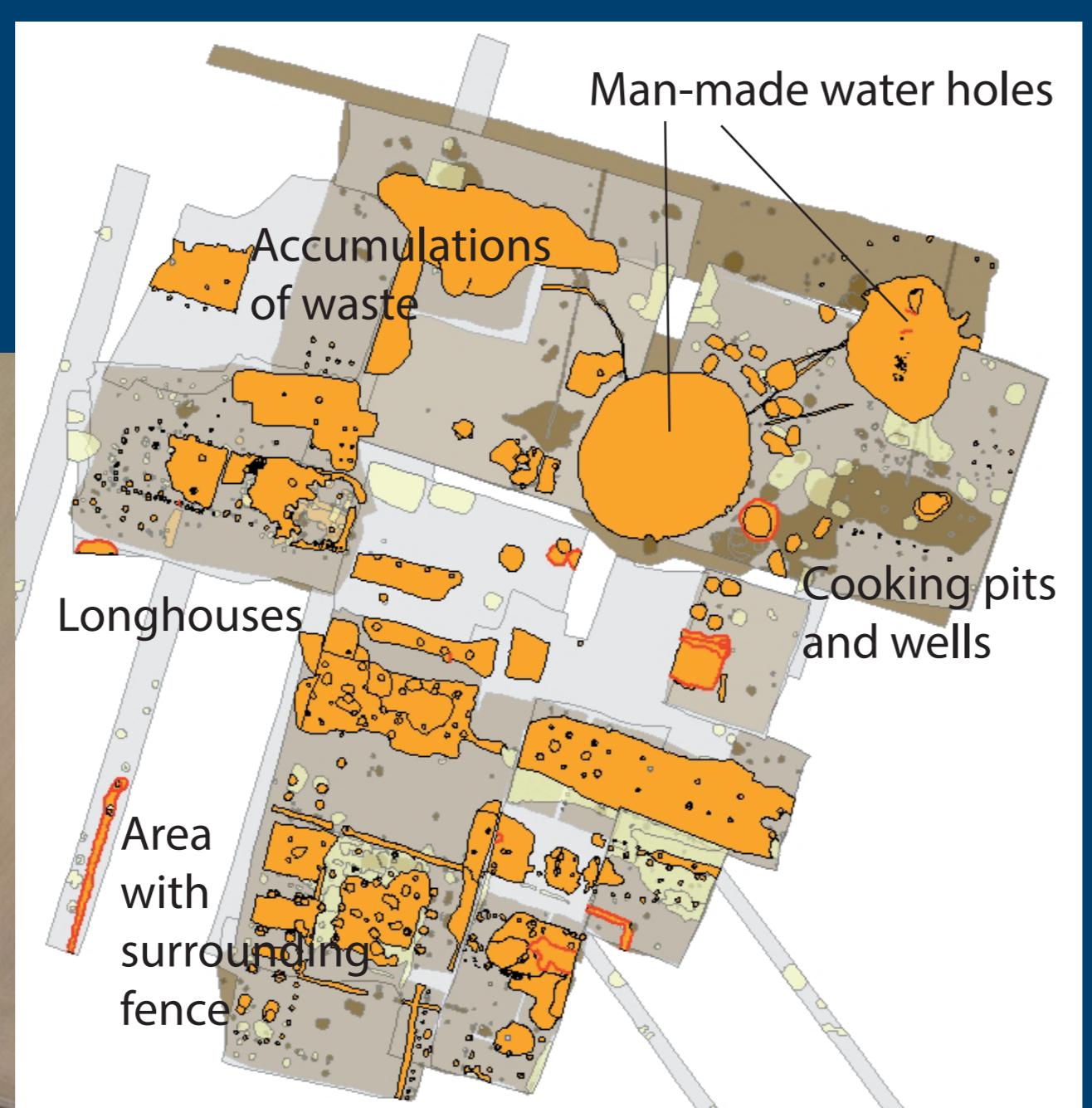
The find site Hoby

The grave goods from *Hoby 1* (above) and *Hoby 2* (below)



The inhumation grave *Hoby 1* was discovered in 1920. It contained an extensive set of imported tableware, two unique silvercups from a greek silversmith and precious items of Germanic origin. As early as 1897, a bronze situla with charred human bones and pieces of an iron sword scabbard – cremation grave *Hoby 2* – was handed to the Danish National Museum. So far, no other graves from this area are known.

200 m separate the inhumation burial Hoby 1 (red dot) and the settlement area.



The settlement of Hoby covers an area about 100x150 meters. Remains of more than 50 buildings have been identified.

Two outstanding longhouses and a building with a sturdy surrounding fence can be interpreted as gathering places and perhaps precursors to the hall-like buildings that appeared in the Late Iron Age. Path systems in the hole activity area, wells, pits, cooking pits, waterholes and substantial accumulations of bone and pottery prove a planned development of the settlement area.

Large broken pots in some of the fire places as well as small pottery vessels in post-holes and along the wall lines are evidence for offering practices in Hoby. Of particular significance in this context are two offerings of horse skulls that were associated with two of the houses.

Depositions of horse skull and pottery



The man-made hole with cooking pits during excavation

Two large man-made waterholes in the northern part of the activity zone, in parts surrounded from rectangular cooking pits, are remarkable. One of these features, 18 m in diameter and 1.6 m deep, was partly excavated. The bottom layer of the hole has been radiocarbon dated to around 50 BC, and the hole was in use for more than 150 years. Several low wattle fences divided the hole into sections. Furthermore, there was a large wooden construction – possibly a platform – in the central part of the hole. Large quantities of waste dominated by animal bones, stones and some pottery were found especially in the eastern part of the hole.



Animal bones, stones and pottery in the eastern part



low wattle fences made of hazel, particularly in the eastern and middle part



Remains of a massive wooden construction discovered at the base of the hole

There is no apparent explanation to the function of the big holes in Hoby and its purpose. They must be the result of teamwork and must have been dug in connection with gatherings at the site. The combination of animal bones, pottery and stones like found in Hoby are also known elsewhere, primarily in connection with offerings in bogs. Maybe extensive offerings were deposited in the big water filled holes at several gatherings – or do you have any better idea and good comparisons to these enigmatic holes?

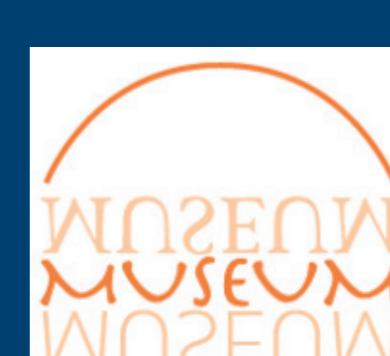
Field work and investigations concerning the graves and the settlement site take place in a joint project between the National Museum Copenhagen, the Museum Lolland-Falster, and the Centre for Baltic and Scandinavian Archaeology (ZBSA). The „Hoby-project“ is included in the „Pre-Christian Cult Sites“ project based at the National Museum Copenhagen (<http://vikingekult.natmus.dk/en/viking-cult/pre-christian-cult-sites/>). Photos and plans: Nationalmuseum Copenhagen and Museum Lolland-Falster

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