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House or not?

Reflexions on the archaeological house

Mostly, the archaeological traces of houses at any settlement excavation in Denmark are rather unremarkable. The prehistoric house is probably one of the most fragmented phenomena in Danish archaeology. Rarely, anything is visible above ground level and usually nothing of the original house constructions has been preserved. Therefore, dissemination of the excavation results in the field can be challenging. In the article, it is argued that it is not the fragmented character of the archaeological record alone that sometimes makes dissemination complicated. Rather, it is argued that the widespread practice among archaeologists to talk about the two-dimensional traces in the ground as 'houses' is in itself causing problems as the archaeological house will never live up to the expectations of 'a house'. Instead, it is argued, as suggested by Nativ (2017) to take the fragmentation of the archaeological material seriously and engage more with the actual archaeological traces of the house. It is suggested that this could for instance be obtained through an alternative understanding of the posthole, not as a remain of a house but rather as an assemblage of actions building, using, maintaining and finally deconstructing the house. As a consequence, it is suggested to abandon the term 'house' and instead use the term 'house site' to describe the archaeological house. This will lead to a better understanding of the investigated record – both among the public and among archaeologists themselves.