BEYOND URNFIELDS

New Perspectives on Late Bronze Age – Early Iron Age Funerary Practices in Northwest Europe

Edited by
Helene Agerskov Rose, Lisbeth Christensen
and Arjan Louwen

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Table of Contents

Ralf Bleile, Dieter Quast and Berit Valentin Eriksen
Preface 7

Lennart S. Madsen
Preface 9

Helene Agerskov Rose, Arjan Louwen and Lisbeth Christensen
Beyond urnfields – an introduction 11

Lisbeth Christensen
The Early Pre-Roman Iron Age urn grave tradition of southern Jutland 17

Scott Robert Dollar, Martin Egelund Poulsen and Lars Grundvad
Burial and settlement during the Early Pre-Roman Iron Age in south-central Jutland 33

Lene B. Frandsen
Billumvad urnfield and some other sites with circular ditches in the western part of Jutland 49

Sarah Skytte Qvistgaard and Bente Grundvad
Pre-Roman Iron Age cremations in Korsvanggaard, southwestern Denmark –
an urnfield with urn graves, cenotaphs and exhumations revealing *pars-pro-toto*
burial rituals. 59

Helene Agerskov Rose and Anna Egelund Poulsen
Revisiting Aarupgaard urnfield in southern Jutland, Denmark 81

Angelika Abegg-Wigg
Urn cemeteries from the Pre-Roman Iron Age and the Migration Period
in Schleswig-Holstein: An overview of the research history 93

Ingo Lütjens
Burials of the Pre-Roman Iron Age in Schleswig-Holstein. A short overview 105

Ringo Klooß
Short report on the excavation of the Early Iron Age burial site of Borgstedt
in the Rendsburg-Eckernförde district. 111

Stefanie Schaefer-Di Maida and Jutta Kneisel
The urnfield phenomenon in Schleswig-Holstein:
New insights into the chronology and hypotheses 117

Jochen Brandt
Pre-Roman Iron Age burials in the lower Elbe region 133

https://doi.org/10.2369/9783869354439.04-christensen

Wenke Domscheit
Grave groups in Late Bronze and Early Iron Age grave fields –
the grave field of Pinnow as an example of a phenomenon 147

Robert Schumann
A tale of ancient mounds …
The re-use of old monuments for Iron Age burials in northern Germany 165

Claudia Pankau
The ceremonial wagon and its relationship with the Urnfield burial rite 183

Katarzyna Ślusarska
Between the Urnfield culture and the Nordic Bronze Age.
Man and environment in the Late Bronze Age on the southwestern Baltic coast 199

Karol Dzięgielewski
Urnfields in their own way:
The Late Bronze Age on the southern Baltic coast (middle and eastern Pomerania) 217

Arjan Louwen
A tale of people, places and broken pots. A long-term perspective on the emergence
of urnfields in the Lower-Rhine-Basin 235

Stijn Arnoldussen and Karen M. de Vries
Cups that cheered no more. Funerary rites in the urnfields of the northern Netherlands 253

Christophe Snoeck, Giacomo Capuzzo, Barbara Veselka, Kevin Salesse,
Ioannis Kontopoulos, Rica Annaert, Sarah Dalle, Marta Hlad, Charlotte Sabaux,
Amanda Sengeløv, Elisavet Stamataki, Mathieu Boudin, Eugene Warmenbol,
Martine Vercauteren and Guy De Mulder
Unravelling the mysteries hidden within the cremated human remains from Belgium –
The inter-disciplinary CRUMBEL project 271

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The Early Pre-Roman Iron Age urn grave tradition of southern Jutland

Lisbeth Christensen

Keywords: Urn grave fields, Pre-Roman Iron Age, burial rites

Abstract: The article presents the Iron Age urnfield tradition and the regional variations of burial practices within southern Jutland, with particular focus on the urnfield phenomenon. The regional differences and similarities concerning burial rituals and grave goods are exemplified using the large urnfields of Aarupgaard and Uldal. The different burial rites and their development during the Early Pre-Roman Iron Age are addressed. This includes a range of cremation grave types, e.g. urn graves with or without stone constructions, bone-layer graves, cremation pits and cenotaphs, besides secondary burials in primary mounds. Some of the burial rituals show continuation from the Late Bronze Age to the Early Pre-Roman Iron Age, but the urnfield graves represent a new form of burial monument in the Early Pre-Roman Iron Age.

Introduction

In the Early Pre-Roman Iron Age, different types of urn burials were in use in southern Jutland, demonstrating a regional variation in burial practices in relation to grave types, burial customs, types of artefacts and burial population. Urn burials can take the form of flat graves without demarcation or with demarcation in the form of stone cairns and stone circles. These can be covered by small mounds or hillocks, which are demarcated by a circular ditch: the so-called urnfield graves (Danish: *tuegrave*). Finally, secondary urn graves can be interred in existing grave mounds. Most of these burial rites occur together within the same regions and sometimes also at the same cemeteries, while the stone cairns are confined to southeast Jutland. The focus of this paper is the small urnfield graves occurring in the urnfield cemeteries (Danish: *tuegravpladser*). For this purpose, two of the largest known urnfields – Uldal and Aarupgaard – have been selected to form the basis for a broader discussion of the Iron Age Urnfield tradition, its development, burial rituals, grave goods and cremated remains.

The urnfield tradition was introduced to the Danish area around the transition from the Late Bronze Age to the Pre-Roman Iron Age. The mortuary process was part of a ritual and religious performance, in which religious practices may have included the commemoration or veneration of ancestors, sacrifices, feasts, dances, etc. The cremation fire itself was perhaps seen as a cleansing ritual or as the complete transformation of the body (Fahlander/Oestigaard 2008). Stages of the mortuary process included: 1) building the pyre, 2) cremating the deceased, 3) rigorously sorting the pyre-debris and collecting cremated remains and personal objects from the pyre, 4) placing cremated

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remains and grave goods in an urn or another (organic) container, 5) placing the urn or container in a funerary monument.

Presently, about 75 urnfields have been recorded within southern Jutland (Fig. 1; see Møller et al. 2020, 14). Many of the urnfields are small with less than 20 graves or middle-sized with up to 40 graves, but none of these have been fully excavated. Other sites have never been excavated at all, as they have been protected under Danish Heritage regulations since the 1930s. These urnfields are still visible today in heathland areas or in woods. The urnfields have historically attracted a special status and have come to characterise the Pre-Roman Iron Age (Becker 1961, 161–170), but today it seems more appropriate to understand this burial form as one among several contemporaneous funerary rites.

The chronology in this article is based on the relative chronological scheme developed by C. K. Jensen, who divides the Pre-Roman Iron Age into two main phases: an early and a late one (Jensen 2005). Some German scholars have included southern Jutland in the area of the Jastorf culture, based on common traits in burial customs and dress accessories (Bräuning 2014, 81–91), whereas Danish scholars regard southern Jutland as a separate group at its periphery, but with strong impulses from the German Iron Age culture (Becker 1961, 268).

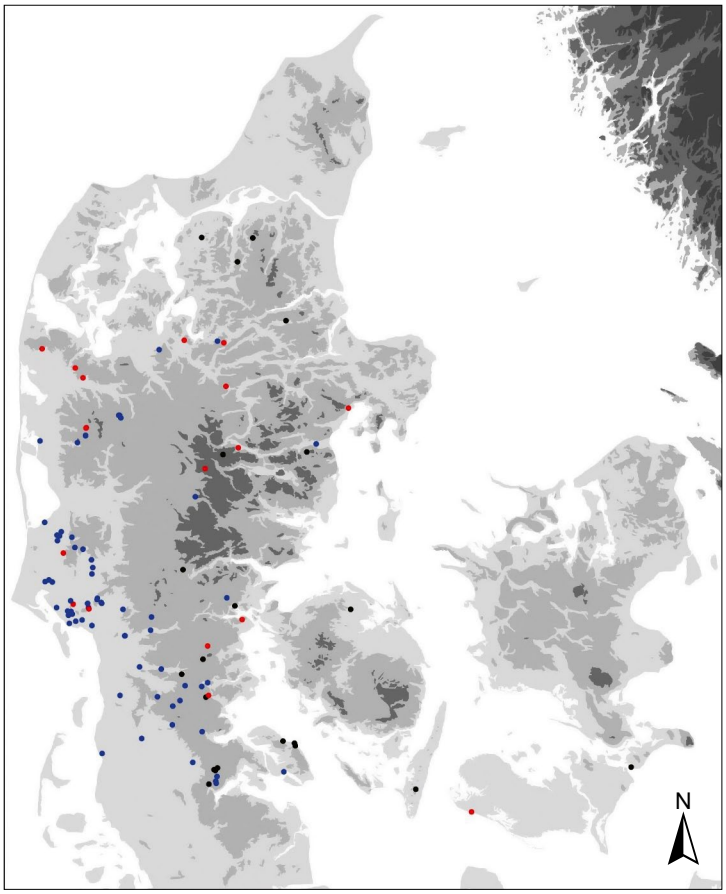


Fig. 1. The distribution of known urnfields in Denmark. Blue – urnfields with mounds and circular ditches; red – possible urnfields; black – related sites with stone cairns and stone circles (after Møller et al. 2020, 14).

Aarupgaard urnfield

The site of Aarupgaard is situated about 10 km southeast of Ribe, at the top of a south-facing slope between the Fladså and Gelså streams. Aarupgaard has been known since the early 1890s, but the first excavations were not undertaken until 1947 by H. Neumann. An area of about 72 x 72 m of un-

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cultivated heathland at the site has been protected by Danish Heritage regulations since 1931. Erik Jørgensen from the Museum in Haderslev excavated the urnfield during three campaigns from 1970–1972. Three founding graves from the Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age were found as secondary urn graves in a Bronze Age mound in the northernmost part of the site. Altogether, about 1,200 burials were excavated within a cultivated area of 60,000 m² and a small area of heathland (Fig. 2). Another 300 monuments remain unexcavated in the protected area. The preservation of the burial monuments and individual graves varies throughout the site. The typo-chronological dating shows that the site was used as a burial ground for three to four centuries, from about 500 to 150–100 BC.

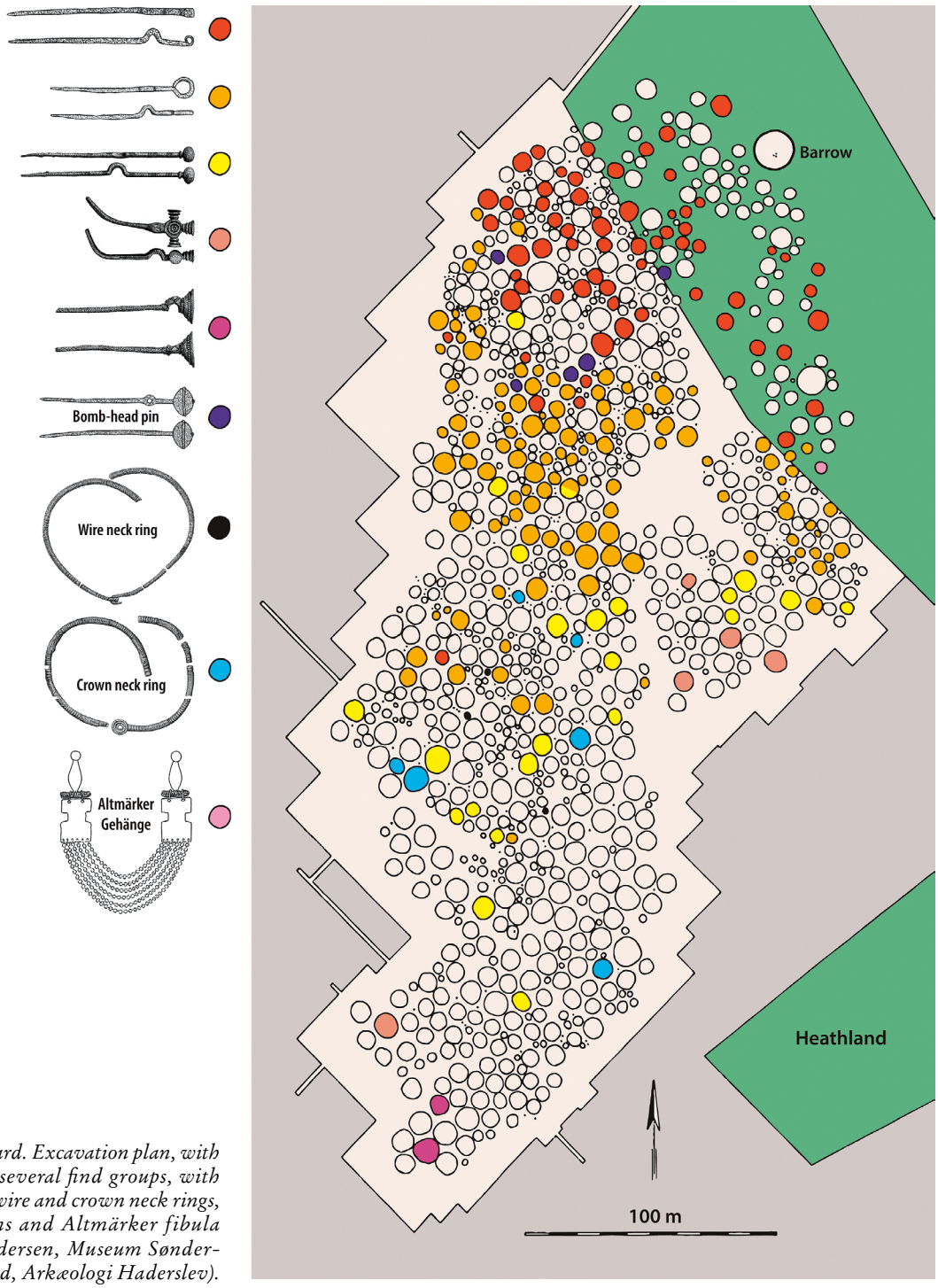


Fig. 2. Aarupgaard. Excavation plan, with distribution of several find groups, with the addition of wire and crown neck rings, bomb-head pins and Altmärker fibula (graphics J. Andersen, Museum Sønderjylland, Arkæologi Haderslev).

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Uldal urnfield

The site of Uldal is situated 18 km west of Haderslev on a small, sandy ridge surrounded by small bogs, close to the Valsbæk stream. Uldal has been known since 1871–1880, when a local veterinarian undertook some small excavations. Further excavations were performed in the 1930s and 1940s, some of them prior to the construction of roads. Erik Jørgensen also excavated this urnfield during several campaigns from 1995–2003. Most recently, in 2021, Museum Sønderjylland performed a minor excavation as part of the URNFIELD network project. The excavation revealed that the urnfield is larger than previously assumed, although the total extent still remains unknown. The urnfield was founded in connection with a row of large Bronze Age burial mounds, probably six in total, although not all are preserved to this day. The horizontal stratigraphy of the urnfield suggests that a large burial mound was situated at the centre of the site, where a gravel pit can be found today. Two of the burial mounds were excavated in 1871 and 1898, respectively. They contained male and female graves from periods II–III of the Early Bronze Age. One of the mounds also contained a secondary urn grave with a glass bead from the beginning of the Pre-Roman Iron Age (Aner/Kersten 1984, 81–82 Taf. 39–40). Excavations of the urnfield have revealed about 420 graves, but at least 550 graves remain within a cultivated area of 15,000 m^2 (Fig. 3). The typo-chronological dating shows that the site was used as a burial ground for three to four centuries, from about 500 to 150–100 BC.

Many of the urns from the excavations during the 1930s and 1940s were well preserved. Several stone structures were also found in connection with the circular ditches during the earlier excavations. Some of the graves do not, however, show evidence of any circular ditches in the documentation, as the archaeologists of this time were only interested in the urn and were not aware of the existence of these ditches. Most of the vessels from the excavations during the 1990s and onwards are poorly preserved and lack their upper part. These graves had been disturbed by the plough, but in some cases the urn had already been removed during the excavations in the 19th and early 20th century. Many years of agriculture have destroyed the remaining stone structures and levelled out the small hillocks covering the urnfield graves, thus only poorly-preserved urn graves and traces of circular ditches remain today.

The Urnfield burial tradition

The following description of the urnfield burial tradition relies on archival records of excavations at Aarupgaard and Uldal urnfields. None of the sites has yet been fully published, although the material from Aarupgaard has been used in research (Jørgensen 1971a; b, 1972; 1975; Jensen 2005; Terkildsen 2005; 2015; Rose 2020), and Uldal has been mentioned in short papers (Jørgensen 2006; Jørgensen/Lewring 1999). There is no information about the location of the pyres, as there are no traces of pyre sites within the cemeteries of southern Jutland.

Categories of cremation burials are:

1) Urn graves: cremated remains only, buried in a funerary urn;
2) Bone-layer graves: concentration of sorted cremated remains. Probably buried in perishable containers of organic materials such as textile, leather or wood;
3) Urn/bone-layer graves: urn graves surrounded by cremated remains and pyre-debris;
4) Burned bones accompanied by a selection of sherds;
5) Cremation pits: mixed deposition of cremated remains, pyre-debris and pottery sherds in a small pit;
6) Cenotaphs: empty graves without grave goods or bones, might contain a vessel without burned bones.

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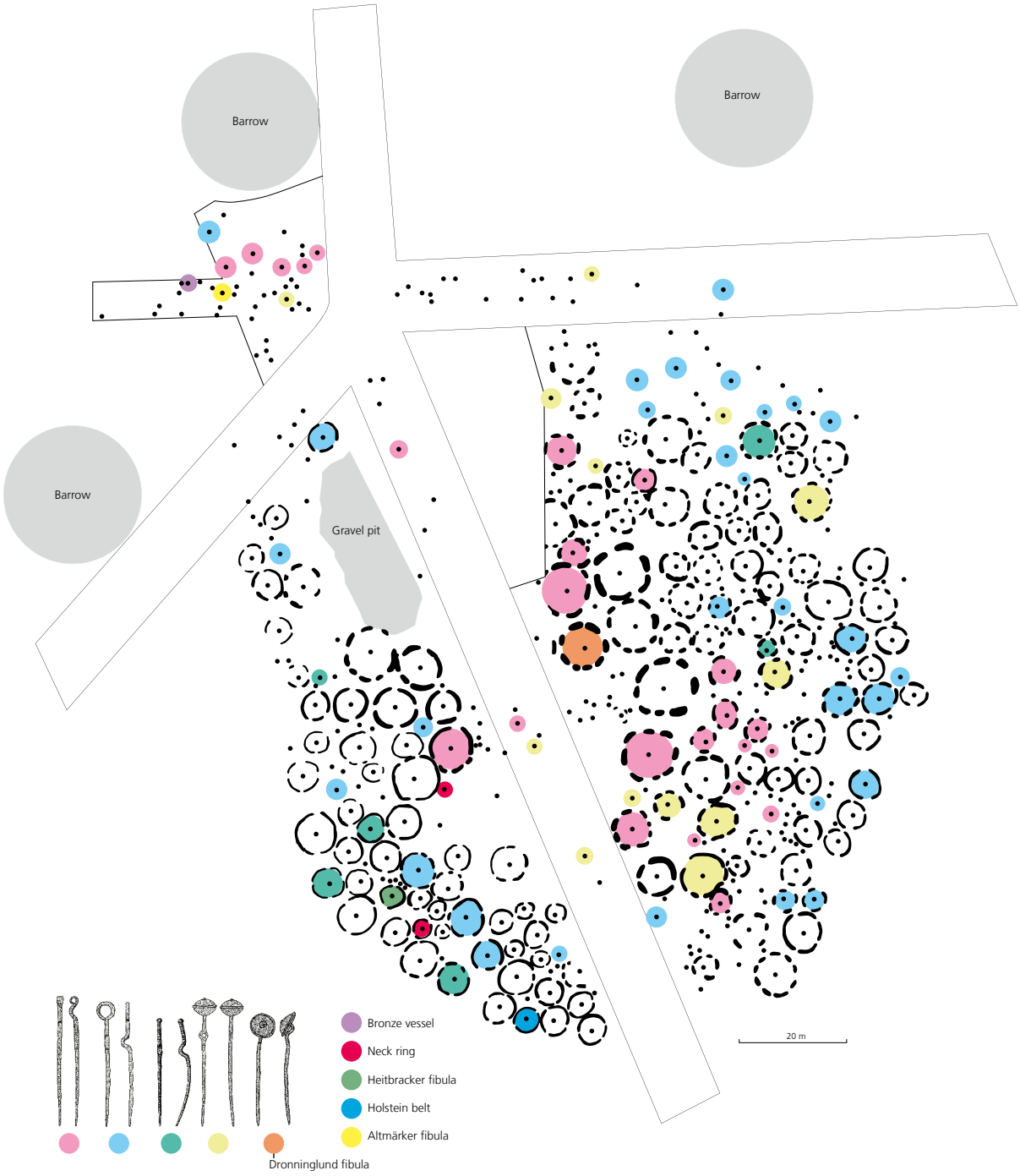


Fig. 3. Uldal. Excavation plan, with distribution of several find groups (graphics J. Andersen, Museum Sønderjylland, Arkæologi Haderslev).

It can sometimes be difficult to attribute some of the burials to a specific category because of poorly-preserved graves in cultivated areas. Some of the graves categorised as cenotaphs may be the result of bad preservation or from a later retrieval of buried bones, as has been observed at Søhale urnfield (Møller et al. 2020). Burials in urns represent the most common burial rite at both Aarupgaard and Uldal, but other basic burial forms are also found at both urn cemeteries. Normally, there is only one urn interred in each mound, but at Aarupgaard two central graves contained two urns each. The absence of a central urn grave in a burial monument may be because the urn was destroyed by ploughing.

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There are differences in the sizes of both urns and burial monuments, which depend, at least partly, on the age of the deceased. The preliminary anthropological analyses of the cremated bones from Aarupgaard show children's graves placed outside the circular ditches. Children are buried in mounds with a diameter of up to 3 m, whereas adults are buried in mounds with a diameter of more than 4 m. The urn can be placed in the mound filling, on top of the old surface or in a shallow pit at the centre of a mound. This burial custom seems to belong to the Early Pre-Roman Iron Age, while grave pits dug deeper into the subsoil seem to be a later custom. At the urnfields, urns are also found in shallow pits outside the circular ditches. These urn graves are situated in between the burial monuments and without a mound. Urn graves with stone pavings are found at both Uldal and Aarupgaard urnfields. Only 2 % of the urns from Aarupgaard have stone settings, but the use of stone packing in the burial pits is prevalent at Uldal. The urn may be totally covered by a stone construction or only supported by a few stones. The urns are either placed on a layer of small stones or a flat standing stone. Some urns have a capstone placed on top of them as a lid, which is often the case at Uldal. These stone settings are found throughout the urnfields. However, the different types of stone constructions still have to be analysed, classified and dated.

The use of stone settings is most frequently found in urn graves, but they are also present in urn/bone-layer graves and cenotaphs. At Uldal 96 % of the graves are urn graves; the remainder are bone-layer graves in stone settings, cremation pits and cenotaphs. Cenotaphs, bone-layer graves and cremation pits are distributed at the periphery of the urnfield and seem to date to the Late Pre-Roman Iron Age or period I.2b–II.1a. There is no overview of the exact number of cenotaphs and urn/bone-layer pits at Aarupgaard.

The urnfield grave

An urnfield grave is an urn grave but with added characteristics – it is a centrally placed grave within a small earth mound, surrounded by a circular ditch (Becker 1961, 161–170; Fig. 4). This definition is, however, no longer sufficient because urn graves with a circular ditch but without a mound also occur, as do circular ditches with other grave constructions, such as stone cairns.

Many of the graves in both Aarupgaard and Uldal are urn graves surrounded by circular ditches. The majority of monuments with circular ditches at both urnfields have a circular or oval shape. The circular ditches have a diameter of between 1–11 m. The ditches are 30–50 cm wide and dug 50–60 cm into the subsoil with a U-shaped cross-section. At Aarupgaard, nine mounds were demarcated by a stone circle within the circular ditch. A further twenty graves showed traces of a row of posts on the inside of the circular ditches as a demarcation of the mound. The pointed poles were dug 1 m into the ground and had a diameter of *c.* 10 cm. They were placed 30–40 cm apart, amounting to 50–60 poles per mound. Stone circles and post settings are never found together in the same mound, and they have only been detected in the well-preserved heathland part of Aarupgaard. The circular ditches often have more interruptions, allowing entrance to the interior of the grave. The depths of the ditches vary considerably, making it difficult to ascertain the number of interruptions in less well-preserved monuments. The circular ditches at Uldal have two to nine openings, while at Aarupgaard they have no or up to seven openings, measuring up to 50–80 cm in width. In the northern part of Aarupgaard, the number of interruptions varies from two to seven, while most monuments in the southern part have only two opposing interruptions. There appears to be a link between the number of interruptions and the size of the mound, with the largest and oldest mounds having more ditch interruptions than the small ones. Most of the circular ditches do not overlap, and the interruptions of adjacent monuments are sometimes oriented towards each other. Both small and large circular ditches are placed side by side, and fill layers show that the ditches were open in the Early Iron Age.

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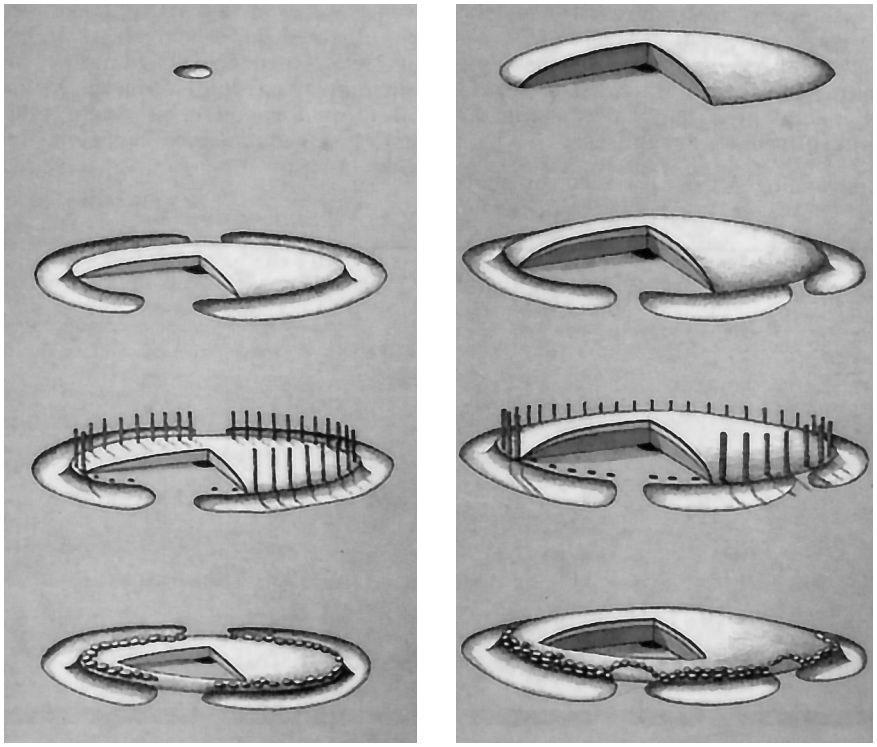


Fig. 4. The urnfield grave. Elements of construction: urn, barrow, circular ditch with or without poles and stone constructions (after Jørgensen *1975, 9).*

Urnfield graves were once covered by a small mound, although not all were surrounded by circular ditches. The mounds were built partly with soil from the circular ditch and partly with additional soil. The mounds range in size from 1–11 m in diameter and 0.3–0.4 m in height. The majority of mounds only contained a single urn grave, but a few mounds contained more urns, and one mound from Aarupgaard contained no less than five small urns. Two of these graves have been osteologically identified as children's graves, whereas the interpretation of the remaining three graves as children's graves is based on the limited amounts of cremated human remains (up to 125 g). Such grave clusters do, however, deviate from the general picture. At Uldal urnfield, there are examples of graves having stone cairns on top and being surrounded by circular ditches. The cairns are built of one to three layers of stone with an outer row of kerbstones; they measure up to 0.5 m in height and 1–3 m in diameter (Fig. 5). It is unclear if the stone constructions were once covered by an earth mound. The cairns are confined to southeast Jutland, whereas the earthen mounds are characteristic of southwest Jutland. The difference might be caused by differences in the geology of southern Jutland, where there is an abundance of stones in the eastern part of the peninsula, but only sandy soil in the western part. The stone cairns at Uldal resemble the grave stone constructions from the urn cemeteries at Bæk, Ustrup and Hinderup in southeast Jutland (Becker 1961, 185–186; Fig. 6). Here, the circular stone constructions have diameters of 0.6–4.5 m, but are without circular ditches, and they were probably never covered by mounds.

Grave content

The grave content is comprised of cremated human remains, occasionally pyre remains or other archaeobotanical remains and then the grave assemblage consisting of a combination of pottery and

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Fig. 5. Uldal, excavation in 1944. Urn grave with cairn and circular stone setting (photo Museum Sønderjylland, Arkæologi Haderslev).



Fig. 6. Ustrup, excavation in 1949. Circular stone settings (photo Museum Sønderjylland, Arkæologi Haderslev).

metal artefacts. Grave goods are here interpreted as any secondary vessels besides the funerary urn and all other artefacts included in the grave.

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Funerary urns

There are indications for prior use of many urns as cooking vessels in the household, such as use-wear on their surfaces or crusted charred food remains inside the vessels. Some vessels may however have been made specifically with the purpose of being funerary urns, as is indicated by the presence of finely burnished and ornamented urns. Only few vessels are decorated with horizontal bands on the upper part of the body. Typical motifs are horizontal zones of geometrical patterns of incised triangles, herringbone patterns, crescent-shaped ornaments, straight lines and finger imprints forming triangles. Some vessels have handles, a small knob, or even just an imitation handle, but the majority of the urns from Uldal and Aarupgaard had none of these. A few of the well-preserved urns from Uldal that originally must have had two handles were buried without the handles (Becker 1961, 183). There are urns with missing rims or handles from Uldal and Aarupgaard, but this is likely a question of preservation or an indication that storage vessels were re-used as funerary urns, rather than signs of deliberate destruction as has been proposed for other Danish and German urnfields (Møller et al. 2020, 57–58).

Grave goods

The grave good assemblages consist of a narrow range of artefact types, and only 30 % of the burials from Aarupgaard and 40 % from Uldal were furnished with secondary vessels or other artefacts. A small subset of the urn graves at Aarupgaard were covered with a lid (8 %), in the form of either a stone slab, another vessel placed upside down on top of the urn, or a ceramic lid. A few graves at Uldal did have vessel sherds placed on top of the urn. Several graves at Aarupgaard and Uldal contained a secondary vessel, which could be placed inside the urn on top of the cremated bones, in the pit beside the urn, or within the circular ditches. Graves with accessory vessels probably date to the later part of the Pre-Roman Iron Age, from period I.2b and onwards. Nine percent of the secondary vessels from Aarupgaard were small, miniature vessels that fit within the urns. Three of these have exceptional shapes, such as that of a small bird or a crescent. The larger secondary vessels from the urn pits or the circular ditches are vase-like vessels with a single band-like handle. An urn grave may contain up to two accessory vessels, plus another two vessels in the circular ditches. The large vase-like vessels with a handle do, however, occur either in the circular ditch or in the urn grave, but not in both ditch and grave in the same burial monument. Some of the vessels in the circular ditches might have been deliberately demolished, although destruction through agricultural activity cannot be ruled out.

Children's graves are often more poorly furnished than those of adult individuals, and more than 50 % of the metal objects from Aarupgaard are found in graves with larger mounds. Some dress accessories accompanied the deceased on the pyre, while others were added after cremation, such as in Aarupgaard U1203, which contained six unburned amber beads. The grave goods consist of jewellery, dress accessories and toiletry equipment, such as tweezers. No tools or weapons have been found. Dress pins and belt fittings made of iron and, more rarely, bronze are the most common types of grave goods. Dress pins often occur in pairs in the early phase of the cemeteries but singly in the late phase, reflecting changes in the typo-chronology (Jensen 2005). Similarly, a change from coil-head pins and ring-head pins to pins with a grooved head, winged-head pins and Holstein pins can be observed. Among the belt equipment, eyelet rings of bronze are succeeded by various types of iron belt hooks and iron rings with shank. Recently, a large number of graves from Aarupgaard have been ^{14}C-dated and the results confirm the established typological sequence of metal artefacts, although it is suggested that the pottery sequence needs some adjustment (Rose 2020).

The majority of artefact types are gender neutral, but excluded from this are bronze neck rings dating to the period I.2b–II.1a, which are associated with female individuals and children (Hingst 1976, 182). Neck rings have been found in two graves at Uldal and in ten graves at Aarupgaard (Fig. 7). The neck rings from Uldal are wire neck rings, one of which was found together with the cremated bones of a four-year-old child. One of the neck rings from Aarupgaard is a typologically early type, made of

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a flat bronze ribbon with small circular punctures or stamps. Three of the others are wire neck rings and probably belong to children's graves. The last six specimens are typologically early crown neck rings of which four were found in combination with a belt hook; three of these are tongue-shaped belt hooks. Crown neck rings are associated with women's graves (Konstantin-Hansen 2013, 23) and often occur singly in bog offerings. They are primarily found in Jutland and north Germany (Brandt 2001, 95–100), where they are also assumed to have been produced (Konstantin-Hansen 2013, 19–26). The most elaborately furnished graves are associated with women and are interpreted as expressions of status and identity, or even of symbolic significance related to the religion and ritual life of the society. One urn grave, grave U3847 in Aarupgaard, contained two fibulas belonging to a local variant of an *Altmärker Gehänge* (Keiling 1971). Three of the urn graves at Uldal also contained special fibulas – grave A182 contained an Altmärker fibula, grave A250 contained a Dronning-

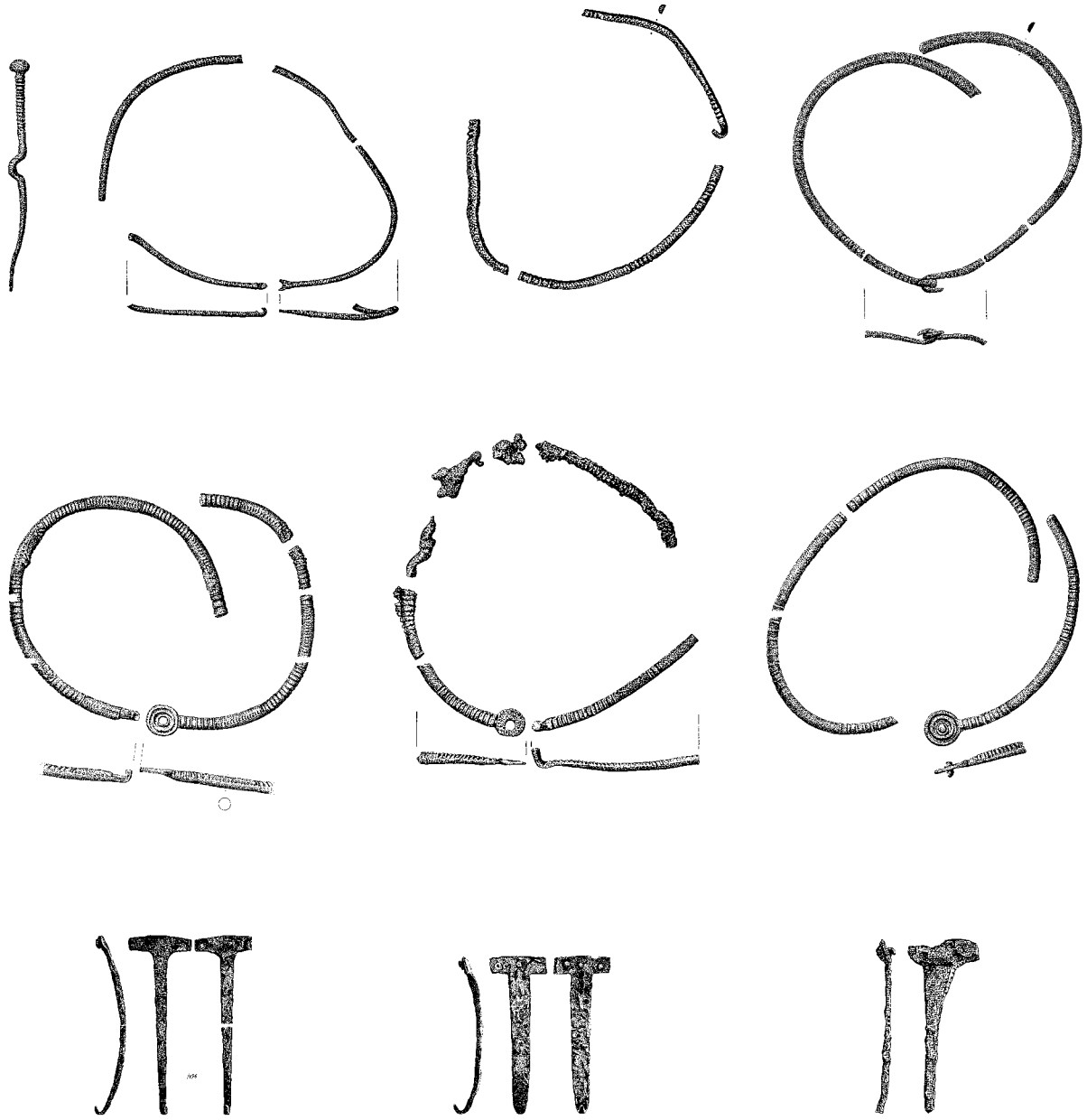


Fig. 7. Aarupgaard. Wire neck rings and crown neck rings combined with tongue-shaped belt hooks (drawings E. Jørgensen, Museum Sønderjylland, Arkæologi Haderslev).

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lund fibula (Becker 1959; Johansen 1990), and grave A206 contained two plate fibulas resembling a Heitbracker fibula (Hofmann 2014). A fourth, probable female, urn grave at Uldal, grave A196, contained the fragments of a belt sheet fastened by hook ends, of a so-called Holstein belt of type D2 from phase II.1b/II.2a (Hingst 1962, 69–90). It has been suggested that the deceased might have been a priestess (Hucke 1962; Keiling 1977).

Cremated human remains

No cremated bones from Uldal have been osteologically analysed. In total, 188 graves in the cemetery of Aarupgaard have been studied. Of these graves, 130 were analysed by Jørgen Balslev Jørgensen in the 1970s and 58 graves by Lise Harvig in 2019. This paper focuses on the more recent osteological analyses that were carried out according to modern standards and which considered the degree of bone fragmentation and pyre temperatures.

For the majority of graves, it was noted that the cremation pyres must have reached minimum temperatures of around 700–800 °C. Lower temperatures are more common for children's graves, and only six of the 20 children's pyres analysed from the cremation remains will have reached temperatures of 800 °C or above. This demonstrates that the cremation pyres were well constructed, with sufficient oxygen and lasted long enough for them to reach such high temperatures. The different skeletal regions were present in the expected ratios in the graves, which suggests that whole bodies are represented and no selections of specific body parts were carried out for the final interment. No evidence of deliberate partial selection or crushing of cremated remains from the pyre-debris was found.

The osteological investigation reveals that men, women and children of all age groups are represented in the material, but there is a remarkably high proportion of graves containing children. Twenty out of the 58 graves (34 %) were children's graves, and possibly adding to this number are four graves with an older child or young adult, and possibly another 12 graves with adult or almost adult individuals. The youngest individual was a neonate, while the oldest one was an adult male of around 25–50 years of age at the time of death. It is often difficult to determine the sex of cremated bones that have shrunken and deformed during the burning process, but here it was possible to determine the sex of eight out of the 38 adult individuals (five males, three females). The slightly higher number of males might be explained by differential preservation between the sexes, because males have a more robust bone structure (Harvig 2019).

The average weight of cremated human remains in a grave can be used as an indicator of the representativeness of cremated remains (Gonçalves et al. 2015, 75, 77). At Aarupgaard, remains of adult individuals weigh 702–2,000 g, with a mean of 1,051 g, whereas those found in children's graves are smaller overall, containing 50–920 g cremated bone, with a mean of 244 g (Table 1). Weather conditions, taphonomic processes, as well as post-excavation and excavation handling of the cremated remains, can have influenced the weights of the cremated bones. Preliminary analyses by the excavator, Erik Jørgensen, indicate a correlation between the amount of cremated bones and the size of the urn. The size of the urns varied according to the age of the deceased, so that the cremated remains of children were placed in small urns and those of adults in larger vessels. The children were often interred in small urns (<20 cm in height), while adults were interred in large urns (>30 cm in height; Fig. 8). At present, it is not possible to tell if specific types of urns can be related to either the sex

Table 1. Aarupgaard. Average measurements and weights of cremated bones of children and adults from the preserved bone material.

	Maximum fragment size (cm)	**Weight (g)**	**Volume (ml)**	**Fragmentation index (g/ml)**
Children (n = 20)	3.8	244	355	0.88
Adults (n = 38)	7.4	1,051	1,707	0.77

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or age of the deceased. In general, the urns only contain the cremated remains of a single individual and no animal bones. Based on the limited osteological investigation, it is concluded that the entire population is represented in the cremated remains and that the cremation practice was standardised, with fixed stages in the mortuary process.

The structure of the urnfields and connections to the ancestors

The urnfield at Aarupgaard relates to a large Stone or Bronze Age barrow north of the urn graves, and it stretches out to the south in two contemporaneous, separate main burial groups. Based on horizontal stratigraphy, a significant number of the graves date to period II.1, and the urnfield may have been in use throughout the second century BC (Terkildsen 2015, 57–58). The typo-chronology of the site suggests a gradual development from the north to the south. The monuments are closely spaced, causing a few circular ditches to intercut and, in some instances, the interruptions of the circular ditches around later monuments are orientated towards the interruptions of earlier ones. In grave U2236, which was analysed in the 1970s, a small child and an adult were placed together in the same urn, which suggests a close relationship. The results of the preliminary anthropological report from 2019, as well as the distribution of smaller vessels with small amounts of cremated bones, indicate that children's graves are found scattered across the cemetery of Aarupgaard. Children are generally interred either outside burial monuments or close to adult graves with large circular ditches, suggesting that it was important to be buried close to one's family and ancestors.



Fig. 8. Aarupgaard. Vessel types (photo L. Christensen, Museum Sønderjylland, Arkæologi Haderslev).

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The Uldal urnfield relates to three larger Bronze Age barrows to the north and extends south of these. Another barrow was probably placed in the centre of the urnfield but it is not preserved today. The urnfield has been in use from period I.1 until period II.1b/II.2a. The monuments are again closely spaced. Based on typo-chronology, it can be observed that earlier and later graves are placed in close proximity and that intercutting of circular ditches occurs. There seems to be a simultaneous development of separate burial groups that eventually merge into one large entity – one central burial group and one or more north of this. Each group is organised by a separate horizontal stratigraphy.

A few undated cooking pits have been identified in the northeastern part of Uldal, indicating that feasting may have taken place in connection with the burials. Broken pottery in the circular ditches at Aarupgaard may indicate smaller feasting ceremonies linked to some of the later burial monuments or ceremonies held in honour of, or in commemoration of, the ancestors. The connections between the monuments at the urnfields of Aarupgaard and Uldal suggests that ancestral and family connections played an important role. The two urnfields were established at approximately the same time and all members of some local communities were likely buried here.

Cultural connections

The burial customs observed at Aarupgaard and Uldal largely correspond to what has been observed at other urnfields in western and southern Jutland, e.g. at Aarre, Søhale and Veldbæk (Becker 1961, 128–196; Lorange 2015; Møller et al. 2020). In the Danish area, flat graves with comparable stone structures but without circular ditches or mounds are known at Bæk, Ustrup and Hinderup, again demonstrating a connection to the circular stone settings of Holstein. The Dronninglund fibula from Uldal indicates connections to northern Jutland, but both grave goods and burial monuments also suggest cultural connections between southern Jutland and northern Germany during the Early Pre-Roman Iron Age. Certain dress accessories, such as the Altmärker fibulas, the Heitbracker-like fibulas, the Holstein pins and the Holstein belt, show cultural affiliation to northern Germany and the Jastorf culture. A few of the bomb-head pins from southern Jutland show local traits as the upper part of the needle shaft is extended and perforated by a single hole. Bomb-head pins are, however, also known from Schleswig-Holstein, and some vessel shapes and decorations show connections to north Friesland (Lütjens 1996, 76). Examples of stone structures such as those at Uldal are found at the urn cemeteries in Groß Timmendorf/Timmendorfer Strand (Hingst 1989), Ruser Steinbusch (Hucke 1972) and Malente-Kreuzfeld (Hingst 1986), which are all situated in the Kr. (German: *Kreis* = district) Ostholstein, at Jevenstedt, Kr. Rendsburg-Eckernförde (Hingst 1964) as well as at Schwissel, Kr. Segeberg (Behrends 1968). Looking beyond the Danish area, another common feature is that many of the German urn cemeteries are also orientated towards Bronze Age barrows, e.g. Mühlen Eichsen, Kr. Nordwestmecklenburg, in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (Ettel 2014, 174). Circular ditches with interruptions are also known from a few sites in Schleswig-Holstein, e.g. Bornhöved, Kr. Segeberg (Schaefer-Di Maida 2020; 2023), on the North Frisian Islands (Kersten/La Baume 1958, 73; Lütjens 1996, 74–76), and from the Low Countries (Louwen 2021, 60–61). The urn cemeteries in northern Germany contain up to 4,000 graves (Mühlen Eichsen), but like their Danish counterparts they date to the Pre-Roman Iron Age, although with a slightly longer duration (Ettel 2014).

https://doi.org/10.2369/9783869354439.04-christensen

This paper has demonstrated that the Early Pre-Roman Iron Age urnfields in southern Jutland share the same burial tradition, defined by a set of norms and cremation rituals, although with some regional differences. The urnfields were established at approximately the same time, around 500 BC, and most of them were abandoned in the middle of the Pre-Roman Iron Age (period I.1a–II.1b/II.2a). Only a few, such as Aarupgaard urnfield, were still in use until 150–100 BC.

Cremations were dominant and osteological analyses of the human cremated remains show that the pyres were generally well constructed and often reached temperatures above 800 °C. Men, women and children of all age groups were interred at the urnfields, suggesting that all individuals from the local community had burial rights in these communal burial grounds. Urn burials are the dominant grave type in southern Jutland in this period, with the majority of graves containing only one individual. A particular type of urn grave is the urnfield grave, which is surrounded by a circular ditch with one or more interruptions. Variations in the size of the burial monument and the urn itself can be at least partly explained by the age and sex of the interred individual. Different burial constructions, e.g. cairns in contrast to earthen mounds, show regional variations, but different construction elements and burial practices, such as the use of circular ditches, mounds or simple urn graves, are also found within the same urnfields. Some of the variations in burial customs seem to reflect changing trends in urnfield burial customs over time, so cenotaphs and cremation pits became more common in the later phases of the Pre-Roman Iron Age.

The grave goods are rather homogenous and seem to have been subject to strict regulation. The inclusion of secondary vessels in the urn graves is also characteristic of the later phases and shows a growing diversity of burial customs. The secondary vessels might be associated with ritual and symbolic activities, providing the ancestors with food offerings. Such offerings were probably contemporaneous with the internment, considering that only up to two secondary vessels have been found in a circular ditch.

Grave goods made of metal are gender neutral, with the exception of a few special objects, such as neck rings that are associated with the female sphere and reflect the age, status, individual identity or different roles of a person in the society.

The structure of the urnfields and the way in which the monuments relate to each other show the importance of group affiliation and the collective burial custom. We see burial monuments situated very close to each other, and the placement of children's graves outside burial monuments likely also shows close familial ties. Monuments with two opposing interruptions or circular ditches that overlap also seem to indicate ancestral relationships in the burial ground. Aarupgaard and Uldal urnfields were both established next to one or more ancient barrows, but they are not connected to contemporary settlements. At Uldal, there were probably several small grave groups separated by open spaces that, over time, merged into a large communal burial ground. So, some of the urnfields could represent communal burial sites with several, separate grave groups, perhaps different families, households or lineages of a local community.

Most of the Danish urnfields remain unpublished today, but they hold great potential for studying the transition from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age, the different burial practices, artefact types, their chronology and relation to age and sex. We lack knowledge about the structure of the urnfields, their demography, the different grave groups and the status of children. The large urnfield of Aarupgaard holds a unique possibility to study all topics concerning the Danish urnfield tradition. For contextualising the archaeological and scientific results (e.g. ^{14}C-dating and strontium isotope analysis), it is of great importance to have all the cremated human remains from Aarupgaard analysed. The results of this analysis would be of great importance for both regional and supra-regional studies of burial sites with urns, as this would improve our knowledge of the Pre-Roman Iron Age urn cemeteries in northern Europe in general.

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This volume presents the results of an international network project on Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age urnfields from northwest Europe.
Individual chapters present the archaeological material and its research history within a local, regional, or supra-regional context, demonstrating the wide range of nuances contained by the funerary phenomenon. The volume provides the first comprehensive overview of the urnfield funerary phenomenon in northwest Europe and forms the foundation for future research across national and disciplinary boundaries.
This volume successfully demonstrates that the inconspicuous urnfields of northwest Europe are not as anonymous as previously assumed but hold valuable information about life and death in the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age.

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