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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'A community of ancestors: the urnfield phenomenon in northern Europe' at the 27th European Association of Archaeologists (EAA) Annual Meeting, Kiel 2021
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Burials of the Pre-Roman Iron Age in Schleswig-Holstein. A short overview

Ingo Lütjens

Keywords: Urn cemeteries, stone structures, painted pottery, Pre-Roman Iron Age, Schleswig-Holstein

Abstract: During the Pre-Roman Iron Age in Schleswig-Holstein, the deceased were burned. Burial of the remains took place in urns either in flat graves or under or within a small barrow, respectively. During the Early Pre-Roman Age the urn was usually placed in a substantial stone packing, but afterwards this stone protection became less important. Especially during the older phase many burials, particularly to the middle and the south of the country, were marked by stone constructions above ground level. Gender-specific cemeteries represent a culture-specific phenomenon, as well as the use of painted pottery vessels as urns at the beginning of the Pre-Roman Iron Age.

Introduction[1]

During the Pre-Roman Iron Age in Schleswig-Holstein, the deceased were burned and the cremation remains mostly buried in urns. The urn cemeteries have been, and still are, often the subject of archaeological investigations, and some of them are nearly completely excavated. Thanks to the efforts of H. Hingst, several urn cemeteries have been published in the special series 'Urnenfriedhöfe Schleswig-Holsteins' (*Offa-Bücher*). Best known are the two very large cemeteries of Schwissel, Kr. (German: *Kreis* = district) Segeberg, site no. LA 1, with more than 2,800 burials (Behrends 1968; Krambeck 1992), and Groß Timmendorf, Kr. Ostholstein, site no. LA 17, with more than 1,000 burials (Hingst 1989; Fischer 2000). In addition, there are several medium-sized cemeteries with 500–1,000 burials and many smaller cemeteries with less than 100 burials. The occasional large number of burials is due to the long use-periods of some cemeteries, and the more than 2,800 Pre-Roman Iron Age burials at Schwissel are due to the continual use of the site for at least four centuries (*c.* 500–100 BCE). Small and large contemporary cemeteries are sometimes found in close proximity to each other. The smaller cemeteries with less than 500 burials were used for shorter periods of 50–200 years, but so were some of the larger cemeteries with more than 500 burials.

Calculations show that a population of a minimum of 200 individuals lived in the area of Schwissel in the Early to Late Pre-Roman Iron Age. The population around Groß Timmendorf is estimated at a minimum of 70–100 individuals. According to the current state of research, the very large cemeteries represent several settlements belonging to local communities (cf. Lütjens 2010; Ettel 2014, 198).

1 Information in this paper has already been partly published: Lütjens 2020.

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The burial traditions of the Pre-Roman Iron Age were quite diverse with occasional regional differences (cf. Hingst 1979; Lütjens 1996). Flat graves are the most dominant form of burial, but there are also secondary burials in older barrows and primary burials below small mounds of only a few metres diameter, particularly from the Early Pre-Roman Iron Age. During this early phase, the urn was deposited in a burial pit and surrounded by a stone packing. The urn was often placed on top of one or more stones and covered by a capstone or another ceramic vessel (bowl, larger vessel part). As a rule of thumb, stone constructions were less frequently used in burial constructions in the Later Pre-Roman Iron Age.

Burials found mainly in the east and south of Schleswig-Holstein were marked above ground by stone paving (Fig. 1), stone rings (Fig. 2), stone circles, rectangular stone settings and occasionally by circular or rectangular ditches (Figs. 3–4). It is not certain whether the ditches were visible above ground; they may have represented the remains of barrow enclosures, perhaps similar to the palisade-like wooden constructions at Aarupgaard urnfield (cf. Jørgensen 1975). Most of the burial markings are not preserved today due to agricultural activity and, in many cases, it remains an open question whether burials were once marked by stones or other means. Burials with and without stone markings are, however, found in close proximity and at the same depth, demonstrating that both options were in use. Although burials were often placed close to each other, an absence of overlapping indicates another form of marking above ground, perhaps in the form of easily perishable materials, e.g. wood, small hedges or bushes.

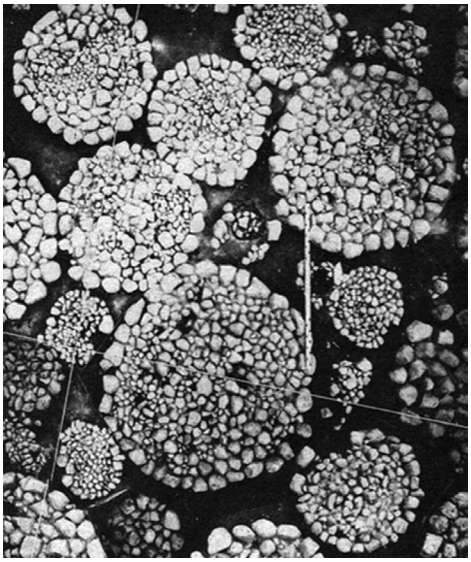


Fig. 1. Stone paving at Groß Timmendorf, Kr. Ostholstein, LA 17 (after Hingst 1989, Karte 6a).



Fig. 2. Stone ring at Ascheberg, Kr. Plön, LA 30 (photo L. Schlisio, © Archäologisches Landesamt Schleswig-Holstein).

In east Holstein, we find urn cemeteries with preserved stone structures on the surface, which is unique for northern Germany. One of these is the urn cemetery at Timmberg near Grebin (Kr. Plön, site no. LA 16). In the early 1950s, 24 stone structures from a presumably large cemetery were documented near two barrows from the Early Bronze Age (Fig. 5; cf. Hucke 1954). Because this is an extraordinarily well-preserved site, only a few stone settings were partly excavated and the monument was kept as intact as possible. The cemetery included 22 round structures with an inner diameter of 2–5 m, although two larger structures measure 12.3 and 15.8 m in diameter, respectively. The round

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Fig. 3. Circular ditch with interruptions at Bornhöved, Kr. Segeberg, LA 115 (photo I. Lütjens, © Archäologisches Landesamt Schleswig-Holstein).

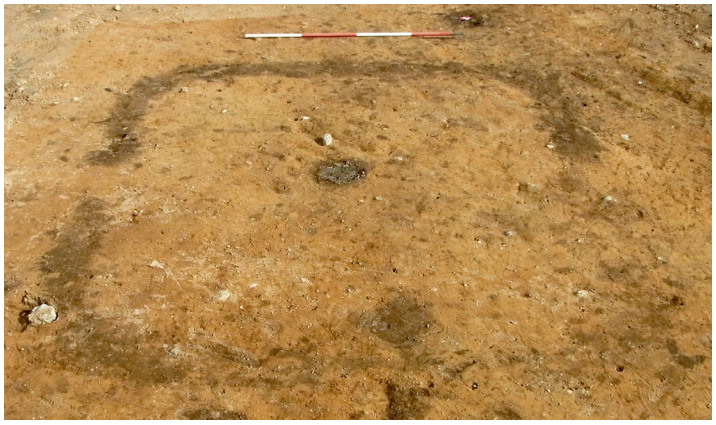


Fig. 4. A nearly square ditch with an interruption at Bornhöved, Kr. Segeberg, LA 115 (photo I. Lütjens, © Archäologisches Landesamt Schleswig-Holstein).

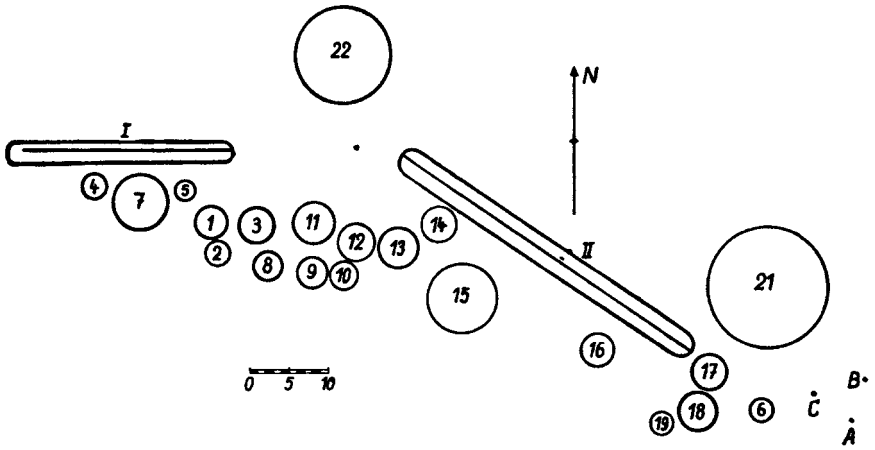


Fig. 5. Stone structures at Grebin, Kr. Plön, LA 16 (after Hucke 1954, 59 Abb. 6).

structures consisted of stone circles with large boulders around stone paving, as, for example, in Groß Timmendorf (cf. Fig. 1). The cemetery also contained two long, rectangular structures measuring 3 m in width and 29 and 45 m in length, respectively (Fig. 6). The rectangular structures have a frame of larger boulders with a stone row in the middle. One of the structures was excavated and in the middle of this was found a single urn burial. The interpretation of these structures in relation to the round structures remains uncertain, but because both types are found in connection with Early Pre-Roman Iron Age burials they are probably a form of burial marker. We do not know why

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Fig. 6. Rectangular structure at Grebin, Kr. Plön, LA 16 (photo K. Hucke, © Kreismuseum Plön).

this unusual form was chosen at Grebin, but comparable rectangular and round stone markings are also found at another large urn cemetery – Högsdorf, Kr. Plön, LA 30 – just a few kilometres away. Perhaps the rectangular structures at Grebin and Högsdorf represent a special status of the deceased buried there, although the urn grave documented within the rectangular structure at Grebin does not stand out from the remaining burials at the site.

In the course of the Pre-Roman Iron Age, a peculiarity of the Jastorf culture emerged that is difficult to explain. This is the occurrence of the first gender-specific urn cemeteries, i.e. men and women were in some instances buried separately at different cemeteries, or one gender was only represented by a few individuals at a particular cemetery (Krambeck 1992; Lütjens 1996). The phenomenon has been verified by osteological analyses and analyses of gender-related grave goods and it prevailed until the Roman Iron Age. The majority of cemeteries from the Pre-Roman Iron Age obviously still had mixed-gender burials (cf. Hingst et al. 1990; Schutkowski/Hummel 1991; Krambeck 1992, 25; Fischer 2000).

Grave content

Graves from the Early Pre-Roman Iron Age are typically very sparsely furnished, with the majority only containing the cremated human remains. Aside from single dress pins and belt equipment of bronze or more rarely iron, there are very few other objects, such as eyelet rings, spiral jewellery and plate brooches. During the Late Pre-Roman Iron Age, metal furnishings became more common and, in contrast to the Early Pre-Roman Iron Age, iron came to play a larger role than bronze. The iron objects were initially primarily dress pins, which were later replaced by fibulas and more complex belt equipment, e.g. Holstein belts (*Holsteiner Gürtel*). At the end of the Pre-Roman Iron Age, iron knives, polishing stones and bone pins became more common and weapon graves started to appear. There are, however, still many unfurnished graves, particularly from the earlier part of the Pre-Roman Iron Age. An exception to this is a wagon grave from Husby (Kr. Schleswig-Flensburg), which contained both wagon parts and a bronze cauldron. The furnishings are all in a poor state of preservation, which makes it difficult to detect social differences based on burial goods.

Eleven Early Pre-Roman Iron Age urns with a painted exterior appear to be very "exotic" for the area (Fig. 7). The urns were all found in northern and middle Holstein, six of them at the urn cemetery at Jevenstedt, Kr. Rendsburg-Eckernförde. Painted pottery from the Pre-Roman Iron Age

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is rare in northern Germany and further finds have so far only been noted in Lower Saxony. The custom was more widespread in the central German Uplands region to the south, indicating direct relations between these areas (Hingst 1979, 184–185).



Fig. 7. Painted urn from Todesfelde, Kr. Segeberg, LA 31 (photo L. Hermannsen, © Archäologisches Landesamt Schleswig-Holstein).

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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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