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

Ringo Klooß

Keywords: Urns, painted pottery, Pre-Roman Iron Age

Abstract: During archaeological investigations at Borgstedt in the Rendsburg-Eckernförde district in Schleswig-Holstein an entire burial ground of the Pre-Roman Iron Age was documented. The cemetery consisted of 90 burials – 87 urn burials and three cremation deposits without pottery. Most urns were placed in stone settings or on stones directly. The pottery vessels represent several types, among them there is also a painted exemplar, but were mainly poorly preserved. Grave furnishings include rings and ring fragments as well as dress pins. Urn no. 66 stands out with grave goods in form of a Pauken-*fibula, several beads and metal objects, perhaps indicating social differentiation within the burial ground.*

Introduction

The municipality of Borgstedt is located in the northwest of the Kr. (German: *Kreis* = district) Rendsburg-Eckernförde, at the transition of the Weichselian terminal moraine to the Schleswig-Holsteinian Geest (Fig. 1a). The predominant soils in this transition area are a mosaic of glacial till sands, till loams and glacial fluviatile sands and gravels with turf iron ore deposits. About 800 m north of the excavation area, the Duvenstedter Berge rise as a soft glacial terminal moraine.

The archaeological investigation at Borgstedt LA 72 was prompted by a planned building project, and in the course of the preliminary investigation 14 search sections were made within an area of *c.* 10 ha. Several urn burials were uncovered in the southwestern part of the preliminary investigation area. Approximately one fifth of the preliminary survey area was set aside for the main survey, which was carried out in June 2020.

Burial forms

The entire burial ground was documented in the course of the excavation. The main burial concentration is found in the southwest of the excavation area and from there urn graves spread gradually towards the northeast at increasing distances (Fig. 1b). The 90 burials consist of 87 urn graves and three cremation deposits without pottery. The majority of the urns stood within stone settings and were placed on one or more stones. Only five graves had neither stone protection nor base stones. Flint was used in the stone setting in six graves, and quartzite hammerstones in another two graves.

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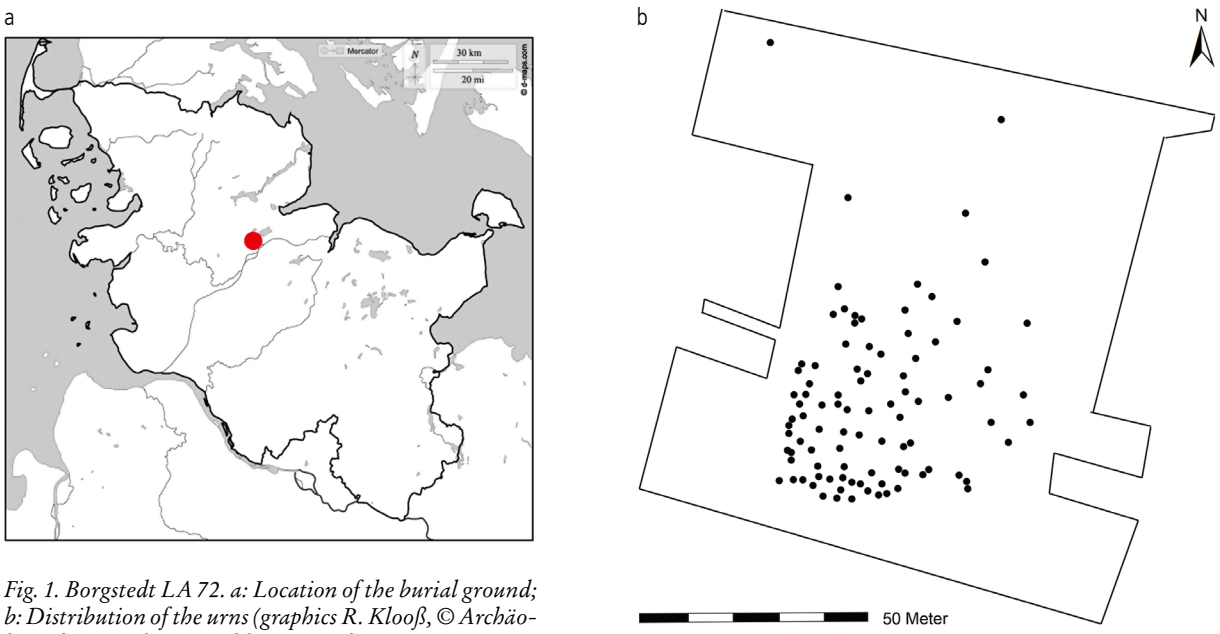


Fig. 1. Borgstedt LA 72. a: Location of the burial ground; b: Distribution of the urns (graphics R. Klooß, © Archäologisches Landesamt Schleswig-Holstein).

Funerary vessels

The state of preservation of the urns was predominantly poor to very poor. Only eleven urns were well to very well, which means completely, or almost completely, preserved. The vessels are all terrine- and vase-shaped, two- and three-parted with a conical or cylindrical neck. Most of them have a clearly defined shoulder or groove defining the transition between vessel body and neck. Seven vessels represent the Todendorf type. These vessels are all heavily shattered and incomplete.

In one case, a smaller vessel was found inside an urn. At the bottom of another urn, numerous seed imprints of *Polygonum lapathifolium* or *Polygonum persicaria* were discovered (Fig. 2a).

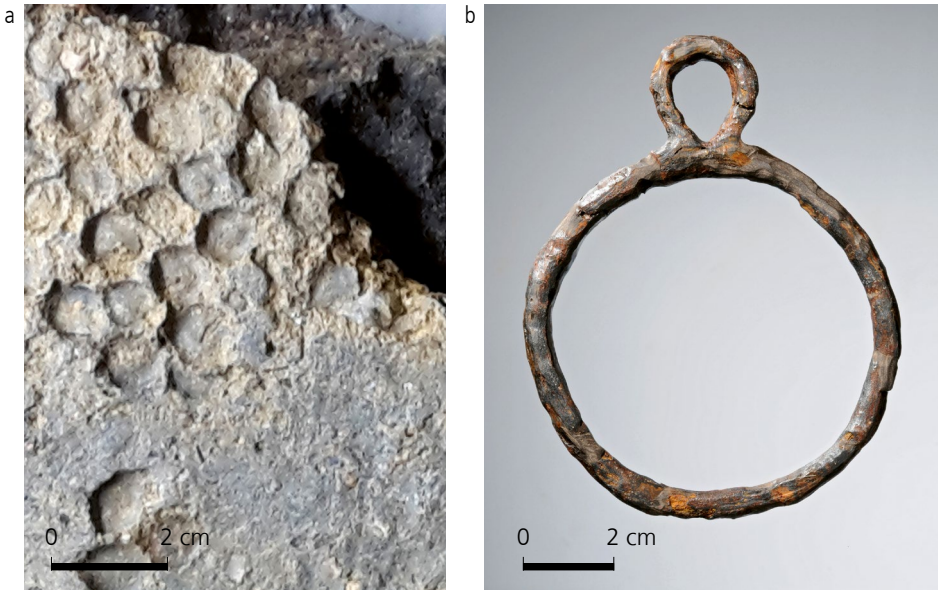


Fig. 2. Borgstedt LA 72. a: Imprints of Polygonum *seeds at the bottom of an urn; b: Iron eyelet ring (photos R. Klooß [a], L. Hermannsen [b], © Archäologisches Landesamt Schleswig-Holstein).*

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Painted pottery

One urn from Borgstedt shows decorations in the form of a chevron pattern. The vessel's shoulder is decorated with a broad band of incised rhombuses, of which each side is outlined by three striations. The upper part of the ornamentation band is marked by a groove and the lower part by a striation. The band of incised ornamentation is filled with a red colour (Fig. 3). The vessel is heavily shattered and incomplete, but it is the eleventh painted vessel known from Schleswig-Holstein in all (Hingst 1974, 51–63, supplements 1–4; Lütjens 2013, 42–43). The area around Rendsburg seems to be established as a centre of this kind of pottery finds, as nine examples of painted pottery have been found at six sites located within a 10 km radius. The Borgstedt vessel is the northernmost known example and the first example from the Schleswig area.

The geometric ornamental style in combination with painting was a short-lived phenomenon at the beginning of the Pre-Roman Iron Age. The motifs found in Schleswig-Holstein show clear similarities to Late Hallstatt pottery from southern and central Germany and demonstrate cultural influences moving from south to north. This influence is also evidenced in the distribution of the *Pauken*-fibulae (*Paukenfibeln*), which extends from southwestern Germany to the Franconian Alps and from there through Hesse and Lower Saxony to Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and Schleswig-Holstein (Bergmann 1958, map 1).



Fig. 3. Borgstedt LA 72. Painted pottery (photo L. Hermannsen, © Archäologisches Landesamt Schleswig-Holstein).

Grave content

Grave goods were recovered from 24 out of the 90 burials in total. Twelve of the 25 better-preserved urns contained grave goods. Based on this, probably about half of the burials must originally have contained grave goods. Fragments of eyelet rings (*Ösenringe*), one of them made of iron (Fig. 2b), were found in six urns, and fragments of bronze rings of various sizes were found in eight urns. The most frequent find categories are bronze and iron dress pin fragments. The heads of these were preserved in only a few cases. These include, for example, iron pins with a ball-shaped head (*Gekröpfte Kugelkopfnadeln*), iron pins with a nail-shaped head (*Nagelkopfnadeln*), an iron pin with a coiled head (*Rollenkopfnadel*) and an iron pin with a bronze bomb-shaped head (*Bombennadel*). Other find categories are belt hooks, tubes of spirally-coiled bronze ribbons and chain fragments. In addition, some heavily melted or corroded iron and bronze fragments were found. One bronze fragment probably originates from a hollow ring.

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The grave goods from the completely preserved urn no. 66 clearly stand out from the furnishings found in the other urns, both in quantity and in quality. The urn contained what appears to be a double *Pauken*-fibula of type VI/3 with a broken base (Fig. 4a). This fibula type dates to the HaD3 phase, and its distribution from southern Germany via Hesse and Lower Saxony to Schleswig-Holstein shows the path of the Late Hallstatt and Early La Tène cultural influence (Bergmann 1958, figs. 3; 10), which is similar to what is evidenced by the painted pottery. The urn also contained the only antler or bone bead found at Borgstedt, and additionally two melted glass beads and twelve fragments of such beads (Fig. 4b). One of the glass beads is decorated with a zigzag pattern. Furthermore, the urn contained numerous fragments of tubes made of spirally-coiled bronze bands, a fragmented spoke-wheel-shaped pendant (Fig. 5a) and an eyelet ring (Fig. 5b). The eyelet ring weighs 105 g and is three times heavier than comparable specimens from the site.

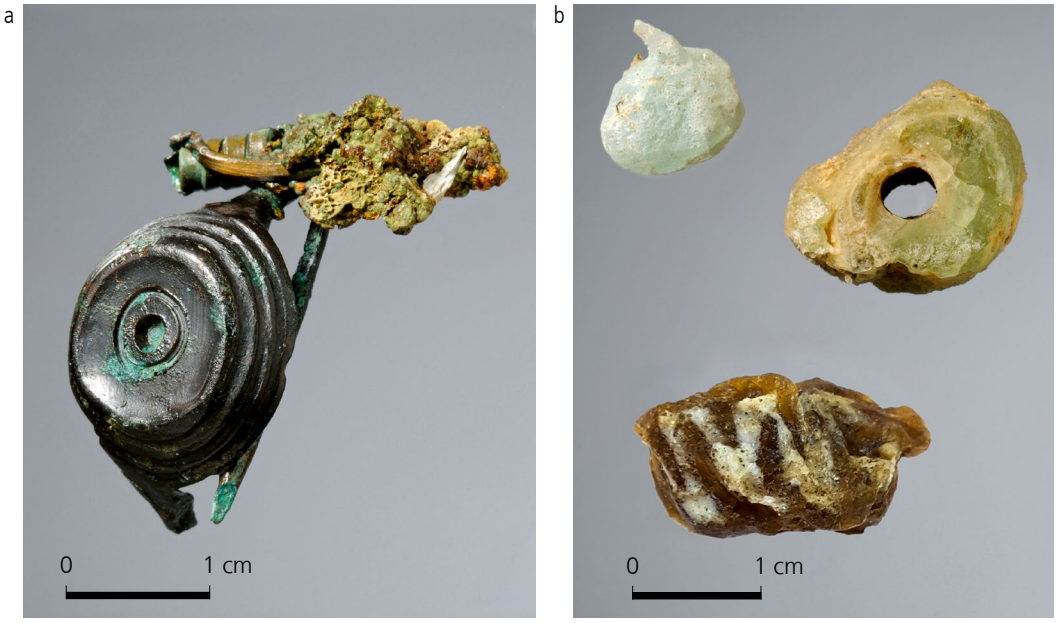


Fig. 4. Borgstedt LA 72. Grave goods from urn no. 66 – a: Pauken-*fibula; b: Glass beads (photos L. Hermannsen, © Archäologisches Landesamt Schleswig-Holstein).*

Chronology

On the basis of the grave goods, the burial site dates to stages 1b and part of 1c of the Pre-Roman Iron Age, according to Hingst (1974). No grave goods from phase Hingst 1a, which is parallel to the final Bronze Age Period Montelius VI and Late Hallstatt D (Hingst 1974, 67–71), were found in Borgstedt. In absolute chronological terms, the Borgstedt burial site dates to the 5th and to part of the 4th century BC. The distribution of the earlier eyelet rings and the later Todendorf-type funerary vessels seems to indicate that the burial site developed horizontally from south to north.

Summary

The Borgstedt site is located in a region where two trade routes cross. Here, the north-south oriented *Ochsenweg* / *Heerweg* crosses the river Eider, which flows into the North Sea. It is possible that the frequent occurrence of southern influences in the form of painted pottery in this region is the result

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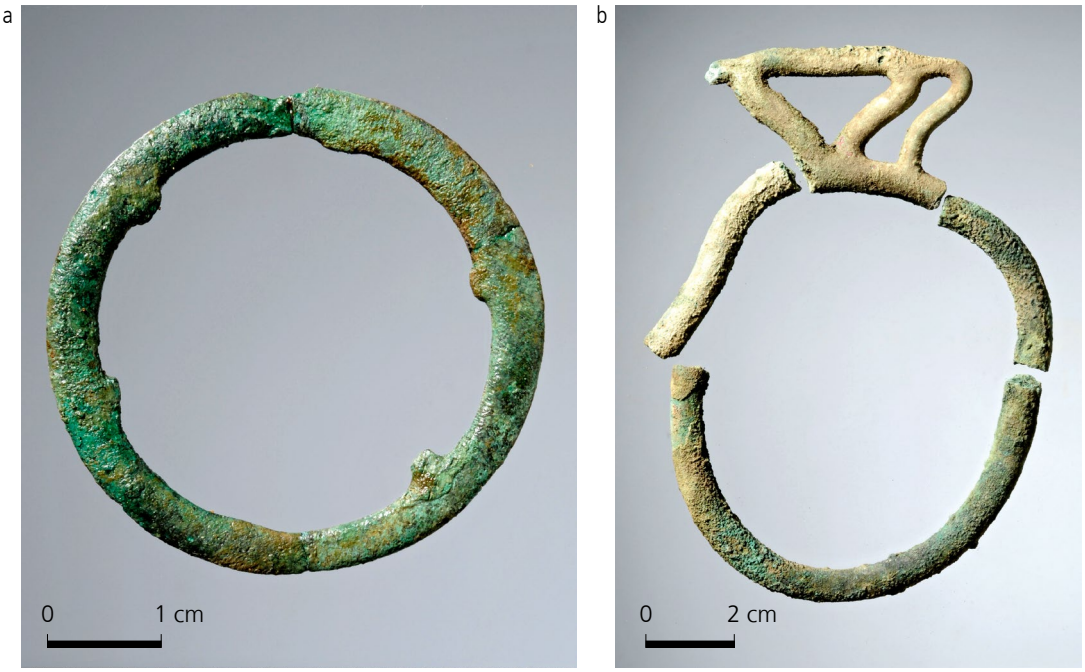


Fig. 5. Borgstedt LA 72. Grave goods from urn no. 66 – a: Spokewheel-shaped pendant; b: Eyelet ring (photos L. Hermannsen, © Archäologisches Landesamt Schleswig-Holstein).

of this favourable infrastructural location. Hingst assumed that the art of vessel painting emerged together with the iron extraction technology and that the bearers of these innovations were probably ironsmiths (Hingst 1974, 62). It is possible that the iron eyelet ring found at Borgstedt also points to this influence, as this type of artefact is usually made of bronze. The extremely richly equipped urn no. 66 indicates a social differentiation of the population. Its grave goods differ from those of the other burials, both qualitatively and quantitatively, and attest southern influences at Borgstedt. This refutes the statement that social differentiation cannot be determined based on grave goods in the Early Pre-Roman Iron Age (Hässler 1991, 226).

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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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