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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The urnfield phenomenon in Schleswig-Holstein: New insights into the chronology and hypotheses

Stefanie Schaefer-Di Maida and Jutta Kneisel

Keywords: Treatment of the dead, grave construction, northern Germany, transformation processes

Abstract: For the first time in the history of archaeological research in Schleswig-Holstein, a cemetery has been absolutely dated on a large scale. The burial ground at the site of Mang de Bargen near Bornhöved was used from the Late Neolithic until the Pre-Roman Iron Age. Most of the burials belong to the Urnfield period and were interred within the Late Neolithic and the Older Bronze Age (1800–1300/1200 BCE) burial mound areas. Due to the long period of cemetery use, the transition from inhumation to cremation as well as the change to the new type of grave construction (urn) and grave furnishings can be traced at this site. In addition, thanks to extensive dating, statements can be made on the duration of the urn cemeteries. Moreover, absolute dates from other sites in Schleswig-Holstein, which have also been dated within the project, together with the data from Mang de Bargen provide new insights into the distribution of the urnfield phenomenon in the region. Furthermore, the anthropological investigations performed as part of the project on the remains at all of these sites show interesting results in the selection of the urn type and the connection between grave goods and age groups.

Introduction

The research presented here is part of subproject D3 of the CRC 1266 'Scales of Transformation – Human-Environmental Interaction in Prehistoric and Archaic Societies' research project. In this project, Schleswig-Holstein forms the beginning of a transect of several regions via Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania to Poland, which are investigated with regard to transformations in the Bronze Age. One such decisive turning point in the Bronze Age is the change in burial practice around 1300 BCE, which is mostly associated with the urnfield phenomenon (Falkenstein 2017, 77–96). A change in funerary customs is a gradual and profound process (Hofmann 2008; Schaefer-Di Maida 2023); the particular funeral customs of a community represent an important area of life that is difficult to change. It is an aspect that presupposes a conviction and certainty about the relevance of custom and is associated with ritualised actions, such as the expression of mourning (e.g. Znoj 2012, 17–18). Accordingly, there must have been important or acceptable reasons that triggered a change in burial customs that should not be regarded as individualised, but as a common, almost simultaneous change of perception. The new treatment of the dead was not an invention of one society, but a general phenomenon that took place in Europe (Fokkens 1997, 360–373), especially in southern Germany (Kristiansen 1998; Harding 2000, 73–123; Falkenstein 2017). Based on the literature, this change can be described for the Nordic Circle (southern Scandinavia and northern Germany) mostly only on the basis of time

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periods. It falls into (Montelius') Period III, which dates between 1300 and 1100 BCE. This is an extremely long period in which to establish the time of a transformation, because we are limited by our archaeological finds classification, which does not necessarily accurately reflect when the transition actually occurred. To address this dilemma, the graves of the Mang de Bargen cemetery were examined and comprehensively dated as part of the project (Schaefer-Di Maida 2023). In addition, a few selected Period III burials all over Schleswig-Holstein were dated in order to obtain a comprehensive picture for the region and to be able to compare and evaluate the transition process on different spatial levels. Additional anthropological analyses also provide evidence for social differentiations that most likely accompanied the change in burial practice (Storch 2023). Further changes in Schleswig-Holstein's find spectra, hoard rites, and house construction show that the changes in the treatment of the dead and in grave construction were part of a complex transformation process.

Mang de Bargen site

The site is located in southeastern Schleswig-Holstein on the Cimbrian Peninsula, in the district (German: *Kreis* [Kr.]) of Segeberg, about 30 km south of Kiel (Fig. 1). In the Bronze Age, burial mounds were built there on the edge of an end moraine, clustered into groups. They were recorded in the 1960s as part of the archaeological survey of the country. The Mang de Bargen cemetery forms one of the twenty groups of barrows located along the end moraine, and these barrows were mapped as barrow group 'K' by H. Schwerin von Krosigk in 1976, but only partially described in more detail. Thereby, 23 barrows and one long barrow were recorded for this cemetery with regard to preservation, dimensions, and height visible above ground (Schwerin von Krosigk 1976, 106–108). During excavations in the course of modern gravel extraction, 18 barrows and one urnfield were finally verified. Most of the site had already been excavated between 2004 and 2014 by the State Archaeological Office (Lütjens 2008, 30–35; 2014; Burkhardt 2014). With the investigations within the above-mentioned subproject of the CRC between 2016 and 2019, work on the site could be completed and data finally analysed (Schaefer-Di Maida 2023). The Mang de Bargen site is situated not far from two locations of pollen assemblages that were used for palynological analyses. At a maximum distance of 500 m as the crow flies from the burial ground, a peat hole (MDB 1 profile) allows conclusions to be drawn about local landscape developments (Fig. 1). Furthermore, a laminated pollen profile is available from Lake Belau, which is located approximately 3–4 km as the crow flies from the Mang de Bargen site. The archaeological data are thus excellently complemented by ecological data, which allow a landscape reconstruction in precise time slices.

The burial mounds were built between the Late Neolithic and the end of the Older Bronze Age (1800–1300/1200 BCE). During the Younger Bronze Age (1300/1200–500 BCE) extensive secondary burial took place around some of these barrows. These latter burials already give the impression of urnfields, as they are highly clustered and sometimes appear in small groups. A 'proper' urn burial ground is located to the southeast between three barrows and dates to the pre-Roman Iron Age. The area around the cemetery was also used for cooking-stone pits and other activities; therefore, the cemetery was not isolated but embedded in a frequently-used landscape (Schaefer-Di Maida 2018).

Bronze Age

Burial development

Of the 18 excavated burial mounds at the site, three can be assigned to the Late Neolithic and 15 to the Older Bronze Age. The majority of the primary graves are inhumations, mostly buried in

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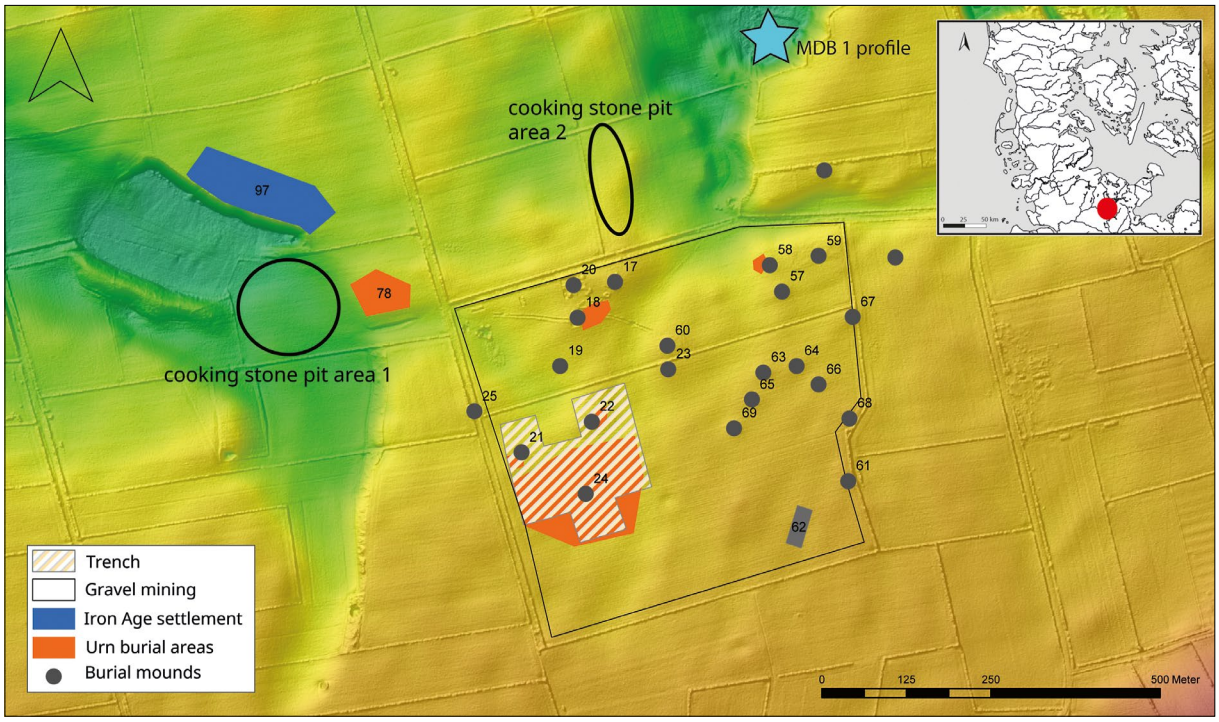


Fig. 1. The site of Mang de Bargen in Schleswig-Holstein (data after Lütjens *2014 and DGM2 © GeoBasis-DE/LvermGeoSH; graphics S. Schaefer-Di Maida).*

treetrunk coffins on stone constructions of varying complexity. Mound LA 57 has the same type of construction but revealed cremated remains. Secondary burials in the mounds were carried out from the Late Neolithic to the Younger Bronze Age. The Late Neolithic and Older Bronze Age secondary burials continued to maintain the customary grave construction method and were also covered by a new/extended mound after they were interred in the existing mound. Meanwhile, the Younger Bronze Age burials were cremations on stone pavements and urn burials. They were often located in the east of the mound, but sometimes in the west, and the majority (75 %) were concentrated outside the mound. Just one was buried in the mound mantle and a few (n = 6) were placed either at the far edge within, or immediately in front of, the mound rim. The urns were mostly protected by stones, which consisted of rolled stones, kerbstones, and split pieces. Less frequently, stone slabs were used for protection. Above the urn, the stone packing was often sealed off with some sort of cover packing. Sometimes the urns had a cover – a slab, a vessel piece, or an upright or inverted bowl. Rarely, a capstone was used. The vessels usually stood on a base made of several stones, less often on a single stone, a stone slab (e.g. of granite) or, even more rarely, on several stone slabs. The cremation burials on stone pavements were mostly interred in the mound rim area, sometimes outside the mound, and rarely in the mound mantle. Overall, however, it is noticeable that they are relatively close to the mound, so a clear relationship can be established, while some urn burials, on the other hand, may be further away. The graves have an average length of about 1.5 m and an average width of about 0.6 m. Mostly the stone packing, sometimes multi-layered, has a rounded-rectangular shape. More rarely it is rather irregular. Overall, the Younger Bronze Age burials were seldom interred in the mound mantle, but were mostly buried flat in the ground in the immediate vicinity of the burial mounds, concentrated mainly around mounds LA 18 and LA 58 (Fig. 2). With the Pre-Roman Iron Age, the burial activities were concentrated in one area, which still included three Bronze Age barrows (see below).

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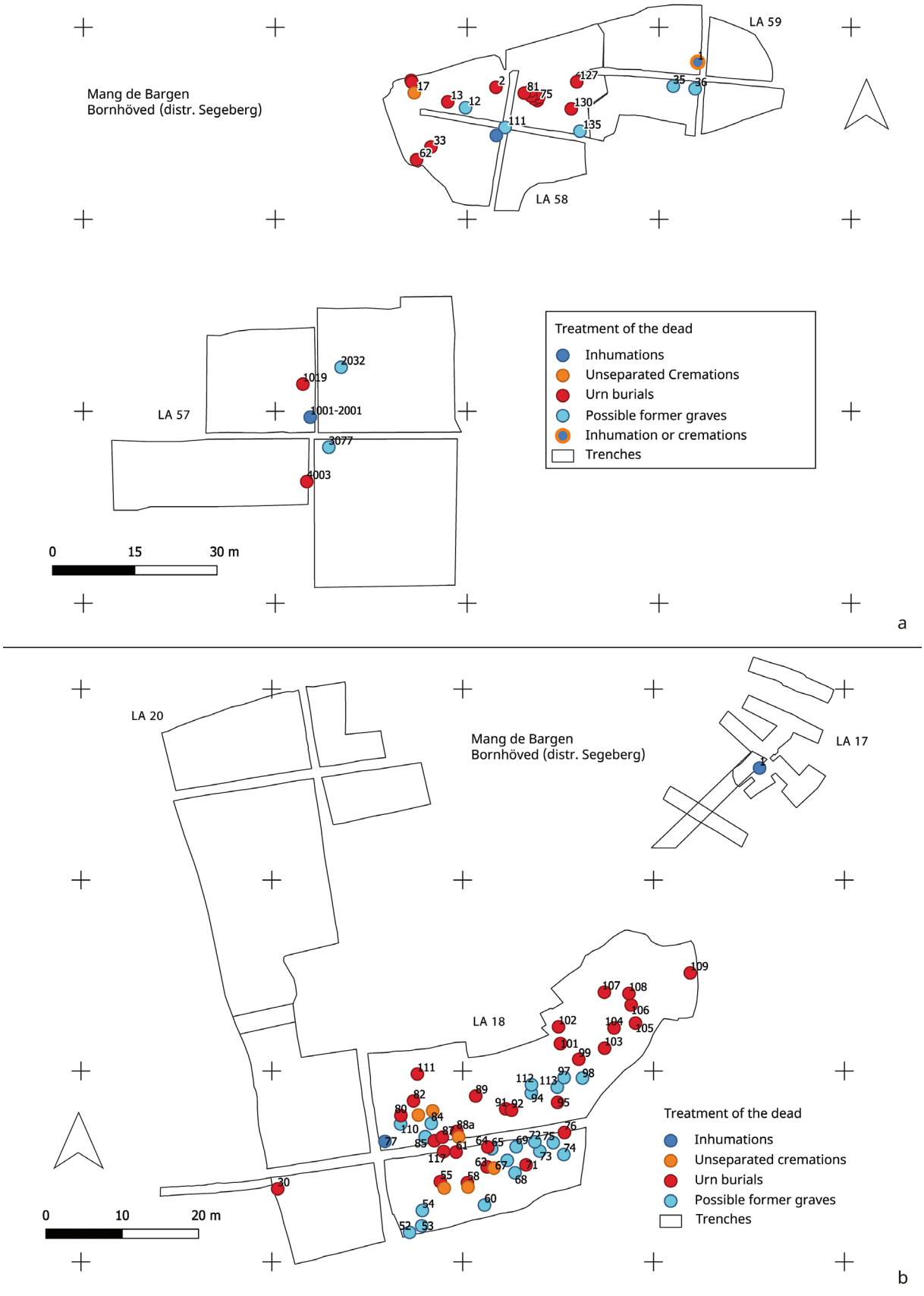


Fig. 2. Distribution of graves around the burial mounds (a: LA 58; b: LA 18) at Mang de Bargen (graphics S. Schaefer-Di Maida).

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Chronology: From inhumation to cremation

Approximately 76 % of the Bronze Age graves were radiocarbon-dated (54 of 68 graves; Fig. 3). The dates were measured at the Leibniz Laboratory in Kiel and calibrated using the OxCal calibration program (Reimer et al. 2020; Bronk Ramsey 2009). The sequence of the dated burials shows that the burial change first appeared in the treatment of the dead and only later in the grave construction (Fig. 4). According to the absolute dates, the primary grave of mound LA 57 represents the first cremation burial at the site. Due to poor preservation, the last inhumation at the site could not be absolutely dated, meaning we can only estimate the moment of transition concerning the first cremation, which dates to between 1438 and 1293 cal BCE (2σ), i.e. from the middle of Period II to the beginning of Period III. This was shortly after followed by a secondary burial of an urn in the mound area of LA 18 between 1433 and 1291 cal BCE (2σ). Again shortly afterwards, two cremation burials that collectively date from 1386 to 1127 cal BCE were placed on stone pavements in the LA 18 area. After a further interval in time, 42 radiocarbon-dated urn burials followed, but only four cremation burials on stone pavements could be dated. They all cover a period between 1214 and 517 cal BCE. One urn was still buried in the younger Bronze Age section of the urnfield, even though the Pre-Roman Iron Age section of the urnfield was possibly already in use, with at least three urn burials dating to between 744 and 404 cal BCE in the burial mound area of LA 18. Since these graves date to the 'Hallstatt plateau', the time spans are unfortunately very long. Based on the few dates from the Iron Age section of the cemetery, it can be assumed that the area was used for burial between 770 and 60 cal BCE. Some finds from the graves even point to a later dating at around the beginning of our common era. Considering this sequence, the temporal transition from cremations in treetrunk coffins to those in urns seems to have occurred almost simultaneously, but it shows only one side of this transition process, as we can observe mainly the introduction of cremation and less the end of inhumation due to the lack of datable bone material. However, in order to examine this moment more closely, further cremation burials from Schleswig-Holstein that were still buried in burial mounds but also already in urns were absolutely dated within the framework of the project. In the course of this, the oldest cremation burial so far, which was still buried in a treetrunk coffin under a burial mound, was discovered. This grave is in Albersdorf and dates to between 1533 and 1427 cal BCE (2σ; burnt bone material), i.e. from the end of Period I to the middle of Period II.

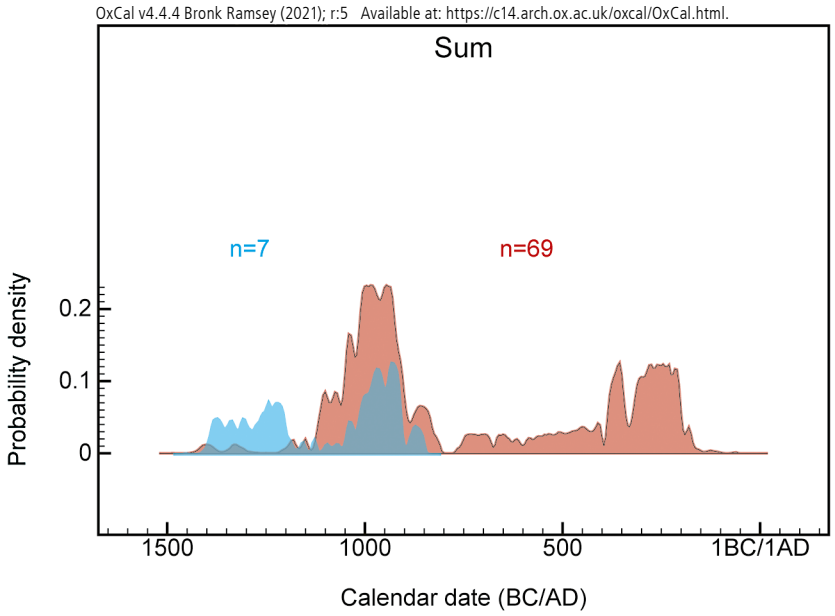


Fig. 3. Sum calibration of the absolutely dated urn burials (red distribution) and cremations on stone pavements (blue distribution) at Mang de Bargen (graphics S. Schaefer-Di Maida).

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The early date from Albersdorf shows that it is probably one of the first cremation burials in the study area. An establishment of the new treatment of the dead alongside the old grave construction practice should be assumed on the basis of the coinciding data from the end of Period II as taking place around 1300 BCE; cremation had, compared to inhumation, become the dominant practice in Period III. The establishment of cremation also marks the beginning of the use of the new type of grave construction, namely urn graves, which must have become an integral part of the burial system by 1200 BCE at the latest. Urn burial and the scattering of cremated remains on stone pavements were practiced at Mang de Bargen at the same time (Fig. 4); therefore, cremation burials on stone pavements here are not a transitional form and thus contrast with some other Schleswig-Holstein sites (e. g. Bornhöved LA 4; Grevenkrug LA 2; Wahlstedt LA 31, Leezen LA 64; Nützen LA 13), which, according to absolute data (Schaefer-Di Maida 2023), show a different behaviour: The majority of these other sites show a temporal gap between the use of cremation burials on stone pavements and the use of urns (Aner/Kersten 1991), but it must be pointed out that these sites were only dated according to relative chronology.

These changes took place at the beginning of the urnfield phenomenon influence, which is also evident at the Mang de Bargen site in the change in material culture, especially from 1200 BCE onwards. While in Period II (Hornstrup et al. 2012) mainly weapons and tools dominate the grave goods, from the middle of Period III onwards only costume components, such as dress pins, buttons or rings, and personal objects, such as razors or awls, are found. Weapons are then no longer present. This type of equipment continues in Periods IV and V. With Period VI, new forms developed, but the traditions of, for example, the addition of dress pins continued. With the Iron Age, again new forms developed as well as new categories of finds, such as belt parts. Besides the metal objects, the ceramic spectrum also shows fundamental changes. While there are no, or hardly any, pottery vessels from the Late Neolithic and Period I, small beakers are recorded for Period II. Then, from Period III

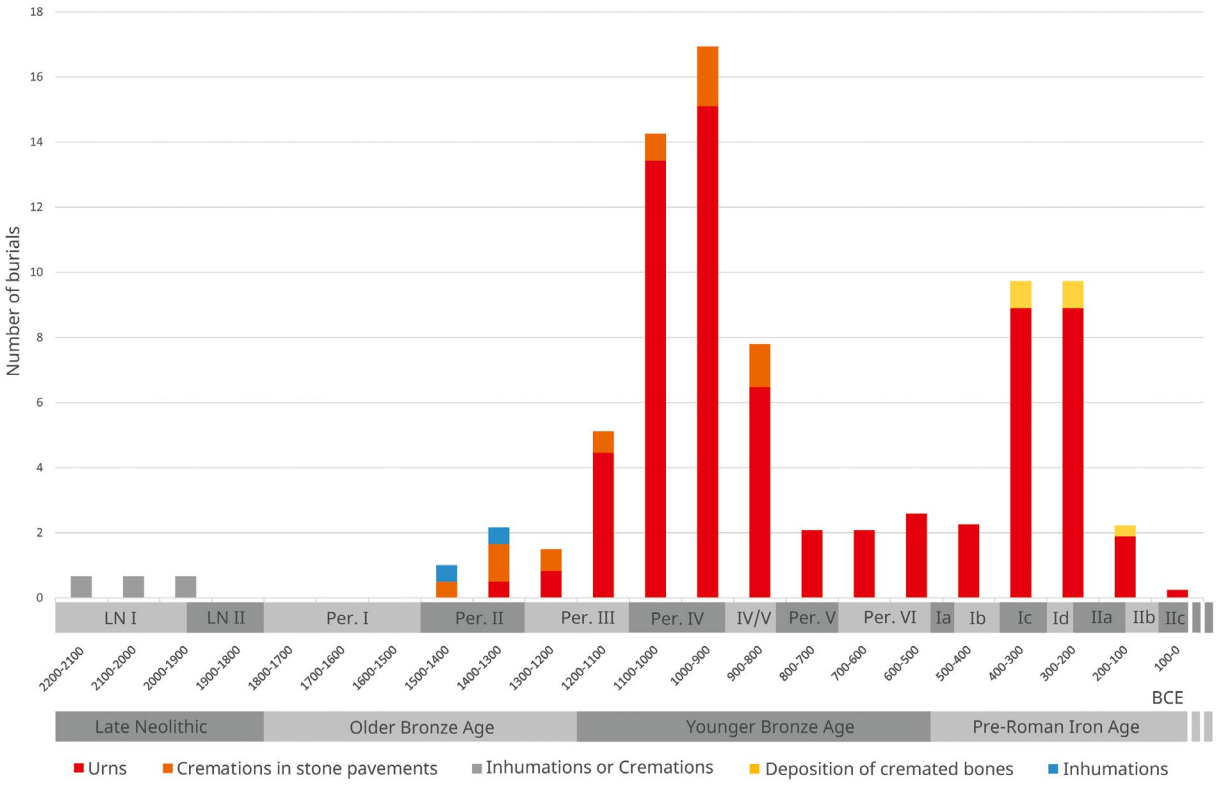


Fig. 4. Grave types at Mang de Bargen, dated according to relative as well as absolute chronology (graphics S. Schaefer-Di Maida).

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onwards, a rise in ceramic vessels can be observed, with a strong increase in the size and variety of forms. In addition to pots/barrels, tureens, double coni, and bowls (including a *Lappenschale mit Randzipfeln*), it was also possible to reconstruct a decorated cone-neck-shaped special form that can be integrated into a northern European contact network (Kneisel 2012, 152). Then, in Period VI, new forms and decorations developed (e.g. tripartite tureens with *Winkelbandmuster*). With the Iron Age, new forms appear again, but the vessels at Mang de Bargen, due to poor preservation, often do not allow a reconstruction.

Initial investigations of the burial sequence at two of the barrows, which show a long period of occupancy with many later urn burials, permit a hypothesis on the use of the cemetery to be formulated by using Bayesian model calculations. It was examined whether shorter intervals (e.g. 2 ± 5 years) in the burial sequence are more possible than those taken as an average based on the total time period over which the mounds were used (Kneisel et al. 2022). A duration of 75 years (LA 18) and 45 years (LA 58) roughly corresponds to the life span of a house (Müller 2011, 176). It can thus be hypothesised that the graves in barrows LA 18 and LA 58 may have belonged to a small burial community.

Anthropology

The anthropological determination of the cremated remains from the Mang de Bargen site allows conclusions to be drawn about possible social relationships that may be reflected at the cemetery. For the analysis, burnt bones were selected from features that were still preserved and relevant with regard to the grave goods and the find context. Only bones that were anthropologically examined were also absolutely dated. Some of the cremated remains were anthropologically determined by Helene Agerskov Rose and Katharina Fuchs in the course of preliminary investigations (n = 67), other remains (n = 29) were subjected to a full anthropological investigation by Susanne Storch. The cremated remains allowed a classification into age groups (infans 1: 0–6 years, infans 2: 7–12 years, juvenilis (early/late): 13–18–20 years, adultus: 20–40 years, maturus: 40–60 years, senilis: >60 years; after Acsádi/Nemeskéri 1970, 104), but not a sex determination. At first glance, the group of juveniles (n = 14) and children (n = 23–24) predominated in the age spectrum. Adults and senile persons (n = 6–7), on the other hand, formed the minority. Nine cremations allowed only very imprecise classifications of the remains, ranging from infancy to senile age. The spatial distribution of cremations around the burial mounds shows a separation of child and juvenile burials. It is noticeable that children tended to be buried near a mound, while juvenile individuals and adults up to seniles were buried further away from it. Burial groups of children and juveniles are also known from mound LA 58, but here juveniles (perhaps up to a certain age group) were still buried together with children. Accordingly, it is reasonable to assume a complex order that may have provided access to a burial complex. It should be noted that the division into the categories 'children' and 'juveniles' according to certain age groups is based on modern standards that as such do not necessarily have to apply to Bronze Age societies. A division into 'children' and 'juveniles' could also have been dependent on elements other than age, which determined the location on the burial site. In this context, 'social age' must also be taken into account, which may have been culturally determined and associated in a society with certain ideas, characteristics, tasks, and evaluations (Hofmann 2008, 159). For children and juveniles, the choice of burial vessel showed many variations (including a special form), while adults and seniles usually received the same vessel form (the majority were cylindrical vessels [*eingliedrige Tonnen*]). For infants also, only these *eingliedrige Tonnen* were used as urns, so they received the same uniform vessels as adults. With regard to the grave goods, comparable conclusions can be drawn. While the range of grave goods from adults to seniles is rather concentrated on tools, dress pins and ring jewellery, the graves of children and juveniles very often contain grave goods such as vessels and buttons, but also tools, dress pins and ring jewellery. Occasionally, a fossil and food remains were also found among the grave furnishings of juveniles. The grave goods show less diversity than the grave vessels;

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nevertheless, the grave goods show a tendency towards the equal treatment of older children/juveniles and adults, while very young infants did not receive any grave goods. Furthermore, it is noticeable that juveniles were more diversely equipped than children, so it can be assumed that the grave goods were person-related and emphasised personality as well as social status, and possibly gender. Based on the correlations between age, grave goods, grave vessels, and location, it can be assumed that the burials at the site were structured in a deliberate way, which may reflect a social, perhaps familial, division of society. Assuming that the present age distribution is representative, the thesis can be formulated that in Periods III and IV secondary burials in and around mounds were preferentially reserved for children and juveniles, while adults were located further away from the mound or in flat cemeteries – assuming that no other adult burials were located in higher strata and had already been removed by agricultural activity. Possibly the burials of children and juveniles in barrows were considered to be in need of particular protection – on the one hand in the sense of maintenance of a burial monument whose future whereabouts were possibly considered more secure, on the other hand in the form of the symbolic protection by possible ancestors who were the first to be buried in the barrow.

Iron Age

The graves

An urn burial ground with 201 Pre-Roman Iron Age graves is located at the southern edge of the barrow field between three mounds (LA 21, 22, 24) which can probably be assigned to the Older Bronze Age (Fig. 5). Due to the partly very poor state of preservation of the graves (caused by uncontrolled removal of the topsoil), reconstruction of the vessels is very difficult and some graves are so heavily disturbed that statements about them are no longer possible. Some grave goods or parts of burnt bones were even found loose in the ground. Regarding the construction, urns and cremation deposits can be distinguished. The urns were differently preserved depending on their location. The grave construction was mostly limited to protective stones, which could consist of stone slabs as well as boulders. Due to the predominantly moderate preservation, just the stone base and the construction slabs were preserved (125 urn graves), so that a more or less compact and closed stone protection around each urn can only be assumed. A covering by a stone (nine graves) occurred only sporadically. Even more rarely, the urns were covered with another vessel (four graves). A covering by stone pavement of the protective stones was also partly reconstructable. Sometimes no construction could be detected, but it must not be assumed that the urn was buried free-standing, but rather that the construction was largely destroyed (10 urn graves). Only in two cases were urns placed in stone cists (features 90 and 346). In terms of finds, belt parts with belt hooks, belt plates, rings with and without ferrules, and strap ends dominate. Furthermore, dress pins were often added to the grave goods. Among them are Holstein pins, a 3-disc-head pin, nail-head pins or swan-necked ones. Only occasionally were fibulae (among others a ball brooch), an eye ring, awls, an amber bead or a knife fragment found in the burials.

The construction for cremation deposits consisted of a stone setup, with no indication of a burial vessel. This mostly included a stone shelter, which was made of boulders and sometimes of stone slabs. In three cases, only a stone accumulation was found. In cases where no stone protection and no stone accumulation could be proved, there was only a base stone underneath the cremation deposit, which could indicate a former construction.

Chronology

^{14}C-dating was performed for some of the Iron Age burials (*c.* 14 %; 28 graves; Fig. 6). The earliest three dates have calibrated ^{14}C-ages of around 2450 BP, coinciding with the Hallstatt plateau. This

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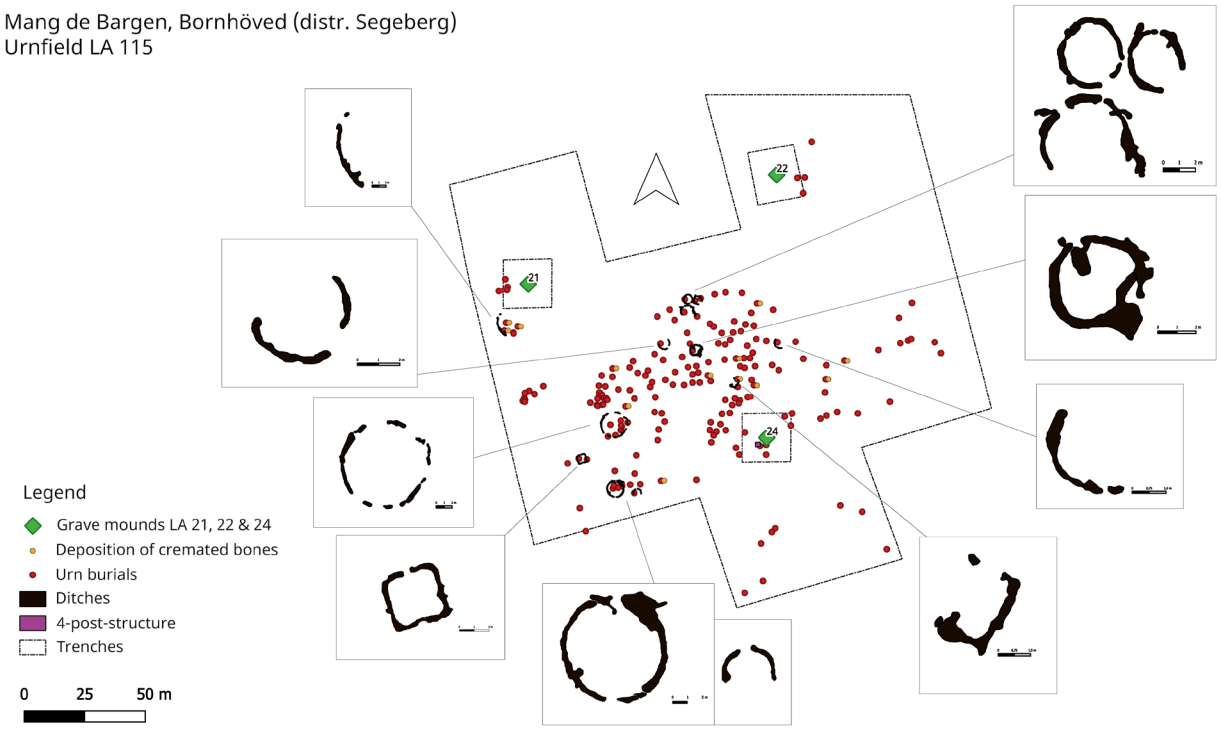


Fig. 5. The urnfield LA 115 at Mang de Bargen (graphics S. Schaefer-Di Maida).

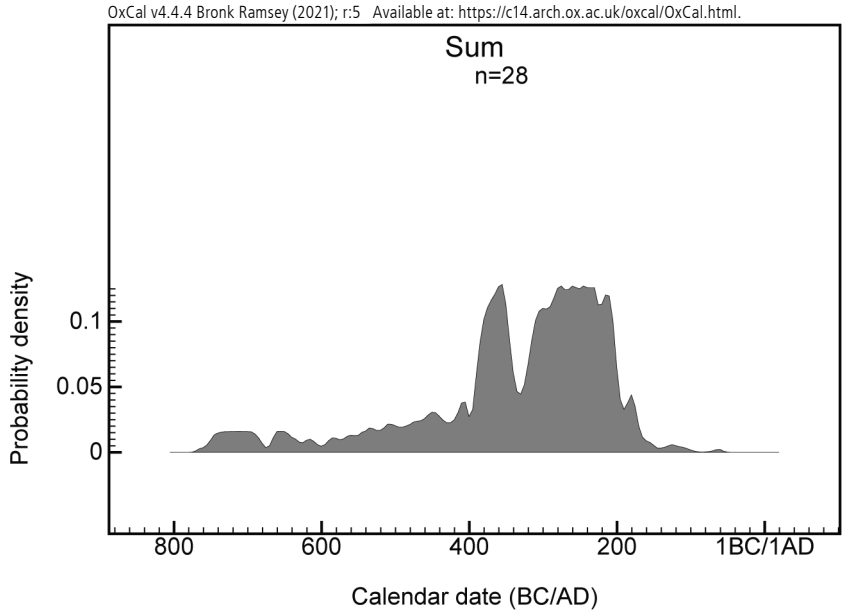


Fig. 6. Sum calibration of absolutely dated graves from the Pre-Roman Iron Age cemetery LA 115 at Mang de Bargen (graphics S. Schaefer-Di Maida).

does not allow a more precise dating than to between 800 and 400 cal BCE. The following three dates are again more precise and suggest a beginning of burials in the LA 115 cemetery between 726 and 395 cal BCE, i.e. between the mid/end of Period V and phase Ib (according to Hingst 1959; see Kneisel 2021). A 68 % probability shows the beginning of Iron Age burials only around 500 cal BCE as well as their end around 400 cal BCE, which would mean phases Ia to Ib for initial buri-

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als (as far as they have been dated). The unmodelled, calibrated dates show a uniform distribution of burials between 405 and 60 cal BCE, i.e. between the mid/end of phase Ib and the end of phase IIc, or with a 68 % probability only up to 100 cal BCE, which would be at the end of phase IIb. Based on these dates from the burial ground, two phases of burials can be assumed – an earlier and shorter one, *c.* 700–400 cal BCE, and a younger and longer one, *c.* 400–100/60 cal BCE. The grave goods confirm a use of the urn cemetery between the end of the Younger Bronze Age and Iron Age stage IIb. Considering the finds, a main Iron Age phase of use can be assumed in stage IIa, i.e. *c.* 250–150 BCE, which is consistent with the large number of absolute dates pointing to this period. Accordingly, the urnfield was used for burials from the end of the Late Bronze Age until phase IIb (according to Hingst 1959), i.e. based on the finds and the absolute dating, from 770 to 60 cal BCE.

Burial ditches

Some burials were enclosed by a circular ditch, which usually surrounded just a single central grave. Larger ditches enclosed up to eight graves, the arrangement of which in the ditch varied. Ditches were always open to the north, so Lütjens assumes a deliberate positioning (Lütjens 2014, 32). Twelve such ditches were found, two of which were only rudimentarily reconstructable. Only one was square, another one was rounded-rectangular to ring-shaped. They all showed different profile shapes – from trough-shaped to rectangular, pointed to irregular, and they were filled with humic sand. The diameters of the entire ditch circles vary greatly from between 1.8 to 10 m. The widths of the ditches range from 0.2 to 0.7 m and the depths from 0.1 to 1.5 m. A spatial arrangement of the ditches at the cemetery cannot be determined. The reason for this can partly be assumed to be a deficit in preservation due to unattended soil removal by gravel quarrying. The absolute dating shows that the graves placed centrally in the ditch do not date from any particular time horizon. It can be assumed that mainly social aspects played a role in the placement. Circular ditches at Younger Bronze Age and Iron Age cemeteries in Schleswig-Holstein are rare but not uncommon. They also occur, for example, in the district of Pinneberg (Younger Bronze Age; Schmidt 2018, 24–33), Westfalen (Brink-Kloke et al. 2006; Wilhelmi/Herrmann 1981), in northeastern Lower Saxony (Late Bronze Age; Fries/Näth 2008, 167–168), Denmark (see below), and also in the Netherlands and Belgium (Van Beek/Louwen 2012, 48, 50–51; Verlinde 1987, 198–199). In southern Germany they are also known as 'grave gardens' (*Grabgärten*; Becker 1995, 75–76). They can occur in different forms. While at Mang de Bargen we have predominantly circular ditches and an occasional square ditch structure, keyhole-shaped and rectangular forms are also known from Overijssel (Netherlands), for example (Verlinde 1987). In general, multiple burials within such a barrier-like construction are to be assumed to symbolically demarcate or enclose social connections (e.g. familial; hierarchical; social). At the site of Groß Timmendorf, for example, several urns are grouped together underneath stone pavements. The burials were demonstrably mostly not simultaneous (Fischer 2000, 38) – as is also the case at Mang de Bargen. Another parallel to the ditches at Mang de Bargen is offered by the Pre-Roman Iron Age (500–200 BCE) site of Aarupgaard in southwest Jutland. There, each urn burial was surrounded with a ditch (Rose 2020).

Discussion

Compiling the presented results, it can be said that, for the change in burial customs in Bronze and Iron Age Schleswig-Holstein, we have a first step: the change in the treatment of the dead from inhumation to cremation, and then a second step: the change in the type of grave construction (burial mound and treetrunk coffin) to the urn grave (with stone construction). Therefore, the implementation of cremation burials and the establishment of the urn graves are discussed below as two different

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transformations. We assume that the so-called urnfield phenomenon, which included the establishment of urns as proper burial vessels, appeared in the research area around 1100 BCE. At the Mang de Bargen site, the development of urn burials could be traced as follows: 1) secondary burials in the burial mound, 2) burial areas adjacent to burial mounds, 3) urnfields independent of burial mounds. The latter can be situated within sight of barrows and thus still refer to them. Early cremation burials in Schleswig-Holstein which also occurred near water (cf. Albersdorf: Aner/Kersten 1991, 5–6; Schaefer-Di Maida 2023) could indicate that the custom of cremation did not necessarily have to have spread from south to north, but could have taken other routes, and thus an influence from the north or northwest would also be possible. Likewise, early urn burials, such as those in Mang de Bargen or further north in Schleswig-Holstein, or even on the North Frisian Islands, suggest that the urn burial custom also had a diffuse spread. A reconstruction of the transmission routes is accordingly difficult. It can only be assumed that cremation burial was either an independent development from the north, or that it was brought in by local or perhaps non-local travellers and thus allowed different but synchronous transmission. Because of the use of sea routes, diffuse processes of transmission are possible.

The simultaneous emergence of new symbols indicating new cosmological knowledge may suggest changes in worldview as a trigger. A new ideology may have interacted with other spheres of life and thus affected the construction of graves and houses. The cremation of the dead thereby signifies an irreversible physical (and perhaps spiritual) transformation of the body. It is thereby transferred into a state that is easier to handle in terms of both weight and substance (avoiding the process of decomposition). Burial rituals can thus last longer or be 'postponed' (Oestigaard 2013, 500). Fire may also have played a certain role. For Bronze Age burial rites, it is very likely that they did not represent an isolated area of life but were entangled with many elements that characterise a society (cf. Hofmann 2008, 99).

The change in the treatment of the dead is accompanied by a change in the material culture. Hoard finds decrease considerably with Period III, so it can be assumed that a decline of ritual or economic significance took place in hoarding routines. The range of deposits was limited to costume items and tools. In barrows, the amount of bronze objects remained stable, while in flat graves their numbers actually increased slightly, resulting in a balance of similar finds in flat graves and barrows. The increase in the abundance of grave goods in the previously poorly equipped flat graves might show the start of the change towards more egalitarian social structures (Kneisel 2021). This is supported by the new funerary compositions: In burial mounds, costume items, toiletry utensils, and pottery were included as before, while weapons, though less common, were still represented in high variance as grave goods in Period II. A few tools such as awls completed the assemblage. The amount of ceramic grave goods increases strongly with Period III. The number of grave goods per grave remains stable at between one and up to nine items. In flat graves, grave goods increase considerably with Period III and show compositions of pottery, costume and toiletry utensils. With up to six grave goods per grave, the flat grave inventories are no longer as distinguishable from those of the barrow graves as before. Overall, the range of grave goods from Period III can be characterised as very varied, since gold, glass, and especially pottery finds increased. Amber finds, however, decreased. The decline of weapons and the concentration on more personal objects, such as parts of costume and toiletry utensils, may have resulted from a presumed lower availability of bronze in general, which is especially reflected in the decrease of depositions as mentioned above, which need not mean an economic change but changes in certain routines, driven by social, cultural and symbolic transformations (Brück/Fontijn 2013). The change in burial practice indicates a central social change, in that it was no longer only certain persons who received a grave with a lot of grave goods, but now the great masses were buried with everyday objects but not a remarkable number of them. The change in grave goods could have been a matter of emphasising the personal relationship between the included objects and the

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personality of the deceased, which was possibly diminished through cremation, where the body is reduced to the point of being unrecognisable (Williams 2013, 198–199).

With the establishment of the new burial custom, which at first still followed the old patterns of grave construction, there was at the same time a slight decrease in mound construction and a slight increase in flat graves, which from then on contained almost exclusively cremations. Cooperative patterns (e.g. mound building, house building) or the committed engagement of individuals within a community to be cooperative on behalf of a larger group and the associated social roles are likely to have lost importance. The cultivation of identity formation within large groups thus declined, which is also reflected in the reduction of house sizes and thus households. In this context, the new social concept must have been more conducive to a better (survival) life of a population that focused on smaller social units. The basis of this decision must have been complex, since, following the decline in depositions, it does not seem to have been primarily economic, but rather social and ideological (Brück/Fontijn 2013). A model corresponding to this perspective has already been drawn by Roymans/Kortlang (1999), but applied to a different dataset for the southern Netherlands.

During this phase, an increase in activity is noticeable in the pollen profile of Lake Belau until 1300 BCE, as evidenced, for example, by the increase in hazel and cereals, while tree pollen declined. Feeser infers the use of forest grazing and livestock during this phase, which shows stable values from 1300 BCE onward (Feeser et al. 2023). The occurrence of millet (*Panicum miliaceum*), which is characterised by short growing seasons, thus shows increased control of land use (Effenberger 2018, 96; Kneisel et al. 2012, 276). Furthermore, millet requires a certain preparation of the soil with a hook, so new knowledge about cultivation techniques and new types of cereals can be observed (Effenberger 2018, 98). The performance of work in general as well as ownership and access rights (e.g. to fields, grassland) may also have changed in the course of the above mentioned developments.

Accordingly, this transformation phase can be seen as a drastic process that caused the establishment of the new mortuary rite and the accompanying socio-economic changes. This restructuring can be seen not only in Schleswig-Holstein, but also throughout Europe. The new treatment of the dead thus represents the transformative beginning of a development that continued to progress with the change in grave construction. The first urns appear at the Mang de Bargen site between the late 15th century and the beginning of the 13th century BCE, but they do not become dominant until the first half of the 12th century BCE. They do not appear to have become well established until *c.* 1200/1150 BCE. For all of Schleswig-Holstein, urn burial construction can also be assumed to have been established from 1150 BCE (i.e. the transition from Period III to IV). Burial mound construction at Mang de Bargen declined sharply at this time and coffin use also reached a low point. Cremation burials on stone pavements, which initially became established at the site at the same time as the urn burials, were only short-lived; flat graves, which are now almost exclusively to be recorded in the form of flat urn graves, increased strongly. Cremations that were placed secondarily in burial mounds show only a very small increase. The establishment of urn burials in this phase can thus be observed as unique, since the number of urn burials also reached a maximum within a short period of time (*c.* 1200–1000 BCE), which numerically exceeds preceding developments by far. At the same time, for the whole of Schleswig-Holstein, regional differences in the distribution of urns are recognisable. According to our data collection (Aner/Kersten 1991; card index of the heritage department), this distribution began to spread from the south to the north, showing an indication of the influences of the 'urnfield phenomenon' coming from the south. However, when considering the use of barrows for secondary burials, the calculation values shift again, so this statement must be seen as depending on the individual case. In the grave goods, pottery finds reach their peak, whereby regional or research-driven differences are to be noted. With the transition to the Younger Bronze Age, the frequency and diversity of artefacts and secondary burials in barrows and flat graves equalise, demonstrating a lack of social differentiation for the first time. At the same time, depositions increase again and, from the Younger

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Bronze Age onwards, their furnishings are similar to that of the graves, but with different preferences (graves contain more toiletry utensils, depositions contain mainly jewellery). Endrigkeit (2010) assumes, especially for the Period V depositions, that these were now mainly 'women's deposits', which she associates with different ideological interpretations (Endrigkeit 2010, 87–90, 114–115). This has already been established for the Danish hoard developments as well (Kristiansen 2006, 177). The number of finds per deposit is also much higher than during the Older Bronze Age and thus contrasts with the grave finds, where there are fewer items per grave.

Settlement findings become more frequent with the Younger Bronze Age. However, these are more settlement pits and less house layouts. In house construction, moreover, a reduction of the house size to an average of 80 m² is detectable from about 1200 BCE onwards. With the transition to Period IV, one-, two-, and three-aisled houses are represented, showing a high diversity, which may also suggest an equally diverse household design and functionality. For Jutland, Kristiansen was also able to establish that, in addition to house reduction, less solid post structures are found in house construction (Kristiansen 1999, 287; Søgaard et al. 2019, 214). The small number of people needed in grave construction and the emergence of smaller house sizes indicates the development of smaller households or group structures. The pollen composition and soil formations in this phase show that tree pollen were declining, while soil erosion was increasing and a more intensive land use with cereal cultivation and grassland grazing can be assumed (Dreibrodt/Wiethold 2015, 311; Feeser et al. 2023, 8). An interaction between the declining tree pollen curve and a lower use of wood in burial and house construction can at the moment only be assumed for Schleswig-Holstein, but is proven for Danish sites (e. g. in Thy, Søgaard et al. 2019, 214–215). The demand for wood for the increasing number of cremations may also have been met by collecting firewood from smaller trees (Tiedtke 2023). With this phase, around 1200/1100 BCE, a social restructuring was emerging, which enabled the establishment of the above-mentioned, possibly (more) egalitarian structures. The new structures included changes in burial customs, the abandonment of monumentality and the strong differentiation of grave goods. Instead, equality in grave and house construction was achieved, which no longer required the cooperation of large groups, but could be accomplished by smaller ones. Kristiansen assumes that there was an increase in 'common farmers' and a decrease in 'chiefs' in Jutland in this period. The latter were said to have been present in smaller numbers, but were possibly more powerful individuals (Kristiansen 2018, 116). In the Schleswig-Holstein data, this cannot be recorded for this phase – especially against the background of the grave and house developments mentioned above. Possibly, this thesis is only applicable to the research area for the developed Younger Bronze Age. The second part of Period III can thus already be considered as part of the Younger Bronze Age, in which basic structures for future Younger Bronze Age developments were created. At the site of Mang de Bargen, some graves which were dated to the Younger Bronze Age based on the grave goods could already be dated to the middle or end of Period III by the use of absolute dating results. This picture of equality in death in the Younger Bronze Age is softened by age-related stratifications, in that graves of children and juveniles were given preferential treatment in terms of placement and furnishings. With the Pre-Roman Iron Age, this differentiation again seems to have become unimportant, as far as we can tell from the latest anthropological investigations. Instead, a new differentiation appears, with some urns being buried within ditches, which suggests new social demarcations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the spread of the urnfield phenomenon in Schleswig-Holstein can be understood as a complex process that seems to have interacted with many other areas of life. However, the exact ways in which the new way of dealing with the dead were spread have not yet been conclusively clarified.

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Was there an independent development from the north-northwest or was the new custom spread by travellers? In addition, where did these travellers come from and what routes did they take? In order to answer these open questions, strontium isotope analyses are currently being carried out on early cremation burials, so that these questions can be approached and results can complement the research carried out in Denmark (Reiter et al. 2021).

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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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