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

Wenke Domscheit

Keywords: Northern Germany, grave field, collectivity, memory, communication

Abstract: Grave groups in Late Bronze and Early Iron Age grave fields can be described as a multiple group-wise arrangement of graves, which are separated from one another by areas with no records. Grave groups are interpreted as the burial sites of individual families, clans or settlement communities, which expressed their individual togetherness in their burial tradition. Based on the grave field at Pinnow (Lkr. [German: Landkreis = *district] Ludwigslust-Parchim, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania), this northern central European phenomenon is explained and discussed by the use of further examples. The focus is on the sometimes long period of individual burial ground use and the associated observance of the respective occupancy structures, as well as the simultaneous use of the grave groups and the sometimes densely clustered burials. Above all, the question of whether other social and societal structures besides family relations could have been a deciding factor in the arrangement of the graves into groups is discussed. Grave groups as part of the occupancy structure are also discussed as a form of communication, which is closely related to the collective memory of the Bronze and Iron Ages.*

Introduction – the beginning

Around the middle of the Bronze Age, about 1300 BC, a process of cultural change took place throughout Europe, which was primarily reflected in the prevailing burial tradition and manifested itself in the change from inhumation to cremation. Before that, inhumation graves in barrows, which were mostly intended for individuals, were the dominant type of burial in northern Germany (Holste 1953, 87; Struve 1971, 30; Keiling 1999, 26; Endrigkeit 2014, 17, 170). This changed with the onset of cremation, which did not initially lead to a compelling change in the grave constructions. This means there was a transitional phase in which the cremated bones in cinerary urns were interred as secondary or subsequent burials in existing barrows (Keiling 1999, 26), although, in the course of Montelius' Period III, pure urn grave fields, also called flat grave fields, were widely established.[1] Thereby, grave fields emerged, which could be shown to be structured into so-called grave groups.

1 Exceptions are known, for example, from the *Seddiner Kulturgebiet*, the settlement area around the famous site Seddin in Brandenburg, Germany, where burial in barrows continued consistently until the end of Period VI (May/Hauptmann 2012, 105; see also Sopp 1999, 19).

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Grave groups[2] are largely described as occupancy structures which often take the form of multiple, dense arrangements of graves, separated from one another by empty areas with no records. Mostly interpreted as the burial places of individual families, clans or settlement communities (cf. Beltz 1906, 33; Tackenberg 1934, 109; Hingst 1976, 80; Willroth 1992, 129; Ettel 2014, 177), some features make other and more complex interpretations possible as well.

Although the actual distribution of grave fields with grave groups is entirely unknown, it can be primarily ascertained for the north of present-day Germany (Fig. 1, nos. 6–16), although they can be found in Denmark as well (Fig. 1, no. 1). For this reason, this form of occupancy is called a northern central European phenomenon (Willroth 1992, 192; Wunderlich 1998, 25; Lütjens 2006, 69), but there are also some examples of burial grounds from other parts of Germany (Fig. 1, nos. 17–18), southern Poland (Fig. 1, no. 2), Switzerland (Fig. 1, no. 3), Austria (Fig. 1, no. 4) and Romania (Fig. 1, no. 5) for which grave groups can be assumed.

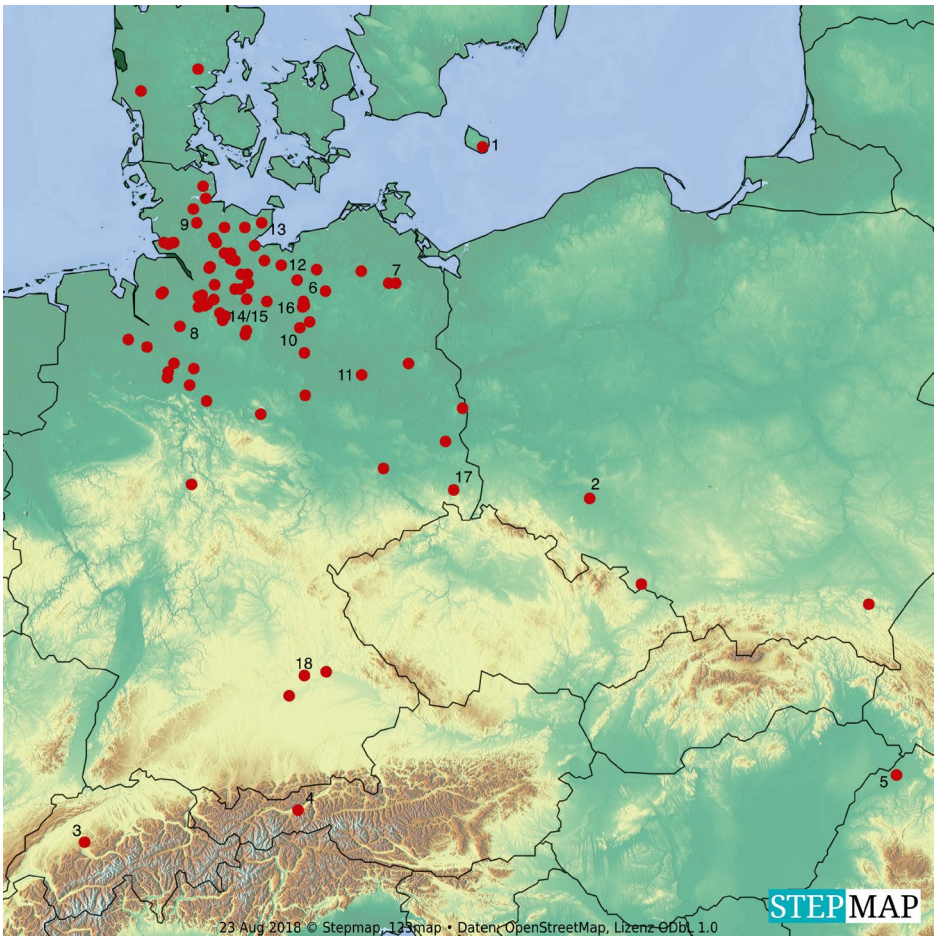


Fig. 1. Grave fields mentioned in the text. Examples outside Germany – 1: Nørre Sandegård, Denmark; 2: Wrocław Żerniki, Poland; 3: Münsingen-Rain, Switzerland; 4: Volders, Austria; 5: Pişcolt, Romania. Examples in Germany – 6: Pinnow, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania; 7: Cosa, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania; 8: Unterstedt, Lower Saxony; 9: Jevenstedt, Schleswig-Holstein; 10: Lanz, Brandenburg; 11: Wachow, Brandenburg; 12: Mühlen Eichsen, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania; 13: Groß Timmendorf, Schleswig-Holstein; 14: Soderstorf, Lower Saxony; 15: Putensen, Lower Saxony; 16: Kolbow, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania; 17: Niederkaina, Saxony; 18: Riedenburg-Untereggersberg, Bavaria (map W. Domscheit).

2 The term 'grave group' is used synonymously with the terms 'occupancy group', 'grave area', 'grave district', 'cemetery district', or 'grave concentration', etc.

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The Late Bronze and Early Iron Age grave field at Pinnow (Lkr. Ludwigslust-Parchim) is a typical example of a burial ground with grave groups in northern Germany. Pinnow and its grave field are located in present-day Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (Fig. 1, no. 6), close to the city of Schwerin and near Lake Schwerin. Excavated in 2009, 2016 and 2019 by the *Landesamt für Kultur und Denkmalpflege Mecklenburg-Vorpommern*, a total of 184 graves were examined over an area of around 12,200 m² (Burkhardt 2010, 2–4; Mewis 2017, 4–6; Möller 2019, 276–277), even if the exact boundaries of the grave field have not yet been recorded. The grave field spans a time range of roughly 500 to 600 years based on relative chronological analyses, with a beginning during the end of Montelius' Period III and a possible termination of occupancy at the beginning of the Early Iron Age, around 500 BC. This time frame is supported by two armrings as well as a small fragment of a bronze dress pin, which can be dated to Period III due to their ornamental elements (Mewis 2017, 10), and by the types of graves and their construction elements, which mainly reflect traditions of the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages (Keiling 1969, 22–24; Hofmann 2008, 282–303, 432; Lütjens 2013, 42; Pahlow 2018, 83–84).

A deeper look into the occupancy structure at Pinnow (Fig. 2)[3] reveals that the graves were not arranged in chronological order, but more into individual groups, which are mainly delimited by almost empty spaces with no graves or other features. Taking into account that not all areas of the grave field are clearly recorded and that there is additional disturbance from a cable trench and an erosion gully, at least three grave groups can be identified. While the southwestern (I) and northeastern (III) groups reveal mainly urn graves (*Urnengrab* and *Brandschüttungsgrab*) as well as some pits with cremation remains (unurned; with remains of the pyre; *Brandgrubengrab* and *Brandflächengrab*) and rare pits with cleaned cremation remains (unurned; without remains of the pyre; *Knochenlager*), mostly laid within stone protection (*Steinsetzung/Steinstandspur*) and surrounded by both round and angular stone rings, the northwestern group (II) differs in that stone constructions are rarely represented here, so mainly free-standing urns could be detected.

It is true that the grave constructions are not suitable for a chronological classification of the grave groups, since all variants actually occur at all times. But stone protection tends to decrease in the course of the older Pre-Roman Iron Age (Keiling 1969, 24; Schmidt 1993, 12; Lütjens 2013, 42), which suggests that the northwestern group could reflect a younger section of the grave field. However, the chronological classification of the few and fragmentary metal finds does not necessarily support this idea. But, apart from the different construction of the graves, no further differences between the groups can be identified at Pinnow, neither in the selection of the ceramics, nor in the number or quality of the metal grave goods. This means that, at Pinnow, individuals were buried remarkably close to one another for several centuries, with the result that grave groups were, in turn, separated from one another by almost empty areas. Thus, the grave field at Pinnow joins a large number of burial grounds in northern Germany from the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages, where occupancy structures reveal so-called grave groups.

3 Here, only the grave field plan from the 2009 excavation is depicted, but this area covers the largest part of the grave field. During the excavations in 2016 and 2019, further areas of the burial ground were recorded that support the previous impressions.

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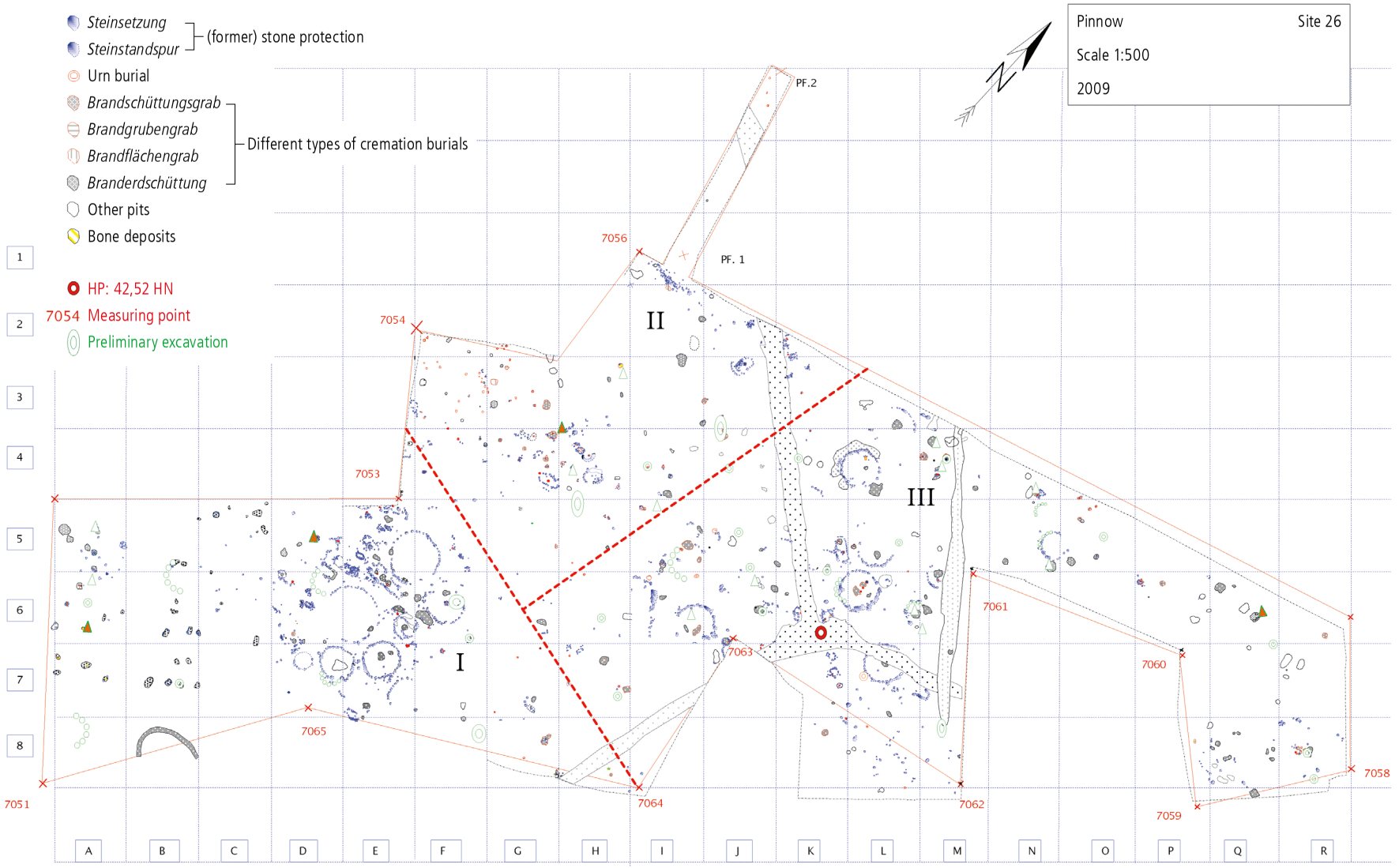


Fig. 2. The grave field with different cremation burial types is divided into a southwestern (I), a northwestern (II) and a northeastern (III) grave group. Stone settings still in situ and traces of stones formerly standing there are marked blue (© Landesamt für Kultur und Denkmalpflege Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Landesarchäologie, Sigmar Burkhardt).

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In the research literature, grave fields with grave groups are already mentioned early and in large numbers. The interpretation that is often presented describes grave groups as burial places used by different families, clans or even settlement communities, who are also thought to have expressed their individual togetherness in a common burial tradition (cf. Beltz 1906, 33; Tackenberg 1934, 109; Hingst 1976, 80; Willroth 1992, 129; Ettel 2014, 177). This would mean that these grave fields show an amalgamation of different families, who carried out burials both separately in groups and yet together in a common grave field. The interpretation is also based on the general observation that, as has also been established for Pinnow, the grave groups of the different grave fields mostly showed only minor differences in the grave construction, the ceramics and the grave goods. In addition, anthropological analyses, when available,[4] show that mostly the same number of men, women and children of all ages are evident for all of the grave groups in the grave fields (Keiling 1962, 4, 38; 1974, 25; Hingst 1976, 80; Fenske 1986, 29).

But there are also burial grounds in which some individual groups show differences to one another or have peculiarities that can be understood as an indication that grave groups cannot be interpreted exclusively in a context of family relationships. This extends to the grave field at Cosa (Lkr. Mecklenburgische Seenplatte, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania; Fig. 1, no. 7), where the graves in one of the seven groups contain only remains of women and children. In addition, the sometimes very close and densely packed burials in individual groups are also noticeable (Fig. 3; cf. Fenske 1986, 29). Another example is the grave field at Unterstedt (Lkr. Rotenburg [Wümme], Lower Saxony; Fig. 1, no. 8), where several grave groups are of interest, not only because of the empty space between them, but because of their grave goods and their grave constructions. This means that certain metal grave goods, such as razors, and certain stone protections, such as stone pavements, were only found in certain groups, while they were not to be found in other groups from the same time period (Grenz 1965, 91–118 Karte 2). In the case of the grave field at Jevenstedt (Kr. Rendsburg-Eckernförde; Fig. 1, no. 9), Schleswig-Holstein, spatially distinct groups of burials can be, according to H. Hingst, distinguished there in which certain types of vessels are found more frequently than in others. These include the rare painted vessels (Hingst 1976, 80) that are thought to indicate influences from the southern Hallstatt area (Nikulka 2009, 161–162).

A remarkably close and dense occupancy, similar to that recorded at Cosa, can also be observed at several other grave fields, e.g. at Lanz (Lkr. Prignitz, Brandenburg; Fig. 1, no. 10; Keiling 1962, fig. 8.) or Kolbow (Lkr. Ludwigslust-Parchim, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania; Fig. 1, no. 16; Keiling 1974, fig. 11). Particularly interesting is the grave field at Wachow (Lkr. Havelland, Brandenburg; Fig. 1, no. 11; cf. Fig. 4)[5] where, out of the 303 excavated graves, 93 urns were found in an area of just *c.* 11 m², representing all chronological stages of the Jastorf culture. D.-W. Buck reports that some of the free-standing urns were so close together that during a funeral the neighbouring urns must have been uncovered. Moreover, in some cases the urns have been literally placed inside each other

4 A comprehensive and representative anthropological analysis cannot be presented for the grave field at Pinnow. An anthropological analysis, carried out by W. Blume, is only available for the contents of 16 urns that were recovered from a cable trench already in 1987. There the cremated bones of men and women of all ages could be documented. Only individuals classified as infants are not represented (Blume 1990, 2–6).

5 The grave field at Wachow does not represent a grave field with grave groups at first sight, because only one group has been completely excavated. As D.-W. Buck outlined and other archaeological records around the excavated area prove, the grave field will originally have been larger (Buck 2000, 173).

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Fig. 3. The grave field at Cosa (Lkr. Mecklenburgische Seenplatte). Grave group 1 contains only burials of women and children. A very close and dense occupancy of burials in individual groups is noticeable (after Fenske *1986, Beilage).*

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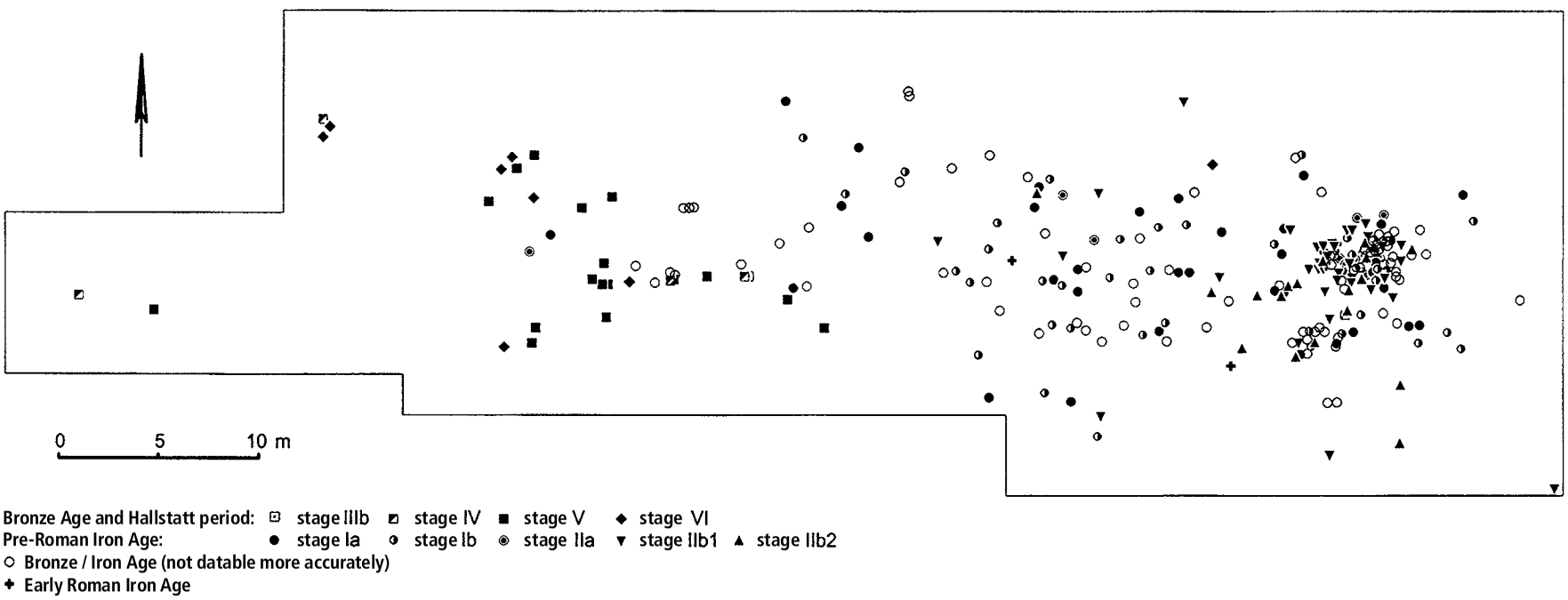


Fig. 4. The grave field at Wachow (Lkr. Havelland). 93 urns were found in an area of c. *11 m². Overlapping and disturbances of older graves by younger ones were not detected (after* Buck *2000, 174 fig. 66).*

(Buck 1976, 144; 2000, 173–174).[6] Thus, the Wachow grave field is a rare exception among the grave fields with grave groups because, in most of the other grave fields, disturbances or even the overlaying of older graves by younger ones were only rarely detected (Keiling 1962, 16; Hingst 1974, 29; Gebers 2018, 30).

This is also true for Pinnow, since such a density of graves as that described for Wachow, and also Cosa, Lanz and Kolbow, could not be documented. However, it is quite noticeable that inside the grave groups some graves are positioned closer together than others. Even more, some of the features can be assumed to be double graves. These are also very close to each other in that they are positioned side by side, but separated by small stone slabs or ceramic sherds (Fig. 5). In addition, in the grave groups with different types of stone rings, graves are to be found both inside and outside of them (cf. Fig. 2). Furthermore, for most of the stone rings – which, it is assumed, may once have been covered by a mound (Burkhardt 2010, 5) –, more than just one grave can be proven, thus showing that the grave groups themselves were also structured within.

The grave fields mentioned above indicate that an interpretation based on family relationships does not by itself go far enough to explain the phenomenon of grave groups and their appearance. In addition, and despite the fact that there is no clear evidence of family relationships, since genetic analyses



Fig. 5. Pinnow (Lkr. Ludwigslust-Parchim), find no. 379/375, an assumed double grave. The urns are separated from each other by a stone slab (© Landesamt für Kultur und Denkmalpflege Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Landesarchäologie, Sigmar Burkhardt).

6 According to D.-W. Buck, on several occasions older graves were damaged during later burials. He describes one example where the walls of two urns standing close to each other were smashed so that a third one could be placed in the resulting gap (Buck 1976, 144).

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on cremated bones are even today not possible, or are extremely difficult (Grosskopf 2004, 36), this raises the question of the meaning of family and clan and whether it is possible to apply present-day viewpoints. We do not know whether Bronze Age and Iron Age families were defined by genetic relationships alone. Accordingly, other determining factors that led to the burial of an individual within a certain grave group are also conceivable.

Furthermore, if we follow the theory that grave groups reflect individual settlements or settlement communities, this should also be evident in the vicinity of the grave fields. Therefore, it can be assumed that, for the region around the Pinnow grave field, several settlements could be found that represented the grave groups. Although there is substantial evidence of settlement activity in the vicinity of the grave field in the form of individual pits, including fireplaces and post pits, as well as corresponding settlement pottery, no house or settlement structures have yet been discovered. Thus, the vicinity of the grave field still reflects just a general impression of the archaeological records of Bronze and Iron Age settlement activity in northern Germany, even though a number of larger settlements have been increasingly excavated and investigated in recent decades, which has significantly improved the state of research, especially in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania[7] (Brandt/Schmidt 1997, 105; Thieme 2009, 124; Meyer 2010, 12–13; Schmidt 2010, 86–97).

Another perspective

Grave fields with grave groups raise much deeper questions that go far beyond the previous interpretation. This can be demonstrated by the long duration of use in connection with the adherence to the grave field structures in the course of occupancy, but also by the often simultaneous use of the grave groups, whereby the discontinuation of some individual groups and the addition of others can also be proven. Furthermore, the density of occupancy within the grave groups, which can take very different forms, is of importance. These factors enable the formulation of theories and conclusions that can be discussed, e.g. in connection with the Bronze and Iron Age culture of memory.

As already mentioned, the grave field at Pinnow had a duration of use of at least 500 to 600 years, whereas for Lanz and Cosa it was around 400 years (Keiling 1962, 106–8; Fenske 1986, 30). But, for well-known grave fields such as Mühlen Eichsen (Lkr. Nordwestmecklenburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania; Fig. 1, no. 12) or Niederkaina (Lkr. Bautzen, Saxony; Fig. 1, no. 17) which, it is assumed, were also structured into groups, a much longer duration of use between 700 to 900 years has been proven (Ettel 2014, 177–178; Kaiser/Puttkammer 2012, 429). Moreover, the grave groups in the grave fields were used almost simultaneously. The use of individual groups is only occasionally cancelled or new groups are added – such as at Cosa (Fenske 1986, 10–11). The focus here is also on the sometimes very dense occupancy in some groups, which is illustrated in the grave fields at Cosa, Lanz and especially at Wachow – or in the different appearance of some individual graves at Pinnow.

If we summarise these three observations, the question arises of how the occupancy structures could be maintained over such long periods of time and over several generations. How was it possible to put the graves so close together without the younger graves disturbing the older graves, and why are the graves so close together in the first place?

In her paper *Leben mit Erinnerung. Die Performanz von Identität, Status und Prestige in Totenritualen der Bronze- und Eisenzeit Mitteleuropas*, K. Rebay-Salisbury (2012) examines the relationship between primary and secondary burials in burial mounds and what relationships these may have

7 As examples of Bronze and Iron Age settlements in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, sites at Zetelvitz and Butzow (Lkr. Vorpommern-Greifswald; Forler/Schmidt 2014a; b) as well as at Glasow (Lkr. Mecklenburgische Seenplatte; Weiss 2014) can be mentioned. All three settlements are published, together with several other sites, in Jantzen et al. 2014.

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to one another. Often, family relationships are assumed, but she points out that other explanations are also possible. If, for example, a burial mound testifies to the special prestige of a deceased person, then a burial in its vicinity could be physically linked to it. In this way, social relations could be constructed, and genealogies could be created that are not based on genetic relations alone. As an example, she mentions the middle Bronze Age grave field at Pitten (Bez. Neunkirchen, Austria). Here, burial mound no. 163 took a prominent position in the course of the occupation of the grave field. The first burial in this mound was probably a male cremation burial in an urn; further burials in the same mound include three inhumations, one cremation burial, one cremation pit burial and two urn burials. In the process, according to Rebay-Salisbury, this burial mound was not only used repeatedly during the occupancy period of the grave field, but also became a landmark for other graves, which preferentially clustered around it. She interprets that a place in the immediate vicinity of this important monument was thus particularly prestigious (Rebay-Salisbury 2012, 430–432).

The approach of Rebay-Salisbury is interesting in several respects for the interpretation of grave groups. Based on her description, clear similarities between the grave field at Pitten and the grave field at Pinnow can be recognised, which can then also be applied to all other grave fields mentioned. So, if burial mounds are initially equated with the grave groups – regardless of the fact that these can partly show further subdivisions later on – it can be assumed that these were also founded by a first burial, or 'founder grave'. In the course of the group burial practice further interments were added, all of them in close spatial proximity to the first burial. But, especially for grave fields such as Wachow, Cosa, and Lanz, it is noticeable that grave groups, in contrast to burial mounds, were not actually subject to any spatial limitation, so such a dense occupancy would not have been necessary. There are no stone circles or fence-like structures around the grave groups. Therefore, the groups could have been spatially larger so that each grave had a wider space for itself, but this simply did not happen at Wachow, Cosa, or Lanz. This, in turn, distinguishes the three grave fields from the grave field at Pinnow. As depicted (Fig. 2), except for those burials interpreted as double graves, all graves and stone constructions are spaced a small but distinct distance apart.

However, for grave groups that only include female or male burials or certain grave goods, prestige did not necessarily have to be of importance. Perhaps the status and identity of an individual and that of the respective group can be assumed to have been decisive.[8] But, all of this had to be negotiated and mediated somehow within the burial community and especially across the generations, both for the grave field and for the grave groups, in order to maintain the occupancy structures from the beginning to the end of the grave field use. This required an exchange of information or communication between the generations.

A question of collectivity and communication?

Humans are characterised by the fact that they do not belong to a single social or societal group. K.-P. Hansen, who works on theories in Cultural and Collective Studies, therefore uses the term 'multi-collectivity', which describes the belonging of an individual to several 'collectives' (Hansen 2011, 157–158). A collective, as a burial community such as the one interred at the Pinnow grave field can be understood, is, according to Hansen, a leading term and covers the totality of all conceivable groupings (Hansen 2009a, 27; 2009b, 20). This already includes social groupings, such as family and clans, but also covers groupings such as craftsmen or farmers, or different religious groups. If we fol-

8 On the meaning of 'status' and 'prestige' as categories of social distinction, Robert Schumann has presented a comprehensive publication in which he introduces different aspects of the terms and discusses them on the basis of case studies from the Hallstatt period in southern Germany (Schumann 2015).

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low Hansen's approach, we can describe individual burial communities as individual collectives that are reflected in the grave fields.

In addition, collectives can be divided into smaller entities, the so-called sub-collectives, which all have a partial commonality with the collective, but can be highly different in content (Hansen 2011, 174). One kind of division of the burial community is now demonstrated in the grave groups in the burial ground. In other words, the overall place of burial was thus used by individuals who joined together to form a burial community with a common burial tradition: a collective. But, on the basis of the grave groups, we can in turn prove the presence of 'smaller' burial communities, the sub-collectives, in the archaeological record, which reveal differences or deviations in the common burial tradition, be it through the selection of different grave constructions, different grave goods, or even through the burial of only one sex or age group within certain grave groups.

In this regard, as specified by Hansen, so-called standardisations are valid in collectives as well as in the sub-collectives from which they are constituted. Such common standardisations, which deviate from the collective in the sub-collectives, are infinite in number but can be categorised in standardisations of thinking, acting, feeling and also in those of communication. If the first comprise primarily the realities of life, the understanding of feelings, and modes of behaviour within collectives, the latter comprise primarily modes of understanding. However, each category is intertwined, so that one standardisation cannot exist without the other (Hansen 2009b, 20; 2011, 31–110).

When we speak of collectives now, we also speak of collectivity, and this means, as Hansen points out, commonality. Also, collectivity can only be established through information exchange, which means communication (Hansen 2011, 31, 36). Commonality, such as a common burial tradition, is based on mutual exchange, which exists across the boundaries of place and time (ibid., 36.). Information is not only exchanged, whereby spatial distances do not play a major role, but are also stored in, as Jan Assmann called it, 'cultural memory' (Assmann 1988, 9–16). There are several terms and concepts for 'cultural memory' or 'collective memory' in the literature: A. Erll summarises in her publication *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen* that 'the generic term »collective memory« unites all possible manifestations of the relationship between culture and memory (from neuronal networks to »tradition«). Collective memory as a totality of all those processes (organic, medial and social), which are important for the mutual influence of the past and the present in socio-cultural contexts, finds its respective expression in memory cultures' (Erll 2017, 98).[9]

This means that, in collective memory, important information is stored and passed on to future generations. This also means that, through collective memory, the existence of collectives beyond the death of single individuals is secured. But, without communication, no collective memory would form, and information could not be passed on over time and space. Primarily, then, this is about preserving the collective across generational succession or beyond generational memory, which requires information exchange. The question now is: How can we archaeologically capture the mutual influence of the past and the present and the exchange of information respectively? Memory culture lives by communication – verbal as well as non-verbal. Bronze and Iron Age verbal communication in northern Germany is archaeologically invisible. Non-verbal communication, on the other hand, is different, because here symbols and signs[10] are used for communication (Hansen 2011, 35–36). In

9 Translated by the author from the original German text: „Unter dem Oberbegriff »kollektives Gedächtnis« werden alle möglichen Ausprägungen des Verhältnisses von Kultur und Gedächtnis (von neuronalen Netzwerken bis hin zu »Tradition«) vereint. Kollektives Gedächtnis als Gesamtheit all jener Vorgänge (organisch, medial und sozial), denen Bedeutung bei der wechselseitigen Beeinflussung von Vergangenem und Gegenwärtigem in soziokulturellen Kontexten zukommt, findet seine jeweilige Ausprägung in Erinnerungskulturen" (Erll 2017, 98).

10 According to M. Lurker, a wide variety of objects can be called symbols or signs. A symbol can be described as a visible sign of an invisible reality (Lurker 1979, 551–552).

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order to guarantee the adherence to the occupation structures of grave fields with grave groups and thus the preservation of the collective over the generational succession, the graves must have been marked accordingly, so that the burial community knew where individual groups were to be found. Examples of different kinds of grave markers, which can be understood as symbols or signs, such as gravestones, stone paving and also mounding, are known from several Bronze and Iron Age grave fields, although their detection is particularly difficult, as they must have been clearly visible above the former surface (Hässler 1976, 20; Hofmann 2008, 293).

At the Soderstorf grave field (Lkr. Lüneburg, Lower Saxony; Fig. 1, no. 14), different forms of grave markers were found. Among them are grave steles and stone circles with the stones still partly standing upright *in situ*, as well as circular stone pavements with a diameter of up to 4 m which, it is assumed, were visible on the former surface (Fig. 6). Therefore, they marked not only single graves but also grave groups (Hässler 1976, 14–20; Thieme 2009, 110, 125 fig. 1). Several grave steles which could also be recovered *in situ* are known from the Pre-Roman Iron Age grave field at Putensen (Lkr. Harburg, Lower Saxony; Fig. 1, no. 15), close to Soderstorf. One of these steles, a granite stone with a height of 0.90 m and a diameter of 0.30 x 0.40 m, is assumed to have marked three graves from the older Pre-Roman Iron Age, which are interpreted as belonging to a family (Wegewitz 1973, 6). Other examples of stone rings and also capstones, which are assumed to have been surface markers, are known from the grave field at Groß Timmendorf (Kr. Ostholstein, Schleswig-Holstein; Fig. 1, no. 13). L. Fischer (2000, 33) acknowledges the fact that disturbances of older graves by younger ones cannot be proved as indirect evidence for the visible designation of the graves. As already mentioned, this could rarely be observed for other grave fields (Keiling 1962, 16; Hingst 1974, 29; Gebers 2018, 30). At least, clear evidence for grave markers is not known from the Pinnow grave field. However,



Fig. 6. Soderstorf: reconstructed stone circles and circular stone pavements, as well as two of the grave steles, which are about one metre high (after Thieme 2009, 125 fig. 1).

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the graves with stone rings, which are assumed to have been covered by mounds, could be understood as a form of grave marker with communicative and thus informative value. Such smaller mounds are mentioned, for example, as common for the burial grounds in northeastern Lower Saxony during the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages, according to M. Pahlow (2018, 84).

What this is largely about is not only the fact that the occupation structures must have been visible above ground, even if they marked just individual graves or they simply have been for orientation. It is more about the question if burial communities also used these structures, or the spatial arrangement of the burial ground, to secure the preservation of the collective and its sub-collectives, for the past but also for the present and future. Occupation structures could be understood as symbols or signs that were used to exert influence on the present or living burial communities. They thus served as a medium of communication between generations and, in the process, signalled and transmitted belonging and delimitation. In relation to Hansen's theories, this in turn enables conclusions about standardisations of thinking, acting and feeling, which were valid in the collective of the superordinate burial community as well as in the associated sub-collective ones. It becomes clear that more complex interpretations of burial groups are possible and at the same time the possibilities of interpretation can be expanded many times over, without the previous interpretation losing its meaning.

In this context, reference should be made to Melanie Augstein's paper *Gräber – Orte der Lebenden und der Toten, Medien der Kommunikation* (Augstein 2013), where she establishes a connection between the occupancy structure and the individual grave. According to her both the spatial arrangement of the grave field and the burial as well as the ordering of the body and objects in the grave can be understood as communicative acts concerning social orders and personal identities. They would equally serve as mnemonic devices through which memory is evoked in such a meaning-laden situation as burial (ibid., 117). However, it should be added that after the funeral, and thus the final closure of the grave, only the above-ground visible elements of the grave construction as well as the spatial arrangement of the grave could be perceived by the burial community over the generations. This again underlines its communicative character and thus also the importance of grave groups.

Furthermore, if we follow K.-P. Hansen's theories again, the grave group, as a phenomenon in itself, can also be discussed as what he calls a 'pan-collective formation'.

As already mentioned, grave fields with grave groups are described as a northern central European phenomenon (Willroth 1992, 192; Wunderlich 1998, 25; Lütjens 2006, 69), whereas other examples suggest a broader distribution (cf. Fig. 1). The grave fields in northern Germany, which are located in a narrower geographic area, already show differences in their burial customs when compared with each other. However, the grave fields that will be mentioned in the following are located at a much wider geographic distance from each other and are accordingly associated with different cultural groups, which also show marked differences in their burial customs. Examples are the site Riedenburg-Untereggersberg (Lkr. Kehlheim, Bavaria; Fig. 1, no. 18) and the exclusively La Tène-period grave field at Pișcolt (Kr. Satu Mare, Romania; Fig. 1, no. 5), in both of which cremations and inhumations are found. These two completely different grave fields (Fig. 7), which are mainly remarkable for their different grave constructions, show, however, parallels to the Pinnow one and thus to several other grave fields in northern Germany, due to their multiple group-wise arrangement of graves, which are separated from one another (Nikulka 1998, 127–139 fig. 33, 175; Zirra 1998, 145–147 fig. 2). For Hansen, pan-collective formations are also means of communication, which are provided on a meta-level via collectivity and which are needed for interaction in and between collectives. Pan-collective formations are completely open in terms of their scope, which means each collective can be involved with its respective individual standardisations. Finally, however, it is always a question of a concrete standardisation, which connects all the collectives with each other (Hansen 2011, 167, 178–181) and which we can potentially record archaeologically in the case of grave groups; that is, all the different burial communities of the grave fields mentioned are possibly

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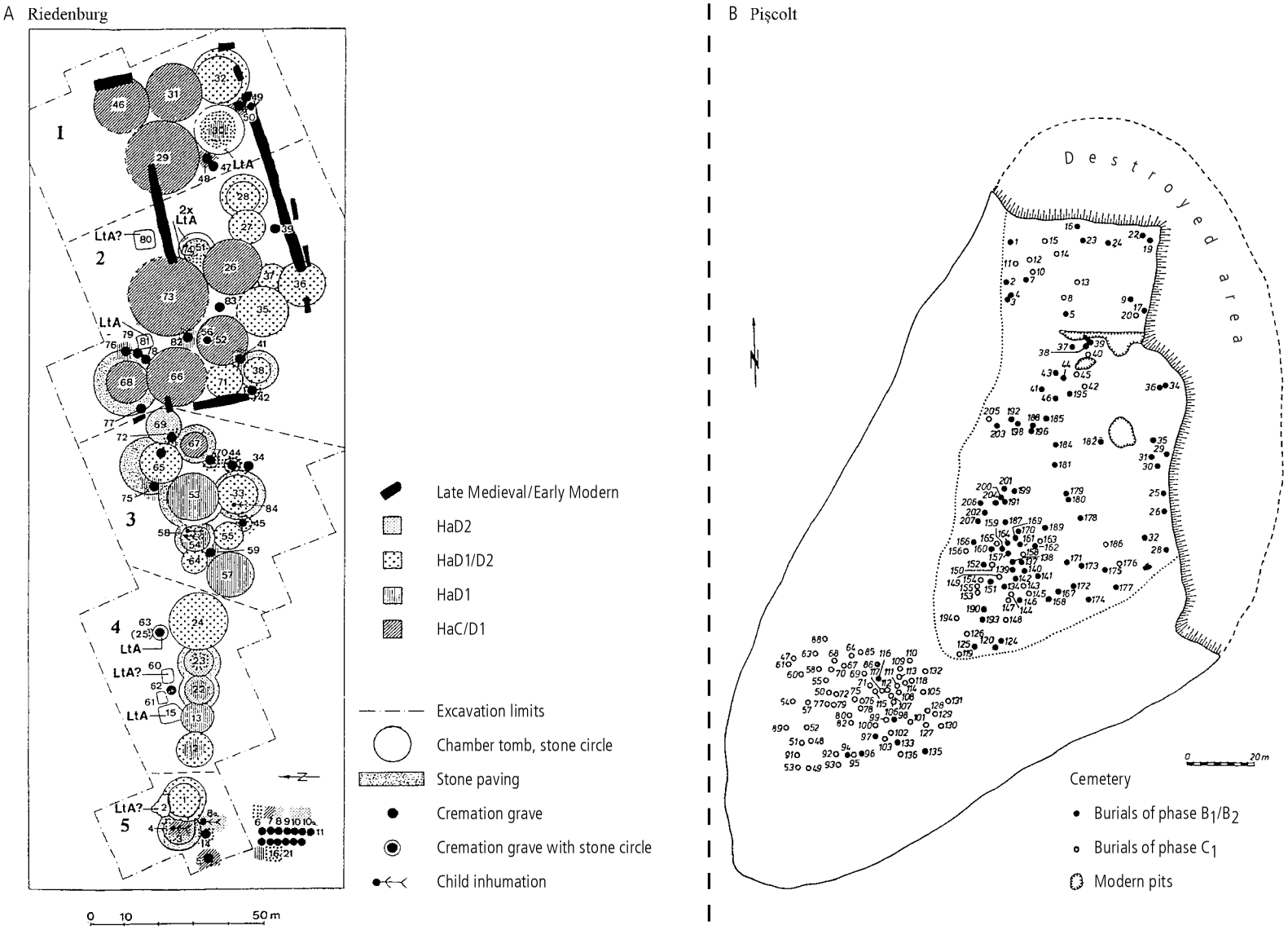


Fig. 7. Plans of the grave fields at Riedenburg-Untereggersberg (Lkr. Kehlheim, Bavaria; A) and Pişcolt (Kr. Satu Mare, Romania; B), illustrating how different grave groups can be perceived due to different burial customs (A: after Nikulka *1998, 138 fig. 33; B: after* Zirra *1998, 147 fig. 2).*

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united just through the use of grave groups as a standardised, and thus communicated, form of burial. However, this does not necessarily mean that grave groups everywhere carry the same meaning, but only that maybe the same form or medium for communication was used.

Conclusion

On the basis of the Pinnow grave field and in the comparison with other burial sites, it has become clear in the discussion that the first interpretation alone is not sufficient to explain the phenomenon. This has so far understood grave groups mainly as possible burial sites of individual family, clan or settlement communities, which expressed their individual togetherness in their common burial tradition.

The sometimes long duration of burial ground use was emphasised, which was connected with an adherence to existing structures in the course of occupancy. Mentioned was also the often simultaneous use of the grave groups, although occupancy in individual grave groups could also be discontinued from time to time, or new grave groups were added. Of particular note is the density of occupancy, which in some grave fields could be extremely high within certain grave groups.

With the help of the theories of K. P. Hansen, further possible interpretations have been presented, without excluding the previous one. In this context, burial communities are first considered as collectives that were constituted on the basis of commonalities: their shared burial traditions. Grave groups, as sub-collectives, point to differences or deviations within the burial community, which can be expressed not only through the different grave goods or grave constructions but also in the occupancy structure. The occupancy structures themselves can be understood as symbols or signs that helped to communicate differences or deviations and, at the same time, exert influence on the present or living burial communities. They served as a medium of communication between generations and also signalled and conveyed belonging and delimitation. This in turn gives rise to interpretive possibilities that allow conclusions to be drawn about the realities of life, the understanding of feelings and modes of behaviour of the burial community that are reflected in the archaeological record.

In addition, grave fields with grave groups are mainly found in northern Germany, but there are also examples far outside this geographical area. Although all these grave fields show clear differences in their burial traditions, they nevertheless show similarities in the structural arrangement of their graves. This also suggests that occupancy structures in Bronze and Iron Age grave fields may have had greater social or societal significance, and that the form of burial was not chosen without reason. For further research on grave fields with grave groups, more in-depth studies, supported by scientific analyses, are needed.

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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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