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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The ceremonial wagon and its relationship with the Urnfield burial rite

Claudia Pankau

Keywords: Wagon, religion, Late Bronze Age, Urnfield culture, burial rite

Abstract: Around 1300 BC, bronze fittings which probably originated from four-wheeled ceremonial wagons pulled by a team of horses can be traced for the first time in the Carpathian Basin and in southern central Europe. In the course of the Late Bronze Age, such fittings, here simplified as 'wagon bronzes', spread to western and northern Europe. While the ceremonial wagon was implemented independently in France and Great Britain, its real, i.e. materially and not only pictorially verifiable occurrence in the area of the Nordic Bronze Age can be described as marginal. Finds such as those from Egemose, Skjerne and Lusehøj were probably imports, especially from the pile dwelling area to the south. In the north, an independent take-up of the 'ceremonial wagon idea' can only be seen in the objects associated with horse teams from the hoard finds of the Ückeritz-Stolzenburg type, which can mainly be dated to Period V. Although these fittings allow almost no conclusions about the wagon itself, the yoke attachments with central, partly vessel-shaped sculptures are strongly reminiscent of the 'vessel and sun' symbolism of the Urnfield culture. They thus indicate that the exchange with the Urnfield culture was not limited to the material level. In general, wagon bronzes are predominantly found in hoards; in burial contexts they only occur to a considerable extent in the early Urnfield Hart an der Alz group in the northern Alpine foothills. From these findings, a close relationship between the ceremonial wagon and the innovative burial ritual of the Urnfield culture (cremation of corpses on the pyre, fragmentation of grave goods, separation of status symbols in the form of grave deposits) can be deduced. It can be assumed that the ceremonial wagon had an important function in the propagation of new religious ideas. In the HaC-period wagon graves, this 500-year-old tradition is consciously renewed.

Introduction

This chapter presents some results of my habilitation thesis (Pankau 2021) which deals with the ceremonial wagons of the Late Bronze Age in Europe. These are four-wheeled, horse-drawn wagons decorated with bronze fittings, and these fittings usually are the only remains of the wagons in the archaeological record. The wagons represent an innovation that is closely linked with the Urnfield ideology or religion that emerged around 1300 BC. Their function is unanimously seen as being, as the name suggests, ceremonial and ritual, which can include both sacred and profane actions and symbolism. They appear in southeastern, central, western and northern Europe between the 13th and 9th centuries BC. These five centuries are referred to in this paper as the Late Bronze Age.

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Due to the continuities in many types of wagon bronze fittings up to the Hallstatt period, it is quite reasonable to assume that the Late Bronze Age ceremonial wagons are fundamentally similar to those of the Hallstatt period. This includes their four-wheeled nature and the assumption of flat wagon boxes. In fact, however, it is seldom the case that there is any evidence at all for the number of wheels belonging to the wagon.

An essential part of research was to collect and sort the great variety of bronze objects which can be associated with the wagon or the horse team, and to date and interpret them also in functional terms. There are only few unambiguous examples of wagon bronzes, and far more examples where the association with horse and wagon is rather vague. Only find complexes containing either parts of the wagon itself or parts of the yoke were taken into account. Find complexes containing only general bridle or harness parts such as cheek-pieces, bits, strap-distributors or phalerae were not included. Accordingly, no horse burials were included. The decisive factor for inclusion was whether the wagon itself or the yoke was materially represented in a find complex, but not the team alone. In total, the catalogue of sites includes 339 find complexes containing wagon bronzes, as well as individual finds without context. Models and illustrations of wagons and wheels were used for interpretative purposes, but not systematically collected. They can contribute valuable information on the construction, appearance, use and symbolic meaning of the real wagons.

The evaluation of find contexts of wagon bronzes shows a clear predominance of hoards (Fig. 1). Funerary contexts are much rarer. To a significant extent, wagon graves only occur in the early Urnfield Hart an der Alz group, which is mainly centred in southern Bavaria (see below). Finds from settlements are hardly represented at all, with the exception of the rather high number of wagon bronzes that were found in the area of pile dwellings in Switzerland. They should surely not be interpreted as normal settlement remains, but as votive offerings or grave goods from 'burials in a wet environment'.

As they are so rare and heterogeneous, late Bronze Age wagon bronzes are not a very rewarding material for a detailed chronological study, so I only sorted them into three broad chronological phases: early phase = BzD–HaA1, (Montelius') Period III; middle phase = HaA2–B1, Period IV; late phase = HaB3, Period V. Not all find complexes could be limited to one of the three phases. As depicted (Fig. 2), wagon bronzes are quite strongly represented in the early phase, are then getting less abundant in the middle phase, and are by far the most common in the late phase.

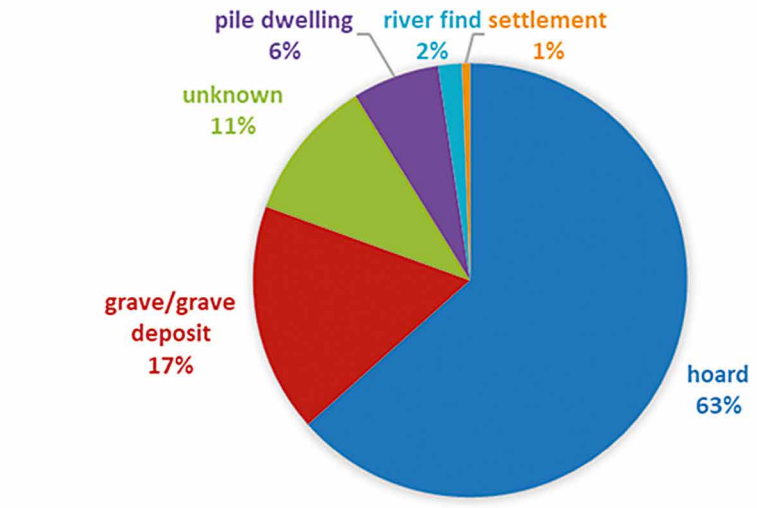


Fig. 1. Percentages of the site categories in which wagon bronzes of the Late Bronze Age were found.

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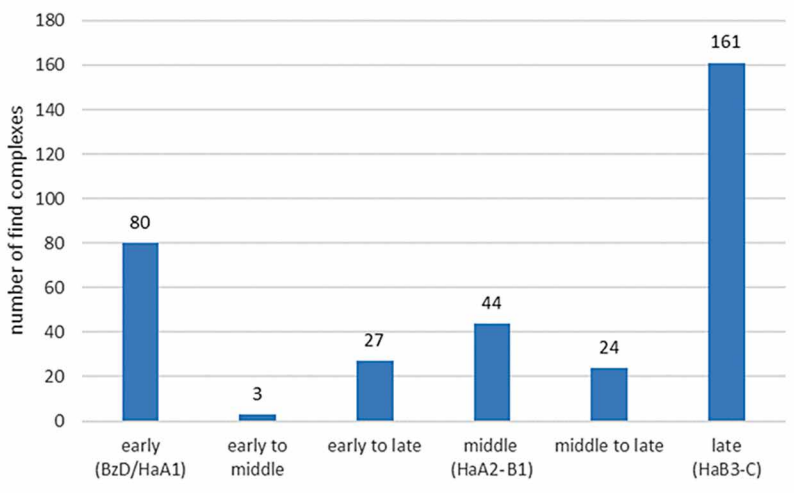


Fig. 2. Chronological classification of the find complexes with wagon bronzes of the Late Bronze Age in Europe (n = 339).

Spread and distribution of wagon bronzes in Europe

The overall distribution area of the wagon bronzes extends from the Carpathian Basin to Wales, and from southern Sweden to the French Mediterranean coast (Fig. 3). There is no evidence from Norway, Ireland, the Iberian Peninsula, the Balkans, eastern Europe and – with one exception – Italy. The distribution area is obviously bound to certain cultural groups in exchange with each other – that is the entire area of the Urnfield culture including its neighbours in the Carpathian Basin, as well as parts of the Nordic and Atlantic Bronze Age cultures. A sort of 'empty corridor' exists between the distribution area of the Urnfield culture and the Nordic Bronze Age. Ceremonial wagons thus seem to have been neither built nor used during the Late Bronze Age in the zone extending from the distribution area of the Lusatian culture to that of the *Niederrheinische Grabhügelkultur*, i.e. in the area of the (northern) low mountain range, and the north German and Polish Plain as well as the Lower Rhine Basin. It should be noted, however, that many areas of this zone in the Late Bronze Age are characterised by a general lack of metals, compared at least with the areas to the north and south of it. It is possible that the ceremonial wagon was used, but did not enter the ground. At least it seems certain that ceremonial wagons or parts of them passed through this 'transit area', since the Danish wagon finds from Skjerne (Gundslev sn., Maribo Amt), Egemose (Jordløse, Svendborg Amt; for both see Jacob-Friesen 1969) and from the Lusehøj (Voldtofte, Odense Amt; Thrane 1984) must probably be interpreted as southern imports.

In the early phase, wagon bronzes only appear in the Carpathian Basin and in the southern part of central Europe. Most striking are the elite cremation burials of the Hart an der Alz group which contain many bronze fittings of wagons, parts of harness and bridle for two horses, and sometimes also weapons and many vessels. 'Real' ceremonial wagons probably did not reach the north in that early phase, but we see them appear in rock art from Period III on. Johannsen (2010, 176–177) distinguishes three different types of four-wheeled wagons in later Nordic Bronze Age rock art. Type 3 has spoked wheels and is associated with the ceremonial wagons of the Urnfield and Hallstatt periods; it has been depicted since Period III. Its first appearance thus corresponds with the occurence of the Hart an der Alz group in central Europe. Also, all three cauldron wagons originating from the territory of the Nordic Bronze Age (Skallerup, Ystad/Hedskoga, Peckatel; see Kaul 2001, 473–475) are probably to be dated to Period III and thus bear witness to the apparently great radiance of the new religious ideas from the south.

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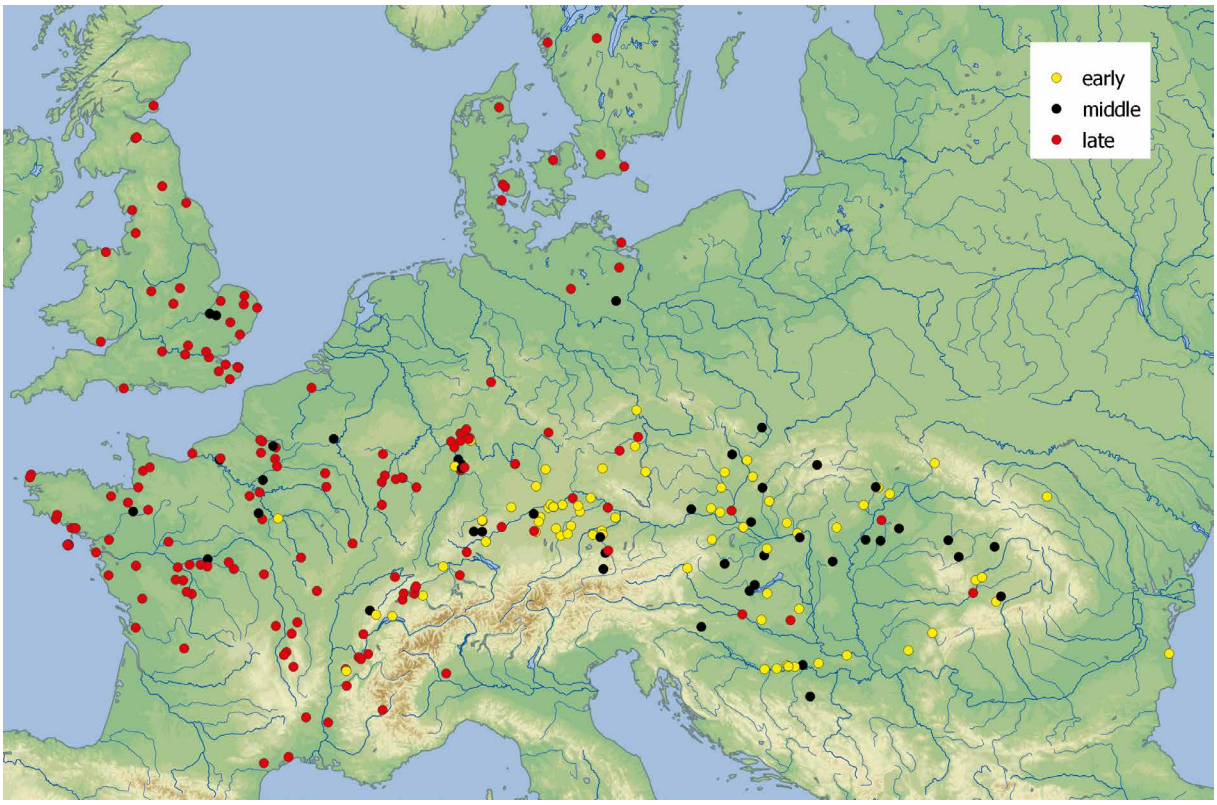


Fig. 3. Distribution map of sites with wagon bronzes in Late Bronze Age Europe, which can be narrowed down chronologically to the early, middle or late phase. See Pankau 2021 *for documentation of the single sites (graphics C. Pankau; physical background map compiled by David Knoll, using CGIAR SRTM and Natural Earth Data).*

In the middle phase, we see a shift to the west, and, if we include the find complexes that cannot be limited to the middle phase, also a little bit to the north, and to the region of the pile dwellings in Switzerland. The similarities between the hand-rails and the bronze tubes which might have decorated the railing of wagon-boxes from Egemose, Autavaux (Kt. Freiburg) and Chevroux (Kt. Waadt) have long been noticed (see Jacob-Friesen 1969, 143–145). The finds from Egemose and Skjerne are very probably imports from Switzerland. They clearly show the cultural influence from the south, but they do not prove a real adoption of the underlying religious ideas. Maybe we should rather see them in a political context, as some kind of gift.

In the late phase, wagon bronzes are particularly concentrated in France and England. There are now also more find complexes, mostly hoards, in the Nordic area, but these are widely spread and not nearly as densely represented as those in France and England. These hoards must be considered in the context of the large group of Ückeritz-type hoards of the younger Nordic Bronze Age, especially those of Period V, in Scandinavia and the southern Baltic Sea region, which comprise the most complete ensembles of harness and bridle known in the late Bronze Age of Europe (cf. for example Sprockhoff 1956, 254–270; Von Brunn 1980; Larsson 1975). An original Nordic expression of horse teams appears in these hoards, which differs from the one represented by the somewhat older find complexes of Egemose and Skjerne. Wagon parts were missing so far, but the hoard of Bækkedal (Sarauw 2016), discovered in 2014, has changed this, as it contained a horned animal socket which shows clear references to the horned bird's head socket from Skjerne.

Phalerae occur very frequently in the hoards of type Ückeritz; other typical components are rattle pendants, tin rolls and rings. Cheek-pieces, on the other hand, are quite rare, bits even rarer. Despite

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the overarching similarities, the individual features of the hoards and their components are also emphasised (Sarauw 2016, 4, 14).

Another interesting type contained in quite a lot of these hoards are the terrets and yoke attachements of type Ückeritz-Stolzenburg (cf. Lampe 1982, 37; Trachsel 2004, 440). They do not look all the same, but some of them have a ring in the middle, containing a little sculpture of what seems to be a vessel – which might be interpreted as a reminiscence of the old Urnfield symbolism of vessel, wagon, sun, and horse. If this interpretation is correct, some religious ideas connected with the ceremonial wagon of the Late Bronze Age might have been adopted in the north, and re-introduced to the south at the end of the Late Bronze Age (Milcent 2015, fig. 3.15,1; Chvojka et al. 2017, tab. 144.8).

All in all, wagon bronzes in the north are to be regarded as a marginal phenomenon. There are only a few widely scattered find complexes, several of which contain objects that can only be doubtfully connected to a wagon. The real wagon thus remains elusive in the north, unlike the team with its harness.

If we look at the distribution of wagon bronzes as a whole in a chronologically differentiated manner, a clear direction of spread from east to west can be established (Fig. 3). At the beginning of BzD, the ceremonial wagon appears rather abruptly in the Carpathian Basin and in southern central Europe. Only from the middle phase onwards it spreads a little into the areas of the Atlantic and Nordic Bronze Ages, certainly within a framework of pre-existing cultural relations between these areas. In the late phase, i.e. at the end of the Late Bronze Age, the focus of wagon bronzes is then clearly in western Europe. This has to do with the fact that most wagon bronzes were found in hoards. The increase in hoarding during the Late Bronze Age in Europe can also be described as a quasi wave-like, time-delayed spread from the southeast to the northwest. While in the Carpathian Basin and in southern Germany the peak was already reached in the early Urnfield period (cf. Hansen 1994, 306; Falkenstein 2011, 84–85), this happened in western Europe only in the late Urnfield period (Huth 2008, 140).

This time-delayed spread of the hoarding customs' peak is probably also partly responsible for the decline in wagon bronzes in the middle and late Urnfield period: Due to the fact that the number of hoards in the former distribution area of the wagon bronzes, i.e. in southern and eastern central Europe as well as in the Carpathian Basin, decreases in the middle phase, there are fewer possibilities for the wagon bronzes to be preserved in the archaeological record. At the same time, the decline of the Hart an der Alz group shows that the custom of wagon burials did not continue. The lower occurrence of wagon bronzes in the middle phase compared to the early and late phases could therefore be explained purely by the poorer preservation conditions. However, it is also possible that ceremonial wagons were generally less common in the middle phase.

From a typological point of view, the Hallstatt ceremonial wagon seems to represent a continuation of the western European wagon-building tradition of the late phase, in addition to influences from central Italy (Milcent/Leroy 2003, 227). According to Pare (2006, 60), the oldest evidence for Hallstatt period wagon graves comes from central Bohemia, Upper Austria, Bavaria, and the Swabian Alb. In the Late Hallstatt period, the wagon burial custom spread westwards to the Middle Rhine and to western France. At a first glance, it does not quite fit that the ceremonial wagons of early HaC are supposed to continue the western European wagon-building tradition of the Late Bronze Age, as spatially they occur comparatively far away from it. In fact, this apparent contradiction might rather illustrate that the concept of the wagon grave had by no means fallen into oblivion in its former early Urnfield main distribution area in southern Bavaria, but was just no longer practised to the same extent. In any case, the late Urnfield wagon graves of Künzing (Lkr. [German: *Landkreis* = district, county] Deggendorf, see Deicke 2011, 14–53) and Pfullingen (Lkr. Reutlingen, see Clausing 1997) prove that the earliest Hallstatt wagon, found at Wehringen (Lkr. Augsburg, see Pare 1992, 315–317), surely had a local cultural substrate.

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The influence from the Atlantic Bronze Age is already clearly evident in the typological composition of the HaB3-period hoards found in western Germany, especially in the Rhine-Main area (Jockenhövel 1972; Huth 2011, 56, fig. 10). At the same time, increasing contacts with the Nordic Bronze Age can be observed for the western Urnfield culture (Thrane 1975, 261; Brandherm 2015, 206). All in all, close mutual contacts between the Nordic Bronze Age, southern central Europe, especially the pile dwelling area, and the Atlantic Bronze Age can be deduced from the find material for the time period 'HaB3/Period V/Horizon of the Carp's Tongue Swords/Bronze final III recent' (cf. Sprockhoff 1951; Hundt 1978; Milcent 2019). Koch (2013, 138) even speaks of an 'atlantisation' of the northern Alpine elites. Thus, a relatively complicated history of the spread of the Late Bronze Age ceremonial wagon becomes apparent, the main direction of which ran from east to west and north for a long time before it reversed again at the end of the Late Bronze Age.

The early Urnfield period wagon burials of the Hart an der Alz group

Due to their comparatively good and complete preservation in burial contexts, the wagon findings of the Hart an der Alz group of the early Urnfield period (BzD/HaA1) play a decisive role for the interpretation of the ceremonial wagon phenomenon. The mortuary practices associated with them will therefore be examined in more detail in the following.

The definition of the group goes back to Christopher Pare, who summarised 13 sites under this name in his 1987 paper (Pare 1987, 38–46). Since then, this number has expanded considerably, partly due to new finds, partly due to older finds whose assignment to the Hart an der Alz group was originally rather vaguely based on single and/or unspecific wagon bronzes (cf. Pankau 2013a). For the sake of clarity, it makes sense to specify the definition of this group and to limit it to the graves and grave deposits mapped in Figure 4. Only in these find complexes the contexts and the quantity and diversity of the wagon bronzes contained indicate that the wagon as a whole or a bigger part of it (like the wagon box or the wheels) was deposited deliberately in or nearby a grave. It should be noted though that the find complexes from Münchsmünster 2, Zuchering, grave 192, Zuchering, 'grave' 507, Zuchering, 'grave' 63A, Zuchering, 'grave' 520, and Zuchering, grave 505, each contained only a few and uncertain wagon bronzes and for this reason would not be counted on their own into this group. However, since they lie in the vicinity of find complexes that can clearly be assigned to this group, they are treated here as well. Classical hoard finds such as Winklsaß (Lkr. Landshut), Rýdeč (okr. Ústí nad Labem), Reventin-Vaugris (Dép. Isère) and Publy (Dép. Jura), which contained only a few wagon bronzes, on the other hand, should not be included. Also graves like those of Großmugl (Bez. Korneuburg), Brandgrab E, and Mühlheim-Lämmerspiel (Kr. Offenbach am Main) or the one from the Lorsch Forest (Lkr. Bergstraße) should not be counted as part of the actual Hart an der Alz group, even if they contain single wagon bronzes which belong to the typical find spectrum of this group. Thus I now propose a narrower definition of this group than advocated in my 2013 article (see Pankau 2013a, also for references for the find complexes mentioned above).

Those individuals buried in the wagon graves – they were all cremated – are generally assigned the highest rank within the social structure of the Urnfield period, which is usually thought of as hierarchical. This is justified both by the rich grave goods, such as weapons, wagons, extensive sets of bronze or ceramic vessels, gold objects, symbols and signs with religious connotations, and by the sometimes striking grave forms (stone cists; cf. for example Schütz-Tillmann 1997, 43; Winghart 1999, 515–517; Clausing 2005, 88, 130; Kreutle 2007, 362–364, 404–405). Considering the local embedding of the find complexes of the Hart an der Alz group, the normal case is certainly the location in or not far from a contemporaneous burial ground. The 'wagon drivers' were therefore not buried in separate places, but very probably in the cemetery of the social community to which they had belonged during their lifetime.

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The sites of the Hart an der Alz group are distributed over a wide area from the northern foothills of the eastern Alps to those of the western Alps (Fig. 4). There is a clear concentration of sites in southern Bavaria. From here, looking west/southwest, the distribution continues via the three find complexes of Königsbronn and Mengen (1905 and 1955) in Württemberg to the three Swiss sites of Kaisten, Bern-Kirchenfeld, and St. Sulpice, although with significantly greater distances between the individual sites than in southern Bavaria.

Of the find complexes of the Hart an der Alz group, seven are more or less securely addressed as graves (Essenbach; Hart an der Alz; Mengen 1955; Poing; Zuchering, grave 192; Zuchering, grave 505; Sulzrain), eight are classified as grave deposits (Bergen; Münchsmünster 1; Münchsmünster 2; Oberottmarshausen; Zuchering, Kreisgraben [circular ditch] 54; Zuchering, 'grave' 507; Zuchering, 'grave' 63A; Zuchering, 'grave' 520), and a further eight as 'grave or grave deposit' (Bern-Kirchenfeld; Bruck; Hader; Kaisten; Königsbronn; Mengen 1905; St. Sulpice; Staudach).

Cornelia Schütz-Tillmann defined a grave deposit (on the basis of four features from the large urnfield of Zuchering and the site of Münchsmünster 1) as an indicator of a high social rank of the deceased that is detached from a grave, but in a figurative sense still has to be considered part of the grave itself (Schütz-Tillmann 1997, 21–23). This new site category was accepted by the majority of researchers (see e.g. Vosteen 1999, 52; Pare 2004, 358 note 3; Eggert 2001, 65–67). The difference to the much older concept of 'grave or funerary treasures', defined, among others, by Hans-Jürgen

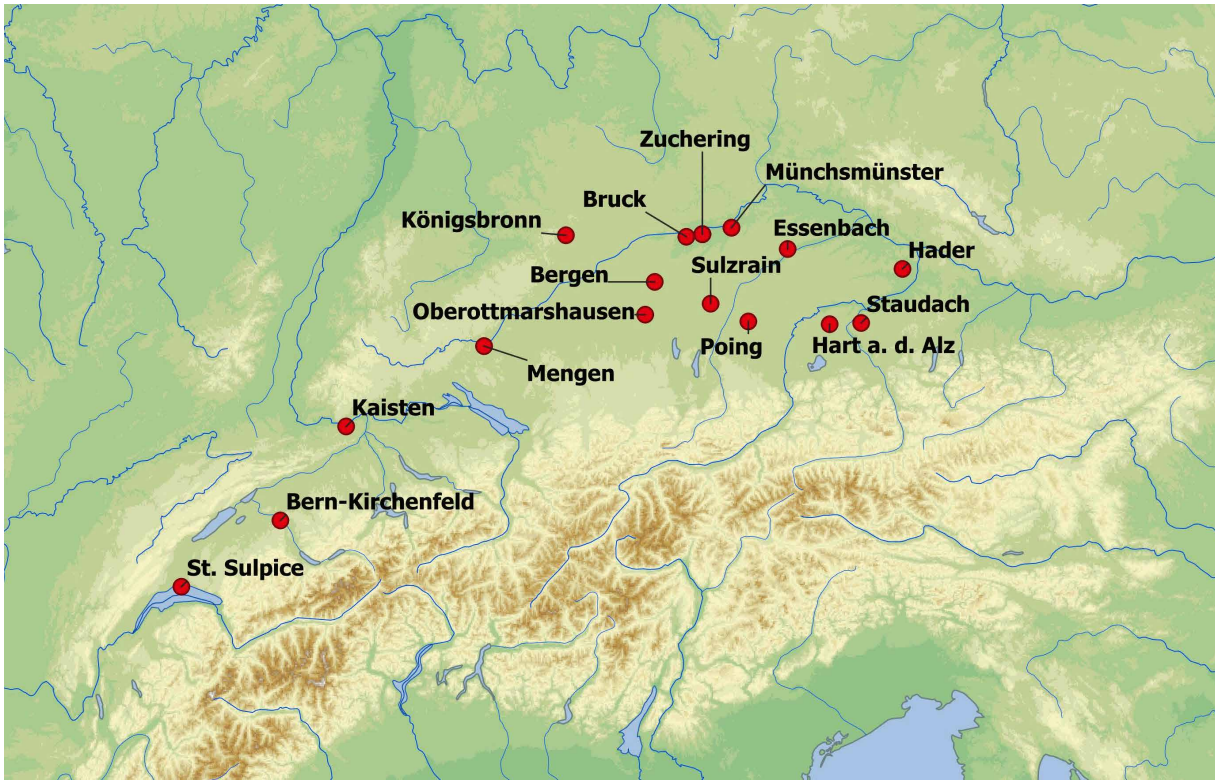


Fig. 4. Distribution map of the sites of the Hart an der Alz group (graphics C. Pankau, with information on: after – Bergen [Lkr. Aichach-Friedberg]: unpublished; Bern-Kirchenfeld [Kt. Bern]: Bolliger Schreyer/Müller 2012; Bruck [Stadt Neuburg a. d. Donau, Fundstelle 5]: Eckstein 1963; Essenbach [Lkr. Landshut]: Koch/Richter 2012; Hader [Lkr. Passau]: Pätzold/Uenze 1963; Hart an der Alz [Lkr. Altötting]; Müller-Karpe 1956; Kaisten [Kt. Aargau]: Pankau 2018; Königsbronn [Lkr. Heidenheim]: Pankau 2013b; Mengen [Lkr. Sigmaringen], two find complexes from years 1905 and 1955: Kreutle 2007, 564–568; Münchsmünster [Lkr. Pfaffenhofen a. d. Ilm], two find complexes: Schütz-Tillmann 1997; Oberottmarshausen [Lkr. Augsburg]: Büttner et al. 2007; Poing [Lkr. Ebersberg]: Winghart 1999; St. Sulpice [Kt. Waadt]: Fischer 1997, 189; Staudach [Bez. Braunau am Inn]: Zu Erbach 1986, 273–277; 1989, 161–165; Sulzrain [Lkr. Dachau]: unpublished; Zuchering [Stadt Ingolstadt], six find complexes: Schütz 2006, 90–91, 157–159, 209–210, 318–322, 327–328).

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Hundt (Hundt 1955) and Ekkehard Aner (Aner 1956),[1] is that the latter are hoards that are interpreted as furnishings for the afterlife and have no spatial reference to the grave of the person for whom the furnishings are intended. Furthermore, not every hoard that comes to light in the area of a contemporaneous cemetery[2] can automatically be described as a grave deposit, because it does not necessarily have anything to do with a specific grave. Another example of the complex phenomenon of deposits 'with funeral context' is grave 2 at Behringersdorf (Lkr. Nürnberger Land), where, according to Clausing (2005, 123), a ceramic vessel filled with burnt and damaged jewellery was placed upright in the uppermost stone package layer like a 'deposit in the grave'. Clausing considers whether the vessel, which was obviously added later, was a deposit of a ritual nature that was related to the buried persons (ibid.).

The fact that grave goods are not placed in the grave itself but deliberately deposited outside of it, though still in the area of the burial ground, is a phenomenon that is also known from other cremation burial periods and cultural areas. Augstein et al. (2020, 61) suggest the following three possible interpretations for such finds:

1. They are graves with an external placement of grave goods where the urn has already been completely ploughed away.
2. They are deposits with funeral character, representative of a grave in the sense of a burial of an individual.
3. The deposits have an autonomous meaning that does not directly refer to concrete graves or individuals.

The first interpretation comes quite close to the concept of a grave deposit according to Schütz-Tillmann (1997), the second case can be described as a cenotaph, the third one as a hoard in a burial ground.

In the following, I will examine whether these categories are helpful in interpreting the grave-like deposits of wagon bronzes.

The eight finds that can be reliably interpreted as grave deposits (four from the urnfield of Zuchering, Münchsmünster 1 and 2, Bergen, Oberottmarshausen) are characterised by an irregular packing of various bronze objects in a small space, with bronze fittings stemming from wagon and/or team dominating in each case. An exception is the find complex from Münchsmünster 2, which contains very individual objects to which hardly any parallels are known and which therefore cannot be reliably identified as wagon parts. With the exception of the finds from Münchsmünster 1–2, all the grave deposits mentioned lie within a contemporaneous cemetery.

The sites of Königsbronn, St. Sulpice, Bern-Kirchenfeld, Staudach, Bruck, Mengen 1905, Hader, and Kaisten might also be regarded as grave deposits. Arguments in favour of this are the lack of human bones and ashes, the (partly only presumed) location in a contemporaneous cemetery or, in the case of Mengen 1905, the proximity to the grave of Mengen 1955, as well as the typological composition of the find complexes (predominantly wagon parts and horse harness elements). The latter argument in particular, however, should be viewed with caution, since the find complexes from Bruck and Mengen 1905, presumably also that from Kaisten, are only partly preserved. The find complex from Königsbronn, on the other hand, in comparison contains many other object categories and might therefore rather represent a grave. In the sense of the above-mentioned variants of interpretation by Augstein et al. (2020) the second possibility, the deposit with funeral character, which is representative of a grave, could be suitable here.

1 G. Tarbay (2019) has convincingly refined the concept of funerary treasures on the basis of Late Bronze Age hoards from Transdanubia and beyond.

2 On this phenomeon, see for example Sprockhoff 1956, 3–4; Falkenstein 2011, 89–90.

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The astonishingly high number of six roughly contemporaneous wagon find complexes in the urnfield of Zuchering is put into perspective if one assumes, as suggested by Schütz (2006, 31–32), that there are pairs of grave deposits and graves belonging to each other. An assignment in the sense of grave deposit – grave is also possible for the find complexes from Mengen 1905 and 1955. Here, however, the problem arises that there would be too many cheek-pieces for only one team, because in Mengen 1955 there are already four and in Mengen 1905 one more. On the other hand, the analysis of the typological composition shows that in Mengen 1905 mainly components of the wheels are included, in Mengen 1955 mainly fittings of the wagon box, which can certainly be interpreted in the sense that both find complexes contained bronzes of the same wagon. It is therefore conceivable that Mengen 1955 is the actual burial, and Mengen 1905 represents the associated grave deposit.

For the early Urnfield (BzD/HaA1) burials of Zuchering, Schütz-Tillmann (1997, 22–23, 25) describes a development ranging from an almost unsorted distribution of bronze objects to the concentration of the 'better' parts in a corner of the grave pit to the removal of the well-preserved weapons, wagon and harness parts, i.e. the rank insignia, and their deposition separated from the grave in the form of a grave deposit. The same pattern – a concentration of burnt wagon and harness bronzes, partly together with weapons, in a densely packed heap within the grave, while the remaining bronzes were deposited on the cremated remains or in other places – can also be observed in the grave of Poing as well as in the disturbed graves of Mengen 1955 and Hart an der Alz. The fourth grave to be added is the one from Essenbach, where the wagon and harness bronzes as well as the sword were also deposited together in the eastern corner of the burial chamber in a dense package (Koch/Richter 2012, 41).

If it is true that the burial rites outlined are in a chronological sequence, then the grave deposits should be slightly younger than the actual graves of the Hart an der Alz group. Schütz (2006, 31) also provides a possible explanation for this development; she suspects a causal connection between the grave deposits and new religious rules of the Urnfield period, according to which the extent of grave furnishings had to be greatly reduced.

A relationship between grave and associated grave deposit can also be assumed for some find complexes outside the Urnfield culture. The two rich graves AO and GX in the Lusehøj possibly represent just two separate deposits of the cremated remains and the grave goods of one and the same person, whereby wagon parts were only contained in grave GX. In addition, there is the find complex from Egemose, only a few kilometres away from the Lusehøj, which might possibly represent another deposit of parts of the same wagon. This fits in with the fact that the finds from Egemose also show traces of burning. A similar connection could exist between the hoard from Onzain (Dép. Loir-et-Cher, see Milcent/Leroy 2003), which contained nothing else but wagon bronzes, among them a very big yoke attachement of type Ückeritz-Stolzenburg with a huge vessel-shaped sculpture in the centre, and the Bronze Final IIIb-cremation burial from Sublaines (Dép. Indre-et-Loire, see Cordier 2009, 531–538, figs. 423–426, 428.5) in France with its magnificent ceramic vessel decorated with wagon depictions. In this case the two sites are already 27 km apart. A possible explanation for this distance is provided by Milcent/Leroy (2003, 226) with the suggestion that this could reflect the territory over which the buried person associated with the wagon once exercised control. Both find complexes emphasise the close iconographic relationship between wagon and vessel, already apparent in the cauldron wagons of the early Urnfield period (see above). The professionally excavated burial mound from Sublaines contained only the vessel described by Cordier (2009, 531) as an urn, which apparently was filled with cremated remains. This 'emptiness' indeed suggests that the 'missing' equipment of the buried person should be sought in the hoards of the surrounding area.

As an interim conclusion, it should be noted that the separation of some grave goods, including wagon and harness bronzes, within the grave pit or their deposition outside of it is a typical phenomenon for the wagon find complexes of the Hart an der Alz group. However, similar phenomena are

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also known from other chronological and cultural contexts. The intentions behind them cannot be deciphered on the basis of archaeological sources alone; however, in the case of the Hart an der Alz group, it is clear that the wagon parts in particular received such a prominent treatment.

In order to gain deeper insight into the rituals associated with the burial, the find complexes of the Hart an der Alz group were also examined with regard to traces of burning and deliberate mechanical destruction that could be detected on the preserved objects. It can be noted that traces of fire occur regularly. However, there are clear differences in the quantity and type of objects affected by fire as well as their degree of burning. The spectrum ranges from find complexes such as Hart an der Alz and Münchsmünster 1, where all or by far the majority of bronze objects have traces of burning, to others such as Königsbronn, Oberottmarshausen and Hader, which have only a certain proportion of burnt objects, to further ones such as Staudach, St. Sulpice, and Bruck, where only very few objects are influenced by fire. In the case of St. Sulpice and Bruck, however, it must be taken into account that these find complexes have certainly not survived completely.

In the find complex from Königsbronn, the ratio of burnt to unburnt objects partly suggests a deliberate selection or a *pars pro toto* burning,[3] since here, for example, one of two cheek-pieces and one of two bits are burnt, as well as three of five phalerae. Furthermore, one spiral disk (of a set of two) is preserved, the other broken to pieces. In Essenbach, one of the two horn-shaped sockets is very well preserved, the other one severely crushed. This list could be continued.

According to Norbert Wiesner, pairs of objects which are destroyed in a differentiated manner by mechanical and/or thermal action are not uncommon especially in the early and middle Urnfield period (Wiesner 2009, 442–446). This custom of deliberate unequal treatment of grave goods of the same type occurs regionally limited and differs in detail. Gräslund's (1994, 16) general statement, that 'prehistoric people' normally avoided laying down unburnt prestige goods in cremation graves, can therefore not be confirmed here.

The deliberate deformation of grave goods is not unusual in BzD; on the contrary, it can be regarded as a typical feature that is often linked to the cremation burial rite (cf. in detail Wiesner 2009, 437–448; see also Nebelsick 1997, 40; Fischer 1998, 317; Louwen 2021, 143–148, 235–236). It may have been carried out both before and after cremation. According to Vosteen (1999, 164), the regularly occurring mechanical damage to the bronze objects in Urnfield culture graves indicates that the entrance of the deceased into the world beyond was only secured if corresponding actions were carried out. Manfred Eggert also regards the intentional damage or destruction of deposited objects as a criterion for ritual activities (Eggert 2015, 266–267 fig. 5).

It can be concluded that either the wagon itself, or only its fittings, usually ended up on the funeral pyre. The fact that the dead person(s) was (were) burnt lying on the wagon can only be proven with certainty for Hart an der Alz due to cremated remains sticking to the wagon bronzes. The burnt bronze fittings were then collected and deposited in dense packs in the grave or in the vicinity, sometimes together with other unburnt wagon parts as well as other bronze objects. This sequence can be deduced from the descriptions of the well-documented graves of Essenbach, Hart an der Alz, Mengen 1955, and Poing as well as the grave deposits of Münchsmünster 1, Oberottmarshausen, and Zuchering, Kreisgraben (circular ditch) 54.

The fact that the wagon bronzes were often burnt only in parts, as well as their partial mechanical destruction, which apparently took place before the burning, indicate that at least these fittings must have been deliberately dismantled from the wagon before its burning. The question arises whether this does not apply to all wagon bronzes, i.e. whether the wooden wagon may not have been placed

3 On the *pars pro toto* aspect of the Urnfield burial custom in general, see Wiesner 2009, 521. Specifically on the topic of the only partial co-incineration of grave goods: Zuber 2018, 23.

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on the pyre or in the grave at all, but only its fittings or a part of them, as a *pars pro toto* for the whole wagon.[4]

In summary, it can be stated that the graves and grave deposits of the Hart an der Alz group were probably established for representatives (men, women, children) of an elite social class who had supra-regional connections and had fully adapted the new burial rites of the incipient Urnfield culture. Whether a group of people can be identified here who promoted the implementation of new religious ideas, and what role the ceremonial wagon might have played in this, will be discussed in the following section.

The ceremonial wagon of the Late Bronze Age: Stage and spectacle

To witness the driving around of a ceremonial wagon certainly was a spectacle, considering all the messages transported by the horses, the sun and waterfowl symbolism, and all the ringing pendants fixed on team and wagon. The elite incineration graves of the Hart an der Alz group actually contained all the elements that are characteristic for the new 'Urnfield religion': cremation, with the remains to be interred in flat graves, waterfowl and sun iconography, wagons, horses and vessels, and horn/cattle/moon symbolism.

The purpose of the flat wagon boxes, both in the Hallstatt period and in the Late Bronze Age, was probably to make the people or objects travelling or being transported on the wagon clearly visible to all spectators – to put them in the limelight. This is deduced because a flat wagon box is not practical for transport – the goods to be transported can hardly be stacked, and they fall out more easily when the journey is bumpy than with a deep wagon box. So a flat wagon box resembles more a stage than a container. This in turn fits with the new burial rite of the Urnfield culture, which has a spectacle character regarding the burning of the body on a funeral pyre. Overall, in the burial ritual of the Urnfield culture there is more emphasis on the funeral process itself, which is likely to have been understood as a transformation of the dead, than on the creation of an impressive funerary monument, as expressed in the Middle Bronze Age burial mound with inhumations.

For Stefan Wirth, the symbolism of the *Vogelsonnenbarke* ultimately contains the hope of immortality (Wirth 2010, 508–512). At the same time, he sees it as a symbol of the sovereign iconography of a warlike culture. These aspects could explain the rapid spread of the new religion. The people buried in the elite graves of the Hart an der Alz group can be imagined as protagonists in this process, namely by linking essential elements of the new religion (cremation burial, water bird symbolism, horse-drawn ceremonial wagon) with traditional status symbols (weapons, jewellery) in the grave.[5] Through this staging, they integrated the old values and the new faith, thus pulling 'the common people' along. Sperber (1999, 654–655) and Falkenstein (2017) have already described this process in a very similar way. The origin of at least some of the new religious elements can probably be traced downstream from the Danube. According to Falkenstein (2017, 84–85), the cremation rite was adopted from the central Danube region, and Winghart (1999, 531–532) sees the special furnishings of the northern Alpine wagon graves and the grave deposits as a direct adoption of east-central European depositional rites into the traditional burial ritual of the western Tumulus culture.

4 See a similar argument in Clausing (1997, 578–579), Fischer (1998, 317–318) and Schauer (2008, 28). It is equally possible that some of the bronzes were not recovered from the pyre remains (Schütz-Tillmann 1997, 41). Deicke (2011, 119), on the other hand, suggests a positioning close to, but not on, the pyre itself for the sword from tomb B as well as the wagon and horse harness from tomb A of Künzing, since these objects were only partially exposed to fire.

5 Falkenstein (2017, 83) aptly writes of a syncretic combination of elements of inhumation and cremation graves.

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Those buried in the wagon graves of the Hart an der Alz group can thus be understood as an avant-garde of the elite, the first to adopt the new religion with its symbols. Further 'milestones' in the adaptation of the new ideas of the afterlife would then be, on the one hand, the enforcement of the urn burial custom from HaA1 onwards (Falkenstein 2017, 89). On the other hand, Sperber (1999, 650–655) assumes a complete abandonment of graves in the area of the Rhenish-Swiss-French and Lower Mainish-Swabian groups of the Urnfield culture from HaB1 onwards, and suggests that the ashes of the dead were scattered in the rivers instead, as indicated by the increase in river finds.

The new iconography of the Urnfield culture features especially in the 'militant sphere' (cf. Ilon 2012; Kaiser 2014; Wirth 2021, 649–650). An essential difference between 'the' warrior of the Tumulus culture and 'that' of the Urnfield culture could thus be described as a tendency towards sacralisation or mythologisation of the latter. According to Müller-Karpe (1956, 73–74), the 'warrior of Hart an der Alz' represents the new belief of the Urnfield culture, which, among other things, enforced the idea of sacrifice to an extent unknown before. As evidence for this, he cites the birds, in which he sees the symbolic figures for the delivery of offerings to a deity and probably for the intercourse between man and God in general. The horse may also have played an important role in the new religion, which may have hardly differed from that of the water bird – possibly both were assigned the function of *psychopomp*, mediator between the worlds (Coimbra 2017). As proof of this, we can cite the images of the sun horse on the Nordic razors, some of which strongly resemble the water bird images, of course only as far as the head and neck area of the horse are concerned (see Kaul 2005, fig. 3). The same can be seen on the bits with horse-shaped cheek-pieces from Italy (cf. e.g. Von Hase 1969, Taf. A and Taf. 1–2). It is generally known that in the Late Bronze Age, both in the area of the Urnfield culture and in the Nordic Bronze Age, syncretic animal representations such as the *Vogelrind* (combining cattle with waterfowl imagery) or the horned horse are popular motifs.

The horse-drawn wagon with spoke wheels, which surely is to be read as a symbol for the sun, and decorated with waterfowl may thus have provided the ideal stage to propagate the new religious ideas. At least, this is probably what happened in BzD in southern Bavaria and further to the west, where the find complexes of the Hart an der Alz group came to light. The expiry of the wagon burial custom, and the simultaneous expansion of the ceremonial wagon into northern and western Europe, which can be observed from the middle phase on, may be a consequence of the 'consolidation' of the new religion. Propagation was no longer necessary, the new beliefs and practices had prevailed and were increasingly 'exported' in the course of existing cultural contacts. Spectacular wagon finds are now more likely outside the Urnfield culture, examples being the find complexes from Egemose and Onzain,[6] and the cast bronze wheels of the Coulon type (Pare 1987, 49–55; 1992, 30–33). The religious implications of the wagon were not necessarily fully adopted during that process, but surely adapted to the local communities' customs.

In the late phase, the core area of the ceremonial wagon had clearly shifted to western Europe, and from there it finally came back to the graves in southern central Europe in the form of the Hallstatt ceremonial wagons. This process should be seen against the background of the cultural changes from the Bronze to the Iron Age.

In graves A and F from Künzing, as well as those from Pfullingen (see above) and Steinkirchen (Lkr. Deggendorf), the revival of the wagon burial custom at the end of the Urnfield period in its former core area is already indicated. The explanation for this is usually given as the legitimation of new elites who, by referring to the ceremonial wagon, wanted to place themselves in a traditional narrative, but who, on the other hand, also presented themselves as particularly modern, among other

6 Both also show traces of fire and mechanical destruction, which is reminiscent of the typical treatment of grave goods in the Urnfield culture.

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things by using the new Thraco-Cimmerian bridle.[7] In HaC, the wagon becomes an integral part of many rich graves, and certainly this continued to be a conscious reference to a burial custom that had never been completely forgotten. Melanie Augstein has worked out in detail the various references to cultic practices of the Urnfield period that manifest themselves in some HaC-period wagon graves in Bavaria, including the *pars pro toto* custom, as well as the deliberate manipulation and fragmentation of grave goods (Augstein 2017). It is noteworthy that the ceremonial wagon in HaC also appears (at least allusively) in elite graves in the previously 'wagon-free' Netherlands (Wijchen, Oss) and in Belgium (Cour-St-Etienne; Schumann/Van der Vaart-Verschoof 2017). There, too, this happens in a strong Urnfield tradition, which is expressed, among other things, in the fragmentation of grave goods and the cremation rite (Van der Vaart-Verschoof 2017, 151–152).

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7 Cf. Vosteen 1999, 164; Metzner-Nebelsick 2003, 108. Deicke (2021, 230) sees a clear correlation between the influx of new status indicators from the east and the reactivation of the wagon grave as a local status symbol of the ruling elite.

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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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