
CREMATIONS AS TRANSFORMATIONS: WHEN THE DUAL CULTURAL HYPOTHESIS WAS CREMATED AND CARRIED AWAY IN URNS

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Abstract: A cremation and subsequent burial can be analysed as a set of technological, social and ritual transformations. It consists of three parts: first, the place where the body was burnt or cremated; secondly, the intermediary period in time and space, where the cleaned bones are often transported somewhere else; this interval increases the room for manoeuvre in those aspects which are concerned with the renewal, reorganization and re-legitimization of relations between the living; and, finally, the place where the ashes or the bones were deposited or buried, which may be the same place where the body was cremated, but normally it is not. Thus the urn represents the place where the deceased died, the cremated bones are from the rite of cremation, whereas the burial of the urn and the deposition of undamaged artefacts are from the final burial site, where other rituals were performed by the descendants, relatives and others. The distribution of urns may illuminate the notion that distance has hardly been a barrier and that people from the 'northern margins' have travelled all over Europe from the late Bronze Age to the Viking period. This approach attacks the dual cultural hypothesis and some elements of core-periphery models.

Keywords: burials, core-periphery, cremations, dual cultural hypothesis, intermediary period, mortuary rituals, transportation, urns

INTRODUCTION

Hegel once wrote that history is the record of 'what man does with death' (Whaley 1981:1). In comparison with other body-disposal methods, cremation is actually designed to dispose of two things, the body and the spirit (Barber 1990:386). A cremation rite is a ritual involving three elements of transformation. It is partly cosmological, as the deceased moves from one location in the landscape to another; it is partly social as s/he is returned to the ancestors, and finally, it is partly ontological as s/he is transformed into a different entity and state of being (Vitebsky

1993:11). Cremation is transformation. It is a medium of change and transmutation. Thus cremation can be analysed as a result of three different but interdependent processes; first as a technological transformation, secondly as a social transformation and finally as a ritual transformation.

The interpretative framework presented here is a socio-ritual approach and a model to cremation burials based on ethnoarchaeological research into funeral practices in Nepal and India. 'Ethnoarchaeology' can be defined as a method of extending the context by collecting primary data in a non-excavation situation directly related to archaeological problems (Oestigaard 1997:22, 1998:21). Ethnographic analogies are mainly a source of ideas to broaden the horizons of possibilities about how the past might be interpreted (Hodder 1999:46). These data are subsequently used to develop models and theoretical frameworks. In this regard, ethnoarchaeology may illustrate how processes worked in the past. To have a science of phenomena means to grasp its objects in such a way that everything about them must be treated by direct definition and demonstration (Heidegger 1997[1962]: 59). This means that a good ethnographic analogy as a source of interpretation of past processes must be capable of demonstration using archaeological data. Thus I have analysed different cremation burials from the late Bronze Age, early Iron Age and late Iron Age in southern and western Norway as a way of investigating the ethnoarchaeological model. This generates a dynamic view of cultures in the past, opposed to the dual cultural hypothesis and aspects of core-periphery models (Fig. 1).

THE DUAL CULTURAL HYPOTHESIS AND CORE-PERIPHERY MODELS

Common to both core-periphery models and the dual cultural hypothesis is that neither of them are clearly defined, for they are often presented as self-explanatory,

Figure 1. Overall location map and implicit 'core'-periphery notions. Sites: 1. Skrivarhelleren (late Neolithic and Bronze Age); 2. Bringsvær (face-urns from late Bronze Age); 3. 'Klungerhaugen', near Naterstad (eighth century AD); 4. Ølbør, near Jæren (Viking-Age mound); 5. 'Loptshaugen', near Sæbø (Migration period). Source: Eggers 1951, with modifications by Arnulf Østerdal.

clouded concepts. Nevertheless, the dual cultural hypothesis is dependent upon notions of a core–periphery model. In the history of archaeological research in Norway, the dual cultural hypothesis was formulated prior to the development of explicit core–periphery models. 1925 was a timemark in Norwegian prehistory, when Haakon Shetelig and A.W. Brøgger presented two different views of the Bronze Age (Hagen 1997:131). Shetelig believed that there had been an authentic Bronze Age culture in Norway, as an integral part of the southern Scandinavian culture (Shetelig 1925:81). Brøgger, on the other hand, more or less rejected a Norwegian Bronze Age culture. The bronze objects, according to Brøgger, were similar to ‘foreign art’, and thus, Norway had an unique *Stone-Bronze Age* culture (Brøgger 1925:104–110). Anathon Bjørn (1926) supported Shetelig’s view to some extent, but claimed that only parts of Norway shared in an authentic southern Scandinavian Bronze Age culture, and that there existed several cultures in southern Norway. This was the foundation for the tradition later characterized as the ‘dual culture debate’ – an agenda, evolutionary paradigm and debate that continued up to the beginning of the 1990s. Over this 70-year period, no paradigms were gained or lost (Prescott 1994:102–104).

There are two different evaluations of the quality of ‘cultures’ implied in the dual cultural hypothesis. (1) Brøgger’s approach to the unique Norwegian culture was positive, and he ‘was critical of the determinism inherent in the reigning cultural-evolutionism, as well as of conventional reductionist positions revolving around metal–subsistence–culture’ (Prescott 1994:94). Even though production was based on lithic tools, the culture was not inferior to the southern Bronze Age culture. (2) The other view is negative and evolutionary. Albeit Norway is a ‘periphery’ in itself, seen from southern Scandinavia or the rest of Europe, within Norway there are also presumed to be internal cores and peripheries. The areas outside the periphery, i.e. areas not integrated into the broader culture, might be perceived as ‘the other’ culture in the dual cultural hypothesis. They are not a part of even the ‘most remote’ peripheries in Europe – and thus, from an evolutionary standpoint, they represent a cultural *cul de sac*. In this approach, these areas are just waiting for European impulses to arrive, so that they can be a part of a ‘bigger and better’ culture as a dependent periphery.

In his research on Skrivarhelleren (Sogn and Fjordane county, Norway), Prescott (1991, 1995) has shown that multi-resource pastoralism developed in some of the innermost mountain areas from the late Neolithic and Bronze Age. Furthermore, there were finds of bronze from these periods on the site (Prescott 1991:76–81). This indicates that these remote areas were integrated into the economy and ideology of the southern Scandinavian late Neolithic and Bronze Age cultures. Thus he argues that there are no variations in the archaeological material to support a dual-culture or multi-ethnic interpretation, even from apparently remote settlements in the mountain zone (Prescott 1995:131).

The crux of the debate is the way people are thinking, acting and living (Prescott 1995:127). From an anthropological point of view, ‘culture’ might be defined as

denoting: '... an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitude toward life' (Geertz 1973:89). Even though there is evidence that the northern periphery was integrated into wide-ranging Scandinavian and European networks, both economically and ideologically, during the late Neolithic and Bronze Age (Prescott 1995), the dual culture view is deep-rooted and implicit in early Iron Age archaeology. However, in the late Iron Age, or more precisely the Viking period, the 'northern margins' are an incorporated part of Europe because of written sources. What is it about the data in the Roman and Migration periods that favours culturally dualistic interpretations?

In archaeology, participation in a culture is dependent upon chronology. There are often implicit cultural evolutionist notions in core-periphery models. It is reflected in the view of how interaction happens and notions of how the participants use and evaluate the goods acquired. There have, of course, been cultural differences between various ethnic groups and social segments in the past, for instance between the Romans and Scandinavian tribes or chiefdoms. However, these contemporary differences in cultures are not parts of the dual cultural debate. The dual cultural debate is a way of thinking and interpreting the past, or how cultures 'develop'. In simplified form, it implies a notion of inferior peripheries that inherit cultural patterns and status objects as 'second-hand objects' when they have lost their value in the core areas. Thus the peripheries participate in the same material culture as the core areas, but at a later stage. It is a cultural replica. My criticism relates to the problem of the delayed duplication of cultures.

The participation in the southern Scandinavian culture is measured in 'imported exotica' (e.g. Lund Hansen 1987; Myhre 1987; Hedeager 1992). One may argue against this view but, for the moment, this is subordinate to the main argument. Core-periphery theories and various levels of regionality have to be analysed from a socio-theoretical perspective as products of social processes and human behaviour (Larsson 1989). I shall focus on an overall perspective where the interaction is between the presumed core (southern Scandinavia and the rest of Europe) and the periphery or 'the northern margins' (e.g. Norway and northern Sweden) (Lund Hansen 1987:259).

Core-periphery models are based upon notions of a redistributive economy (Lund Hansen 1987). Ulla Lund Hansen argues that, for the early Iron Age, the circulation of Roman imported goods to peripheries such as Norway and Sweden is clearly later than the distribution of these objects in Denmark. She gives two explanations: (1) the objects were distributed to the periphery after they went out of use in Denmark, or (2) after the objects were exchanged through Denmark, they were exchanged further north via various centres before deposition in graves in the peripheries (1987). As a consequence of this view, there is an implicit view of a dual culture.

If we see economic interaction as a social practice, there are not necessarily limitations in space but in time. The workings of an economic system depend upon the availability of goods for exchange and redistribution within a limited time span. Tributes from the periphery cannot come decades or a century later into the core, and vice-versa. Relating this to the discussion of the prevailing, although implicit, notion of a dual cultural hypothesis, there are three alternatives: (1) Based on core assumptions about the meaning of 'culture', it is the knowledge of the use and the value of the objects that defines whether or not the peripheries were a part of a broader culture, and not the presence of the objects in themselves. If the people in the peripheries were satisfied with non-modern 'second-hand' status objects, which only had a value because they lived in cultural backwaters without knowing that these objects were out of fashion in the rest of Europe, then there existed in reality at least two cultures. (2) If the peripheries really were parts of a broader contemporary southern culture, then the chronology is wrong. (3) There was one culture, but the societies were highly ranked, stratified and politically controlled, and the leader therefore exerted total control over redistribution between his allies. Thus it was either an explicit strategy to delay the exchange of 'exotica' to the periphery, or the means of transport and communication were rather undeveloped.

The 'imported exotica' are more to be seen as prestige goods (Bradley 1984; Hedeager 1992). Richard Bradley argues that prestige goods are not freely accessible:

They are essential for the performance of particular types of transactions, for example marriage payments, with the result that through limiting access to those objects an elite is able to control the transactions in which they are used. The important element is that the supply of prestige items should be restricted to one section in society (Bradley 1984:46–47).

Thus most of these objects probably represented a person-to-person exchange (1984:55). 'Prestige goods were personal: they could not be bought but had to be obtained through personal relationships and connections; either when the elite received them from far away or when the elite undertook their local redistribution' (Hedeager 1992:89). The implication is the personal participation of powerful persons in alliances cemented by the regular exchange of prestige goods functioning as social bonds.

The important point is that, prior to the deposition of status objects, they have already served as objects of exclusion (Bradley 1984:67). Furthermore, objects may have been inherited for several generations; if they should serve as objects of exclusion, they cannot be deposited immediately when they arrive as 'imports'. Based on this, a core is then nothing but the final destination of the exchange network of an alliance, where personal or collective prestige goods finally are deposited in one or several burials, and the periphery represents the excluded people.

Albeit the elite had a monopoly of the prestige goods system and exploited any periphery to some degree, core-periphery models are not closed units where all interactions must be channelled through the leaders. Thus the economic foundation

for stratification and hierarchy lies in local intensification of production for the payment of tribute, but not necessarily indicating total control over social reproduction; prestige goods systems are unstable and characterized by conflict and continual change. If the monopoly of prestige goods breaks down, the elite will rarely be able to maintain their political control (Hedeager 1992:88–89). How is it then possible to trace these alliances? To discuss this issue, we must return to the question of cremations and especially those artefacts which can reveal information about longer-distance exchange and alliances.

CREMATION AND BURIALS AS TECHNOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATIONS

Technology is a means to an end as well as a human activity. To posit ends and procure and utilize the means to them is a human activity (Heidegger 1977:4). Cremation is usually neither a final act nor sufficient in itself. The ashes are rarely left at the pyre site. After an intermediary period, a complementary rite of burial is performed (Hertz 1960:42–43). There are practical limits to the distance it is possible to carry a corpse on a stretcher in order to perform either a cremation or an inhumation. Normally there are spatial limitations and cultural constraints in the choice of cremation sites. An emphasis on the intermediary period, the time between the cremation of the body and the burial of the cremated bones, is crucial in order to understand the whole mortuary sequence. The time between the cremation site and the place where the ashes are buried or scattered into a river depends upon distance. If the corpse is cremated at a cemetery next to a river into which the ashes are scattered afterwards, the distance is short and the intermediary period small, but still, there are two rituals, although the use of an urn as a container of the collected bones is not necessary. Similarly, if there is an amalgamation of the time and space of the beginning and the end of the intermediary period, i.e. when the ashes are buried at the pyre site, an urn may not be used. But if the distance increases, the urn can be a portable container for the ashes and the bones.

For more than a century, archaeologists in Norway have been aware of the fact that cremations were often performed in a different place from where the urns were deposited in a barrow (Rygh 1877:166–168; Rygh 1906; Schetelig 1906, 1912; Sverdrup 1933; Bjørn 1935:7; Nissen Fett 1972; Helgen 1982). But the main issue in the archaeological debate has been the time at which the cremated remains were buried (e.g. Schetelig 1912:88; Møllerup 1950:44), since the bones were supposed to be deposited at the pyre site. As a result of this, Schetelig distinguishes between cremation burials with and without urns or cists (Schetelig 1912:22) – a classification that is still in use (e.g. Dommasnes 1998:188–190). The separation of the bones from the ashes is interpreted as aspects of the burial. In my opinion, the debate has been a bit blurred because there is an implicit assumption that cremation is sufficient in itself, whereas if we emphasize different ritual aspects within the same mortuary practice, we may plunge deeper into past social practices. Funeral practices involving cremation always consist of a later act of burial. Thus,

I have distinguished three stages in mortuary sequences involving cremation (Oestigaard 1998:120, 1999):

1. the place where the body was cremated
2. the intermediary period in time and space. This interval increases the room for manoeuvre in those aspects which are concerned with the renewal, reorganization and re-legitimization of relations between the living. During this period the bones cleaned during cremation may be further treated locally or transported in an urn over long distances
3. the place where the cremated remains were deposited or buried. This place may be the same site where the body was cremated if there is an amalgamation of time and space of the intermediary period but, normally, the urn is transported to another place or cemetery.

Fundamental to interpretations of burials of cremated remains is an understanding of the meaning and the function of the urn as a container for the burnt bones in a social and religious context. An urn as an object used for cremation remains is an ideologically transformed multi-vocal container with several functions, characteristics and properties. Functionally, it is transportable and thus represents alliances, relationships and circles of acquaintances. Socially, it is an object of economic status which may reflect social differentiation and hierarchies. Ritually, it is a charnel-house for the burnt bones, through which cosmological and religious ideas are expressed.

The basis of the model is that neither the deceased nor their relatives had procured the urn prior to the death, but that the descendants had to obtain the urn *after* the death of the deceased. Thus the urn will have been procured between the time of death and the performance of the cremation. This time limitation restricts the possibilities of procuring urns from regions other than areas near the place of death. Thus I shall argue that the urns used to store the burnt bones after cremations have been procured from the same area or region where the deceased died. The urns are not necessarily locally made, but they are locally procured after the time of death. It is here necessary to distinguish between two different types of urns: first, containers whose primary function is as urns in the burial of cremated remains. This type of urn normally shows a limited distribution pattern within a region that corresponds to some kind of social or religious network. Secondly, there are containers made for another use but with a secondary function as urns. These containers may have been exchanged over great distances before they were used as urns. The distribution patterns of the various containers and their context of deposition will determine the type of urns.

The first group of urns provides the possibility of interpreting technological and social transformations. The appearance of such urns outside their own production area probably reflects the movement of people from other regions that have lived and died in the area where the urns were made. Thus the urn represents the

place where the deceased died, while the cremated bones are from the first stage of the mortuary process and the burial of the urn and the deposition of unburnt artefacts are from the burial of the cremated remains where other rituals were performed by the descendants, relatives and others.

The second group of urns is more difficult to interpret as a technological transformation. Since the containers may have been exchanged as ordinary pots prior to their use as urns, it is difficult to establish in which area and when they were used as urns. In other words, even though the urns were procured locally, these containers may represent circles of acquaintances rather than places where the deceased had been. Identical objects used in different contexts have different meanings (Saetersdal 1995:120). Although the urns may be identical to ordinary pots used for daily purposes, their meaning and their use have changed, and thus, these containers are multi-vocal since their last function was as urns. Moreover, it is in some cases difficult to establish if these vessels have been used as cooking or storage pots prior to the burials, or if the urns originally and intentionally were made identical to vessels for food. However, this ambiguity opens up various possible interpretations focusing on ritual transformations in mortuary practice.

CREMATIONS AND BURIALS AS SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS

Bloch and Parry (1987:4) argue that it is not 'a matter of the fate of the soul determining the treatment of the corpse, but rather the nature of the society and the state of the collective conscience determining both the treatment of the corpse and the supposed condition of the soul'. Mortuary practices revitalize what is culturally conceived to be the most essential to the reproduction of the social order (1987:7). Death rituals are an integrated part of the society of the descendants and the ancestors. The point is to establish the ritual bond between the generations of the living who offer gifts and the deceased who receive the gifts (Knipe 1977:111–112). This relation changes through rites of commemoration. Therefore, the dead have to be returned to an auspicious place, such as a cemetery, that is normally either home or a holy place. The basis of this argument is that the burial of the deceased's cremated remains is normally in the local society where s/he lived or at a special sacred place, and not in a foreign area where the deceased happened to have died.

The preferred funeral rite for Hindus in India is cremation, at the holy city of Benares, on the banks of the Ganges – the holy river into which the ashes are scattered afterwards. If it is impossible to bring the corpse to the holy city, an alternative is to cremate the body at another cemetery and thereafter send the ashes in a copper pot to the city. Thus the ashes are still scattered into the Ganges (Pandey 1969:261; Parry 1994:69). It is not possible to distinguish 'pragmatic' from 'other-worldly' goals (Parry 1994:70), and this way of performing the funeral custom is practised as far as the means allow. With a focus on different spatial and social aspects established through the intermediary period within the full cremation

cycle, it is possible to identify cremated remains on the move, carried in the urns, in the present as well as in the past. These similarities are the relevant variables in this relational analogy (Hodder 1982:19).

If we extend our notions of spatiality back into the past, it is possible to make new interpretations of the urn as an object revealing the dissolution of distance as a barrier. Thus it is possible to generate a dynamic view of cultures where people travelled not only from the 'cores' to the 'peripheries' but also vice-versa. People from 'the margins' in the north travelled all over Europe, to 'the great centres' as well as other 'peripheries'. During these extensive journeys or perhaps in times of war, it seems obvious that travellers died far from home. It is difficult to imagine that the descendants imported 'exotic' urns from all over Europe in order to perform a cremation burial if the deceased died in the vicinity of their home. On the contrary, when people died far away, the dead had to be returned back home either to the ancestors' land or to the descendants, and some of the urns indicate the place of death.

Nevertheless, not all were honoured with this respect in the past. Anders Kaliff has emphasized the difference between cremation and burial. The vast majority of people may have been cremated without having their ashes interred in a grave and, thus, the burning of the body would have been the central element in cremations. Only some individuals were buried but even they were not all buried with all their bones (Kaliff 1997, 1998:183). When only some of the deceased's bones were transported back home, it may have been because the descendants required the presence of the deceased for social continuity.

The archaeological material shows that those who were brought back from foreign areas probably belonged to a rich elite among their contemporaries. When a special person died in a foreign area, a cremation was arranged but the mortuary sequence was not complete before the remains were carried back to the land of ancestors and the burial was performed there. The death of a member of a society threatens any society (Hertz 1960:78) and therefore it was of the uttermost importance for the descendants to bring them back and to incorporate the dead in the re-creation of the society. The descendants' performance of the burial rite includes a concern for the spiritual world and the ancestors as well as the society in general. Thus death is something contra-social, and the beliefs of people in an afterlife may meet the threat generated by death to the social system (Goody 1962:26). The deceased's resurrection is integrated into the society, as well as the reallocation of the rights and duties of the dead man among the surviving members of the group. The crucial point is the method of acquiring sexual rights and property by the process of inheritance; living persons gained the possession of the deceased's personal property (Goody 1962:311). Therefore social aspects may be emphasized in the burial, not only the descendant's relations or the deceased's status, but also the social order and society in general. Funerals redefine social relationships and reaffirm certain relationships of exchange as a part of inter-generational transmissions of rights, duties and power (Strathern 1981:206). Thus, the deceased must be transported

back home within a relatively short time-span if as the newly-dead he or she is to be incorporated in the resurrection of the society.

I shall use some few examples of cremation burials from the late Bronze Age to the late Iron Age in Norway to illuminate how it is possible to extend the understanding of past societies with this approach. Except for the early Iron Age example, I shall argue that the urns belong to the first group – special containers made only as urns for the specific function of containing and transportation of cremated bones. I shall start with some examples from the late Bronze Age and then the late Iron Age before returning to the question whether or not there exists a dual-culture in the early Iron Age.

Seven face-urns from the late Bronze Age have been found in southern Norway. All of them have been found in graves and used as containers for the deceased's cremated bones (Haavaldsen 1985). N. Nicolaysen found the two most famous urns in 1876 in a barrow at Bringsvær (Aust-Agder County). The diameter of the barrow was 13 m and the height was 2 m. In the centre of it was a cairn and, on the north side of this cairn, two cists of stone slabs were erected. The larger one contained nothing except cremated bones, whereas the smaller one (65 × 40 cm) contained the two urns (Nicolaysen 1877:133). One urn contained cremated bones probably belonging to a woman aged between 20 and 40, with no pyre debris (Holck 1987:250). The other urn probably contained the cremated bones of two individuals, both aged between 20 and 40 years old, at least one of whom was a woman (Holck 1987). The latter urn also contained a bronze knife (Fig. 2) dated to period V (900–750 BC) (Haavaldsen 1985:28). Another bronze knife dated to the same period was also found in the barrow.

The face-urns are such a special and rare category of artefact that it has been a matter of course to compare them with neighbouring areas. The major concentration of face-urns in Scandinavia is in Denmark (104 face- or house-urns), located in Jutland and dated to periods V (900–750 BC) and VI (750–500 BC) (Haavaldsen 1985:29). Since the bronze knife from Bringsvær, dated to period V, does not fit with the Danish urns, it is more likely that the urns date to period VI (Johansen 1986:82). The evolutionary implication is clear – everything has to pass through Denmark before it reaches the northern periphery. Even though the urns bear similarities to those from the areas east of the Oder and west of the lower Vistula in Poland (Johansen 1986:84), people from the northern 'margins' were thus supposedly unable to move, especially the women! It is not so difficult to sail to Poland instead of Denmark. 'The northern cultural *cul de sac* view' has deep roots; to quote Haavaldsen,

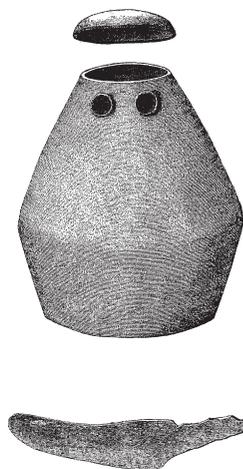


Figure 2. One of the two face-urns found at Bringsvær. This urn contained the bronze knife. Source: Rygh 1885, R-114 and R-141.

the urns in Norway 'bear witness to a society and a culture immediately ready to gather up those innovations and new cultural features that were developed in south Scandinavian Bronze Age culture' (Haavaldsen 1985:31, my translation). Therefore the urns are interpreted as local replicas of European models and henceforth should bear a later date (e.g. Haavaldsen 1985; Johansen 1986:77–84).

Similar ritual patterns are even more visible in other periods. In 1904, Bergen Museum received an urn from the large grave mound of 'Klungerhaugen' at Naterstad in Hordaland, and parts of the mound were later excavated by Schetelig the same year. At the base of the mound, the cremated remains of a male were discovered, in association with two axes, a spearhead, a harness bell, a hasp from a chest, iron fragments, a slate whetstone and two horse teeth. One of the axes had a beard, which is common in Norwegian graves from the Merovingian period. The other axe probably has a south Germanic origin and is known from only one other Norwegian grave find. The spearhead is also of a rare type with barbs (*agnorer*), interpreted by some as a harpoon. The weapon types suggest that the find should be dated to the eighth century AD (Gjessing 1934:65; Nissen Fett 1972:89; Helgen 1982:27).

The artefacts were situated within a limited spread of charcoal, similar to those found at typical late Iron Age cremation pyre sites, except that bone fragments were missing. Instead, the bones were separated from the charcoal and placed in a large coarse ware vessel. The treatment of the bones is in itself a major deviation from the standard cremation custom in the Merovingian period, as is the use of a container for the cremated bones. Most striking, however, is the fact that the urn is a ceramic vessel, considering that the late Iron Age in Norway is believed to be non-ceramic. The burial custom has been interpreted as the reinvention of an early Iron Age custom, which is supposed to have continued in this area for generations (Nissen Fett 1972:89). For many reasons, this is not a satisfactory explanation. It is unlikely that the people of Naterstad were able to resist the major change in burial custom and material culture that occurred in all of Norway with the transition from the Migration to the Merovingian period. I maintain that it is more likely that the urn represents a container for the cremated bones of the deceased, while the deposition and the charcoal layer represent the pyre site back home, thereby providing the grave with a standard mortuary practice. This interpretation is strengthened by another grave in the same mound. According to Schetelig, in the eastern part of this mound, there was a cremation burial in an 8 m-long unburnt boat. The bones were deposited in an urn covered by a slab stone (Schetelig 1905:15), dated to the tenth century (Nissen Fett 1972:90). Thus the grave mound bears witness to a social group with a long tradition of local settlement continuity, but whose 'exotic' voyages prompted distant cremation of those members of the family who died far from home, followed by transport of their bones back home in an urn.

The intermediary period between cremation and burial is known and documented in the archaeological record, although its consequences are not elaborated. In 1902,

a Viking-Age mound was excavated in Ølbør at Jæren, south-west Norway. The circular mound was 16 m in length and 1.5 m in height and contained the burial of the cremated remains of a man. Cremated bones, charcoal from the pyre, grave goods and boat nails were scattered within a ship stone setting 3.5 m in length and 1.78 m in width (Fig. 3). Schetelig argued that this stone setting is a symbolic representation of the ship that should have gone to the grave, although the real ship this time was already burnt before deposition (Schetelig 1912:199).

The remaining question concerns mortuary practices in the early Iron Age. Are similar patterns visible within mortuary sequences from this period?

There are some written sources which illuminate parts of these practices and it is most likely related to concepts of honour and the honourable death. Tacitus mentions that, after a war or a battle, both the victors and the vanquished searched together for the body of the fallen commander and burnt it with due solemnity. Of the other dead, a few were buried by their relatives and the great mass were left lying on the ground (Tacitus 1997, *The Histories*, 2:45). The Danish *Saxo Grammaticus*, although referring to the late Iron Age, refers to a similar agreement. Prior to a battle in the Viking Age, the chieftains agreed that the victor should take care of the funerals of the vanquished. This act of piety was an honourable act for the victor, for he was obliged to give his dead enemy a proper funeral, together with his weapon and equipment (*Saxo Grammaticus* 1985:85).

It seems that these concepts of honour were crucial to the decision of whether or not the deceased should be carried back home in an urn. *Saxo Grammaticus* refers to a battle where the Danish king Harald Hildetann went with his fleet to Kalmar in Sweden and attacked king Ring and his people. Ring's men killed Harald Hildetann. When Ring realized that Harald was dead, he ended the battle and ordered his men to search for the king's body. After half a day's search among the corpses, they found the dead king. Then Ring prepared the funeral pyre and let the Danes place the king's ship there before the pyre was lit. Afterwards, the cremated bones were collected, put into an urn and transported back to Leire in Denmark (*Saxo Grammaticus* 1985:312–316).

The main problem in the early Iron Age is that most of the urns found in Norwegian cremation burials belong to the second group of urns; they are

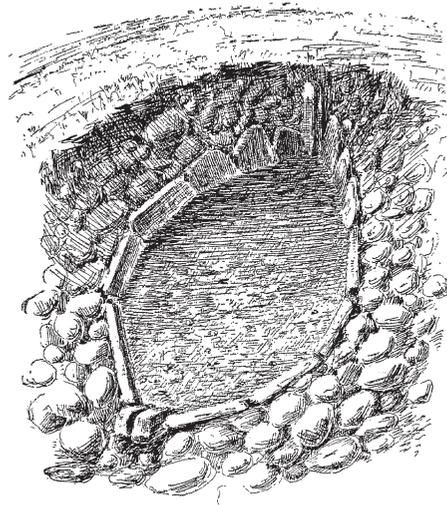


Figure 3. Ølbør near Jæren. Stone ship setting. Symbolic representation of the ship that was already burnt before deposition. Source: Schetelig 1912:199.

containers ideologically transformed, or containers with a secondary use as urns. These urns are basically Roman cauldrons (e.g. Eggers 1951; Lund Hansen 1987). Thus they are assumed to have been exchanged or brought as plunder over great distances before they were used as urns. This assumption may be correct in some but not necessarily all cases. It is important to distinguish between (a) the date and distribution of the cauldrons as cauldrons, and (b) the date and distribution of the cauldrons when used as urns.

The Migration period grave mound 'Loptshaugen' at Sæbø in Hordaland county in Norway (Ross 1879) may illuminate this problem. Graves with similar rich grave goods are normally inhumations (Kristoffersen 1997) but this is a cremation burial. In this grave, a solidus was found with the inscription 'Gratianus' (AD 375–383). Of special interest is the sword chape and a silver strap buckle dated to the fifth century AD. The strap buckle has similarities in form and decoration to finds from Ejsbøl. The sword chape has similarities to finds in Nydam, Hoestentorp in Denmark and Brighthampton in England (1997). The urn is a Roman cauldron of the 'Vestland' type (Fig. 4). Most of these cauldrons are found in western Norway and used as urns in cremation burials (Hauken 1984). In Norway, 112 of these cauldrons have been found, whereas only 15 in Sweden and 4 in Denmark have been discovered, but they are also found in England and in various places in continental Europe. The production centres of these cauldrons were most likely to have been somewhere in the lower Rhine area (Hauken 1984:10, 102). Most of the cauldrons were presumably brought to Scandinavia as loot by returning armies.

The funeral practice in the cremation burial in 'Loptshaugen' is striking. In the Roman period, most of the cremation burials contained urns where the deceased's bones were cleaned of pyre debris. In the Migration period, this practice continues together with other variations; the bones are either scattered on the pyre site or stored in an urn (Schetelig 1912:72). The bones from 'Loptshaugen' were cleaned of pyre debris and the urn was situated in the middle of a cremation pyre site. Schetelig characterizes this as a 'hybrid funeral practice', where the relatives wanted to keep on their old tradition with cleaned bones in the urn, but nevertheless, they were influenced by the new fashion (1912:85). This view seems rather traditional.

Instead, I shall advance a tentative hypothesis with a focus on the cognitive aspects of culture. This has to be seen in light of the honourable death, where the victors are obliged to bury or take care of the vanquished funeral, and in relation to the many great bog finds and weapon hoards in Denmark. Many of the cremation burials in Norway reflect people of high rank and social position. The close similarities in the weapons found in Norwegian burials to weapons from bog

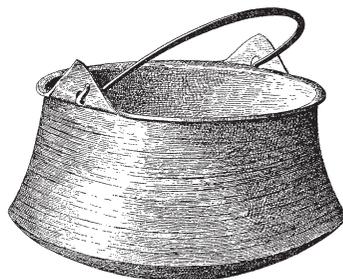


Figure 4. 'Vestland' cauldron, from 'Loptshaugen' on Sæbø. Source: Schetelig 1912:86.

finds may indicate that they were military leaders who had died on the battlefield. This might explain the Loptshaugen practices, where a high-ranking warrior or leader died in a battle and the victors were obliged to send him back in a cauldron used as an urn.

The honourable death may explain why the concentration of 'Vestland cauldrons' is outside the presumed core areas. Regarding the bog finds, it seems most plausible that the majority of battles were fought in southern Scandinavia rather than in Norway or the 'northern peripheries'. If armies from the north lost the battles, the cremated remains of their leaders were sent back home in Vestland-type cauldrons, which represented the most honourable and respectful way of doing this. Alternatively, if Danish tribes lost the battle, it would have happened in the vicinity of their home, and thus inhumation would have been the prescribed funeral practice. Thirdly, if high-ranking military leaders died of old age and not in battle, this death was regarded as less honourable, at least according to Viking sources. Thus such newly-dead may not have been worthy of transportation in these cauldrons.

This dynamic view of cultures is opposed to the dual cultural hypothesis. The northern 'margins' were not *culs de sac* in Europe. A movement in space does not imply centuries of difference in time. Thus, in Norway, the Viking period is not a time of expansion, as previously assumed, but marks, rather, the end of a tradition linking Scandinavia with Europe through communication and trade routes, alliances and wars which had lasted for more than 2000 years.

CREMATIONS AS RITUAL TRANSFORMATIONS

Death is not a non-existence; it is only another existence, which makes possible different forms of dialogues between the living and the dead through various performances and media. The funeral is not the end of the road; it is the beginning of, the entrance to, eternity. Catherine Bell distinguishes three approaches to studies of rituals. Rituals are normally perceived as either (1) routinized and habitual actions or activities that express conceptual orientations inspired and promoted by beliefs, symbols and myths; (2) mechanisms for integrating actions and thought, because beliefs can exist without rituals, but not the opposite; or (3) affirmation of communal unity in contrast to the society as presented by Turner, and thus, rituals are creative 'antistructures' (Bell 1992:19–21).

Based on ethnoarchaeological research in Nepal and India (Oestigaard 1998), cremation is a medium to express and manifest social distinctions in mortuary rites. The major distinction is between those who are cremated and then buried, and those who are buried in inhumations. This distinction is related to social status achieved through life-cycle rituals. Van Gennep (1960) and Turner (1967, 1969) developed the conceptual framework of *rites de passage*. Bourdieu, on the other hand, prefers the term *rites d'institution* rather than *rites de passage*. He emphasizes the distinctions between the stages rather than the documentation of the

rituals. The importance is the establishment of new social roles and their function in the society. The crucial point is the difference and the separation between those who have undergone the rituals from those who have not, because it creates a hierarchy of legitimate distinctions and social practices (Bourdieu 1996:27–28).

Fundamental to cremation is fire as the mediator of and between the elements – the very embodiment of change and transformation and a medium to express metaphoric relations (Gräslund 1994; Kaliff 1992, 1997, 1998). Fire is also an extremely common apotropaic element because it wards off evil spirits (Barber 1990:385); it is entrusted with the task of presentation of offerings to the gods (Hubert and Mauss 1964:41). The fire changes a substance from one state to another and, once it has been changed, it does not revert to its original state. ‘The concept of an irreversible transformation mediated by heat provides a cultural solution to the crossing of boundaries’ (Collett 1993:505). The metaphor of irreversible heat-mediated transformations can be used to produce change in both the physical and social world. It is a part of a pervasive mode of thought or system of beliefs that allows humans to ‘control’ nature (1993:505–506).

In anthropological accounts of cremation ritual, there is often a close tie between the soul and the container of the bones as a charnel-house (Hertz 1960:60). The transformative elements implied by this relationship are supported and strengthened by the use of food pots as urns. Food practices are technological processes; food is thereby understood as a means to some other end, an end thought to define the practice (Curtin 1992:13). As a substance, food is as much mental and spiritual as it is physical (1992:10). As a symbol, food has an immanent power to generate and create life. Feeding is viewed as the opposite of sex (Meiggs 1992:116); these are the two life-giving processes which maintain the lineage and society. They are connected and must be controlled.

Furthermore, food calls into question the boundaries of the body (Oliver 1992:71), and in death these boundaries, both spiritually and physically, disappear only to require re-creation. The transformation from raw to cooked is not only interpreted as a transition from ‘nature’ to ‘culture’, but can be used to define the human state (Levi-Strauss 1964:164). The use of food utensils and vessels as burial urns strengthens the meaning of burial of cremated remains as transformation. The irreversibility of food transformations has its parallel in the irreversibility of the crossing and the re-creation of boundaries: death becomes life again in terms of survival as ancestors. Thus there are parallels between the symbolism of food and fire, and the use of food pots as urns in cremation burials may be another active medium to symbolize the transformations of the dead as well as society itself.

CONCLUSIONS

A contemporary time-based approach, focusing on what is actually done in subsequent steps as different actions in the rites, where it happened and who could have participated in and performed these rituals, renders possible new insights and a way

forward towards interpretations of mortuary practices, which incorporate social and religious identities. Grave goods indicate different circles of acquaintances and places associated with the deceased or their relatives. As two stages in mortuary practice, cremation and subsequent burial of cremated remains renders possible a technological, social and ritual transformation. An emphasis on the period in time and space intermediate between cremation and burial is crucial to an understanding of the descendants' social manoeuvres and practices in the past. This implies a dynamic view of cultures in the past. The dual cultural hypothesis has been cremated and carried away, to be replaced by studies of contemporary cultural complexity.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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ABSTRACTS

Kremasjoner som transformasjoner: da kulturdualismen ble kremert og fraktet bort i urner *Terje Oestigaard*

En kremasjonsbegravelse kan bli analysert som teknologiske, sosiale og rituelle transformasjoner, og består av tre faser: 1) Stedet hvor den avdøde blir brent eller kremert. 2) En mellomfase i tid og rom. I løpet av denne perioden kan beinrestene bli rensset, eventuelt forbli urensset, lagt i ei urne og transportert over store avstander. 3) Stedet hvor asken og beinene er deponert eller begravd. Dette stedet kan være den samme gravplassen hvor avdøde ble kremert hvis det er en sammensmelting av mellomfasen i tid og rom, men vanligvis må den avdøde fraktes i ei urne til det siste og endelige hvilestedet. Urnen representerer stedet hvor personen døde, de kremerte beinene er fra den første begravelsen (kremasjonen) mens begravelsen av urnen og nedleggelsen av uskadete gjenstander stammer fra den andre og siste begravelsen hvor andre ritualer ble utført av familien, slektninger og andre tilstedeværende. Distribusjonen av urner kan belyse at distanse ikke har vært ei hindring i forhistorien, og at folk fra de 'nordlige utkantsområdene' reiste rundt i Europa i fra yngre bronsealder til vikingtid. Denne tilnærmingen går i mot kulturdualismen og deler av sentrum–periferi modellene.

Les incinérations en tant que transformations: quand l'hypothèse du contact entre deux cultures part en fumée*Terje Oestigaard*

Une crémation et son ensevelissement peuvent s'analyser comme une série de transformations techniques, sociales et rituelles, en trois stades: - premièrement, le moment et le lieu où le corps a été brûlé ou incinéré; deuxièmement, la période intermédiaire dans le temps et dans l'espace où les os sont le plus souvent transportés ailleurs. Cet interval accroit l'espace conceptuel nécessaire au renouvellement, à la réorganisation et à la re-légitimation des relations entre les vivants. Enfin, l'endroit où les cendres ou les os sont déposés ou enterrés, qui peut être le lieu de crémation même mais ne l'est en général pas. L'urne représente donc l'endroit où le défunt est mort, les os brûlés correspondent au rite de crémation, tandis que l'enterrement de l'urne et le dépôt des objets intacts appartiennent à la tombe finale, où les descendants présents et autres poursuivent les autres rites. L'analyse de la répartition spatiale des urnes peut éclairer la notion que la distance n'a pas vraiment constitué un frein aux déplacements et que les habitants des "marges du Nord" ont voyagé à travers toute l'Europe, du Bronze Final à la période Viking. L'approche présentée ici s'attaque à l'hypothèse d'une double culture scandinave et à certains éléments des modèles centre-périphérie.

Leichenverbrennung als Transformation: als die duale Kulturhypothese verbrannt und in Urnen weggetragen wurde*Terje Oestigaard*

Eine Leichenverbrennung mit anschliessender Bestattung kann als Set technologischer, sozialer und ritueller Transformationen analysiert werden. Sie besteht aus drei Teilen: erstens, dem Ort, an dem der Körper verbrannt wurde; zweitens, der Zwischenphase in Zeit und Raum, in der die gereinigten Knochen oft anderswo hin transportiert werden; dieses Intervall vergrössert den Raum für Manipulationen in jenen Bereichen, die die Erneuerung, Reorganisation und Re-Legitimation der Beziehungen zwischen den Lebenden betreffen; und schliesslich, dem Ort, an dem die Asche oder die Knochen niedergelegt oder vergraben werden, was der gleiche Ort wie der Verbrennungsplatz sein kann aber normalerweise nicht ist. So repräsentiert die Urne den Ort, an dem die oder der Tote starb, die verbrannten Knochen stammen vom Ritual am Scheiterhaufen, während die Bestattung der Urne und die Beigabe unzerstörter Artefakte vom endgültigen Bestattungsplatz stammen, an dem weitere Rituale von Nachkommen, Verwandten und anderen durchgeführt wurden. Die Verbreitung von Urnen verdeutlicht, dass räumliche Distanz kaum eine Barriere war und dass Leute vom 'nördlichen Rand' durch ganz Europa gereist sind, von der Spätbronze- bis in die Wikingerzeit. Diese These greift die duale Kulturhypothese an sowie Elemente von Zentrum-Peripherie-Modellen.