The Powerful Dead: Archaeological Relationships between the Living and the Dead

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The dead, collectively or individually, are sometimes powerful forces in human society. At other times they fade into relative insignificance. How archaeologists recover such ideological changes has repercussions for their interpretation of social organization and social change. Interpretations of status, gender, and ranking from funerary deposits are to a large extent dependent on archaeologists' abilities to interpret initially the relationship that the living construct with the dead. This contextual analysis of the Danish Iron Age uses studies of landscape and topography, and contrasts in material culture to situate the changing placement of the dead in society. Their increasing incorporation into the world of the living in the pre-Roman Iron Age indicates a growing concern with lineage and individual status. Later on, within the hierarchical ordering of Roman Iron Age society, the dead retained their significance for the living but in certain regions this was expressed in terms of their communality rather than status differences.

No one who studies the original documents of any religion can fail to be amazed at the power of the dead. There are peoples whose existence is almost wholly dominated by rites connected with them. (Elias Canetti 1973, 305)

There is now a considerable body of anthropological and historical literature which bears out Canetti's observation that the roles which the living often attribute to the dead are active and powerful. The dead may work miracles, require sacrifices, have power over agricultural fertility, or sanction tradition and social order; they may be malevolent or dangerous spirits or ancestral heroes or gods. A wide range of roles for the dead can be found within any single society. The dead may be a legitimation of the social order, embodiments of land rights, martyrs to a holy cause, guardians of ancestral traditions or even an archaeological management resource. The living may conceal, embellish or justify their actual social relations through a relationship to the dead (Lévi-Strauss 1973, 320).

This study sets out to demonstrate just how that relationship can be reconstructed from material remains and how it has a bearing on our understanding of social organization.

Ritual, liminality and transformation

That the dead do not bury themselves may seem obvious and banal. It is, however, the starting point for consideration of the social context in which an individual's death was celebrated and commemorated. Funerary practices are products of 'political' decisions (or sequences of decisions) in which the corpse is manipulated for the purposes of the survivors. Their treatment of the deceased is conditioned by their perception of death and their relationships with each other as much as by their relationship to the deceased whilst alive (Pader 1982, 56–60). Even when the arrangements are specified in advance, as in a will, the wishes of the deceased are not always followed. A famous case is the burial of St Swithun, Bishop of Winchester in the ninth century. He requested that his remains be interred '... in a mean and lowly place where the sweet rain from heaven may fall upon my grave'. Although the ecclesiastical
authorities acceded to this request at the time, they
decided later to exhume him for reburial in a more
appropriate and prestigious location within the
cathedral. The story goes that on 15 July, 971 — the
day of the proposed exhumation — it rained so heavily,
continuing to do so for the next 40 days, that the plan
was abandoned.

Lévi-Strauss described the wide variation of
power relationships between living and dead as fall-
ing somewhere between two poles, epitomized by
stories of the ‘grateful corpse’ and the ‘enterprising
knight’ (Lévi-Strauss 1973, 302–3). In the former, a
rich man buys a corpse from creditors who were
objecting to its burial. After he buries the corpse, the
deceased appears in a dream and promises success
on condition that the spoils are shared between them.
The man, aided by the deceased, rescues a woman
whose love he wins. The dilemma of sharing her is
overcome because she turns out to be half woman
and half dragon; the dead man takes only the di-
abolical part, leaving the man with her human side. In
the other story, a poor man successfully barter a
grain of wheat for a cock which he barter for a pig
and so on until he manages to exchange a corpse for a
living princess. Lévi-Strauss interprets the first story
as embodying a world which is shared between living
and dead, with the dead playing little part in the
affairs of the living so long as they are respected. In
the second the dead are exploited in competitive pre-
tige relationships; appeals for aid are made through
ancestral legitimation or by sacrifice. In this latter
case the dead are all the more powerful and demand-
ing of the living.

The great variety of relationships that the dead
may maintain with the living contrasts with the seem-
ing universality of the rites of passage surrounding
death. Ritual activity has been described as a pro-
scribed and proscribed performance with sets of rou-
tines or formulae similar to a theatrical play except
that there is a capacity for improvisation (Lewis 1980).
The rituals surrounding death conform to certain
structural principles revolving around the social con-
struction of liminality (van Gennep 1960 (1909); Hertz
1960 (1907); Turner 1969; Huntington & Metcalf 1979;
Leach 1976). Leach explains liminality (1976, 33–6,
77–9) as the institutionalized categorization of cer-
tain moments in time and specific locations in the
landscape as sacred, both outside of ordinary time
and between the world of the ‘here and
now’ and the ‘other’ world of the supernatural. The
treatment of the dead undergoes three stages. The
first stage involves the presence of a corpse, contami-
nated, impure and dangerous. The corpse then un-
dergoes a passage or transition into the liminal zone
where the ritual activities of funeral and associated
secondary rites take place. The corpse is separated
from the living, purified (for example by cleaning or
burning) and changed in its appearance (for example
by dressing in its finery). Gifts or goods associated
with it may be ‘killed’ by breaking or rendering un-
usable, since gifts to the supernatural can be trans-
ferred only as metaphysical essences. The liminal
zone in its physical manifestation is a sacred area
(temples, graveyard or shrine) often marked off by
physical boundaries that divide the sacred from the
profane. Once the ritual activities have been com-
pleted, the dead pass into the ‘other’ world, which is
anywhere other than the ‘here and now’. There the
supernatural dead reside as ancestors, gods or spirits
in a world which is often the inverse of life on earth
or even a glorious extension of it. The corpse’s
progress through the liminal zone might take many
years, especially if a complex series of secondary
rites is involved.

Leach’s simple framework provides a key to
the interpretation of the symbolic landscape in which
the living and the dead both have their place. The
physical locations for activities sacred and profane
form an eschatological map of practical actions and
relationships linking and separating the living and
the supernatural. The dead are removed from the
world of the living by a series of transformations
which can be detected in part through the placing
and treatment of the dead.

Ucko’s cautionary tales about inference of mean-
ing from funerary remains (1969) emphasize
the need to employ a fully contextual archaeology.
Universal generalizations about the meaning of par-
ticular rites, spatial relationships and practices in-
volved the dead are unsupportable. For example,
cremation has no universal connotation of a transfor-
mation from corporeal to spiritual, regardless of cul-
tural context (Ucko 1969, 274). The meanings of any
practice or association can only be recovered by situ-
at ing it within a changing sequence of traditions.
Whilst the dead may be spatially remote from the
living at a particular historical moment, we may only
infer a deliberate distancing of the dead if previously
they had been located closer. Decisions taken to place
the dead further away from the living are historically
situated within an existing, traditional relationship
of living to dead. It is only the chronological and
relative change from close to further away which can
be interpreted, and not the absolute siting in either
case. ‘Far away’ in one cultural tradition may be
another culture’s ‘close at hand’. Outside its histori-
Figure 1. The Danish region of southern Jutland. Sites mentioned in the text are:

1. Kraghede
2. Overbygård
3. Norre Fjand
4. Prioslekker
5. Vorbasse
6. Hodde
7. Esbjerg
8. Sønder Vilstrup
9. Dollerup
10. Hjemsted
11. Hjortspring
12. Husby
13. Christiansdal
14. Årupgård

In a social context, the meaning of a particular configuration of funerary practices may be obscure. When understood in relation to its historical context — what comes before and after — and in relation to other domains of ritual and non-ritual activity, this configuration is replaced within its historical circumstances and re-integrated into its full social context.

The analysis of variability between mortuary or funerary deposits has been a central feature of 'New Archaeology' studies (Saxe 1970; Binford 1971; Brown 1971; Goldstein 1980; O'Shea 1984). With the exception of examples like Goldstein's examination of Saxe's hypothesis on corporate descent groups and formal disposal areas, there has been relatively little study of associations and relationships beyond the cemetery. Archaeological studies of the placing of the dead are, however, becoming more numerous. Sharples' study (1985) of the changing place of Neolithic tombs in the Orcadian landscape, related to other changes in the treatment of the dead, examines the shifting significance of megalithic tombs, initially peripheral to settlements and cultivable land and later central to these areas. Tilley similarly incorporates a study of megalithic tomb locations and contrasts in funerary and settlement assemblages in his analysis of ideology and power in the Swedish Neolithic (1984). Hodder's analysis (1990) of the shift from 'domus' to 'agrios' in the European Neolithic similarly links a trend from burial under house floors to cemeteries away from the living with a change in focus from women's control of the domestic domain to men's power in the outside world. More recently Morris has attempted to bridge the theoretical divide between the New Archaeology-derived Saxe/Goldstein hypothesis on corporate groups and formal disposal areas and the 'post-processual' critique. He suggests that the formation of formal disposal areas for the dead in classical Athens can be linked to the rise of one particular corporate entity, the citizenry. In his other example, republican Rome, he suggests that similar strategies are employed by the ascendent aristocratic lineages (Morris 1991).
Methodology

Three types of analysis can be identified which explore the relationships between the living and the dead, and their role within the supernatural (Parker Pearson 1982, 110).

1. Analysis of spatial and topographic relationships between the abodes of the living and the dead

Goldstein's elaboration of Saxe's Hypothesis 8 (Goldstein 1976; 1980, 7-8) is of relevance here. She summarizes this as follows: if a formal, bounded disposal area exists and if it is used exclusively for the dead, the society is very likely to have corporate groups organized by lineal descent. The maintenance of this exclusive, bounded and separated area is one means of attaining or legitimating lineal descent from the dead, to control crucial but restricted resources. This hypothesis was derived from Meggitt's observation on the relationship of land to cemeteries among the Mae Enga of Papua New Guinea (1965). It can be criticized for its decontextualized approach (Hodder 1982, 195-6) and for its breadth (Morris 1991). Just what constitutes a crucial yet restricted resource will vary from place to place. Equally, cultural perceptions of such categories will also vary. The dead themselves might be viewed as a crucial yet restricted resource. Morris' recent discussion of the hypothesis illustrates the shortcomings of such a broad statement of causation. His analysis of case studies from classical archaeology demonstrates how such propositions can be useful only within specific historical circumstances and with reference to particular interest groups.

The concepts of exclusivity, boundedness, permanence and specialization are dependent on a defined cross-culturally and absolutely. Instead they must be treated within some kind of contextual framework, both temporal and cultural. For example, as we shall see later, the concept of separation should be seen as relative to whatever existed before and after. A universal measure of what constitutes bounded or unbounded, exclusive or non-exclusive, and so on, can only be constructed in the most general terms. Specific identifications must be dependent on the particular aspects of historical context. In other words, the principles of liminality, segregation and boundedness may be universal but their application and resolution in different human societies can be understood only through study of particular cultural contexts. In some societies adequate liminal separation may be achieved by placing the dead below the ground, whilst elsewhere they must be buried on the other side of running water to achieve the same effect. It is only when we can detect sequences of changing placement of the dead, that we may attempt to ascribe meaning to the relationship of dead to living.

'Segregation' of the dead from the living is achieved through a series of transformations that the corpse passes through, of which spatial and topographic distancing is only one. The meaning of a change in the distancing or separation of the dead should be inferred by comparison with other lines of evidence, though it is likely that the role or influence of the dead is greater the more closely they are physically integrated within society. As such, the dead may form a powerful element within the social order, as ancestors of senior status; 'without' they may have little influence on the living, as Lévi-Strauss' 'grateful corpses'.

The place of supplication or worship of supernatural forces other than the dead must also be considered. In certain societies the many different aspects of the supernatural are monopolized within one sacred zone by particular groups, as is the case with Christianity. Nevertheless, the changing sacred zones of non-funerary ceremonial ritual, such as sacrificial votive offering or labour investment in monument construction, should be analyzed in relation to their separation from or incorporation with the abodes of the living and the dead.

2. Analysis of intra-site organization within the abodes of living and dead

There are three types of comparison that can be made. The first comparison is the contrast between contexts such as the basic units of household and grave. If some measure of productive or storage capability, and of relative social status, can be ascribed to different households within a settlement, then those variations can be compared to the variability in the funerary context.

Secondly, the structure of a settlement may be organized according to principles such as gender (e.g. men's houses, women's areas), kin (e.g. spatial distinction of moieties), status (e.g. the central placing of a chief's house), or other cosmological principles. Comparison can be made with the spatial organization of cemeteries of the same date. Placing of the dead within the landscape conforms to a symbolic map of the social order and reveals its values in microcosm (Rawnsley & Reynolds 1977); those dead whose lives or deaths symbolize central social values may be placed in opposition to the deviant dead whose actions have threatened the social order. In medieval and post-medieval Britain, for example,
deviants such as witches, executed criminals, suicides, and women dying in childbirth were among the social groups whose treatment in death set them apart from the worthy dead. The symbolic associations of the disposal contexts of these two groups can be understood in positive or negative terms: the sanctified ground in the churchyard was contrasted with the limbo of evil spirits at the crossroads.

Thirdly, comparison between settlement and cemetery development can reveal inconsistencies which may indicate the extent to which the world of the dead misrepresents and acts upon the social relations among the living, such as the modelling of past society as an ideal for the present (Bloch 1971). The processes of formation, abandonment and relocation of both settlements and cemeteries are integral elements of that comparison.

3. Analysis of the distribution of artefacts and assemblages between settlements, funerary deposits and other contexts

Studies of assemblages from contrasting contexts can provide a more valid assessment of artefact value than the potentially circular argument of calculating values of grave good types according to their rarity in funerary contexts or the calculation of value from labour investment. Such cross-contextual analyses assess more accurately the symbolic value of different artefact types and expose the selection processes for grave goods (Braun 1977).

The identification of 'central tokens of value' (Appadurai 1986, 21) within funerary contexts has received attention in Renfrew's consideration of the reasons for the value of gold in the Chalcolithic cemetery at Varna (Renfrew 1986). Its use to adorn the body, especially the face and genitalia, its incorporation in objects of symbolic authority, its imitation in other materials, its relatively economical use and its inherent aesthetic attraction all demonstrate that it was a very important substance in that society (Renfrew 1986, 148–9). Braun's comparison of rubbish contexts and grave assemblages from Native American sites of the Woodland Period also distinguished those items in burials which were of significant social value, determined by their rarity in the waste contexts of settlements (Braun 1977).

The inclusion of central tokens of value as grave goods has implications for the role and power of the dead. In many societies, burial with the dead may be the most significant process by which wealth is disposed of, as 'gifts to gods' rather than 'gifts to men' (Gregory 1982). There are certain types of artefacts which are selected as appropriate for the grave and others which rarely if ever are used as grave goods. In many societies the deceased's possessions are 'polluting' to the living (in a way not dissimilar to the ritual items contaminated with 'sacredness' that have to be disposed of after a religious rite: Leach 1976, 87). They must be disposed of with the corpse (Mack 1986, 70–2) but often there are mechanisms to allow their re-circulation in society (Goody 1962, 303). Grave goods form a very carefully selected sample of the total stock of portable artefacts, a fact commonly acknowledged but rarely examined critically except in assessing status differentiation between graves. The principles behind selection of grave goods may relate to the wider categories of social experience that form the basic cosmology around which life is ordered. For example, it is common for death and fertility to be juxtaposed as oppositional forces (Braun & Parry 1982). It is interesting that, in European prehistory, agricultural implements — associated with securing the growth of crops — were more rarely used than weapons as grave goods. Conversely, some artefacts are known only from funerary contexts, such as certain types of dagger or jewellery. In contemporary Western cultures there is an entire material culture of death where all the items and paraphernalia surrounding the dead are explicitly produced and used for funerary ritual alone. This separation of material culture can be seen in nineteenth- and twentieth-century European society (Rahtz 1981) and illustrates the emphasis on separation of the dead from the living, as also revealed by marginalization of cemetery location and by the purifying and obliterating effect of cremation.

Living and dead in the Danish Iron Age

The archaeological evidence for cemeteries, settlements and votive deposits between 500 bc and AD 500 in Denmark (Hedeager 1990), and particularly southern Jutland (Fig. 1), is suitable for investigating changing relationships between living and dead, and for assessing the significance of those changes. Recent accounts have attempted to integrate the full range of evidence (Parker Pearson 1984a,b; Hedeager 1990). In the 1500 years before the emergence of the Danish Viking state, the societies of Jutland were formed of small rural communities subsisting on mixed agriculture. Hamlets or small villages were composed of longhouses, with their living quarters at the west end and the animal byre at the east end (Fig. 2). Between 500 bc and AD 600, trade contacts, social inequalities, political centralization, regional agricultural specialization and inter-tribal warfare all seem to have in-
increased. There were concomitant changes in the physical manifestations of the significance of the dead. These changes can be identified by analysis of topographic relationships, comparison of the ordering of cemeteries and of settlements, and comparison of material culture from each domain. There was also a complex interplay of funerary consumption and votive deposition (Parker Pearson 1984a,b; Hedeager 1990 — see also Bradley 1984 & 1990 for discussions of the phenomenon more widely in European prehistory). After a period (500–50 BC) when deposition of valuables was centred on votive offerings in watery contexts, valuables were deposited in graves during the Roman Iron Age. Naturally, the relationship of living to dead cannot be considered independently of the relationship with other aspects of the supernatural, as illustrated by the votive deposits.

1. The landscape contexts of settlements and cemeteries

Two types of locational analysis were employed in this study. The first compared the locational factors influencing the placement of cemeteries and of settlements in the landscape. These patterns were compared for sites of different periods. The second examined the spatial and topographic relationships of settlements and cemeteries of the same date in close spatial proximity to each other. Again, these spatial relationships could be compared through time.

Locational contrasts between settlements and cemeteries

Within southern Jutland, in Denmark, a total of 160 settlements and 317 cemeteries could be identified and dated to any of five periods within the Early Iron Age (500 BC–AD 600). The site locations of each were characterized by soil type, geomorphology, slope position, orientation, distance from water and topographic situation. Settlements in all of the five periods shared similar characteristics. They were generally within 300 m of fresh water (rivers, streams, springs, lakes), but occupied a variety of topographic locations with no discernable statistical preference for slope position or orientation. In contrast, the cemeteries exhibited more varied patterns of location. Cemeteries of the early Pre-Roman Iron Age (500–300 BC), known as PRIA Period I (Becker 1961) tend to be located on the upper slopes of hills and on plateaux at a much greater distance from water sources (Fig. 3). There are few instances where cemeteries and settlements of this date have been found close together. The differential distance from water suggests that cemeteries were located according to principles different from those influencing settlement
Figure 3. The distance of settlements (thin line) and cemeteries (thick line) from water (rivers and streams), contrasting the locations of fifth-second century BC cemeteries from settlements and from cemeteries of later date (numbers of PRIA and LRIA sites scaled up for comparison). In this and later diagrams, PRIA = Pre-Roman Iron Age, ERIA = Early Roman Iron Age, LRIA = Late Roman Iron Age, EGIA = Early Germanic Iron Age.
Figure 4. Discontinuities of cemetery use and settlement location, compared with periods of weaponry deposition. The major periods of abandonment and relocation fall at 50 BC and AD 200.
location. It is just possible that such differences are due to post-depositional recovery, though this is unlikely given the long-term and intensive antiquarian and archaeological coverage of the region (Hedeager 1985). Since cemeteries are further away from water, they are distant from the settlements, generally at least 200–500 metres away. It would seem that, during Period I, the remains of the dead were taken some distance away from the domains of the living. The treatment of the corpse also corresponds with this symbolic distancing. During this period the dead were cremated and their ashes were placed in pots and buried. Sometimes these burials were inserted into earlier, Bronze Age mounds. Most burials were placed in cemeteries of up to several hundred urns, with each grave marked by a small, low mound. The grave goods are uniformly sparse and, when they occur, are generally limited to a single metal dress fitting (such as a pin or buckle attachment). Within the historical setting of funerary practices involving cremation in the later Bronze Age (Jensen 1982, 176–7) the dead of the earliest Iron Age may not have been marginalized more than they were already. This apparently limited involvement in the affairs of the living, however, was soon to change.

Few burials are known between 300 and 50 BC (Periods II and IIIa) though recent excavations at Årupgård (Jørgensen 1974) indicate that they are likely to be located on the peripheries of the larger Period I cemeteries. In contrast, many settlement locations of this date are known. Whilst some settlements appear to have continued in use throughout the later PRIA, many new sites seem to have been initiated around 50 BC (Fig. 4). A similar discontinuity is also found in cemeteries, since many new ones were founded at this time and used for the next few hundred years.

Between the Final Pre Roman Iron Age (Period IIb — c. 50–1 BC) and the Early Roman Iron Age (c. AD 1–200) the locational positioning of settlements and cemeteries shows relatively little variance, in contrast to the EPRIA pattern. An even closer correspondence between cemetery and settlement distance from water is found in the Late Roman Iron Age (c. AD 200–400). This correspondence between settlements and cemeteries in the ERIA hides certain differences in topographic sitting. From c. 50 BC to AD 200 there was a tendency for cemeteries to be more often located on hilltops than on the middle and lower slopes (Fig. 5).

Relationships between settlements and cemeteries
The study of cemetery and settlement location with regard to common locational factors can be refined when we consider pairings of settlements and cemeteries. Obviously, we can never be certain that a cemetery is linked to a particular settlement unless we have joining or matching artefacts between the two contexts. Equally, a settlement’s cemetery may be populated with the dead of other communities whose bodies have been ‘brought back’ from the villages where they lived (Bloch 1971; Hodder 1982, 163–70). But if we make the assumption that villages had their respective cemetery or cemeteries within their territories or catchments during the Roman Iron Age, we can investigate this topographic relationship. Recent studies of settlement density on the more fertile soils of southern Jutland indicate that settlements were evenly spaced 2–4 km apart (Jensen 1980; Hedeager 1990, 190–2). Within this settlement pattern it is reasonable to assume that village catchments might not be much wider than a radius of 1–2 km around the village. Of the 160 settlement sites and 317 cemeteries that are known, only 39 settlements and cemeteries were situated within a kilometre of each other and most of these dated to the Roman Iron Age, the period when relatively little difference in settlement or cemetery location can be discerned.

The data from two periods, 50 BC–AD 200 (Final PRIA and ERIA) and AD 200–400 (LRIA), indicated different patterns, admittedly from a small sample (Fig. 6). In the earlier of the two periods the cemeteries were located within 200 m of the settlements in 18 out of 26 cases. Though cemeteries were more often placed on hilltops above the settlement, as at Christiansdal (Fig. 7) and Sonder Vilstrup (Fig. 8),

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**Figure 5. Comparison of settlement and cemetery locations according to location on slopes.**

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Figure 6. Comparison of cemetery location in relation to settlements during the ERIA (AD 0–200) and LRIA (AD 200–400) by orientation, distance and relative height (+ cemetery above settlement; - cemetery below settlement; = cemetery and settlement at same height).
there was no consistent preference for locations above or below the settlement. However, this difference in height may have been significant because cemeteries were rarely situated on the same contour as the settlement. In the next period (LRIA), cemeteries were located equally as close, and closer, to settlements; they were often at the same height above sea level. Four of these were within, or immediately adjacent to, the settlement area, a relationship not found at any of the ERIA sites. This shift of cemetery location from outside settlements to incorporation within, or adjacent to, them is exemplified at Hjemsted where large scale excavation has revealed three ERIA cemeteries outside the settlement (Fig. 9). The furthest of these consisted of a group of high status inhumations, possibly under mounds. By the Late Roman Iron Age, it had become the focus of a cemetery contained within a fourth-fifth century settlement (Fig. 10; Ethelberg 1986, 7). Area excavation at Vorbasse has revealed a similarly changing relationship between a settlement and its cemeteries (Fig 11; Hvass 1983, 131-3). This apparent change in locational relationships indicates a drawing together of settlements and cemeteries, leading to an aggregation of the abodes of the living and dead around 200 AD. Throughout the region there seems to have been a discontinuity in cemetery use around this time. This also coincided with other changes in funerary practices, in votive activities as well as more general aspects of material culture (Hedeager 1990). Its significance can be evaluated in relation to these changes rather than as an isolated cultural phenomenon.
2. The layouts of settlements and cemeteries

Association with the distant past
The cremation cemeteries of c. 500–300 BC (Early PRIA) show strong conformity in their paucity of grave goods. Spatial patterning within the two large cemeteries so far excavated, at Årre and Årugård, indicates only directional expansion of the cemetery area over time (Becker 1961; Jørgensen 1975). Within these large, tightly-packed cemeteries it is the conformity to a shared norm of cremation under miniature mounds which is so striking, particularly in contrast to the human victims in the bogs. A particular feature of funerary practices at this time is the re-use of funerary monuments of much earlier date (Neolithic and Bronze Age), either as mounds in which to insert cremations or as mounds which form the focus of the cemetery, as at Årugård. In southern Jutland some 30 per cent of all cemeteries or grave groups of this date are known as groups of secondary interments into much earlier mounds, in contrast to only 11 per cent in later periods. The construction of small 'mini-mounds' may also recall in miniature the mounds of the Early Bronze Age. This association of the dead with monuments distant in space and time suggests an active reworking or invocation of values linked to an ancient past. This is particularly striking, given the major structural changes in the transition from bronze to iron with its associated innovations in agriculture, domestic life and social organization (Parker Pearson & Sørensen in press). We may surmise that the dead joined a society of ancestors with attach-
Figure 9. Locations of the Hjemsted settlement and cemeteries in the ERIA (AD 0–200) and LRIA/early EGIA (AD 200–500). (After Ethelberg 1986.)
munal dead'). With ceramic and dress styles conforming to regional territories within southern, central and northern Jutland (Parker Pearson & Sørensen in press) such cemetery areas may have consolidated ancestral homelands of these apparently acausal regional tribal societies. The degree of conformity between burials does not tally with the increasing economic differentiation apparent between the farmsteads at that time (Parker Pearson 1984a,b).

Spatial segregation of status
The evolution of settlement form between 500 and 150 bc seems to have been gradual. The sequence at Granof (Becker 1965; 1968; 1971) shows a gradual widening of the gap between the wealthiest and the poorest farmers (Parker Pearson 1984b). In the second century bc the social structure as expressed in settlement form changed dramatically with the appearance of several 'main farms', notably at Hodde where excavations have identified the founding farm unit of an enclosed village community (Hvass 1985). This main farm has all the attributes of a chiefly residence and signals a formal validation of the growing economic inequalities of the preceding period. Its geographical location, between two dress style zones, may help to explain its extraordinary size and hierarchical organization. It was perhaps on the margins of the
territorial, kin-based tribal groupings that such new social relations might flourish, unfettered by tribal convention (Parker Pearson & Sørensen in press). It is not until 100 BC that there appears a horizon of ‘rich’ cremations, equipped with the paraphernalia of wagons, cauldrons, weapons and imported drinking vessels, all formerly restricted to votive offerings. These graves are found in geographically marginal locations with regard to the regional tribal groupings, as identified by style zones, supporting the notion that elite political systems developed on the peripheries, and not at the centres, of the social networks. Secondly, they were not placed within existing cemeteries but in new locations where they became foci for new cemeteries (generally short-lived but at Husby, in northern Germany, lasting for over 400 years; Raddatz 1974). Within the first century BC and perhaps the beginning of the first century AD (Final PRIA and Early ERRA) cremations containing swords, among other weaponry, appear to have had a similar founding status. In other cases the old cremation cemeteries continued in use until c. 50 BC, at which time a marked discontinuity is also found in settlement locations (Fig. 4).

Unfortunately the cemetery contemporary with the Hodde settlement has not been found, nor are settlements known for the ‘rich’ cremations. These cremations would, however, appear to be legitimations of changes already apparent in the world of the living. These particular ancestors have appropriated the offerings of the votive deposits — cauldrons, wagons, weapons — and the appearance of new cemeteries with new grave goods represents a change from communal and territorial values to the establishment of the power of certain farm-holders (and presumably lineages) whose superior status is visible in the worlds of both living and dead.

In the early first century AD a new funerary rite, inhumation, appeared alongside the cremations. These tended to be foundation graves in new locations which, like the earlier sword-associated cremations, formed the foci of new cemeteries of mixed cremations and inhumations. Cemeteries of this period were generally located within 200 metres of a contemporary settlement. The inhumation burials occupied the most prominent central position within the cemetery and defined a central area for use by later inhumations. Cremations were placed outside and around this area or, as at Hjemsted, in separate

*Figure 11. Locations of the Vorbasse settlement and its cemeteries in the first century BC, second century AD and third-fourth centuries AD. (After Hjøass 1982.)*
Figure 12. Clustering of ‘female’ graves in the multi-period inhumation cemetery at Hjemsted. (After Ethelberg 1986, redrawn by Colin Merrony.) LRIA graves are marked with a criss-cross design and EGIA graves with thick vertical lines. ERIA inhumations are stippled. Other graves are undated.

cemeteries (Fig. 9). The artefactual associations of these inhumations (discussed below) indicate that these were elite groups, possibly with cultural affinities to the region of central and northern Jutland. The evidence from settlements at Esbjerg (Christiansen 1985) and Priorsløkke (Nielsen & Kaul 1984) indicates the continued existence of main farms, though they are distinct from the others in terms of their size alone, rather than by surviving architectural features. The setting out of houses around a central open area, found in some of the later PRIA settlements, is also evident in the plan of the ERIA settlement at Priorsløkke. Here, the main farm is located close to the centre, mirroring the spatial arrangement of inhumed elites at the centres with later cremations peripheral to them within seven contemporary cemeteries in southern Jutland (Parker Pearson 1985, 145-6).

Gender segregation
In the acid soils of southern Jutland human bone does not survive well. Cremated bone is often recovered but there is no available osteological determination of sex on this material. Discussions of gender are only possible by reference to osteological studies in northern Jutland, the Danish islands, and northern Germany. A detailed analysis of gender associations for artefact types found in graves throughout this area has been carried out by Gebühr (1976). Osteological analysis of Roman Iron Age burials, mainly cremations, in Scandinavia and northern Germany (Breitsprecher 1987) generally supports these gender associations but shows that they were significant trends rather than absolute differences. Since the same associations hold for the areas around southern Jutland, it is likely that the burials in this region conform to that patterning.

In the late first century BC and early first century AD (Final PRIA and Early ERIA) most cemeteries exhibit very definite spatial differentiation according to gender-associated artefacts. Separate male and female cemeteries are known from northern Germany (Capelle 1971) and the same phenomenon can be extrapolated from artefact sets in six first century BC/AD cremation cemeteries in southern Jutland (two female, four male). Within the region, two more cem-
eteries can be divided by artefact associations into male and female areas while four others, initially founded with sword-bearing warrior graves, continued as predominantly female cemeteries. This apparent spatial structuring of cemeteries by gender segregation may not have been so marked in northern Jutland (Trolle-Larsen 1989). In southern Jutland, however, gender was one of the significant principles behind the spatial development of cremation cemeteries until the second century. In contrast, it does not seem to have applied in the spatial organization of the elite inhumation groups. By the second century a very small number (10 out of 238) of burials each contained artefacts which previously had specific sex associations — 'female' needles and curved knives with 'male' swords. Whilst there are certain artefact assemblages shared by both sexes — single brooches, small knives and Roman imports — the mixing of artefacts with previously definite sex associations would suggest that previously strict gender roles were breaking down and being redefined in the second century. At the same time the spatial segregation of male and female associations within cemeteries disappeared. Evidence for gender roles within farmhouses and settlements has not been explored in any detail, so contrasts between cemeteries and settlements are difficult to explore.

Around AD 200 (the transition from ERIA to LRIA) there was a major reordering of funerary practices. Existing cemeteries were discontinued and new ones founded. Of the exceptions, four ERIA cemeteries were abandoned after a single LRIA burial, one was abandoned after three LRIA burials and in three case ERIA inhumations became focal for LRIA cemeteries. The status distinction between burying and burning the corpse disappeared and, presumably as a result of emulation of elite practices, over 80 per cent of all burials were now inhumations, mostly oriented east-west with the head in the west end. After the second century breakdown of gender segregation, these new cemeteries were also divided by gender with women's areas often in the west and north and men's in the east and south of the cemeteries (Fig. 12). This striking spatial patterning can be found in the earlier part of the LRIA but the spatial separation of male and female corpses was not adhered to later on (Ringtved 1988, 192-3). It is possible that this relates to the structural differentiation of longhouses into two with the hearth and domestic space at the west end and the cattle byre at the east end. Alternatively, we may speculate that the pattern corresponds to a contrast between the secluded western end of the living space and the eastern part of the living space by the doors and passageway. Since the orientation of the longhouse is likely to have embodied broader cosmological elements (Doxtater 1990), the east-west ordering of individual graves, and female and male areas within cemeteries, may conform to conceptions contrasting light and dark, sunrise and sunset, male and female. Additionally, this orientation may have served to distinguish this southern Jutish regional identity from that of the Danish islands, typified by north-south orientation of graves.

There was also something of a reversal in gender associations in burials. Previously the greatest quantities and better qualities of grave goods had been buried in male graves. Now it is the female-associated jewellery sets (with gold, glass, amber and silver beads and rings) which stand out. At the same time, there was a reduction in grave goods which did not form part of the costume of the dead. These changes in the representation of gender roles occurred with a major reorganization of society in agricultural, political, technological and architectural terms (Hedeager 1990). It is interesting to note the restructuring of gender differentiation at around the time that the large weapon offerings begin, when a more martial, ordered and hierarchical political and social structure is thought to have developed (Hedeager 1990).

3. Artefact assemblages for the dead and the living

Analysis of artefact assemblage variability between funerary, votive deposition and domestic contexts has three purposes. The first assesses the value of items used as grave goods, the second determines the comparability and inter-relatedness of votive and funerary assemblages, and the third identifies the main themes or activities represented in the realm of the sacred. Settlement contexts for artefacts that are selected as grave goods provide an assessment of value, availability, and symbolic meaning, which cannot be obtained from funerary and votive assemblages in isolation. It is as important to know what articles were not appropriate for 'sacrifice' as to know those that were.

The major classes of artefacts to be considered are ceramics, faunal assemblages (particularly as food offerings), weapons, jewellery, imported goods and tool kits.

Ceramics

There are two aspects of ceramic variability to consider; the selection of vessels for sacred purposes from the domestic assemblage and the association of
Figure 13. The distribution of black burnished ware around the main farm and the main entrance at Hodde 150–50 BC. (After Hoass 1985, pl. 109.)

stylistic attributes with specific social groups among the living and the dead. The first has been mentioned briefly in the context of PRIA votive and funerary offerings. The assemblages accompanying the dead throughout the whole period cover the whole range of domestic wares with the exception of the larger storage vessels. Most of the ceramic grave goods can be characterized as table wares. Among the votive deposits, in contrast, ceramics include not only table wares but also the larger storage pots whose presence in this context complements the other artefacts emphasizing agricultural fertility.

Between the second century BC and the first century AD ceramic burnishing had social implications which linked certain styles with certain social groups. The second–first century BC settlement at Hodde contained a variety of spatial and contextual differences in ceramic types, of which the most striking was the concentration of black burnished fine ware around the main farm (Fig. 13). The presence of the usual debris of domestic activity within this compound indicates that this was a residence unit comparable to the other farms rather than a specialized non-domestic structure.

Another five settlement contexts for this fine ware are known in Jutland over the period 200 BC–AD 100. At Overbygård a sunken storehouse of the late first century BC had burned to the ground and been left intact, providing a ‘time capsule’. Many of the sixty grain-filled pots were black burnished and they were associated with two swords that had hung by the door (Lund 1979). The associated longhouse was not excavated so identification as a main farm is uncertain, though the presence of the swords would suggest so. At Nørre Fjand a sequence of main farms, one on top of the other, demonstrated a similar association with the fine ware, probably extending into the second century AD in this remote coastal community (Hatt 1957). Black burnished ware was associated with chiefly residences from c. 200 BC to the first century AD. It was rarely used in votive deposits, though examples are known from c. 300–200 BC and the second century AD.

The black burnished ware makes its appearance in the funerary context in the ‘rich’ cremations of the second/first century BC at Kraghede and Husby,
though it is found slightly earlier in votive deposits but not in association with other artefacts. In the first centuries BC and AD the ware remained socially restricted in the burials. It occurs in weapon graves which include swords and with imported Roman bronze vessels and ornaments of silver. With one exception, female cremations were not associated with the ware until the first century AD when they similarly contain Roman imports and silver dress ornaments.

The correlation of black burnished wares with the most lavishly equipped cremations is perhaps not surprising, but the arrival of the inhumation rite in the first century AD marks a new emphasis. None of these inhumations in the first century could be described as 'rich'. They did not include weapons, Roman imports or precious metals with the occasional exception of a gold finger-ring (Fig. 14). Instead they rarely included more than shears, a small knife, a sickle, a brooch and a gold ring as well as pottery. Out of 34 of this date only 4 were without black burnished pottery. This identification of an élite who displayed a lack of ostentation in death is important because it demonstrates an inversion of previous practices involving cremation and copious wealth destruction, and the establishment of new élite customs based on a purely symbolic differentiation.

By the second century this neat social distinction had begun to break down. Ceramic style had ceased to function as an indicator of social position and the rite of inhumation had become more elaborate, with grave cuts up to 5 m in length, containing large tree trunk or wooden chamber coffins, and with large earth mounds built over them. Increasingly they became arenas for conspicuous wealth deposition, culminating in the elaborate double 'princely grave' at Dollerup (Voss & Ørsnes-Christensen 1948). By the end of the second century many of the gender distinctions of spatial location and of assemblage types had been transgressed. Similarly, the restriction of quantities of imports to inhumations was challenged in the later second century by the appearance of a series of lavishly provisioned cremations.3

Faunal remains and food offerings
The poor preservation of bone in the acid soils of southern Jutland limits analysis of any scope but some tantalizing possibilities can be found. Faunal assemblages from settlements in northern Germany and the Danish islands indicate the predominance of cattle, followed by sheep and pigs, generally reared for meat (Haarnagel 1979; Higham 1967). The emphasis on cattle is confirmed by the byres within each longhouse for their winter stalling.

A number of votive deposits in Scandinavia contain animal remains; the bones of cattle, pig, sheep, horse and dog were found in the late EPRIA weapon deposit at Hjortspring. Deposits of the Roman Iron Age in Sweden and western Denmark include bundles of animal bones particularly of horses but also of cattle and sheep.

Animal offerings in funerary contexts survive as bones in the more alkaline soils and as calcined bones in the cremations in acid soils. The Kraghede wagon and cauldron cremation, dating to 100–50 BC, contained the whole carcases of two horses, two pigs and a sheep, and bones of cattle and sheep. Food offerings are known from low status ERRA cremations in southern Jutland and on the Danish islands and these are restricted to sheep bones. In contrast, élite graves throughout Denmark in the ERRA were provided with the bones of cattle, pig, and pike, as well as sheep. The only ERRA high status burial in southern Jutland analyzed for animal bones, a late second century cremation from Kastrup, included bones of sheep, horse, cow and pig. We may tentatively conclude that horses, cattle and pigs (and possibly certain species of fish and birds) had a special status in funerary ceremonies as offerings reserved for the élite. In eastern Denmark, lavish burials for the élite continued after AD 200 and contained a similar range of animals to their ERRA predecessors, such as the food offerings in the male burial at Kirkebakkegard on Zealand (Thran 1967, fig. 5).

Precious goods
The overall quantities of precious metal (silver and gold) and fragments of imported dress items and other goods (brooches, bronze vessels, glass, ceramics, coinage) from discard or loss contexts is very small until after the first century BC when it rises steeply during the next 500 years. This pattern of increase corresponds to the increasing capacity for agricultural storage and animal stalling in the farms. The availability of 'central tokens of value' in settlement debris when they were not placed in ritual deposits can be seen in the first century AD in particular, but also in the third–fifth centuries AD. This would suggest that, as well as the context for ritual deposition switching between votive deposition and burial (and back again), the appropriateness of wealth deposition was not dictated by the simple availability of precious items, but by social and ideological forces.

The votive deposits of the Early Pre-Roman Iron Age (500–300 BC) display elements of a contrast-
Figure 14. Black burnished ware from the first century AD Grave 120 at Hjemsted. (After Ethelberg 1986, 118–9, drawn by Jørgen Andersen.)
ing, even oppositional, role to funerary practices. Different treatments and even different classes of artefact were appropriate to either the funerary or votive context. Pots were used in both settings but otherwise there are few similarities. It has been suggested that offering sites were ‘central sanctuaries’ serving areas the size of parishes (Ilkjaer & Lønstrup 1982, 95), and thus more than one settlement. In the Early PRIA (500–300 BC) the deposits fall into three broad categories: personal dress items (neckrings, armrings, pins and clothing), agricultural items (ploughs, animal bones and pots) and human sacrifices. The oppositional nature of the human sacrifices (or bog bodies) to the funerary norm (violent:peaceful, naked:clothed, wet:dry, unburnt:cremation, not buried:buried below ground, no memorial maker:small mound) has been discussed elsewhere (Parker Pearson 1986). Towards the end of this phase and into the LPRIA the variety of items was extended to include items of precious metal and of fine workmanship, such as a gold torc, cauldrons (one of silver), weapons and a boat, and ceremonial wagons (Parker Pearson 1984b).

The practice of votive deposition tailed off after 50 BC (in the Final PRIA and ERIA) and continued mainly in the form of offerings of pots, some containing food remains. These offerings no longer included central tokens of value and the importance of the rite was upstaged by funeral offerings. The decline of black burnished ware amongst votive offerings after c. 150 BC indicates that the ruling groups probably participated no longer in these rituals. Pot offerings are also known from settlements. In the second–first century BC settlement at Hodde they were buried within ten farms, nearly all in the animal byres (Hvass 1985, 112–13). They have also been recovered from in and around a small central outbuilding in the compound of the main farm of the fourth–fifth century AD settlement at Hjemsted.

Weaponry
From discard contexts on settlements the rarest types of weaponry and associated equipment are riding spurs, swords, horse bridles and shield bosses. Spear-heads are in fact quite common on settlements and are known from over 20 such contexts in the Danish Iron Age. This suggests that swords are over-represented in relation to spears in burials (a ratio of 1 to 2) and in votive deposits (a ratio of 1 to 3). It can be concluded that the social restrictions on ownership of swords and horse gear apparent from the ritual deposits are reflected in the settlement evidence. Swords would seem to have had a special significance which made them particularly appropriate items for ritual deposition. Whilst weapon sets have been found in the graves of individuals of all ages, swords accompany only relatively elderly people.

A resurgence in other forms of votive offerings after AD 200 is marked by the deposition of vast quantities of weaponry, often broken, burnt, and hacked up. It would seem that these large assemblages were collected together and symbolically ‘killed’ before being thrown into a lake. Series of these large weapon offerings were repeated in the same locations (after periods of up to 200 years between offerings) at four main sites in Jutland between AD 200 and AD 600, with a group of smaller offerings in other locations. The distribution of settlements at this time, and the forest regeneration indicated by a pollen diagram in the vicinity of one of the major deposits, suggest that these offering places were located in sparsely inhabited and wooded areas, at least 10 km from the periphery of the settlement zone (Parker Pearson 1989). Their conventional interpretation as sacrifices of the spoils of battle is no doubt close to one aspect of the truth but they should also be viewed in their full ritual and social context as new foci of wealth deposition, perhaps replacing burial consumption, and revealing activities in areas of wilderness, probably involving men, so far from the associations of hearth and home, and the places of the dead. Although the weapons are not diagnostic of particular regions within Scandinavia, some of the associated brooches have regional distributions. On this basis, Ilkjaer & Lønstrup have inferred that the Thorberg deposit is the war booty of a defeated war band from north Germany and one of the Illerup deposits of a war band from southern Sweden (1982). It was after AD 200 that regional differences in grave good provision became marked. West of the weapon deposits, graves were relatively standardized and modestly equipped, whereas to the east of the deposits increasing quantities of imported vessels and lavish costumes accompanied the elite dead (Hedeager 1990, 146–8). The modest funerary practices in Jutland do not signify an egalitarian society nor do they mean a lack of imports. Evidence from settlements such as Vorbasse (Hvass 1979) and Nørre Snede (Hansen 1982) illustrates significant architectural and economic differences between, and perhaps within, farms. Finds of late second century Roman silver coins and Early Germanic glass vessels in quantity from the settlement of Dankirk (Thorvildsen 1972; Hansen 1990) indicate that precious materials were in circulation but were no longer suitable grave goods other than as occasional items.
Tools
Certain items are rarely or never recovered from funerary contexts. These artefacts include felling axes (as opposed to battle axes), adzes, hoes, ploughshares, spades, spindle-whorls, weaving combs, loom-weights and quern stones. Sickles, shears and metal-working tools were rarely placed in graves and the first two types are restricted to élite burials of the first century AD. Sickles, axes and plough components are, however, well known from votive deposits while examples of all the items have been found on settlements. The tools of agricultural production were thus considered suitable votive offerings but not grave goods, with implications for the association of agricultural fertility with votive offering but not burial.

Living–dead relationships reconstructed

Over this thousand year period the living’s relationship with the dead went through a series of changes which can be related to social and economic developments as well as to changing concerns with other areas of the sacred. While grave goods do not necessarily indicate belief in an afterlife (Ucko 1969), the inclusion of eating and drinking sets from the first century BC onwards does imply a need to make some form of provision after death. A lack of such provision in the period before may or may not indicate the absence of belief in an afterlife.

The dead in the period 500–100 BC did not reside close to the living and their ashes were accompanied by their simple metal and bone dress fittings. The distancing and segregation of the dead from the living was stressed more than in later periods. Frequent association with the funeral monuments from the distant past suggests their role in the contemporary world was slight but that they may have acted as some form of legitimation for a distant mythical past in a period of sweeping social change. The rigidly organized funerary style finds an echo in the relatively egalitarian settlements and in the territorial groupings of artefact styles which may have defined acephalous, kin-based territories in which the communal dead played a significant legitimating role.

The practice of votive offering in and around bogs and open water, in contrast to funerary rites, was a central focus for consumption rituals. The offerings often involved food and items associated with agricultural production, perhaps to promote fertility. Increasingly, these offerings consisted of prestigious and often imported goods. Human sacrifices, the famous bog bodies, were also made and, where analyzed with care, these seem to have been individuals untouched by the rigours of manual farmwork. The increase in wealth deposition accompanied a decrease in the maintenance of territorial identities and a growing economic differentiation among farmers. The appearance of large weapon offerings towards the end of this phase suggests that men played a dominant role in the votive rituals by this time, if not before.

The institutionalization of inequality within the developing village community occurred by c. 150 BC and found expression in funerary rites at some point within the next hundred years. The cremations of the élite with their wagons, cauldrons and weapons make powerful statements about the ownership of movable wealth and the emphasis on male ancestors of specific lineages. The funerals of these few privileged individuals appropriated those elements of the votive rituals not concerned with fertility, as ‘gifts to gods’ became ‘gifts to ancestors’. As hierarchical relations replaced a communal, territorial identity, so the different and, perhaps, inferior status of women in this newly inegalitarian society was represented in funerary ritual by the segregation of sexes and the relative poverty of female assemblages.

In the early first century AD, or slightly before, a new rite of inhumation became associated with these village chiefs. Grave goods were not ‘killed’ by breakage as they had been in cremation rites and they did not include weapons and quantities of valuable personal effects. This reorientation of values stressed absolute and symbolic differences between chiefly groups and the rest in contrast to previously more open systems of gradations in wealth disposal. Within the next two centuries this system became increasingly open to competitive deposition as inhumations were monumentalized under mounds and elaborated in their size and provisions (riding gear, gaming sets, Roman drinking sets, and fine costumes), culminating in a ‘horizon’ of lavish cremations and inhumations around AD 200. This was accompanied by the dissolution of the signification of status and role as the categories which once clearly defined high and low, male and female, were transgressed and muddled.

There was a marked discontinuity in cemetery location around AD 200, as in other aspects of material culture. Other changes in funerary rites included a strong shift to inhumation as the dominant rite, a gradual decrease in portable valuables used as grave goods and a return to the spatial segregation of graves by gender. Cemeteries were located close to settlements, or vice versa. The more elaborate costumes worn by the corpses were generally those of women (buried with their jewellery) and there was a return
### Funerary Practices

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**KEY:**
- - - - Period of use as a status item or central token of value
- - - - Period of use without status associations or of insubstantial importance

**Figure 15.** Table of thematic developments in the Iron Age in cemeteries, votive deposits and settlements, indicating the items and practices of central social importance and their periods of use.
to female and male separation within the cemeteries. At the same time, the ritual destruction of large weapon deposits reappeared, in the recently deserted coastal lands to the east. These presumably were exclusively male-controlled rituals and again overshadowed death as the occasions for conspicuous destruction. Although deposition of simple offerings of pots and food had continued since the first century BC, this reassertion of votive offering of battle spoils away from home may have indicated a change in the status of the ancestors, replaced in importance by the appeasement or supplication of the spirits or gods that could be reached through the lakes. The proximity of the dead to the hearth and home coincided with higher apparent status in death for women, and with rituals of warfare conducted well away from the settlements. The proximity of the dead may indicate a concern with territory and with the safe-keeping of the dead at a time of continuous warfare. A small number of isolated warriors’ graves are known from the third and fourth centuries. These are not found in settlements, with the exception of Vorbasse on the edge of the battle offering zone, and are commonly inserted into older burial mounds, especially in the area between the settlement zone and the zone of the battle offerings. Elsewhere in Jutland, burials were disturbed at this time (Lund 1982, 111-12) and it is possible that acts of desecration against an enemy’s ancestors were a legitimate component of warfare.

Few cemeteries of the fifth and sixth centuries are known in the region, despite the large number of settlements. At Hjemsted, the one large inhumation cemetery known, the organizational principles of gender separation and heads at the west end had ceased to operate by this time. There was also a revival of the cremation rite in the region. Votive offering of weapons continued in this period and included larger quantities of silver items, though increasingly swords were withheld from sacrifice. Very large quantities of gold and silver bullion were buried as hoards, not usually in watery deposits but on dry ground often close to settlements. Their interpretation as wealth hidden in times of danger may represent part of the truth but later Norse myth hints at their possible connection with funerary rites and their role in conspicuous destruction of wealth.

Conclusion

To return to Canetti’s statement about the power of the dead, we have glimpsed a society which, for hundreds of years, devoted substantial resources to the procurement of goods for disposal with the dead, and with other forces of the supernatural. Consumption patterns could shift from one domain to the other and both were manipulated as political and economic institutions. The dead could be a functioning element of the economy, as gift takers through whom competitive prestige relations could be developed. The perceived return of power — luck, prosperity, honour, supernatural abilities — would be indirectly effective amongst all those who shared in the beliefs of the powerful dead as living force.

Over 500 years later, Viking literary sources revealed the importance of burying wealth with the dead, a practice that had returned in the Viking period. The sagas of Egil and Laxdaela contain examples of sons who were denigrated as mean and dishonourable for failing to bury their fathers with wealth (Ellis 1943, 34-5). The Ynglinga Saga says of a man that the more possessions buried with him, the richer he would be in the other world (Ellis 1943, 32). Odin’s Law may also have implications for understanding wealth consumption at the grave and by votive offering and hoarding: ‘...every man should enter Valhalla with as much wealth as he had on his pyre, and should also enjoy everything which he himself had buried in the earth...’ (Ellis 1943, 32). Within gift-exchange based societies, dishonour was a serious impediment to the accumulation of prestige and hence power.

It has been possible to recognize changes in the status of the dead, or of particular groups of dead, as social entities. Over a period of a thousand years their relationship with the living and their importance was manifested in a sequence of physical relationships: the communal dead spatially distant and linked with the distant past; the receivers of valuable gifts; the embodiments of a hierarchical social order defined by burial style and not by wealth inclusion; again as the receivers of valuables; and finally an apparently egalitarian dead within an egalitarian society. Such changes have been recoverable only by considering the whole social context and its physical manifestations through settlement, votive, landscape and funerary settings.

A series of processes can be identified from the case study which have more general applicability. These are the use of the dead for political legitimation, the identification of the dead with a distant past, the naturalization of the social order by reference to a supernatural or ancestral hierarchy, the inversion of traditional funerary practices, the appropriation of components from other rituals, and the emulation of restricted practices by inferior social groups. The patterns of status separation (through grave goods, grave
form, body treatment, etc.), made visible by a discontinuity with past practices, are more apparent at certain moments than others. With time, these segregational categories become lost or altered through gradual processes of elaboration, emulation and integration. Distinctions among the living as portrayed between the dead become less clear cut and open to ambiguity as formerly inappropriate combinations of goods and categories are made.

The archaeology of mortuary practices is no longer confined to the bounds of the cemetery. It requires a study of the changing relationships that the living create with the dead in general, as much as those differences that are created between the dead.

The analysis of variability between individual funerary deposits remains an integral part of the methodology but a contextual appreciation of those deposits requires analysis of other archaeological data. The main themes identified are: the mapping of the sacred and profane in the landscape and identification of physical relationships between the abodes of the living and the dead; the comparisons of foundation and abandonment, organization and morphology of settlements and cemeteries; and the examination of inter-contextual variability of artefact assemblages between the mundane and the various ritual deposits. Rather than using burial groups as microcosmic descriptions and analogues of how societies might have been organized, archaeologists should perceive that past societies' treatment and placing of the dead was integral to their development and change.

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Notes

1. Or conversely, several villages or hamlets may have shared a single large cemetery, as may have been the case in the early PRIA at Årre and Årupgård.

2. For example, 24 cremations out of 210 burials with spindle whorls were identified as males and 40 cremations out of 273 burials with weapons were identified as females (Breitsprecher 1987, tables 1 & 2).

3. The change to inhumation in many areas of the Roman Empire has also been dated to the third century (Jones 1981) and we cannot discount a link between innovations in Denmark and south of the frontier. Nevertheless, within the empire the change was gradual and regionally varied (Jones 1981, 18) whereas in south-western Denmark it seems to have been fairly rapid.

4. Similar changes in funerary ostentation and restraint have been noted amongst the historic North-East Iroquois and in Victorian-modern England (Cannon 1989). Cannon explains this process as emulation of an elite strategy of restraint regulation designed to prevent the re-emergence of ostentation in low status associations (1989, 447). In the case study presented here, the period of 'restraint' lasted 50-100 years and was succeeded by a further phase of 'ostentation' in the second century AD.

References


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