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## **Rethinking the Urnfield Concept: A comparative study on funerary practices during the (Late) European Bronze Age**

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# Rethinking the Urnfield Concept

A comparative study on funerary practices during the (Late) European Bronze Age

Mark Butterman

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A comparative study on funerary practices during the (Late) European Bronze Age

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# Chapter 1 - Rethinking the Urnfield Concept:

## An Introduction

While death is a certainty for all of us, we have no say in what happens to our remains in a thousand years from now, whether we were buried or cremated, or cremated and buried. There will come a time that our place of burial may be given a different function. If a future excavation were to take place at our place of burial, and our grave is excavated just as we excavate the burials of the people who used to live here. Since we might not know anything about that individual (or individuals) and in this case for cremated individuals, "context is all important: burned human remains do not simply occur in a vacuum but are rather, mostly the result of human agency" (Thompson & Ulguim, 2009, pp. 392).

In prehistoric Europe, the dominant funerary tradition at some point transitioned from inhumation to cremation marking an important cultural shift in all affected regions. Over time the funerary traditions changed and the cremated remains of the people occupying parts of Bronze Age Europe were put into urns. This discovery gave scholars the inspiration for the terminology of 'urnfields'. Scholars recognized a trend and dubbed the Late Bronze Age of the vast lands of central Europe the 'Urnfield Culture(s)' (1300-700 BC).

Despite this being an important aspect of European Prehistory the concept of urnfields appears problematic, the academic world relies on constructs being as clear as possible. If a construct lacks this primary task, it has to be challenged and re-evaluated. With the concept of 'urnfields' at hand there seems to be a consensus that it is used even though multiple scholars have pointed out that the concept fails at this task. The concept of urnfields uses a specific word, 'urnfield', which has an interesting history. The term 'urnfield' has been around since the nineteenth century. It was specifically coined by scholars because it has a neutral tone, and therefore, did not get into conflict with the Christian connotations. This term then evolved into a concept once scholars were interested in getting to know the people behind the funerary rites. Entangled with late nineteenth century nationalism defining a people was important and 'urnfield' became a cultural concept that transformed into the 'Urnfield Culture'.

Scholars have scrutinized the term and concept of urnfields extensively. The term has been questioned before, most prominently by Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury (2008; 2023). Their

research shows that contemporary academic research was influenced by political agendas (Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2008, p. 63), of which nationalism was an important player. They discuss the limiting factor of this concept from a twentieth century view. In their conclusion they call their 2008 article a "starting point" and that is what it was. Despite the critique posed by Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury (2008), they are still using the terminology and concept in their more recent work (2023). In their 2008 article they mention that the term has become embedded in the research (Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2008, p. 65). Since the term is tied to the concept it is also difficult to revise.

This does, however, clearly showcase the main research problem. The terminology hinders the workable nature of the concept. The first of those problems is the shift in academic focus from archaeological cultures to human connection, to material culture and practices. Secondly, the limitations of comparative research in which the term "urnfield" hinders comparative research between regions, the Nordic Bronze Age and Atlantic Bronze Age, described on a map by Cunliffe (2008, fig. 8.2). A critique by Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury (2008) is that the concept has become inseparable from ideas like time, region, and culture. This is a problematic concept which needs to be investigated and challenged by a set of fresh eyes. Therefore, the main research question is as follows:

### **Is the 'urnfield concept' still a viable theoretical and sociocultural construct?**

To conduct this entire research, I will carry out a literary study in order to compare funerary practices across different regions.

Before diving into the main body of the thesis, I will briefly outline the chapters and the methodology behind some of them. At the base of this research stand the questions: Where does the urnfield concept come from? And what is it? Chapter 2 is used to answer these questions. To enable myself of studying this, I mainly use the second chapter of Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury' 2023 book titled *Death and the Body in Bronze Age Europe*, which provides a clear overview of the subject and prior research. However, additional studies will be included where relevant. Chapter 2 will conclude in discussing more recent studies and presents limitations that the subject presents. Following this, chapter 3 is used to provide the reader with a brief descriptive, yet engaging, study of each region on their respective geographical sphere, chronology of cremation practices and the underlying idea behind the region.

Chapters 2 and 3 set the stage for chapter 4, which presents the data of funerary practices throughout the regions. Beginning with the Traditional Region of the 'Urnfield Culture', which

is the starting point of this research and moving onto the Atlantic Bronze Age system and the Nordic Bronze Age. The sources and archaeological information for this study can be found in literature about the specific regions. This literature will mainly consist of overarching studies of that (sub-)region, however additional sources will be used. Furthermore, the regions span quite some distance and to be as concise as possible I will need to find evidence and examples from most corners of all regions. This also means, however, that sources might be in languages that I am not familiar with. This implies that I will need to use a translation tool – google translation in specific - to get rough translations of what happens in those regions. While this might not be the best manner of conducting such a study, it will allow me to obtain more information if I cross the boundaries of my known knowledge in languages. After gathering and going through all the literature, the research will be guided by a couple of criteria: body treatment (inhumation and cremation), grave architecture, funerary vessels, spatial patterning, and the quantity of grave goods. Chapter 5 provides an analysis of the results found within the research and focusses on similarities, differences, and deviations between the regions. After this analysis, chapter 6, provides room for a discussion - on both the results and analysis – on a broader scale and circles back to the research question. Lastly, chapter 7 will be the concluding chapter of this thesis, in which a summary will be presented, and some concluding remarks are made.

## Chapter 2 - The Urnfield Concept: A Brief History

Conceptual frameworks do not just appear; they are forged within a long discourse. In this chapter, I explore the various ways in which 'urnfields' have been interpreted since their first mention in academic studies. This ranges between the discovery of the first urns to the academic world discussing on how to call this new find. The focus of the research will be from central Europe and the German tradition, as Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury also mention, since they have a significant influence on the start of the research topic (Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, p. 15). The aims for this chapter are to lay out a timeline and create a framework through which the remaining research can be conducted. It is important to assess where the concept came from in order to understand where it is at this moment in research. Therefore, I will start with the historical background, which predates the academic interest in this particular field.

### 2.1 The historical background

Urn fields have, within history, been described or presumed to have been used as a form of burial since the days of Homer. During the Bronze Age urns were buried in such a manner that they were almost invisible from above. Due to this, centuries later, urns were mostly found accidentally during farming and building activities (Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, p. 15-16). However, because urns differ from the standard burial practices of the time, inhumation graves, the people who found the graves, both educated and uneducated, began thinking about what they could be and how they got there. Therefore, the historiography has two sides. The educated and uneducated, or privileged and deprivileged, sides. It may be considered unethical to describe groups as one of either, however, in light of this research it is mainly due to reasons beyond their own control that people are sorted into either group. I will start with the 'uneducated' side, which comprises mostly the 'common' people from the Middle Ages to the Industrial era. From the beginning of when the urns were found people have been theorizing what they could be, and where they came from. They were said to have grown in the soil, like potatoes, therefore natural objects. Another long-lasting idea was the connection to magical activities and creatures, such as dwarves (Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, p. 16). An argument for these ideas might be that during those ages Europe was highly Christianised and

due to this, cremation was a foreign subject for the uneducated. For context, the first 'modern' (recorded) cremation in Europe dates to 1876 in Milan (Colombo, 2017, p. 23). In extension, the Catholic Church only accepted cremation as an acceptable burial rite in 1983 (Colombo, 2017, p. 29).

However, foreign cremation was for the 'common' people, it was less so for the 'elite' part of European societies that witnessed and enjoyed the Enlightenment. This 'elite' part read all the classical Greek and Roman works and were familiar with the idea of cremations and urn burials. This is where the age of antiquarianism (fifteenth century – eighteenth century) comes into play. At its peak, during the eighteenth-century, "hunting" and excavating urns became a form of leisure for the 'elite' (Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, p.16). Because of this, urns went from natural objects to cultural objects.

For the first time, in pre-modern Europe, urns were seen and discussed as a form of burial. The classical texts inspired texts such as Sir Thomas Browne's theological discussion of urn burials found in England. But they also interpreted them as part of a specific burial tradition (Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, p.16). This idea spread throughout academic Europe in ways such as letters sent by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz to a colleague, who asked whether they knew anything about *urnae sepulchrales* (Gummel, 1938, p. 101; In Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, p.16-17). Then came the issue of chronology. One example of this is found in a letter by Christian Jürgensen Thomsen, from 1818, in which he described 'grave-urns' as one of the main categories in his (early) Three Ages System (Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, p.17). The assumption was made that these 'grave-urns' were in abundance within archaeological collections, and therefore a recognisable feature of a specific time and people. It turns out however that Thomsen included a wide array of vessels, made from all sorts of materials. Therefore, not all vessels that he spoke off were in fact funerary urns. This usage of the term 'urn' for more than vessels containing cremated human remains, created a terminology crisis of ambiguity within archaeology. Concerns about this were already raised as early as 1824 by Büsching and remain to this day (Büsching, 1824, p. 24-25; in Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, p. 18).

The place of urns within time was encouraged by the development of stratigraphy as a concept. Urns found within barrows were most commonly found in a layer above an inhumation burial. This led to a conclusion that urns must be from a later part of the European Bronze Age. In 1854, Nils Gustaf Bruzelius argued that there was a change in funerary practices during that

time, and this became widely accepted by the late nineteenth century (Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, p.18).

## 2.2 The origins of the word 'urnfield'

While chronology has an important role in the historiography behind the 'urnfields', terminology is the focus here. Once multiple places with a lot of urns, with cremated remains inside are found, what are they to be called? That is a question that, to this day, lingers within prehistoric archaeology. Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury (2023, p. 19-20) give a short but clear explanation on where the term 'urnfield' comes from. The first discoveries on a larger scale were all made during a time where the church had a major presence. Since these fields with urns were not found close to anything related to Christian people, like churches, the term 'churchyard' was quickly rejected (Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, p. 19). This absence of Christian affiliations led scholars to look for terminology that better represented the archaeological context. The leading scholars on this topic were based in Germany, therefore, some of the first terms that were coined are in German.

The main suggestions were 'Urnfriedhof' (urn-cemetery) and 'Urnfeld' (urnfield). The division between the two terms were in part geographically, since Northern and eastern Germany preferred to use 'Urnfriedhof', whereas southern Germany and the Austro-Hungarian regions used the latter (Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, p.19). However, Otto Tischler was, in 1886, possibly the first scholar to use 'urn fields' in his work (Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2008, p. 57) Other scholars used them simultaneously, and as shown the terminology, like the chronology, varies per region. The discussion on the terminology is still ongoing. However, some consensus has been achieved within the field of archaeology, because the fact remains that the 'Urnfield' period/culture/phenomenon/package is very present in studies. So, it seems the term 'urnfield' became the dominant variant over any other term.

## 2.3 Academic background

This line of thinking about both chronology and terminology developed into ideas about the people within the urns, or in other words, the ethnic explanations. The research, alongside the chronology, focussed more and more on questions concerning people, races, and cultures (Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, p. 20). At the time that these discussions started, in the nineteenth century Germany, there were other factors in the background influencing academic

thinking across the board. These are, the rise of nation-states, and thus nationalism. For the field of archaeology, this meant a rise of interest in national archaeology. Fuelled by the politics of the time, differences in material culture were explained by linking them to different groups of people (Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, p. 20). This way of thinking partially ensured the creation of an 'Urnfield' Culture. At the forefront of this creation were two cultural-historical approaches, namely 'Kulturkreislehre' and 'Siedlungsarchäologische Methode'.

### 2.3.1 Academic theories, methods and more

The 'Kulturkreislehre', or the Theory of Cultural Circles, was built upon developing a 'universal history of mankind' on the backbone of so-called cultural circles. Cultural change was explained by contact between at least two of those cultural circles but also through migrations of peoples (Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, p. 20-21). In the context of the Central European Urnfield Culture(s), these cultural transmissions have been said to come from more advanced and innovative Cultural Circles from the Mediterranean. This thinking allowed for the idea that cultures in a less developed stage are dependent on more advanced cultures to grow and innovate. While this statement is quite loaded and highly prone to bias, these ideas have influenced interpretations of the origins and spread of the "Urnfield" Culture. In addition, the 'Kulturkreislehre' also explains the concept of cremation, and later urn-burials, as something foreign to the traditional region of the 'Urnfield' Culture (Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, p. 21).

The second influential scientific theory is the 'Siedlungsarchäologische Methode', or Settlement Archaeological Method, by Gustaf Kossinna. While overlapping with the 'Kulturkreislehre' in some areas, the main difference is the focus on history instead of ethnography. Its aim was to write a 'history of peoples,' in particular one of the German(-ic) peoples (Kossinna, 1911; in Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, p. 21). An important difference with the 'Kulturkreislehre' is that Kossinna did not see the cultural changes as deriving from the Mediterranean but were individually developed after the Ice Ages. By connecting the earliest documentation of a specific people with available archaeological data, this method follows the development of an archaeological culture in reverse. This way of conducting research reflects a clear political agenda, because specific values were ascribed to specific peoples, cultures and races. Which in turn was used to demonstrate that the 'German race' was superior to other peoples or ethnicities (Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, p. 22).

In contrast to the prominent Germanophile worldview of the first half of the twentieth century, there were also theories that did not focus on the ethnicity of a people. An example of this is the Marburg School and its first professor of prehistory, Gero von Merhart. Merhart did not only disagree with the Germanophile worldview, but he also used ethnic interpretations sparingly and with caution (Merhart, 1928; in Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, p. 22). Merhart aimed to conduct "extensive comparative studies of the material culture of a given geographic area to establish chronological order" (Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, p. 22). Despite extensive research conducted following an ethical focus, the ethnicity of the 'Urnfield Culture' remains unanswered. It might not even be possible to find a definitive ethnic determination for the 'Urnfield', and if it is possible, is it necessary to?

### 2.3.2 Flow of movement

The process of understanding how urnfields came to be such a staple concept was taken further by looking at how it 'spread' throughout Prehistoric Europe. I intentionally use the entirety of Prehistoric Europe in this section because the purpose of this study is to challenge the traditional way of thinking. Whether by examining through the lens of the Cultural Circles of the 'Kulturkreislehre', or alternative theories, aspects of the 'urnfield' concept are recognised throughout the region. The difficulty with the 'urnfields' in particular is, according to Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury (2023, p. 23), that it underwent a rapid spread. This rapid spread introduced new ideas within academic thinking about the mechanisms of spread and became an inherent aspect of how scholars thought about the Urnfield Culture (Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, p. 23). The most influential scholar who was concerning themselves with migration and the spread of cultural elements was Vere Gordon Childe, who argued that the flow of movement by people and the noteworthiness of cultural influencing were the main mechanism of changing cultures (Childe, 1950; in Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, p. 23). Important to understand about Childe's view on the matter of the origins of the 'Urnfield' Culture, however, is that it changes throughout his career. Along with his developments, also came issues, of which, contradictions between his stress on continuity and the focus on invasions and the spread of cultural aspects, is a particular case. While this contradiction may or may not be known to Childe, he does not try to resolve this for the 'Urnfield' Culture. Childe's "final" remark on the origin of the 'Urnfield' Culture is that it truly originated in Central Europe, and from there on it spread to and influenced regions in Northern Europe. This interpretation

of a central European origin for the 'Urnfield' Culture inspired a discussion about the relation between central Europe and the Mediterranean (Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, p. 26).

An important take on what defines the 'Urnfield' Culture is one from Wolfgang Kimmig in a 1964 article. For him, the defining element of the 'Urnfield' Culture was the spread of cremation, and specifically urn burials (Kimmig, 1964, p. 245; in Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, p. 26). Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury further interpret this as the following: "thus stating that, for him, the defining concept of the Urnfield Culture is a developed, finished practice of an urn burial, and not the other forms cremations might take (2023, p. 26)". This sounds reasonable, for the dictionary definition of urn is a container with, in modern times at least, the ashes of a dead person (*urn*, Oxford's Learner's Dictionaries; *urn*, Van Dale). To be considered 'part of this cultural sphere of 'urnfields' an area has to meet certain criteria, of which the area containing actual urn-burials is the main point. Just like Childe, Kimmig was also an advocate of the central European origin of the 'Urnfield' Culture. He saw the Danube-Balkan region as an area through which the sharing and adapting of cultural elements passed on a mutual base (Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, p. 27).

### 2.3.3 World System Model

Continuing this line of thinking about Central Europe and the Mediterranean was, according to Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury, the basis for multiple efforts to fit the 'Urnfield' Culture into a World System Model (2023, p. 27). However, they mention one major problem within such approaches. 'The concept of the Urnfield Culture has neither been questioned nor examined. Rather, it has been summarised and used in a general way to explain long-term historical processes (Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, p. 27)'. This World System Model focuses on a beginning in the (European) Iron Age, but ever so slightly dips into the (European) Late Bronze Age. While the World System Model shows problems for inducting the 'Urnfield' Culture, the model goes on to play an interesting role in the research on urnfields. The model describes the world as a system of cores and peripheries. At this time, the Middle East and the Mediterranean were the core of economic strength and cultural influences transmitted into the rest of Europe. Kristian Kristiansen tried this model for his research into one of the other regions described by Cunliffe (2008), the Nordic Bronze Age, where he argues that the social development of a random Bronze Age society determined its place within the World System Model. One critique offered by Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury is that these ideas generally did

not include an in-depth discussion on changes in burial practices. In his work, Kristiansen's main take on urnfields was that they represented ideologies of egalitarian village communities, even though other forms of burials might still occur (Kristiansen, 1994; in Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, p. 28).

## 2.4 Recent trends and limitations

After having laid out and discussed the past research ranging from the nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth century, I am putting forward, with help from Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury's chapter (2023), some more recent trends surrounding the 'Urnfield' concept as a whole. One important factor in this move is the shift in academic focus from archaeological cultures to the human connection to material culture and practices. The first new insight that I am discussing comes from the experimental work described by Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury (2023, p. 33), which aims to understand the act of cremation better. This experimental research conducts tests with different kinds of pyres, construction-wise, and the effect of cremation on human bones. One of the new insights gained by this recent research is that the act of cremating a deceased human being takes specific technological knowledge (Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, p. 33). Which, according to them (2023, p. 33), presents the discipline with the question of how this knowledge was gained and practiced if cremations were only practiced sporadically in the small-scale societies that were typical for the Central European Bronze Age. Another question that they ask is how is this detailed technological knowledge maintained and transferred (Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, p. 33)? This line of questioning, and especially the latter, pushes scholars to rethink their view on how we deal with cremations themselves. One important remark Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury make in their discussion is, in my eyes, that cremation no longer needs to be reduced to a moment of transformation alone but also discussible as being a staged and choreographed event during which specific deliberate choices were made (2023, p. 33).

A second interesting new advancement is in the study of human remains. Due to all sorts of strontium isotope analyses, researchers are now able to investigate the remains we find within the burials. Therefore, we can see whether they are local or came from another region. This new line of studies, however, is very new, and more research is still needed to understand the full potential of this (Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, p. 33).

However, the most important remark in this chapter is that the conversations are still ongoing (Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, p. 33). Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury clearly state that the concept of 'Urnfields' is flawed and accept that the usage of the concept is conflicting and therefore try to take distance from it. This act, however, is very difficult to achieve because it is embedded in academic thinking, or as they frame it: "The package has become packed too tightly! (Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, p. 34)". That the concept has become too dense is shown in the different uses by scholars. It not only refers to a general phenomenon within Central Europe but also used as a double for Bronze Age in specific regions (Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, p. 34).

This leads some scholars trying to create criteria or qualities that should give a good look on what an urnfield is, and what is required to be considered one. A short list of these that are also relevant to this study are:

1. The use of urns as the container for cremated human remains (Cavazutti et al, 2022; Louwen, 2021).
2. The place of burial – of the urn – must be in a fixed-point – like a pit – in the landscape (Cavazutti et al, 2022; Louwen, 2021).
3. Frequent reduction/exclusion of grave goods (Cavazutti et al, 2022).
4. An open structure of the burial grounds (Louwen, 2021).
5. An inclusive nature (Louwen, 2021).
6. General tendency to be largely representative of the communities (Louwen, 2021; Cavazutti et al, 2022).

While these criteria could be considered a useful tool, they have been debunked in some regard, because they are not unique to their respective study area (Louwen, 2021, p. 238).

#### 2.4.1 Limitations

By now, it should be clear that the 'urnfield' concept, and with it, the terminology, is far from perfect nor ideal. As shown above, scholars have different criteria and essences of what makes an urnfield an urnfield while working within the concept. While Kimmig's remark on the existence of an actual urn-burial, with cremated remains inside, is essential for the concept of 'urnfields' (Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, p. 26), this is not always the case. Take a study by Kortlang, in 1999, that shows that some cemeteries are put down as urnfields, while no actual urn was found (Louwen, 2021, p. 238). In their 2008 article, Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury

have already touched upon the ambiguous nature of the terminology (p. 57). They show the ability to use the term in both single and plural, like 'Urnfield Culture' but also 'Urnfield Cultures'. But the ambiguity is also shown in the interchanging of the word that comes after 'urnfield', with terms like phenomenon, complex, and package (Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2008, p. 57). The consensus, however, remains to shortly mention the limitations and lack of clarity of the concept, but continue to use it anyway (Teržan, 1999; Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023; Rose, Christensen & Louwen 2023). Sometimes, due to the nature of the study in question, the concept is just used and not explained to the extent that this concept does require (Falkenstein, 2012; Honti & Jankvits, 2022).

Another limitation is that, despite the terminological ambiguity, the concept itself is quite narrowing. It hinders comparative studies between the three regions described by Cunliffe in 2008 – Urnfield Systems, the Atlantic Bronze Age System, and Nordic Bronze Age - because it creates clear lines on a map (2008, fig. 8.2). While this will be discussed in later chapters, there are examples from both the Atlantic Bronze Age system and Nordic Bronze Age, that prove that the criteria set for the 'urnfield' package can also be applied elsewhere. For example, Jo Appleby wrote an article on Bronze Age Britain's transition to cremation, in which she discusses urn-burials with cremation remains inside (2013, p. 90). While less common than in the 'traditional region of urn-burials, they do exist. The same goes for the Nordic Bronze Age, where multiple scholars have noted that cremated remains have been found within pottery vessels that they omit to use the word 'urn', even though it is rare (Röst, 2017, pp. 132; Kaliff & Østigård, 2023, p. 106).

## 2.5 Concluding remarks

As shown in this chapter, the concept of 'urnfields', has been around forever. While it began as a form of treasure hunting for the antiquarian elite, it turned into academic thinking that has changed perceptions through the decades. Due to the extensive studies and discussions through, for example, the 'Kulturkreislehre' and 'Siedlungsarchäologische Methode', the development of how to interpret this 'phenomenon' grew exponentially. Despite the importance of all the theories, methods, and ideas carried, there lingers a problem. This problem lies in the name and concept of an 'urnfield'. For what is it exactly, and what does it include and exclude? While choosing a specific term to give a conceptual framework is quite essential to create uniformity and clarity with academic thinking, sometimes it creates more problems than it solves. The

term 'urnfield' is based on certain criteria that differ for different scholars. For example, Kimmig defines the Urnfield Culture, by the concept of a developed, finished practice of an urn burial, and not any other form of cremation burial. All of these criteria do indeed create a rigid checklist. As shown above, there are discrepancies in this concept, with not only the example that showed not all designated 'urnfields' housed actual urns but also the sporadic examples from the other regions. Building upon this chapter, the following chapters will dive deeper into these specific regions. How do cremation practices compare between the regions, and why the rigid boundaries of the urnfield concept make it difficult to conduct comparative research?

Before moving forward and diving into the physical space that covers the research area, a critical problem must be mentioned and tackled. While its importance for this chapter stands, the concept of urnfields will only be used where absolutely necessary in the following chapters. As known to scholars, this concept can be traced back to only a couple of words: cremation (and the remains put in an urn). As established in chapters 1 and 2 the concept itself hinders comparative research. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to refrain from using it in the upcoming chapters. To achieve this, I will look at the basis of the concept alone, which is: cremations. A set of fresh eyes is required to rethink this embedded concept. In Chapter 3 I will therefore look at the regions as put forward in the map from Cunliffe (2008). If I am referring to the traditional region of the "Urnfield Culture", I will use the following terminology: " Traditional Urnfield Region ". This means that I will maintain using the term of "urnfield", even though I will let go of its usage apart from referencing to this region.

# Chapter 3 - Cremations in Bronze Age Europe:

## A Geographical and Chronological Dimension

Many studies have shown, the act of cremating a dead body has been part of quite a portion of European (pre-)history. Cunliffe (2008) identifies three distinct contemporary regions in his map of Late Bronze Age Europe: the traditional region of the Urnfield Culture, the Atlantic Bronze, and the Nordic Bronze Age. This chapter examines the academic ideas behind the regions. I will also focus on their individual geographical scope and chronological development.

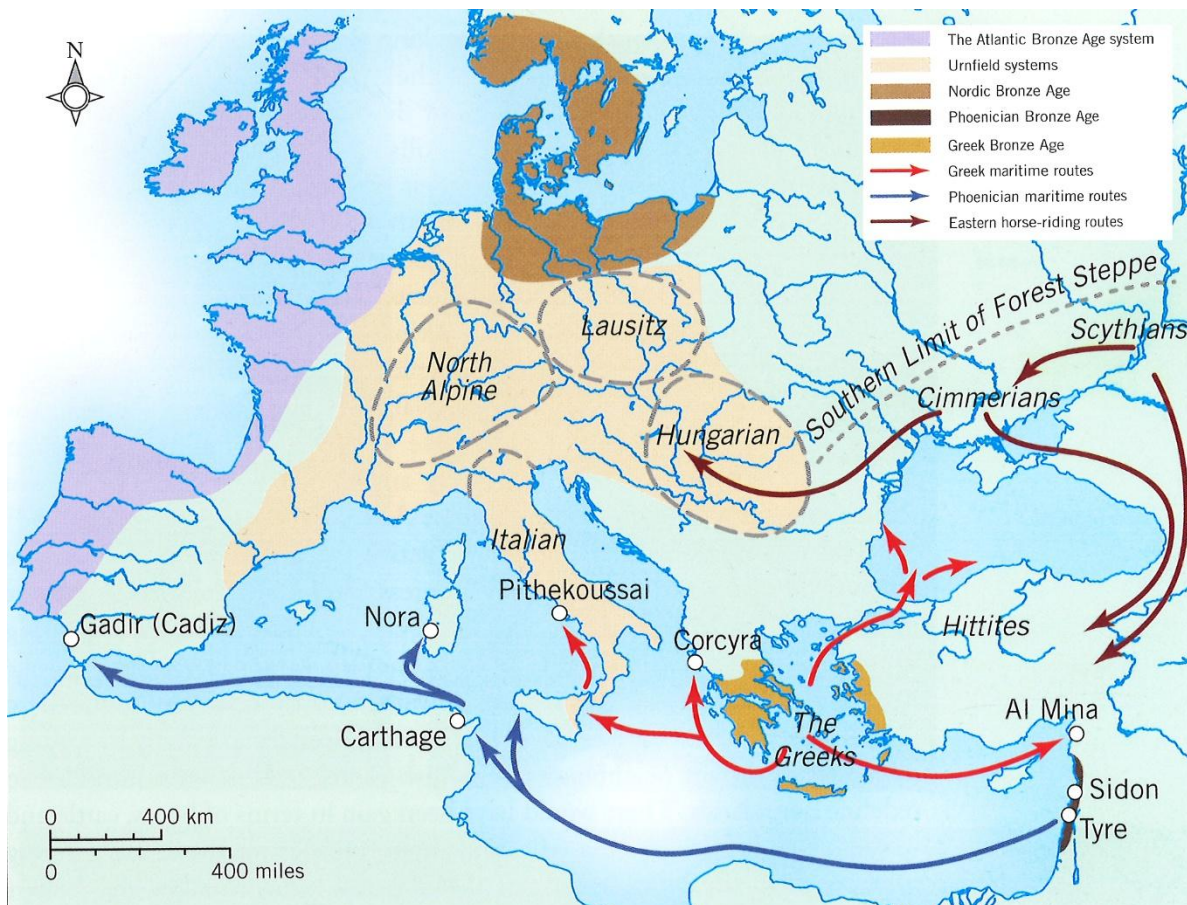


Figure 1. Cunliffe's map of 1300-700 BC Europe. With the Traditional Urnfield Region in light yellow, the Atlantic Bronze Age in pink, and the Nordic Bronze Age in orange (Cunliffe, 2008, fig. 8.2, p. 231).

Each of these regions has their own origin point in time for the practice of cremating human remains. The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to dig into these origin points and their development over time. While the regions will be examined individually, an intrinsic problem has to be acknowledged. This way of thinking only contributes to solidifying the boundaries put up by Cunliffe, while the aim of this thesis is to critically engage with these boundaries. However, it is necessary for this study to create a clear research area and for that I need to tackle this chapter individually per region. This map by Cunliffe (2008) creates an interesting problem. It almost suggests that Central Europe, or the Traditional Urnfield Region, is the only region to have urn burials, and to an extent also cremation burials as a whole. While this might not be the intention of Cunliffe, it is something to watch out for. Earlier studies, like Childe (1945), have shown that cremation was the dominant funerary rite for Western, Central and Northern Europe during their respective Bronze Ages (p. 14). Despite this disclaimer, Cunliffe's effort to tackle the, seemingly, impossible task of mapping out the situation of the Late Bronze Age in Europe warrants due recognition.

I must introduce a short clarification about this chapter and the use of certain terminology and concepts. The first concerns the geographical scopes that I am discussing in this chapter, for the interpretation of the span of a certain culture or "Age" can differ tremendously from scholar to scholar. Therefore, I will discuss multiple different approaches of the regions. However, I will not, since it is not the purpose of this study, set new boundaries for the regions. This also hinders the study in a fundamental way.

The second is on the chronology of cremation practices in Prehistoric Europe. There is evidence that "disposal of the dead by fire" was part of Prehistoric Europe from at least the Upper Palaeolithic (Williams & Cerezo-Román, 2017, pp. 3). However, it only became dominant around the overgeneralised Middle Bronze Age (1500-1100 BC) (Williams & Cerezo-Román, 2017, pp. 3). With this in mind, this chapter will focus primarily on Bronze Age cremations and the inclusion of urns in that ritual.

The chapter is structured into three parts, each exploring one of the regions. Each part begins with a brief discussion on the academic idea behind the region. This is followed by examinations on the geographical scope and chronologies of cremation practices. While I will use regional examples, I will not engage the evidence in detail. This will be tackled in the following chapters.

### 3.1 Traditional Urnfield Region

The Bronze Age in the Traditional Urnfield Region is particularly complex because it spans across a larger area on the map of Cunliffe (2008, fig. 8.2.) compared to the other regions. This means that the Bronze Age here is even less cohesive due to varying chronologies and the myriads of "subcultures". A general consensus in the chronology of the European Bronze Age is that it starts in the Aegean region around the late fourth millennium BC. It comes to Central Europe around 2300 BC and lasts till around 800 BC (Szeverény, 2004, pp. 20; Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, fig. 4.1). The span of this region is shown in the fact that, for example, the Bronze Age in the Netherlands only began around 2000 BC and ended around 800 BC (Fontijn, 2002; consult Louwen, 2021 (fig. 3.9) for a broad view of the European region between 1800 BC and AD 100).

#### 3.1.1 Geographical sphere

As previously mentioned, the complexity of the Bronze Age in the Traditional Urnfield Region is mainly due to the sheer size of the region, as visible in figure 2. With this in mind I am looking at the region itself. Cunliffe's map in figure 1 illustrates the modern countries this region encompasses, such as Italy, Hungary, Poland, Germany, Austria, France, Spain, Belgium, and the Netherlands. This is not even the complete list of countries. A key aspect of this geographical sphere is the emphasis on the region called "Central Europe". This is often explained through the origin narrative of the "urnfield" being in Hungary (Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, p. 26). The traditional affiliation of Central Europe with the Urnfield Culture fits perfectly into the narrative discussed in chapter 2 on the German schools, for the idea of *Mitteleuropa* (Central Europe) is tied to the German speaking world. In this definition, Central Europe entails the German speaking countries and the former Habsburg territories (including Hungary) (Delanty, 2012, p. 15-17). This geographical sphere, however, encompasses much more than just Central Europe. This is not only shown by Cunliffe (2008) but also acknowledged by many studies on the subject (some are: Childe, 1945; van Beek & Louwen, 2013; Smith, 1957; Scarre, 2018; Louwen, 2021). Letting go of the idea of a Central Europe in this specific scenario is necessary to avoid restrictive boundaries and allows for a broader engagement with cremation practices.

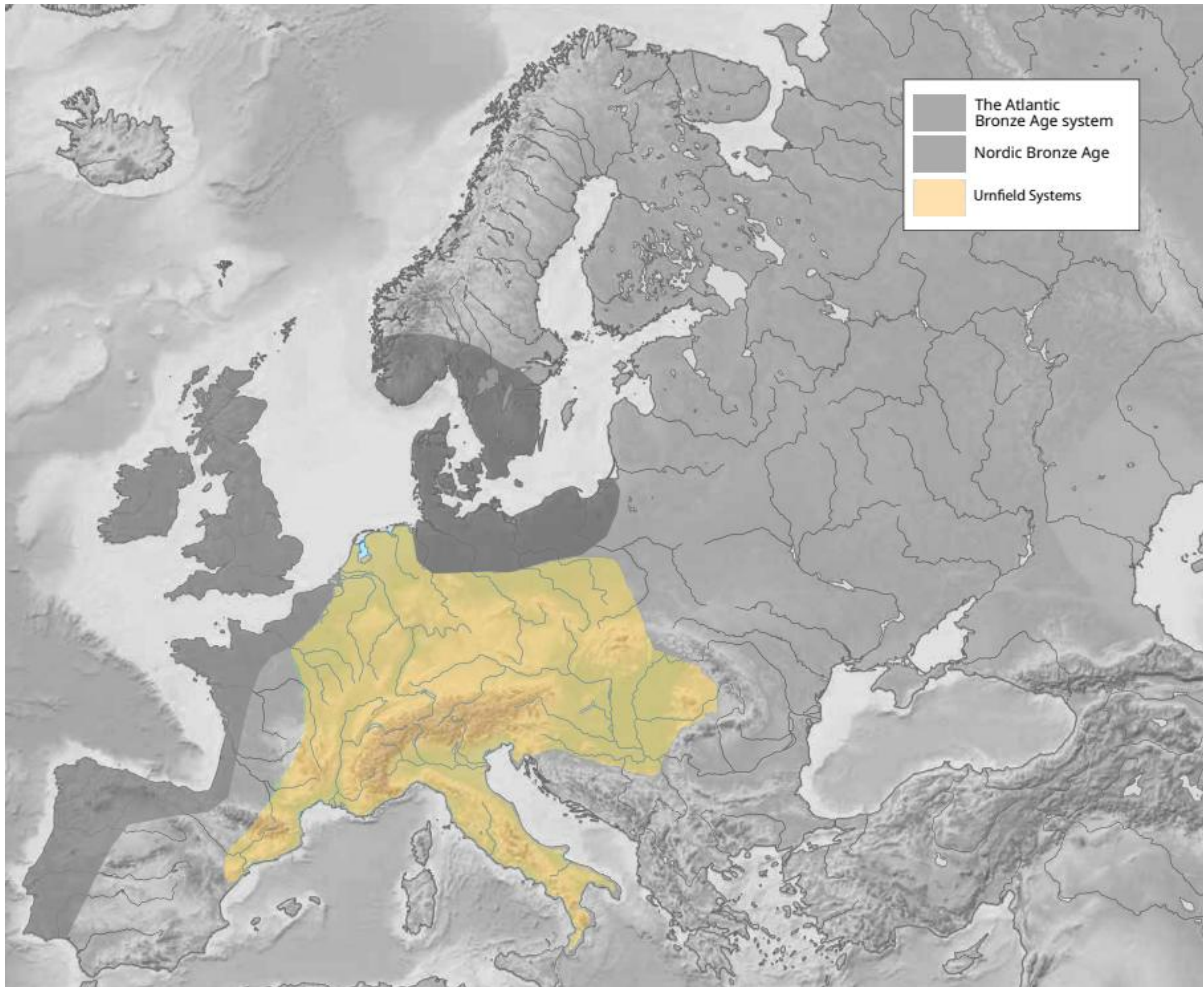


Figure 2. Geographical scope of the Traditional Urnfield Region according to Cunliffe (After: Louwen 2021, fig. 1.1).

### 3.1.2 Chronology of cremation

Since this is the region where, allegedly, the urnfields originated there must have been an early presence of cremations. While this is indeed the case for parts of the regions, it takes a while to become truly dominant. Take Hungary for example, where cremations take place already in roughly 2000 BC but is still being done alongside inhumation burials up and till at least 1400 BC (Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, p. 89-90) However, the act of cremation takes on a true dominant form across the region between 1300 BC and 700 BC. This period is also, commonly, referred to as "The Urnfield Period". In some regions, like Northeastern Iberia, cremation only becomes an additional variant of burials (López-Cachero, 2011, p. 119). Since it is a vast region the chronology of cremation burials spreads like a fire in a way, that it in the end gets to most regions in Europe at the end of those respective Bronze Ages.

## 3.2 Atlantic Bronze Age

The Atlantic Bronze Age is an idea that has been around for some time and can be traced back to, at least, the 1940s (Burgess & O'Connor, 2008, pp. 42). One of the theories behind the creation of this concept is that Spanish archaeologist Julio Martínez Santa-Olalla wanted to distinguish western Iberia from the eastern side (1946, in Burgess & O'Connor, 2008, pp. 42). However, according to Dirk Brandherm the true origin of the concept is found in the speech given by Adolf Mahr in 1937 at the Prehistoric Society (Brandherm, 2019, p. 1). However, there were some discrepancies within the academic scene, for no-one, including Santa-Olalla, referred to Mahr' speech as the origin of the concept (Brandherm, 2019, p. 2). Setting the underlying dilemma of the troubling 1940s aside, the concept has been reinvented quite some time, which makes it a complex subject to tackle for even the most experienced scholar. Brandherm (2019) begins his conclusion with a statement that guides one's reader in understanding the Atlantic Bronze Age.

*"[...] we are not dealing with an archaeological culture in the conventional sense, but with a nexus of inter-regional relations that translate into a broad socio-economic, and by extension cultural, interaction zone, held together to a large extent by maritime contacts along the western seaways." (Brandherm, 2019, p. 11)*

As this quote explains, the Atlantic Bronze Age drives massively on the term 'Atlantic,' being the water that connects the region. While this term does indeed fit perfectly with the region, as I show below, it is not as straightforward as just geographical spheres. Whereas the focus for a metal age is arguably rightly on the metals being worked, the scope is broader than that. The concept of an Atlantic Bronze Age is also held together by settlement features and funerary practices (Brandherm, 2019, p. 1). The latter being the primary focus of this study. There are also those who do not fully believe that such a thing as an Atlantic Bronze Age even existed (Bradley, 2007, p. 229). However, they do argue that there is indeed evidence for more and more interaction within this region.

### 3.2.1 Geographical sphere

The terminology makes clear that the regions considered for the Atlantic Bronze Age have to be adjacent to, or closely connected to, the Atlantic Ocean. However, what regions are included in this discourse? According to the map of Cunliffe, see figure 1, this includes the Atlantic

coastal regions of modern countries, including France, Belgium, the Iberian Peninsula and the entirety of Great Britain and Ireland (2008). Or as Brandherm puts it nicely "Europe's Atlantic façade" (2019, p.1). Interesting for this concept is that the French Atlantic region was only included from the 1950s onwards (Brandherm, 2019, p.3). Which, again, shows the complex nature of deciding what does and does not fall under a specific region and concept. Within literature on this region there seems to be a specific trend in which studies on Britain and Ireland rarely, or not even, mention the 'Atlantic Bronze Age' at all (Brück, 1995, 2004, 2009, 2019; Appleby, 2013). This does not necessarily mean that these authors don't agree with the existence of such a concept, but that it merely does not suit their type of research. It is nevertheless an interesting thought to keep in mind. In contrast to the geographical sphere of the Nordic Bronze Age, the Atlantic Bronze Age map as shown in figure 3, influenced by Cunliffe (2008), is hardly prone to change.

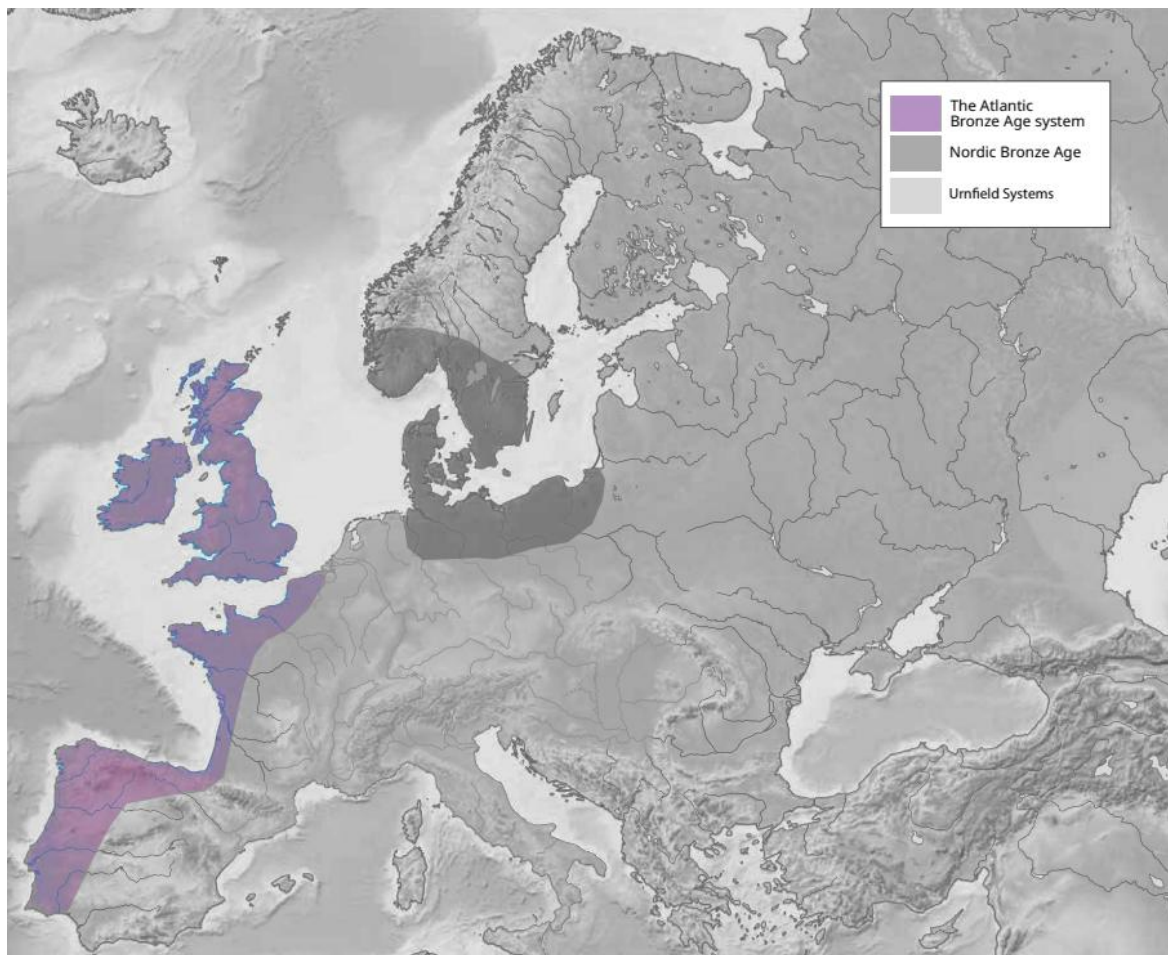


Figure 3. Geographical scope of the Atlantic Bronze Age according to Cunliffe (After: Louwen 2021, fig. 1.1).

### 3.2.2 Chronology of cremations

The chronological order of cremations in the Atlantic Bronze Age world is a bit different than the others, for the sense that it's stretched out along the coast. The first indication of cremations in this region are Ireland and Scotland, for there appears to be a consistent presence of cremations since 2200-2000 BC onwards (McSparron, 2020, p. 110; Medina-Pettersson, 2014, p. 12). While cremation comes up during the same time period (2100 BC), it only becomes more common from the 16<sup>th</sup> century BC (Brück, 2009, p. 1; 2019, p. 17). Moving away from the British Isles, the Atlantic coast of France experiences changes around 1700-1400 BC, and this goes on for the rest of the Bronze Age. The data for that sub-region is more fragmented and regional studies have not always been published (Marcigny, 2022, pp. 23).

### 3.3 Nordic Bronze Age

The Bronze Age reached Scandinavian regions quite late in comparison to other regions in Europe. While the Aegean region kicked off the European Bronze Age around 3000 BC, the Nordic Bronze Age starts around 1700 BC and lasts until roughly 500 BC before the Iron Age commences (Price, 2015, p. 199). Important for the context of the Nordic Bronze Age is that the term itself originates from work done by Oscar Montelius. He viewed the region as one ethnic phenomenon, for which he, therefore, chose the word *Nordic* (Salminen, 2017, p. 157). So, the basis of this entire region is somewhat based on a nineteenth-century ethnic thought and cemented the region in academia. It seems not entirely unchallenged, for scholars, like Anna Röst, also use the term "South Scandinavian Bronze Age Culture" (Röst, 2017). Aside from an example like that, what does this Nordic Bronze Age encompass?

#### 3.3.1 Geographical sphere

A recent study on Nordic Bronze Age economies by Christian Horn (et al., 2024) puts the geographical scope of the Nordic Bronze Age within the current countries of Denmark, Sweden, Norway, the southwestern coast of Finland, and lastly the northernmost part of Germany (p. 1). This initial description of the region diverts quite extensively from Cunliffe's map (2008). Cunliffe's Nordic Bronze Age also reaches Denmark, the south of both Norway and Sweden, and the northernmost part of Germany, as shown in figures 1 & 4. The first difference here is that Cunliffe does not show Finland to be part of this influence sphere. The

second difference is that Cunliffe instead includes the northernmost part of Poland, and the coastal part of the Kaliningrad region (2008). Adding to the complex discourse of what the boundaries of the Nordic Bronze Age are, is a study from 2010 that provided evidence for cremations at a Norwegian site called Frøset. In respect to Cunliffe's map this site is way more north than where he drew a border (Engedal, 2010, Map 10). The "South Scandinavian Bronze Age Culture" mentioned by Röst, if applicable here, suggests that the boundaries by Cunliffe are quite accurate. This complex situation of what is to be considered part of the Nordic Bronze Age sphere keeps changing with the coming of new research and is ever-changing. Therein also lies a problem for scholars who prefer a distinct boundary between certain "cultural" spheres. However, it is refreshing for a scholar who wants to look at the past without such distinctions.

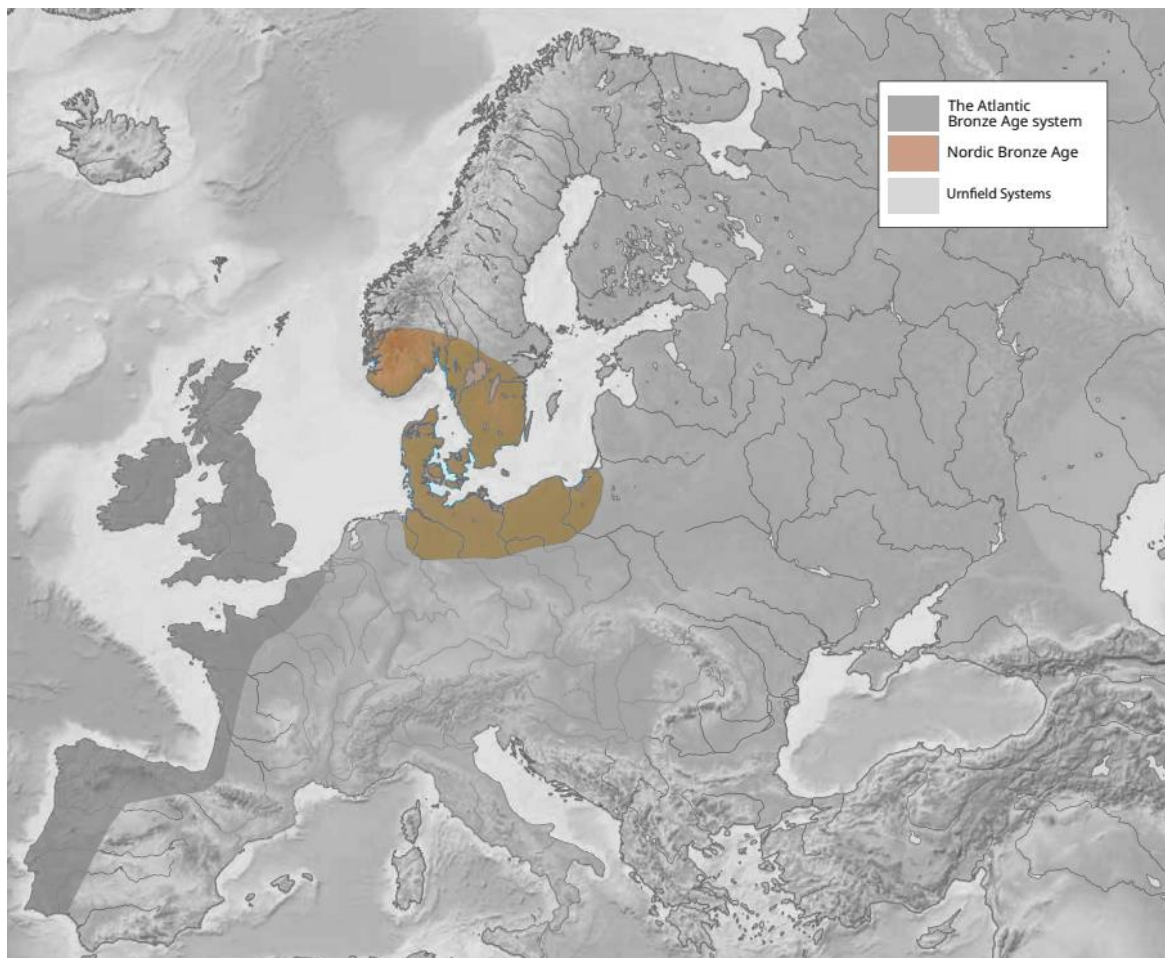


Figure 4. Geographical scope of the Nordic Bronze Age according to Cunliffe (After: Louwen 2021, fig. 1.1).

### 3.3.2 Chronology of cremations

We know that the Bronze Age started rather late in this region compared to the other regions, but cremation has been around for longer. Going back to Montelius' 1885 work on the chronology of the Nordic Bronze Age, he put cremation burials and the usage of urns in *Periods IV-VI* (1100-500 BC) (Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2024, p. 18). However, according to Röst's take on Montelius' 1885 work, his *Period III* (1300-1100 BC) is already the moment when cremation replaced inhumation as the dominant funerary rite (Röst, 2017, pp. 132). However, according to Lise Harvig (et al., 2012) cremation existed, in Denmark at least, before the Bronze Age came to the region and was found sporadically throughout the Stone Age (p. 369). These examples show that there is a certain consensus about the takeover of cremation practices around 1100 BC. But despite this it is still interregional and chronologically different (Harvig, 2017, pp. 238).

### 3.4 Concluding remarks

All three regions present with complex and intertwining geographical and chronological narratives. However, there is a limit to what extent those narratives, or ideas, can be pursued. I have demonstrated that these complexities are the exact cause of the problems for studying the act of cremation in a Prehistoric European context. Creating boundaries where they may not be necessary imposes a structured framework, which also risks limiting our capabilities of conducting research into cremation practices throughout prehistoric Europe. Therefore, I will part from these rigid boundaries. These regions, as an entity, will not be the focus of the rest of the chapters. It is important to reiterate the aim of this study - to examine European Bronze Age cremation practices with a fresh perspective. This means discarding set boundaries and avoiding specific discipline jargon, like 'urnfields'. The next chapter will focus on the evidence of cremation practices throughout Bronze Age Europe. There will be a focus on evidence from the discussed regions, to stay within the scope of the aim of this study.

## Chapter 4 – Results

The results from the literature review conducted for the three regions discussed in the previous chapter will be presented here. For this study, I deliberately focused on several key facets that I deemed essential to the research. While there are slight differences between the datasets, I aimed to maintain consistency where possible. For the broader comparison between cremation *versus* inhumation, I examined most countries individually – to the extent that the literature allowed. Some regions, for example the Lower Rhine Basin, have been combined because existing literature made this more approachable (Louwen, 2021).

The data is mostly collected from overarching studies, either on an entire region or on specific sub-regions. Along with these overarching studies some more specific in-depth studies of sub-regions, and really local works have been – sparingly – used.

The full set of facets I examined includes:

### **Body treatment**

- Cremation
- Inhumation

### **Grave architecture**

- Mound
- Flat burial
- Cave burial
- Cairn
- Pit burial

### **The use of a funerary vessel**

- All types of urns (with cremated remains)
- Coffins & cists

### **Spatial patterning**

- Isolated
- Clustered
- Structured

### **Grave goods**

What follows is the descriptive phase of the results. The data on the body treatment is the most developed within this study and serves as a main reference point throughout this chapter. The other facets will generally appear in the order listed above. Before heading into the results, it

is important to note that a study like this always carries certain risks – namely, the absence of access to information, the absence of information, and the potential misinterpretation of the sources.

## 4.1 Body treatment

I will present the data collected on the treatment of the body – inhumation "*versus*" cremation – in order of regions. The sequence begins with the Traditional Urnfield Region, followed by the Atlantic Bronze Age, and concludes with the Nordic Bronze Age. Each region includes two tables: one for inhumation, and one for cremation. These will be presented with the one table below the other to allow for a clear visual comparison.

As for the tables themselves: the x-axis shows the different sub-regions within the Traditional Urnfield Region, while the y-axis shows the *years BC*. A colour gradient is used to portray frequency or presence in the literature:

- Dark tone = dominant or most prominent in literature
- Lighter tone = mentioned and (most) likely to have occurred
- Lightest tone = either absent or simply not mentioned

### 4.1.1 Traditional Urnfield Region

This region comprises of the most modern countries, though it sometimes includes only specific parts rather than entire nations. As such, certain choices had to be made in how the data was gathered and presented. As previously mentioned, the Lower Rhine Basin does not represent one country. The same applies to the Rhône-Suisse-France region, which comprises of, among others, northwestern France and Switzerland. That being said, the data does not cover each country completely, but it does give a reflection of what is found in the literature.

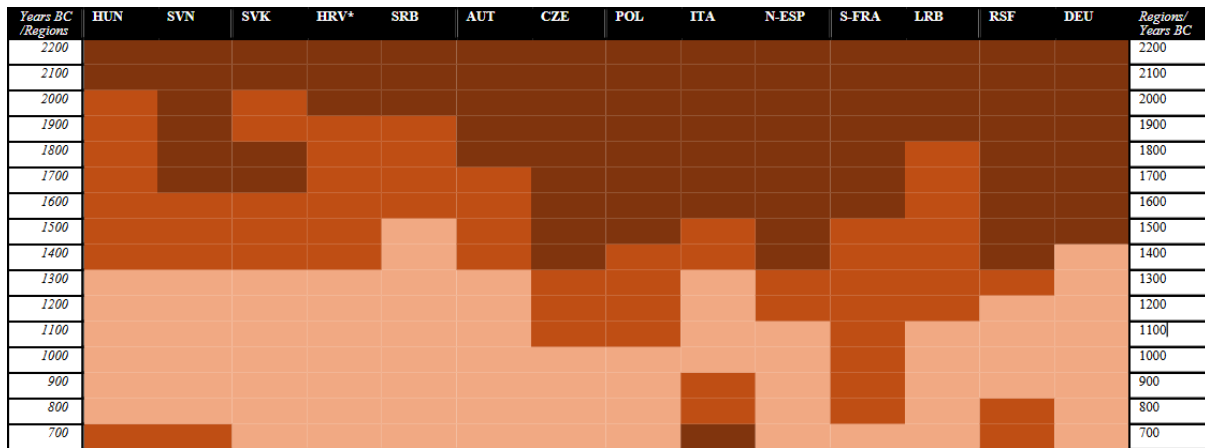


Table 1. Inhumation in the Traditional Urnfield Region from 2200 BC till 700 BC. Sources: *Croatia*: Dizdar, 2011, *Hungary*: Cavazutti et al., 2022; Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, *Slovenia*: Teržan, 1999, *Slovakia*: Tocik, 1978. *Austria*: Falkenstein, 2012; Cavazutti et al., 2022; Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, *Southern France*: Capuzzo & Barceló, 2022. *Rhine-Switzerland-Eastern-France*: Mordant, 2013; Capuzzo & Barceló, 2022. *Serbia*: Cavazzuti et al., 2022. *Northeastern Iberia*: López-Cachero, 2011. *Italy*: Bietti Sestieri, 2013; Cavazzuti et al., 2022. *Lower-Rhine-Basin*: Louwen, 2021. *Czechia*: Gediga & Józefowska-Domańska, 2024. *Southwestern Poland*: Schmid, 2020; Gediga & Józefowska-Domańska, 2024. *Germany*: Falkenstein, 2012; Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023.

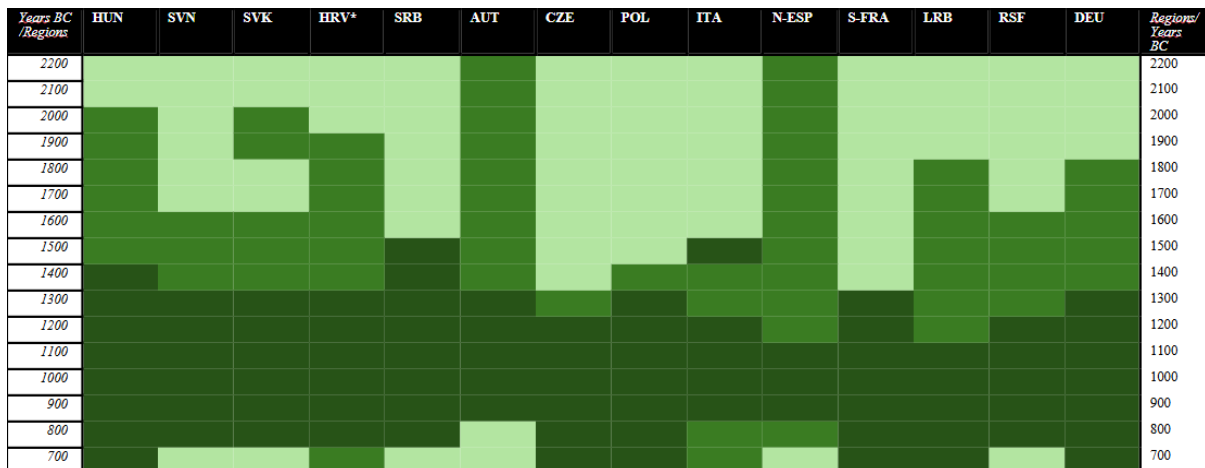


Table 2. Cremation in the Traditional Urnfield Region from 2200 BC till 700 BC. (*Croatia*: Dizdar, 2011, *Hungary*: Cavazutti et al., 2022; Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, *Slovenia*: Teržan, 1999, *Slovakia*: Tocik, 1978. *Austria*: Falkenstein, 2012; Cavazutti et al., 2022; Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, *Southern France*: Capuzzo & Barceló, 2022. *Rhine-Switzerland-Eastern-France*: Mordant, 2013; Capuzzo & Barceló, 2022. *Serbia*: Cavazzuti et al., 2022. *Northeastern Iberia*: López-Cachero, 2011. *Italy*: Cavazzuti et al., 2022. *Lower-Rhine-Basin*: Louwen, 2021. *Czechia*: Gediga & Józefowska -Domańska, 2024. *Southwestern Poland*: Schmid, 2020; Gediga & Józefowska-Domańska, 2024. *Germany*: Falkenstein, 2012; Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023).

As shown in Table 1, most countries within the traditional urnfield region display a dominant inhumation funerary rite, in various forms, during the first half of the second millennium BC. This dominance is mentioned in the literature – either through explicit statements, the rare occurrence of alternative rites, or the absence of any mention of other practices. A similar pattern is visible in Table 2 for cremation. Although a lot of the sub-regions indicate ongoing usage of cremation throughout the Bronze Age – as represented by the light green shading – it

really becomes dominant around the 14<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Table 2 also shows the uniform dominance between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries across the entire region. Both Table 1 and 2 show some discrepancies within the data, Italy for example. This, however, will be tackled later in the analysis and discussion.

#### 4.1.2 Atlantic Bronze Age

The Atlantic Bronze Age consists, compared to the Traditional Urnfield Region, of only a small number of sub-regions. However, just as with the Traditional Urnfield Region, some concessions had to be made with the sub-regions depending on the available literature. The Atlantic Coast of France has been reduced to "Western France", while the two Northern Spanish regions have been kept intact. In line with this, Scotland has been separated from the UK because of the evidence found for this region.

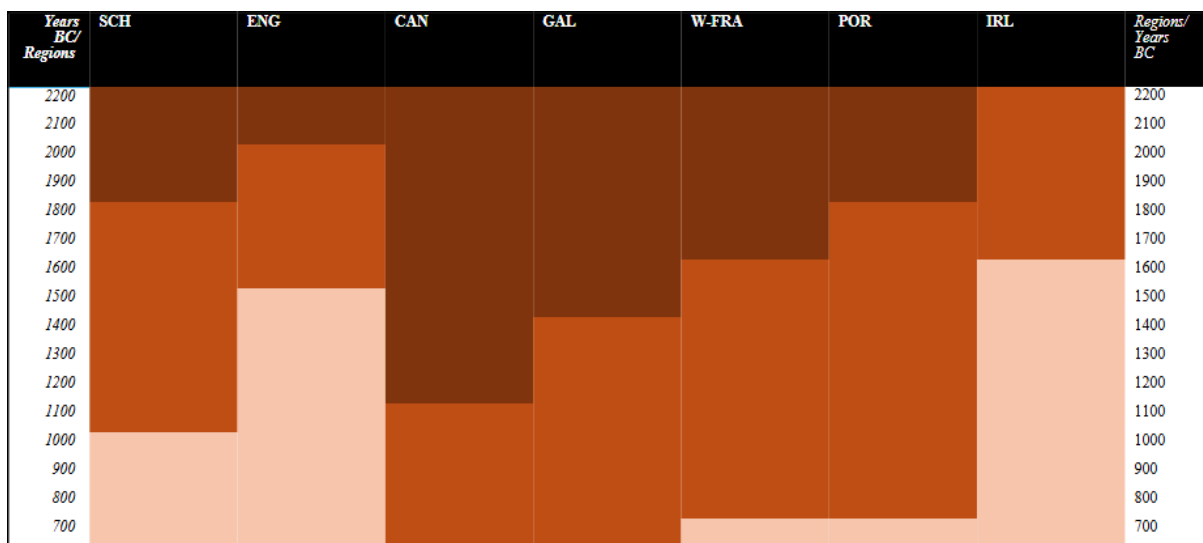


Table 3. Inhumation in the Atlantic Bronze Age from 2200 BC till 700 BC. (*Scotland*: Cameron et al., 2013; Medina-Pettersson, 2014; Scholma-Mason, 2018. *England*: Brück, 1995; 2019. *Cantabrian*: Armendariz Gutiérrez, 2022. *Galician*: Nonat et al., 2022. *Western-France*: Germain-Vallée et al., 2007; Blanchet, 2022; Boulud-Gazo et al., 2022; Marcigny, 2022. *Portugal*: Vilaça et al., 1999; Vilaça, 2014. *Ireland*: Lynch & O'Donnell, 2007; McSparron, 2020).

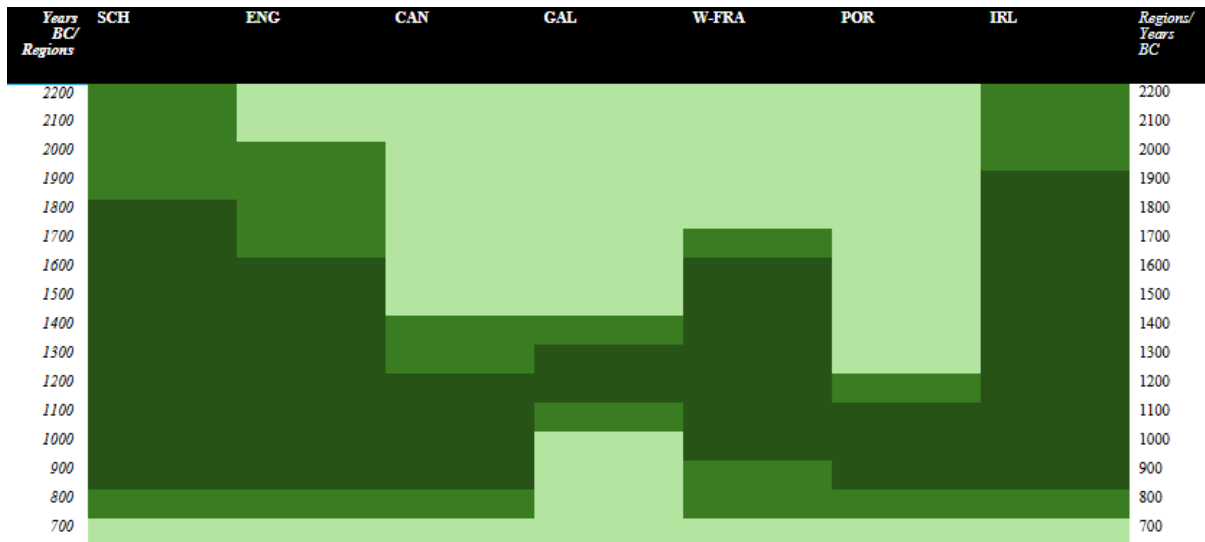


Table 4. Cremation in the Atlantic Bronze Age from 2200 BC till 700 BC. (Scotland: Cameron et al., 2013; Medina-Pettersson, 2014; Scholma-Mason, 2018. England: Brück, 1995; 2019. Cantabrian: Armendariz Gutiérrez, 2022. Galicia: Nonat et al., 2022. Western-France : Germain-Vallée et al., 2007; Blanchet, 2022; Boulud-Gazo et al., 2022; Marcigny, 2022. Portugal: Vilaça et al., 1999; Vilaça, 2014. Ireland: Lynch & O'Donnell, 2007; McSparron, 2020).

Table 3 shows that inhumation was a dominant rite from at least the 22<sup>nd</sup> century till the 17<sup>th</sup> / 16<sup>th</sup> century. Also, the non-uniformity in possible changes is clearly visible in Table 3. In this, some sub-regions have evidence in the literature of the continuation of inhumation burials throughout the Bronze Age. This is represented in Table 3 with the lighter shade. As for cremation in Table 4, there appears to be another non-uniformity in the appearance of cremation. As Table 4 shows, some regions show an early usage of cremation rites, while others show a later and shorter period of cremation dominance. Furthermore, discrepancies as in the case of England (Britain) for both Tables, will be discussed in an analysis and discussion.

#### 4.1.3 Nordic Bronze Age

The last region to be discussed is visibly the region with the least number of sub-regions. The most prominent concession that was required for this region was that most sub-regions only portray a relatively small portion of a modern country. For example, these Tables represent mostly Southern Norway and does not represent the rest.

Years BC/Region	DNK	SWE	NOR	FIN	POL	N-GER	Region/ Years BC
2200							2200
2100							2100
2000							2000
1900							1900
1800							1800
1700							1700
1600							1600
1500							1500
1400							1400
1300							1300
1200							1200
1100							1100
1000							1000
900							900
800							800
700							700

Table 5. Inhumation in the Nordic Bronze Age from 2200 BC till 700 BC. (Denmark: Röst, 2017; Kaliff & Østigård, 2023, Sweden: Price, 2015; Röst, 2017; Kaliff & Østigård, 2023, Northern Germany: Price, 2015, Northern Poland: Gediga & Józefowska-Domańska, 2024. Finland: Saipio, 2017; Salo et al., 2022, Norway: Price, 2015; Röst, 2017).

Years BC/Region	DNK	SWE	NOR	FIN	POL	N-GER	Region/ Years BC
2200							2200
2100							2100
2000							2000
1900							1900
1800							1800
1700							1700
1600							1600
1500							1500
1400							1400
1300							1300
1200							1200
1100							1100
1000							1000
900							900
800							800
700							700

Table 6. Cremation in the Nordic Bronze Age from 2200 BC till 700 BC. (Denmark: Röst, 2017; Kaliff & Østigård, 2023; Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023. Sweden: Price, 2015; Röst, 2017; Kaliff & Østigård, 2023, Northern Germany: Price, 2015; Schmid, 2020. Northern Poland: Schmid, 2020; Gediga & Józefowska-Domańska, 2024. Finland: Saipio, 2017; Salo et al., 2022. Norway: Price, 2015; Röst, 2017).

As Table 5 shows, inhumation was the dominant rite in most of the Nordic Bronze Age between 2200 BC and 1600 BC. A clear visual aspect of Table 5 is the absence of evidence for inhumation burials in Finland. Table 5 also shows a gap in the data for Norway. Table 6 on the other hand shows a rather clear distinction between cremation and a possible transition. A visible line shows the rite of cremations coming up in the sub-regions of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, becoming dominant from the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The sub-region of Finland is, as in Table 5, a clear separate entity within Table 6. Table 6 also shows that cremation appeared slightly earlier in Northern Germany compared to

the remaining Scandinavian sub-regions. The contrast here is that Table 6 shows that cremation in Northern Germany became dominant at a later stage compared to the other sub-regions. Discrepancies, like the sub-region of Finland, will be discussed in the analysis and discussion.

## 4.2 Grave architecture

The following part will present the data collected on the different styles of grave architecture found within the respective regions. While examining the regions, some general architectural types – mounds, flat burials, cairns, cave burials, and pit burials - have been recognized, and these will be presented in this section. This comprises both cremation and inhumation burials within the context of these architectural types. Some of these types, for example mounds, represent a broader spectrum of variations – including, for example, any type of barrow.

In comparison to Tables 1 and 2, the sub-regions of the Traditional Urnfield Region are grouped in a total of 7 regions – Lower Rhine Basin, Northwestern Mediterranean, Rhine-Swiss-eastern France, Austria-Germany, the Carpathian Basin, Czechia-Poland, and Italy – to maintain a clear visual. The two changes in the division of sub-regions of the Atlantic Bronze Age is the grouping of the sub-regions of Cantabrian and Galicia into northwestern Spain, and the inclusion of Scotland into England, thus changing to the Great Britain. Nothing changes for the Nordic Bronze Age. These are condensed into their respective region.

The determination per region is based on the percentage of sub-regions in which these types of burial architecture are found. This means that table 7 presents a condensed dataset on the sub-region within the regions with at the top (or X-axis) represent the three regions, and on the left side (Y-axis) the differing grave architectural types. The visualization of, for example 100 %, means that all of the sub-regions of a region present evidence of this type. It does not mean, however, that at one point one of these exists on its own. It merely represents where one can find these types of grave architecture. This spans the entire Bronze Age because of the reuse of certain grave architectural structures.

Grave architecture/ region	Traditional Urnfield Region	Atlantic Bronze Age	Nordic Bronze Age
Mounds	100 %	100 %	83,33 %
Cairn	0 %	60 %	50 %
Flat Burial	71,43 %	60 %	33,33 %
Cave	28,57 %	100 %	0 %
Burial pit usage	100 %	100 %	83,33 %
(Stone) cist	85,71 %	100 %	66,67 %

Table 7. Calculated average percentage of sub-regions in which the grave architectural types on the y-axis are present between 2200 BC and 700 BC. (Sources: Traditional Urnfield Region: Točík, 1978; Teržan, 1999; Dizdar, 2011; López-Cachero, 2011; Falkenstein, 2012; Bietti Sestieri, 2013; Mordant, 2013; Schmid, 2020; Louwen, 2021; Capuzzo & Barceló, 2022; Cavazutti et al., 2022; Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023; Gediga & Józefowska, 2024. Atlantic Bronze Age: Germain-Vallée, 2007; Lynch & O'Donnell, 2007; Medina-Pettersson, 2014; Viliča, 2014; Brück, 2019; Blanchet, 2022; Boulud-Gazo et al., 2022; Marcigny, 2022; Nonat et al., 2022. Nordic Bronze Age: Price, 2015; Röst, 2017; Saipio, 2017; Schmid, 2020; Salo et al., 2022; Kaliff & Østigård, 2023; Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023).

Table 7 shows the distribution of grave architectural types per region. The most visible aspect of Table 7 is the fact that all regions had a wide range of architectural types for burying their deceased. A curious aspect that Table 7 shows is that cave burials were present in at least two of the regions. Mounds and the application of pits seem to be the most uniform type of architecture across the regions, with both the Traditional Urnfield Region and the Atlantic Bronze Age scoring a 100 %. Another interesting feature that is highlighted in Table 7 is the absence of cairns in the literature on the Traditional Urnfield Region. Also, based on Table 7, the Atlantic Bronze Age seems to be the region with the most overlap within the region.

### 4.3 The use of funerary vessels

This section covers the information collected on the usage of funerary vessels, with a focus on urns. The spectrum of urns is quite extensive, and these differences have not been taken into consideration because the purpose of this data is to present the distribution of the usage of urns, with cremains, throughout the study area. First, the data representing the presence of urn-burials, with cremains, will be presented in a similar fashion of Tables 1-6. After presenting those results in Tables 8-10 there will be a Table on other forms of funerary vessels – like wooden coffins. Important to note is that a colour may be given if there is only one piece of evidence for such a burial, or a hint within the literature.

### 4.3.1 Traditional Urnfield Region

Table 8 shows the results of the urn burials in the Traditional Urnfield Region. The table presents the first urn-ed burials to be found in Hungary. Furthermore, Table 8 shows that between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries that urn burials are an established funerary rite within the Traditional Urnfield Region. Most sub-regions begin showing significant signs of urn burials around the 14<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, while other appear to have been later, like in the Lower Rhine Basin. Most remarkable is the data on Italy's urn burials, which shows a decline in urn usage.

Years BC /Regions	HUN	SVN	SVK	HRV*	SRB	AUT	CZE	ITA	N-ESP	S-FRA	LRB	RSF	DEU	Regions/ Years BC
2200														2200
2100														2100
2000														2000
1900														1900
1800														1800
1700														1700
1600														1600
1500														1500
1400														1400
1300														1300
1200														1200
1100														1100
1000														1000
900														900
800														800
700														700

Table 8. Urn burials with cremains in the Traditional Urnfield Region between 2200 BC and 700 BC. (*Hungary*: Cavazzuti et al., 2022; Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023. *Slovenia*: Teržan, 1999. *Slovakia*: Tocik, 1978. *Croatia*: Dizdar, 2011; Karavanic, 2013. *Serbia*: Cavazzuti et al., 2022. *Austria*: Falkenstein, 2012; Cavazutti et al., 2022; Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023. *Czechia*: Capuzzo, 2022; Gediga & Józefowska-Domańska, 2024. *Southwestern Poland*: Gediga & Józefowska-Domańska, 2024. *Italy*: Bietti Sestieri, 2013; Cavazzuti et al., 2022. *Northeastern Iberia*: López-Cachero, 2011. *Southern France*: Capuzzo & Barceló, 2022. *Lower-Rhine-Basin*: Louwen, 2021. *Rhine-Switzerland-Eastern-France*: Mordant, 2013; Capuzzo & Barceló, 2022. *Germany*: Falkenstein, 2012; Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023).

### 4.3.2 Atlantic Bronze Age

Table 9 gives interesting data, first of all, the two northwestern sub-regions of Cantabrian and Galicia do not show any, or no clear, evidence of urn burials with cremains. Secondly, Table 9 shows that Scotland and Ireland are on the other side of the spectrum with a continuous streak on urn burials with cremains. The contrast between the sub-regions, as highlighted, appears to be quite extensive.

Years BC/ Regions	SCH	ENG	CAN	GAL	W-FRA	POR	IRL	Regions/ Years BC
2200								2200
2100								2100
2000								2000
1900								1900
1800								1800
1700								1700
1600								1600
1500								1500
1400								1400
1300								1300
1200								1200
1100								1100
1000								1000
900								900
800								800
700								700

Table 9. Urn burials with cremains in the Atlantic Bronze Age between 2200 BC and 700 BC. (*Scotland*: Cameron et al., 2013; Medina-Pettersson, 2014; Scholma-Mason, 2018. *England*: Brück, 1995; 2019. *Cantabrian*: Armendariz Gutiérrez, 2022. *Galicia*: Nonat et al., 2022. *Western-France*: Germain-Vallée et al., 2007; Blanchet, 2022; Boulud-Gazo et al., 2022; Marcigny, 2022. *Portugal*: Vilaça et al., 1999; Vilaça, 2014. *Ireland*: Lynch & O'Donnell, 2007; McSparron, 2020).

### 4.3.3 Nordic Bronze Age

Table 10 on the Nordic Bronze Age shows a very uniform urn usage. Therefore, Finland is the sub-region that stands out with an absence of urn-ed burials. A level of consensus in Table 10 is shown regarding the other sub-regions, where urn-burials have a clear presence from the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Whereas the centuries between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> are present by having possible or lower amounts of urn-burials.

Years BC/Region	DNK	SWE	NOR	FIN	POL	N-GER	Region/ Years BC
2200							2200
2100							2100
2000							2000
1900							1900
1800							1800
1700							1700
1600							1600
1500							1500
1400							1400
1300							1300
1200							1200
1100							1100
1000							1000
900							900
800							800
700							700

Table 10. Urn burials with cremains in the Nordic Bronze Age between 2200 BC and 700 BC. (*Denmark*: Price, 2015; Reiter et al., 2021; Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023. *Sweden*: Röst, 2017. *Norway*: Price, 2015; Röst, 2017. *Finland*: Salo et al., 2022. *Northern Poland*: Gediga & Józefowska-Domańska, 2024. *Northern Germany*: Price, 2015).

#### 4.3.4 Other Funerary Vessels

Within the broader spectrum of funerary vessels, I include coffins and cists. Besides urns these are other vessel-types that appear in the literature and thus presented in Table 11. While cists are already represented in Table 7, they are presented here because of them being a funerary vessel-type.

Table 11 shows that there is not much evidence regarding wooden coffins during the Bronze Age, because it is only represented in 3 or 4 sub-regions. (Stone) cists on the other hand are represented a lot in Table 11 - 6 out of 7 sub-regions in the Traditional Urnfield Region, 5 out of 5 in the Atlantic Bronze Age, and 3 or 4 out of 6 in the Nordic Bronze Age.

	Traditional Urnfield Region	Atlantic Bronze Age	Nordic Bronze Age
<b>Wooden coffin</b>	Austria/Germany		Denmark, Northern Germany
<b>(Stone) Cist</b>	NW Mediterranean, Rhine-Suisse- France, Austria/Germany, Carpathian Basin, Czechia/Poland, Italy	Portugal, Northwestern Spain, Western France, Britain/Scotland, Ireland	Finland, Denmark, Sweden

Table 11. Other funerary vessels, and where they are found. Both cremation and inhumation. ((*Wooden coffin*) *Austria/Germany*, Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023; *Denmark*, Price, 2015; *Northern Germany*, Price, 2015. ((*Stone*) *cist*) *Northwestern Mediterranean*, López-Cachero, 2011; Mordant, 2013; *RSF*, Mordant, 2013; *Austria/Germany*, Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023; *Carpathian Basin*, Teržan & Karavanić, 2013; *Czechia/Poland*, Schmid, 2020; Gediga & Józefowska, 2024; *Italy*, Bietti Sestieri, 2013; *Portugal*, Díaz-Guardamino, 2014; Viliça, 2014; *Northwestern Spain*, Lull et al., 2013; Nonat et al., 2022; *Western France*, Mordant, 2013; *Britain/Scotland*, Medina-Pettersson, 2014; Brück, 2019; *Ireland*, Cleary, 2005; *Finland*, Saipio, 2017; Salo et al., 2022; *Denmark*, Price, 2015; *Sweden*, Østigård, 2022).

#### 4.4 Spatial Patterning

The second to last piece of data that is presented is the idea behind the spatial patterning of Bronze Age burial within their respective regions. Table 12 presents multiple aspects of the usage of space within a funerary landscape – namely, density rate & organisation, re-usage of older grave architecture, cemeteries with cremation, and cemeteries with urns.

The first one, as shown in Table 12, present the regions being examined on how the burials appear – clustered, isolated, and structured. Which shows that the Atlantic Bronze Age is more isolated burials, but there is extensive evidence to prove clusters existed. The Nordic Bronze Age is presented in Table 12 as having both isolated and clustered patterns. Lastly, the Traditional Urnfield Region appears to be more clustered and having a structured nature.

The second aspect is the idea of re-using older, or existing, grave architecture to bury their deceased in. All the regions score a yes on this, while not every sub-region gave clear indication whether it occurred in those places.

	Traditional Urnfield Region	Atlantic Bronze Age	Nordic Bronze Age
Clustered, isolated, structured	Mostly clustered and structured	Mostly isolated, but clusters exist	Both isolated and clustered
Re-use of burials	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cemeteries with cremations	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cemeteries with urns	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 12. An overview of the spatial patterning and usage between 2200 BC and 700 BC. (*Traditional Urnfield Region*: López-Cachero, 2011; Falkenstein, 2012; Louwen, 2021; Cavazutti et al., 2022; Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023. *Atlantic Bronze Age*: Viliça, 1999; Lynch & O'Donnell, 2007; Lull et al., 2013; Medina-Pettersson, 2014; Brück, 2019; McSparron, 2020; Armendariz Gutiérrez, 2022; Blanchet, 2022; Marcigny, 2022; Nonat et al., 2022. *Nordic Bronze Age*: Harvig, 2017; Schmid, 2020; Salo et al., 2022; Kaliff & Østigård, 2023; Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023).

The third aspect of Table 12 is the presence of cemeteries – including necropolis, and various sizes – with cremation burials present. All main regions show the presence of cemeteries with cremations, despite not uniformly across all the sub-regions.

Fourth and lastly, the presence of cemeteries with urns – with cremains – is presented in Table 12. As for the previous aspect all three main regions show evidence of cemeteries – including other forms and various sizes – with cremains in urn.

#### 4.5 Grave goods

The last part of the data is where a lot of people are interested in, archaeologically speaking, however it is simultaneously the most difficult to determine. Namely, grave goods. The way in which I have gathered this data is looking through the literature and picking up whether the authors recognized a higher or lower amount of grave goods for both categories: before 1300 BC and after 1300 BC.

In essence this means that one 'x' means that there is little evidence of grave goods presented in the literature, while 'xxx' means that there is a seemingly abundance of grave goods. The importance here is on the amount of goods, not how valuable the goods were or are. I was not able to gather data for both timeframes for all sub-regions, these are represented by question marks. The major danger of the data on grave goods is that it is highly affected by local or regional differences. This results in a difficult situation where one study may claim higher numbers of grave goods and another the opposite. Therefore, I have taken mostly broader studies on these areas, with the chapter on the sub-regions in the Oxford Handbook of the

European Bronze Age by Fokkens and Harding as guidewire – especially for table 13 - (2013). However, if the possibility exists to use additional sources, this has been done and referred to underneath the tables by the names of the scholars who wrote those chapters.

The clear distinction between the two categories is determined by the academic consensus that – roughly – 1300 BC is when the Urnfield Period or Culture truly begins. This is likely to result in discrepancies for the regions that outside of the Traditional Urnfield Region, however this will be discussed in chapter 5.

	Before 1300 BC	After 1300 BC*
LRB	XX	X
RSF	XXX	X
NE Iberia	?	X
Italy	XX	X
Germany	XX	XX
Austria	XX	X
Hungary	XXX	X
Slovenia	XX	X
Slovakia	XX	X
Serbia	XX	X

Table 13. A general overview of the presence of grave goods in the sub-regions of the Traditional Urnfield Region within literature. (*LRB*, Louwen, 2021; *RSF*, Mordant, 2013; *NE Iberia*, López-Cachero, 2011; Lull et al., 2013; *Italy*, Bietti Sestieri, 2013; Cavazutti et al., 2022; *Germany*, Jockenhövel, 2013; *Austria*, Jiráň et al., 2013; Cavazutti et al., 2022; *Hungary*, Marková & Ilon, 2013; Cavazutti et al.; *Slovenia*, Teržan, 1999; *Slovakia*, Marková & Ilon, 2013; *Serbia*, Teržan & Karavanić, 2013; Cavazutti et al., 2022. \* After 1300 BC does not include the time after roughly 700 BC).

Table 13 on the Traditional Urnfield Period shows that the period before 1300 BC shows a higher level of grave goods found within the contexts. With the information on Northeastern Iberia – before 1300 BC - being either unavailable or unclear, therefore it is not included in this table. Furthermore, most sub-regions show a medium level of grave goods, mostly due to the lack of a clear mention in the literature. After 1300 BC – while maintaining the Bronze Age edge at around 800/700 BC - on the other hand most sub-regions show a clear decline in the amount of grave goods found. Only the sub-region of Germany shows a more or less consequent trajectory.

	Before 1300 BC	After 1300 BC*
Scotland	xxx	x
Britain	xx	x
W-Iberia	xx	x
Western France	xx	x

Table 14. A general overview of the presence of grave goods in the sub-regions of the Atlantic Bronze Age within literature. (*Scotland*, Medina-Pettersson, 2014; *Britain*, Brück, 2019; *W-Iberia*, Lull et al., 2013; *W-France*, Mordant, 2013). \* After 1300 BC does not include the time after roughly 700 BC.

Table 14 shows the data on the Atlantic Bronze Age. The data for before 1300 BC presents a higher amount of grave goods. This changes, like in table 13, after 1300 BC where the literature presents limited evidence of grave goods. Therefore, all of these four sub-regions go across the periods from a higher to lower amount of grave goods, with Scotland being the one with the higher level before 1300 BC in comparison the others.

	Before 1300 BC	After 1300 BC*
Denmark	xx	x
Sweden	xx	x
Norway	xx	?
Finland	x	x
N-Germany	xx	x

Table 15. A general overview of the presence of grave goods in the sub-regions of the Nordic Bronze Age within literature. (*Denmark*, Harvig, 2017; *Sweden*, Harvig, 2017; *Röst*, 2017; *Norway*, Harvig, 2017; *Finland*, Saipio, 2017; *Salo et al.*, 2022; *N-Germany*, Jockenhövel, 2013). \* After 1300 BC does not include the time after roughly 700 BC.

Table 15 shows the data on the Nordic Bronze Age, which is pretty coherent all-round. However, some differences can be recognized. Firstly, the sub-region of Finland is consistent with the lower amounts of grave goods across the periods. Secondly, in the case of Norway, the lack of information I found on this region is reflected in table 15, for there is no clear indication on a higher or lower amount of grave goods after 1300 BC. The other sub-regions go, in contrast from one another, from a higher amount to a lower amount between the periods.

#### 4.6 Concluding remarks

This chapter provided the results of the literary study and focused on a myriad of aspects – body treatments, grave architecture, funerary vessels / urn usage, and spatial patterns. The results presented in Tables 1 through 12 all tell a story and spark theories and ideas. These results will first be analysed and looked at from a data-standpoint in the following chapter. What do the visible patterns in the results mean? In chapter 6, the results and analysis will be discussed in a broader context. What do these results and patterns mean for the question whether the urnfield concept is still viable?

## Chapter 5 – Analysis

This chapter interprets the burial patterns outlined in the results. The focus was on the interplay between inhumation and cremation practices, the use of funerary vessels, grave architecture, and spatial patterns. The driving force behind this chapter is the question on what do these results show us about the funerary rites within a broader spectrum of Bronze Age Europe. By focussing on comparing these funerary rites, and the aspect that are essential to that question, the aim is to gain a comparative look at these events over a long period of time. The main aim of interpreting the results in this chapter is the examination of the data that is presented. The present chapter is solely focused on the results presented in the previous chapter. This will be done with two different kinds of methods – change over time and cross-regional comparison. This dual approach allows for the investigation of both long-term trends and transitions in funerary rites but also look at possible regional distinctions in burial practices.

Two of the facets – body treatment and funerary vessel usage – are suited for analysis through both methods because they are presented in a timeline from 2200 BC to 700 BC. This not only makes them suited for changes over time, but since these are the most developed sets of results, the tables can provide an interesting angle in cross-regional comparison. The other two facets – grave architecture and spatial patterning – are, in contrast, in this form only suited to be examined with the cross-regional comparison method. This is because there is no timeline that coincides with these tables.

The chapter is structured in line with the results: beginning with body treatment, followed by grave architecture, funerary vessel usage, and spatial patterning. While this chapter is meant to interpret possible patterns and trends, it will not be used to look at the bigger overarching discussion on concepts and boundaries, but it does lay the foundations for those discussions.

### 5.1 Body treatment

This section is used to look more in-depth at the results in Tables 1-6 and interpret these for what they present. Beginning with the change over time per region and moving to a cross-regional comparison of the tables. Case specific examples can be used per region to highlight parts of the results.

### 5.1.1 Traditional Urnfield Region

Tables 1 & 2 show clear sections of when either inhumation or cremation was the dominant rite per sub-region. While there is a seemingly clear transition between the two rites, it is not as black and white as it can be presented in the literature. Previously presented by Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, the transition in Hungary takes longer and is not as strict as sometimes portrayed (2023). The lighter tones of brown and green in Tables 1 & 2, for example of Hungary – far left -, cover the same period between roughly 2000 BC and 1400 BC. This is represented in the literature as a period where not any funerary rite was the clear dominant player in that sub-region and time. Hungary is always presented as the "motherland" of the Traditional Urnfield region, with a long history of cremation burials, which is not incorrect. But the transition period, towards a dominant period of cremation burials, is quite a co-existing environment of multiple funerary rites.

While a large portion of regions keeps producing evidence for the continuation of inhumation burials to a certain degree, Tables 1 & 2 do show a possible line that shows the moment cremation becomes the dominant funerary rite. This is a rather short period that, from the literature, we can be sure cremation was the predominant rite, namely 1100 BC to 900 BC. It does, however, not extend into the later centuries because, for example, the case of Italy presents a deviation from this longer discourse. Cremation does become the dominant rite in Italy after around 1150 BC, but is already present in earlier centuries (Cavazzuti, 2022). The difference here is that southern regions of Italy present evidence of a return of dominance of inhumation burials (Beitti Sestieri, 2013).

Based on the results for the Traditional Urnfield region the change over time could be divided into three parts – inhumation dominance, co-existence, and cremation dominance. The first is presented in Table 1 with inhumation seeming the dominant funerary rite in the sub-regions Earlier Bronze Ages. The second part is the co-existence of rites, which is shown in the overlapping periods of lighter tones. Thirdly and lastly, there is certainty that cremation was the dominant funerary rite during parts of the Late Bronze Age, but it is not spread evenly. This division is visually pleasing and is already less boundary oriented. However, it is at present not advisable to make a certain division between the observations in the results. While creating these divisions is creating new boundaries, it is in this case a good tool to remembering for comparing the region to the other regions.

### 5.1.2 Atlantic Bronze Age

The Atlantic Bronze Age instantly presents this study with interesting results in Tables 3 & 4. This region also begins with a dominant rite of inhumation across most sub-regions, where only Ireland seems to deviate. This region is the most incoherent region out of three, which reflects an "Atlantic" identity in a sense. Especially for the cases of Ireland and Scotland, which both show early evidence of high levels of Bronze Age cremations (Lynch & O'Donnell, 2007; Medina-Pettersson, 2014; McSparron, 2020). Scholars on the British & Irish Bronze Ages actively seem to avoid the topic and idea of an "Atlantic" connection, since it was not mentioned a single time in the literature I read on the British Isles. Especially Table 4 presents a strong case in favour of that this unspoken rejection. Table 4 shows an extensive deviation in changes over time between Scotland, Ireland versus the continental sub-regions. Table 3 on the other hand shows a more uniform region, while changes over time really do not align with each other. One interpretation is that this is because the sub-regions are not as connected in the exchange funerary practices.

The British Isles place in this entire discourse is a good example on how complex the situation is, and how these results show this variation. Because where do they fit in, if not in an Atlantic sphere. Of course, these results only look at funerary rites and are conclusive in putting a region in a specific sphere. Britain, for example, is also proposed to be connected to the Traditional Urnfield Region, another aspect often ignored by scholars on the British Isles (Childe).

Moving away from the British Isles, especially into France, this place is geographically the closest to a large part of the western part of the Traditional Urnfield Region. By comparing Tables 4 and 2, a certain relation can be recognized and acknowledged. While this can be partially true, for urn cremation became a dominant rite in the sub-region of Normandy in Western France. However, due to a lack of regional publications of these sites, not too much is known (Marcigny, 2022, p. 23). Other examples, include two cremation urns within a barrow (Germain-Valleé, 2007). Most cremated remains of urns found within the sub-region of Western France appear to be isolated and not located in any larger cemetery style burials.

The transition in Cantabrian, in Spain, for example, happened around 1100 BC, much Northeastern Iberia in the Traditional Urnfield Region. The main difference here however is the apparent lack of urn usage. Most commonly placed in cists inside of stone circles, or *Harrespils* and sometimes found in smaller clusters (Armendariz Gutiérrez, 2022). Galicia and

Northern Portugal experience mostly the same trajectory as Cantabrian, for there was little too no evidence of urn usage. In contrast, stone cists, previously used for inhumation burials, were transformed for the deposits of cremains (Nonat et al., 2022). The south of Portugal is another case all together. The so-called "Tagus Line" is a sub-region where cremains within urns are actually found. It follows the Tagus-river and has provided with lots of evidence for this phenomenon (Viliça, 2014). However, the influence of the urnfields stopped, according to Ana Cruz, after Catalonia and did not influence the Tagus Valley in Central Portugal (2016, pp. 176).

While the scholars on the British Isles do not recognize this Atlantic sphere. Scholars on the Iberian Peninsula, recognize three different ways in which cremation (or incineration) came to the Peninsula. The third being "[...] Atlantic, arrived by maritime way [...]" (Viliça, 2014, pp. 130). The narrative of spreading cremation throughout the Atlantic coastal areas, for that matter, seems to be working from an Iberian perspective.

The "Atlantic" Bronze Age shows a diverse narrative on funerary rites, and where they could come from. By look at the results it can be classified as the least homogeneous region in terms of funerary rites. However, cremation is a major part in the funerary history of the region.

### 5.1.3 Nordic Bronze Age

The Nordic Bronze Age, especially within literature is the most homogeneous region when it comes to funerary rites. First of all, the sub-regions of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden are mostly referred to as Southern Scandinavia, which makes it more difficult to separate these three. While it is always stated that this region experienced the Bronze Age the latest within Europe, the connection to cremation was there all the same. The seemingly unanimous decision to transition towards cremation feels too good to be true. A massive influence here is that narrative of a Southern Scandinavian niche. However, most literature found without this specific region, the results are pretty similar. Northern Poland reflects the rest of Poland and Czechia from the Traditional Urnfield Region, while Northern Germany is very tied to Denmark. Northern Germany is a case that shows earlier signs of cremation; however, it does not appear to be dominant till a later stage.

The main deviant sub-region is Finland. While not always discussed in the Nordic Bronze Age, it does appear in that discussion. However, Tables 5 and 6 do show why it might not belong in this region. There is almost no evidence of inhumation burials, because cremation is the only

burial rite talked about in literature. However, the funerary rites in Finland do not reflect the general view on the Nordic Bronze Age, also following a different chronology (Saipio, 2017, pp. 206).

The almost linear results of this region raise concerns about their credibility. Nevertheless, the findings cannot be discarded because they reflect the outcomes of this study. These results are based on the literature that has been written about this region. However, the fact remains that the practice of cremation was a major part of this region’s Bronze Age.

### 5.1.4 Cross-regional approach

A cross-regional comparison of Tables 1-6 – visible in tables 16 and 17 - gives a couple of interesting insights in Bronze Age Europe. First of all, most of the (sub-)regions provide evidence of inhumation and cremation burials, throughout the Bronze Age. The most striking similarity in this, is that most sub-regions favour inhumation over cremation between 2200 and 1400 BC. While cremation appears to be the most common rite after 1400 BC. However, as some sub-regions show, the transition is rather varied in time and manner. Moreover, it is not even a complete transition towards cremation because evidence of inhumation burials is still present. Another similarity is that every region has its particularities involving reverse transitions back to inhumation, or the non-existence of inhumation within the literature, or a lack of knowledge of certain periods. This cross-regional comparison will be extended into the following chapter, however, it is clear that in at least 90% of all sub-region's cremation was dominant at one stage or another. 1100 BC being the most overlapped time.

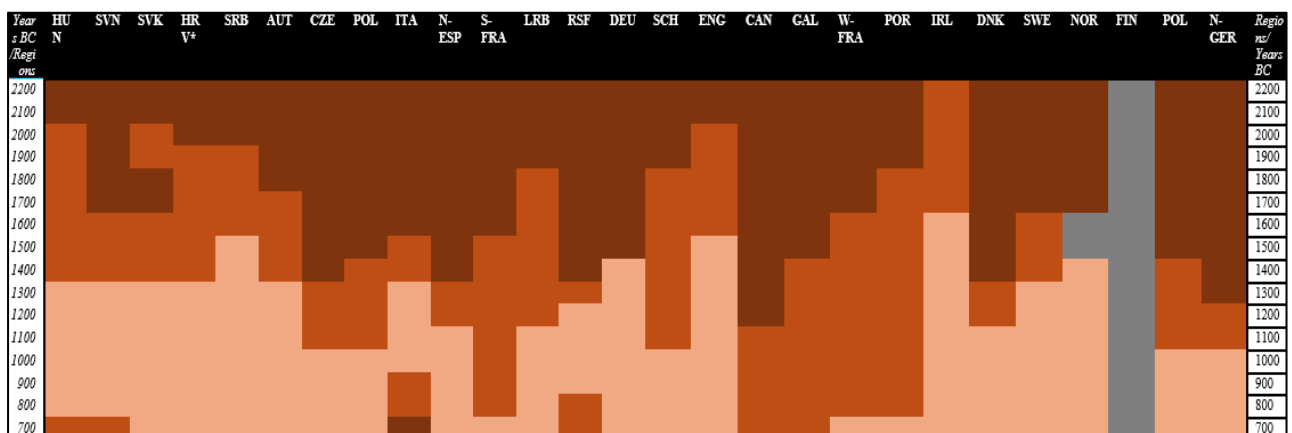


Table 16. A combined table of tables 1, 3, and 5 on inhumation across Bronze Age Europe. With left to right: Traditional Urnfield Region – Atlantic Bronze Age – Nordic Bronze Age. Sources: Tables 1, 3, and 5.

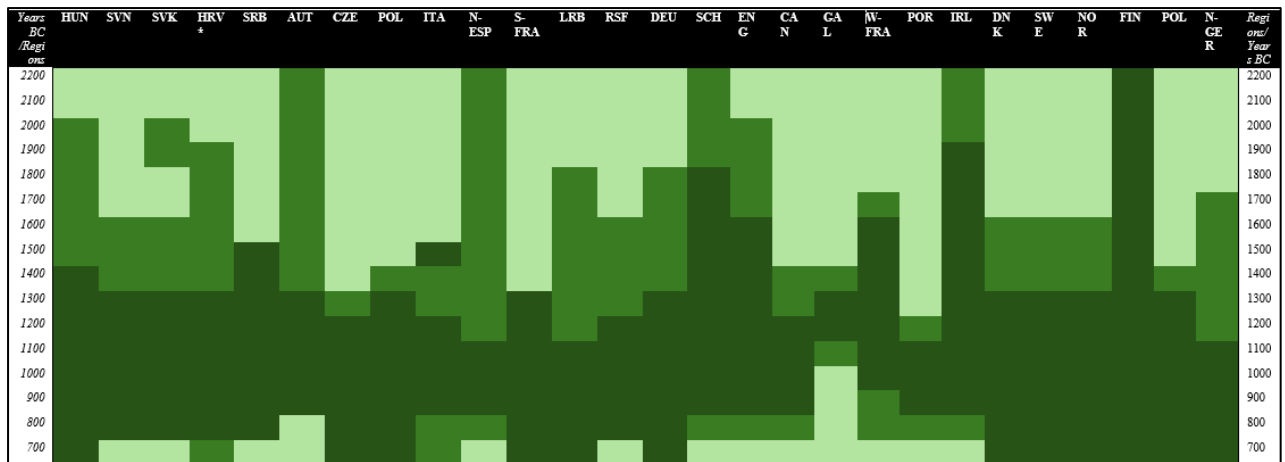


Table 17. A combined table of tables 2, 4, and 6 on cremation across Bronze Age Europe. With left to right: Traditional Urnfield Region – Atlantic Bronze Age – Nordic Bronze Age. Sources: Tables 2, 4, and 6.

## 5.2 Grave architecture

A bit of different type of data is presented in this section. It purely describes trends in the form of grave architecture across the three regions. It is a less comprehensive part of the study because it has only been researched in a general view. So, no time comparison is applicable to the current state of these results. However, the results in Table 7 presents itself as a tool for looking at different ways of presenting the deceased. For example, from this table, the Atlantic Bronze appears to be the region with the most overlap between the sub-regions and the types of architecture discussed in the literature. I am discussing each type individually but with a cross-regional comparative view.

The category mounds, for starters, also includes all forms of barrow. These are a pretty widespread phenomenon throughout Bronze Age Europe, as only the Nordic Bronze Age does not show a hundred percent. This is linked to the exclusion of Finland, where mainly cairns are found. My interpretation of these kinds of more stone mounds is that they appear to be different from other mound-types and are therefore classified as their own type.

The second type is the cairn, which has a dominant presence on the Atlantic and Nordic regions. It is, however, not quite common in the Traditional Urnfield Region. No evidence has been found on the existence of them. This does not mean that they do not exist, but merely that they are not mentioned in the literature. Therefore, they are not represented in Table 7. An interpretation that can be drawn from this is that cairns are a more coastal phenomenon, in comparison to the Traditional Urnfield Region, which spans across continental Europe.

Flat burials are the next category, and in my opinion the most difficult to define within the literature. However, for the results that came up, it appears to be quite common across the regions, with a stronger presence in the Traditional Urnfield Region in comparison to, for example, the Nordic Bronze Age.

The fourth type is a bit more abstract in the sense that is mostly using natural and existing landscape to bury the deceased. The literature that mentions this kind of burial, whether cremation, cremains in urns, or inhumation, is the most prominent for the Atlantic Bronze Age. Whereas the Nordic Bronze Age does not look similar with no hits. The Traditional Urnfield Region on the other hand does show signs of the usage of cave burials, but also mostly within the Iberian context.

The fifth type, burial pit usage, is also a bit more difficult to discuss because it can be used as a general way of describing a burial. However, it was a common description of burials within most of the sub-regions. Only scoring less than a hundred percent in the Nordic Bronze Age.

The last, and sixth, type is (stone) cists which are spread throughout the regions. While cists are also represented in Table 11 for funerary vessels. There is also a type of grave architecture because they typically consist of stone slabs covering the sides of a burial.

These grave architectural types are presented in a manner of percentage for each region, as to reflect the presence of a specific type within that region. It shows that some types are represented more in specific regions than others. The variation of burials and the way people display those burials of their deceased is an important factor of providing a comparative study on this subject. Because yes there are major differences between the regions, however not as much as I had expected there to be. The main differences are in the way these structures are presented or created. This is regionally different, that are beyond the scale of this study.

### 5.3 The Usage of Funerary Vessels

Funerary vessels exist in many shaped and forms, the same goes for its existence in Bronze Age Europe. They are present since the 22<sup>nd</sup> century BC and continue to be used for the many centuries following it. It is however not as widespread as, for example, the act of cremation itself. Also, the usage of a funerary vessel does not immediately mean that cremation was the main funerary rite. Just outside the study area, is the Argaric southeastern Spain (2250-1450 Cal BC) that predates the Traditional Urnfield Period (1300-700 BC). One of their principle burial rites were urn burials, however, the dead were not cremated (Lillios, 2015, pp. 556-558).

For cremations in the Traditional Urnfield Region, the usage of urns or other funerary vessels coincides with the act of cremation quite naturally. The same goes for most places, however, as explained earlier the sub-region of Cantabrian and Finland do not use urns, but cists. Just as with cremation itself within the Traditional Urnfield Region, the usage of urns with cremains, is most common between 1100 BC and 900 BC. It does not disappear after that, but regionally places divert from using cremations and urns, like the south of Italy.

There is one type of vessel that is quite unique, namely, the wooden coffin. From all the regions it was only present, and prominent, in the sub-regions of Denmark, Northern Germany, and Austria/Germany. It was also still in use during the times of cremation; thus, a variety of vessels was in use in those sub-regions. In contrast, this kind of burial does not appear in the literature on the Atlantic Bronze.

The main conclusion of these results and tables are that the use of funerary vessels, primarily urns, are a widespread phenomenon and not reserved for one region. The context in which these are found is discussed in the section below.

#### 5.4 Spatial Patterning

Table 12 presents a more condensed collection of data because it looks at general information about funerary rites. The first being the organisation, whether it they are clustered or isolated, and if the place is structured or more random. This is the part of the data where the regions diverge most from each other. Where the larger clustered and structured cemeteries of the Traditional Urnfield Culture are seemingly different from the more isolated burials in the Atlantic and Nordic Bronze Ages. However, those regions also have evidence of more clustered cemeteries. This data shows that there are clear differences in burial organisations between the regions. There might not be one single explanation for this difference. One could argue that these differences are logical because of different climates or landscapes.

Secondly, the re-use of burials is a wide-spread phenomenon across the regions. The most striking factor of this collective re-use of burials can contribute to ideas about how the people burying the dead looked at their own past and ancestors.

Thirdly is the part that is linked to the main question about urnfields because what is counted as a cemetery. As for the re-use of burials, both cemetery types score a hundred percent across the regions. Not completely unreasonable, because the criterium was a low number of at least

one. Additionally, for the sake of this study a phenomenon like a necropolis counts within this spectrum.

While there are a lot of regional differences between these regions, there is also a part that resembles the same practice. This does not imply anything other than it reads the same.

## 5.5 Grave Goods

Grave goods are a tool for archaeologists, in the past and present, to try and see how they could relate to that person's life – or that of the people who buried the person. While the results from tables 13-15 must be approached extremely carefully, and are not representative of all sub-regions, and not all local differences. One example of this is the Håga Mound in Uppsala, Sweden (Østigård, 2022, p. 51-53), dated to roughly 1000 BC. This is considered not only a "rich" burial in the sense that the goods found are made out of gold, which was rare in the sub-region of Sweden at that time, but also because of the quantity of goods (Price, 2015, p. 220). Despite this, it is not reflected in the data of table 15, because it is the exception on the rule.

Even though this data must be approached carefully and needs completer research to have bigger impact of studies, it does show a clear change in periods. Even in this more or less clear change are clear differences. While the division is currently decided by the 1300 BC marker, the decline of goods being buried with people in Britain grew around the start of their respective Middle Bronze Age (roughly 1500 BC) (Brück, 2019, p. 70). However, because the period before 1300 BC is extended beyond 1500 BC, it is not really reflected in the left side of table 14.

Still, as will be discussed in chapter 6, this change does have a deeper meaning in the context of the urnfield concept. Which means that, even though the results may not be as conclusive as hoped, they are not to be cast aside.

## 5.6 Synthesis

This chapter provided a strictly evidence-based analysis of the findings. This included some interesting information about the regions and the “transition” from inhumation to cremation practices, or the longevity thereof. Furthermore, synthesizing the findings suggests that the differences between the regions are less significant than initially anticipated. The idea that these

three regions are put into three different groups has to be justified in a way. However, most evidence I have uncovered shows that those differences have to be approached in a nuanced way. This has important implications for the broader discussion on the Urnfield concept, which will be explored in the following chapter.

## Chapter 6 – Discussion

This chapter comes after much research on both the idea behind concepts and a lot of data distributed across literature. The aim of this chapter is to discuss the results and analysis in a broader sphere. What does it mean for the conceptual basis on which this study comes from. Because the study now allows me to come to the main research question: is the urnfield concept still a viable concept? Firstly, on the basis of a cross-regional comparison on a conceptual level, then on the basis of looking at what happens across the regions. Secondly, based on prior markers of what the urnfield concept entails – its characteristics and what qualifies to be part of it. Thirdly, the practice of cremation, and the idea that the body transforms away from its human form. Fourthly, and lastly, because scholars have noted the complexity of the concept at earlier stages, some suggestions for future research are discussed.

### 6.1 Cross-regional comparison

This section compares the funerary rites of the Traditional Urnfield Region, Atlantic Bronze Age, and Nordic Bronze Age regions to assess differences, similarities, and patterns. The focus lies in these broader patterns, whereas boundaries are still put aside. In comparison to the analysis which contained partial cross-regional comparisons, this section dives more into the conceptual aspect.

#### 6.1.1 Body treatment

The debate on the transition from a dominance in inhumation to cremation is a complex one. The data clearly shows that across all regions and sub-regions there are different timelines if it comes to transitioning towards a dominance of cremation, if at all. The Nordic region seems quite late and uniform in their transition, apart from Finland who is already a disputed part of this chronological region. While the Atlantic sub-regions show a diverse trajectory of cremations, with Ireland and Scotland claiming the clearest evidence of almost continuous acts of cremation. Even the Traditional Urnfield Region is quite diverse in this transition, only fully converting around the 11<sup>th</sup> century BC. Another intriguing aspect that comes forth is the evidence that in a lot of the regions discussed inhumation and cremation coexisted. For example, Hungary displayed a long "tradition" of coexisting funerary rites. In all sub-regions

cremation does become the dominant funerary for some time, however, it happens so differently per sub-region. This challenges any simple diffusionist idea of an Urnfield concept.

### 6.1.2 Grave Architecture

The examination of the existing grave architecture from Bronze Age Europe shows another clear picture of the landscape. While regional differences are important to reinforce, it is also clear that the existence of multiple variations of grave architecture, like mounds – and thus barrows –, cists and cairns were more widespread than one would expect with more or less set boundaries. The main difference that does show is the more monumental existence in the Atlantic and Nordic regions, in comparison to the Traditional Urnfield Region where more flat cemeteries appear. But even with this idea, mounds are also common throughout the Traditional Urnfield Region. Another aspect is the inclusion of multiple kinds of grave architecture within burial spaces, for example in the Traditional Urnfield Region. Cremation graves, for example, contained in urn pits are found in quite a significant number of mounds. Which can later be surrounded by more flatter burials. All in all, this section shows that local – or sub-regional – preference towards grave architecture is the most influential factor in this debate. For example, cairns are constructed in Iberia, but also in Finland. They take different forms and are most likely not part of a diffusionist concept.

### 6.1.3 Usage of funerary vessels

This section dives into the usage of funerary vessels, one of the key characteristics of the Urnfield concept. One of the important factors on this matter is that urns with cremated remains appear in a lot of sub-regions at one stage or another. This, however, is not a single uniform movement. While it is argued that the Urnfield concept came to the British Isles at some point, the evidence of cremated remains in urns for earlier periods in Scotland and Ireland, show that this might be true, but not the reason urns came to those sub-regions. Also, the differences within the urns themselves change from sub-region to sub-region and there are differences within these sub-regions themselves. Some places used amphorae (Cavazzuti et al., 2022, p. 61), while the Scottish database contained an entire typology of their urns. So, no uniformity in most sub-regions on how the urns had to look.

Besides the typical urns, other vessels were also in use across the regions. First of all, the (stone) cists, which were present in most sub-regions and therefore also represent a large portion of

the burials found within Bronze Age Europe. The second is a wooden coffin, less common but still an alternative for the urn usage.

This means that urn usage was widespread, however, it was – both chronologically and typologically – uniform within Bronze Age Europe. A single concept of 'urnfields' therefore seems implausible to maintain.

#### 6.1.4 Spatial Patterning

Even though most regions provide evidence of cemeteries with both cremated remains and cremated remains contained in funerary vessels – with a preference for urns -, the Traditional Urnfield Region stands out for its more structured and clustered form of cemeteries across the regions. The other regions also feature more clustered cemeteries; these tend to be relatively smaller in size and appear less systematically structured. This difference in the layout of cemeteries and the spatial patterning highlights the most diverging aspect between the three regions. The Traditional Urnfield Region is known for its cemeteries with “sometimes hundreds of graves” (Louwen, 2021, p. 156). Which is the reason why it is an excellent comparative aspect to the other two regions.

#### 6.1.5 Grave goods

The results of this data must be addressed with caution but there is a significant and visible change. The evidence before 1300 BC points to a higher quantity of grave goods in comparison to the period after 1300 BC. One of the characteristics attributed to the urnfield concept is that the quantity of grave goods seems to diminish. However, as the evidence shows, this happens across the regions and not only in the Traditional Urnfield Region.

One theory behind the disappearance of especially "richer" goods like metals in burials, is an idea by Gräslund that "*if the grave goods were not present with the body at the moment of its destruction*" it was deemed useless (1994, p. 20). While this can explain the reason why these specific types of goods are missing from the burials, it does not explain why the mourners did not replace those items. Another theory behind grave goods is the idea that it reflects one's status in life (Brück, 2019, p. 87). This is, however, a problematic statement with the danger of classifying certain elements as elite or chiefly. In response to this, suggests Brück that there might be link towards social relationships, rather than social status (2019, p. 87).

The results show that there is a, more or less, decline in the quantity of grave goods across the regions. This is therefore not limited to the Traditional Urnfield Culture.

#### 6.1.6 Some remarks

By comparing these aspects across the regions, it becomes visible that the differences are not so great as these boundaries do suggest. All regions show variations on the general burial practices, which seem to reflect local choices or preferences. This goes from differences in transition to other burial rites coexisting with a more dominant one. This shows that there is quite a diverse way of addressing funerary rites throughout Bronze Age Europe, however, that the act of cremation and the containment in urns, within cemeteries, is not exclusive to any regions. The conceptual background of this study shows that a single "Urnfield" concept is not accessible concept to tackle Bronze Age Europe. Given the variation in the results, but also the striking resemblances, it is essential to revisit the core characteristics that belong to the "Urnfield" concept and assess their applicability to the data.

### 6.2 Evaluation of urnfield characteristics

The importance of this section cannot be underestimated because it, in essence, is the backbone of this study. Scholars have come up with, mostly potential, criteria that make the 'urnfield package'. These criteria or qualities, however, are also contested within archaeology. While scholars like Cavazutti et al. identify criteria that they deem essential, but also criteria they deem optional to test something on belonging to their "urnfield package" (2022, p. 48-49). Other scholars, like Louwen, mention and recognize certain qualities that are traditionally attributed to the "Urnfield concept. However, they also state that those qualities are not unique to their respective study area (Louwen, 2021, p. 238). As a short recap the criteria or qualities contain, but are not complete, the following points:

1. The use of urns as the container for cremated human remains (Cavazutti et al, 2022; Louwen, 2021).
2. The place of burial – of the urn – must be in a fixed-point – like a pit – in the landscape (Cavazutti et al, 2022; Louwen, 2021).
3. Frequent reduction/exclusion of grave goods (Cavazutti et al, 2022).
4. An open structure of the burial grounds (Louwen, 2021).
5. An inclusive nature (Louwen, 2021).

6. General tendency to be largely representative of the communities (Louwen, 2021; Cavazutti et al, 2022).

Before heading into this discussion, the last addition to this list is the latest of them, the idea of Kimmig represented in the book by Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury (2023). It says the following:<sup>1</sup>

*"The defining concept of the urnfield culture is a developed, finished practice of an urn burial, and not the other forms cremations might take." (Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, p. 26).*

This citation from their book seems to be the most straightforward and simplest answer to the question what the concept entails, because it implies the most essential aspects put forward by other scholars. However, if we look at this definition closely, it means that at its purest form, the concept is all about the containment of cremated remains within an urn – without a specified form this urn has to take. By looking at the data and all the literature on the subject, the concept would apply to almost all sub-regions of this study. However, by looking at the list of criteria and qualities associated with this concept, the discussion broadens.

First of all, let's take a look at the fixed-point criteria. Most urns found throughout the regions have been found within a fixed-point. This can be anything from a pit within a flat burial, mound or stone structure. Therefore, as Louwen also pointed out, it is not unique to the Urnfield region alone (Louwen, 2021, p. 238). The second point of interest is the reduction of grave goods. This does happen for the Traditional Urnfield Period but it coincides with a reduction in the other regions. Therefore, it is hardly a unique quality to one region, at least on its own. Thirdly, the open structure of the burial grounds. For now, the assumption is made that this would not include cave burials. However, those would be the only exception to the rule. Since cave burials can show cemetery-like characteristics – like multiple burials at one place – it would only be disqualified on the merit of an unopen structure. Lastly, the inclusivity of the burial grounds, which a determination can be drawn from the reuse of burials. Which actually all three regions qualify for.

These criteria or qualities, while discussed rather shortly, can be dismissed as being unique for the Urnfield concept as Louwen also stated (2021, p. 238). Cavazzuti et al. on the other hand does work on the basis of these criteria and determines when the first group in the Danube area truly meets all criteria (Cavazutti et al, 2022). However, this is by looking through the lens of this static concept. All the variation within the Traditional Urnfield Region itself leads to a

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<sup>1</sup> Has been altered to be correct, still needs looking at!

conclusion that it is not easily accommodated by the current use of the Urnfield concept (Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023, p. 56).

### 6.2.1 Time

Besides the discussion on the physical space funerary rites claim, there is also a presence in time. This is a crucial aspect of the Urnfield Culture. For example, another name it carries is Urnfield Period, so it is chronologically embedded into academic study. Chronologically it spans a time from 1300 BC to 700 BC, while the earlier mentioned Danubian group that meets all criteria dates roughly to 1900-1600 BC (Cavazutti et al, 2022, p. 67). While it must be admitted that the dating of the Urnfield Culture is based on the most dominant version, it is a diverging idea that because it is not widespread at that time, it should not be included in the narrative of the Urnfield concept. At the same time as this takes place in the Danube area, it also happens in, for example, Ireland and Scotland. These are also excluded from this chronology. The difficulty this poses for research is that, while the presumed Urnfield concept is thriving in the Traditional Urnfield Region, the same activities in Ireland and Scotland are similar but excluded from this discussion.

By critically discussing different criteria and qualities presented by other scholars, the data collected for this study could be assessed whether they would qualify. The conclusion of this is that the regions actually seem to comply with this list. The main difference remains the size and extent of these attributes. However, by looking at the core essence of the Urnfield concept – being cremated remains contained within an urn, and deposited into a pit, preferably part of a cluster – the regions do not deviate that much from one another. Differences in presentation and construction are locally orchestrated. On the basis of chronological arguments, the concept does not hold up, because similar things were happening in different places at earlier and different stages of the Bronze Age in Europe. To open a new discussion on this subject, a selection of possible suggestions – that can help future research - will be put forward.

## 6.3 The bigger picture: cremation

The core of this study is at the practice of a certain burial rite, namely cremation. As discussed in the previous section, the urnfield concept is also embedded in cremation. The last two discussion points here are centred around the practice of cremation. To begin with the practice itself, and what role it seemingly plays in the Late Bronze Age. Secondly, the idea from Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury that this transition in the Traditional Urnfield Region also created a change in thinking about the body of the buried (2023).

### 6.3.1 The practice of cremation

While cremation has been the centre of the previous discussion parts, it cannot be stressed enough that the base of this study, and that of the urnfield concept, lies in the practice of cremation. An important aspect in this way of framing cremation here is making it about the practice, rather than the - or a - culture. This does not mean, the practice of cremation cannot be an integral part of a specific culture or religion, as for example in Hinduism (Kaliff & Østigård, 2023, p. 163).

A crucial part of the argument of letting go the idea of cultures, is the time period it is situated in. We simply do not know the way people thought about cremation as being part of themselves, or their "culture". Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury argue that burials in small-scale prehistoric societies were not routine activities, but mostly actions based on previous experience (2023, p. 195). This argument makes sure that regional differences are accounted for in the broader picture of the Traditional Urnfield Region. By putting this argument against the data gathered for this study it shows that this is by far not unique to this region.

Table 17 shows that, apart from the sub-region of Galicia, Spain, there is an almost complete dominance – not exclusively practiced however – in cremation burials across all researched sub-regions. Especially during a part of the so-called Urnfield Period (1300-700 BC) there is a strong presence of cremation between 1100 BC and 800 BC. This renders the division of regions based principal burial rites useless. There are of course major differences of when cremation become a more dominant burial practice per sub-region, however the fact remains that it happened across the continent.

### 6.3.2 Changing perspectives of the body

Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury argue that the body, and the treatment thereof, is the principal actor in burials (2023, p. 191-200). The "intact" body of a deceased person is not specifically destroyed, as in, to get rid of it, however it can be seen as a transformation. It can, in a way, be connected to the idea of freeing one's soul or spirit through cremation (Gräslund, 1994). The cremains are carefully placed inside a funerary vessel, like urns, which have now replaced the physical body – a so-called stand-in of the body. Whereafter the vessel is buried.

This insight and idea of putting the body at the centre of the discussion has implications on how we deal with the concept of urnfields. Within that concept, the traditional view is one of (cultural) uniformity in the practice of cremation, but most importantly the usage of urns. If the argument from Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury (2023) is taken across the Traditional Urnfield Region, it can be used against – as they show – this traditional way of using the urnfield concept. By looking at the urn being a replacement for the body, the uniformity of using urns as funerary vessels falls apart, because the meaning behind the urn can differ between regions.

Even if the meaning would have been the same across the Traditional Urnfield Region, the other regions studied here have similar transitions, some sooner and some later in comparison to the Traditional Urnfield Region. The evidence of Scottish cremation burials being a dominant presence in the burial practices in that sub-region way earlier than on Continental Europe shows that there is, again, no uniformity in the trajectory.

With that change towards looking at the body and urn as being co-existing, but also replacing, makes a more comparative study possible.

Therefore, rather than using the Urnfield concept as an archaeological phenomenon on its own, this thesis and other studies argue for a more representative – and perhaps even more productive – way of taking the concept at a practical level across the studied parts of Late Bronze Age Europe. In that sense, the focus should be on the shared practice of dealing with the dead. This not only allows for a more comparative study but also gives regional differences a chance to be their own thing, rather than being part of something they may not have known. Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury's conclusion drives this thinking about the body and the urn towards a more nuanced view, discussing what they – the body and urn – do to specific mortuary contexts.

## 6.4 Reflections on complexity and suggestions for further research

The fact is that this concept of Urnfields has had a long history of entangling the archaeological field in its continuous adaptation. This section provides a set of possible suggestions to this complex situation. It is by no means a definitive answer to this discourse, but it can be used as a step into a better understanding of that period, without limiting ourselves to set boundaries. The possible suggestions are combined of two core ideas:

1. Moving from cultural complexity to the act of certain practices
2. Moving from essentialist labels to more fluid comparative frameworks

The first suggestion includes inclusive language like terminology in the form of "phase of – urn cremations, and other -" this is less focussed on the culture that envelops the Urnfield concept and can be applied to different regions on their own but is also open for comparative assessments.

A second suggestion follows this line of inclusivity and opens up to comparative frameworks quite well. This study, among others, have shown that cremation was at one point a dominant funerary rite. Therefore, another angle scholars may take is the idea of a Bronze Age Cremation Sphere. One could include the usage of urns; however, this might limit the comparative research as a concept on its own. It can be seen as one variation within this Bronze Age Cremation Sphere; however, the focus is still of the act of cremation.

## 6.5 Short conclusion

In summary, the findings suggest that there are less differences between the regions than previously thought, challenging the traditional idea behind these traditional regions on the basis of funerary practices. While limitations remain – particularly regarding the need for more in-depth studies per (sub-)region - this study offers a valuable overview of the situation around funerary practices in the Bronze Age. These insights will be further concluded in the next chapter, which will consider broader implication of this study.

## Chapter 7 – Conclusion

This study originated from the question on why this urnfield concept is still in use, without having evidence of backing it up. The problem here is that it is too complex, and non-inclusive that it hinders comparative research in contemporary context. From that original idea came the following question: **Is the 'urnfield concept' still a viable theoretical and sociocultural construct?** While this seems like a straightforward yes or no question, it goes deeper. Because in order to unpack this concept, I looked at its core by answering the question on where it came from and its meaning in academia. This second chapter, combined with a descriptive chapter on the three regions – Traditional Urnfield Region, Atlantic Bronze Age, and the Nordic Bronze Age - from Cunliffe's 2008 map. This laid the foundation for the rest of the study: a literary approach on the different regions and their respective funerary practices throughout the European Bronze Age.

The data collected for this study were on: Body treatment – inhumation & cremation -, grave architecture, funerary vessels usage, spatial patterning, and the quantity of grave goods. These, in order, revealed interesting results. To begin with the data on body treatment. This shows that the funerary practices are way more fluid throughout the study area, and there is no clear trajectory of where the practice of cremation came from. There is, however, a moment in time where almost all – except Galicia – experience a dominance of cremation practices. The second is grave architecture, from which the main finding is that there is no clear structure in what type is used somewhere. This is because most types are used across the regions. Thirdly, the usage of funerary vessels is present in all sub-regions. In which some sub-regions provide evidence of this before it is clearly visible in the Traditional Urnfield Region. Fourthly, spatial patterning is the area of data where the three regions differ the most from one another. While all regions include "cemeteries" with cremated remains, the Traditional Urnfield Region shows to be the most structured in this practice. Fifth and lastly, the quantity of grave goods tends to lower after 1300 BC, which correlates with criteria that some scholars attribute to the urnfield culture.

These findings challenge the conceptual viability of urnfields – as other studies have pointed out – because it shows to be too rigid and creates these boundaries, where none exist. The idea that this Traditional Urnfield Region is this uniform cultural space, has been debunked in prior studies, however the similarities or differences have not been made this visible on such a scale.

One example of such a challenge is the idea that Hungary is the birthplace of the Urnfield Culture, while depending on whose characteristics you lean on, a site in Slovenia is the first proper Urnfield, and that Ireland and Scotland had been using urns with cremains for a long period before this. Therefore, this approach calls for a new way of looking at funerary practices in Bronze Age Europe. Instead of looking at these bigger regions, look at smaller-scale regions, to increase specific determination, without the risk of creating a – possibly political –Pan-European phenomenon.

By approaching this problem from a broader perspective and trying to let go of the urnfields and going back to the basis, namely cremation. It offers a more nuanced view on funerary practices, rather than thinking of clear cultural boundaries and guidelines. Even though this subject has been studied in similar fashion by others, it has never reached the level of a complete overview which could provide interesting results. This study is merely a stepping stone in a larger discussion.

One of the key contributions of this thesis is to show that the narrative of Bronze Age Europe is way more diverse than simply attributing certain areas to a specific culture or cultural group. Additionally, this is also the reason why these elements are difficult to be put into a box. While an academic's aim should be to strive for clarity, for which this is the first step. It does, however, not only help the academic discourse on this topic but also provides a new basis for rethinking how this period is presented to the public. Insights such as this thesis has shown can bring more nuanced representations in public spaces such as museums. It contributes, to some extent, to a reframing of the existing narratives for the European Bronze Age.

However, this study has not been without its limitations. First of all, the data gathered only includes that what was available to me and mostly covered larger stretches of land instead of going in-depth into the sub-regions themselves. Therefore, the data does not represent every part of the study area. However, this is unavoidable for such a large area. Second of all, not all sources are in language that I master. Therefore, with the help of online translating tools, I have tried to translate them as to obtain more information than I otherwise would have. Thirdly and lastly, there is obvious bias in the data, because it all depends on what I view as relevant and what qualifies as being data.

These limitations should not dismiss the need for further future research of this topic. The Urnfield Concept is an embedded concept within the field of archaeology and therefore difficult to challenge – as many have tried and it has not changed all that much. It is, however, of importance that academics strive to create a clear as possible concept to work with but also to share with the public. The Urnfield Concept creates too vague an idea to be clear and is admittedly complex to work with. I, therefore, suggest a change in the usage of this conceptual framework, and to strive towards a more inclusive concept.

Ultimately, this thesis advocates for a more flexible approach to funerary practices in the European Bronze Age, with the Late Bronze Age Urnfield Concept in particular. One that moves away from rigid cultural constructs and goes back to fundamental human practices at its core. By letting go of the urnfield construct and returning to the igniting of a fire, we may illuminate not only the ashes of the past, but also the untold narratives still waiting to be discovered.

## Abstract

This thesis critically re-evaluates the traditional understanding of the Urnfield concept within a broader context of European Bronze Age funerary practices. The Urnfield phenomenon has historically been characterized as a mostly uniform cultural complex, primarily defined by its urn (with cremains) burials and funerary customs. However, the concept has been debated since its earliest formulation, with more recent critiques focusing on how rigid and overly complex the framework has become. The aim of this study is to challenge this conceptual rigidity and to propose a more inclusive and practice-oriented alternative—one that better suits both academic discourse and broader public understanding of Bronze Age Europe.

The research begins by discussing the origins and academic development of the Urnfield concept, consulting key literature, especially the work of Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury, which explores both the historical construction and the modern implications of the term. These studies reveal how the concept has become entangled with assumptions about regional identity, chronological boundaries, and static cultural models. As a result, the focus on cremation as a mortuary practice has often been obscured. Central to this thesis, therefore, is the argument that we must shift from understanding the Urnfield as a fixed cultural entity to viewing cremation as a widespread and variable funerary practice that connects regions rather than separates them.

Methodologically, this study conducts a comparative literature review of archaeological data from three distinct regions: the Traditional Urnfield Region, the Atlantic Bronze Age, and the Nordic Bronze Age. These regions are introduced and discussed in a clear and structured manner, aiming to show both their unique characteristics and their shared practices. The limitations of this study are acknowledged, including language barriers, uneven data due to availability, and selection bias in the available data. Nonetheless, the data and analysis—focusing on elements such as body treatment, grave architecture, funerary vessel usage, spatial patterning, and the presence or absence of grave goods—suggests that the differences between these regions are less substantial than traditionally assumed. In fact, most significant differences are found locally, in contrast to the broader regional practices, which is reflected across the regions.

The thesis concludes by reflecting on the structural limitations of the Urnfield concept and recommends adopting more inclusive terminologies that allow for meaningful cross-regional comparison. It proposes thinking in terms of a broader “Bronze Age Cremation Sphere” to capture the shared funerary practices without the weight and restriction of cultural boundaries. Ultimately, this thesis advocates for a shift in focus—from cultural labels to human practices—in order to arrive at a more nuanced and flexible understanding of Bronze Age funerary behaviour across Europe.

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## Appendix - Expanded Tables

### Guide to the Appendix

The tables below provide additional information for tables 7 and 12. These tables are condensed in the main text to make them more manageable. This means that the tables that follow include the results per individual sub-region – as long as they are included.

### Expanded Table 7

#### *Traditional Urnfield Region I*

Axes	LRB	NE-Iberia/S-France	RSF	Austria/Germany
<b>Urn pit</b>	X			X
<b>Cist</b>		X	X	X
<b>Cairn*</b>				
<b>Mound*</b>	X	X	X	
<b>Pit (grave)</b>	X	X	X	X
<b>Barrow*</b>	X	X		x
<b>Round barrow*</b>				
<b>Bell barrow*</b>				
<b>Ring ditch</b>				
<b>Flat burial/ grave</b>	X			X
<b>Cave</b>		X		
<b>Tumuli*</b>			X	
<b>Enclosures</b>		X		
<b>Pit /w stone slab</b>				X
<b>Wooden coffin (in cist)</b>				X
<b>Scattered graves</b>				
<b>Stone circle</b>				X
<b>Sources:</b>	Louwen, 2021	López-Cachero, 2011	Mordant, 2013; Capuzzo & Barceló, 2022	Falkenstein, 2012; Cavazutti et al., 2022; Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023

\*Mounds, cairn, tumuli, and barrows are classed as more or less the same. Cairns, however, have been regarded as their own thing in Table 7.

*Traditional Urnfield Region II*

Axes	Carpathian Basin	Czechia/Poland	Italy
<b>Urn pit</b>	X	X	X
<b>Cist</b>	X	X	X
<b>Cairn*</b>			
<b>Mound*</b>	X	X	X
<b>Pit (grave)</b>	X	X	X
<b>Barrow*</b>	X	X	X
<b>Round barrow*</b>			
<b>Bell barrow*</b>			
<b>Ring ditch</b>			
<b>Flat burial/ grave</b>	X	X	X
<b>Cave</b>	X		
<b>Tumuli*</b>	X		X
<b>Enclosures</b>			
<b>Pit /w stone slab</b>		X	
<b>Wooden coffin (in cist)</b>			
<b>Scattered graves</b>	X		?
<b>Stone circle</b>			X
<b>Sources:</b>	Točík, 1978; Teržan, 1999; Dizdar, 2011; Cavazzuti et al., 2022; Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023	Schmid, 2020; Gediga & Józefowska-Domańska; 2024	Bietti Sestieri, 2013; Cavazzuti et al., 2022

*Atlantic Bronze Age*

Axes	Portugal	NW Spain	W-France	Britain/ Scotland	Ireland
<b>Urn pit</b>	X		X		
<b>Cist</b>	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Cairn*</b>	X			X	X
<b>Mound*</b>	X		X	X	
<b>Pit</b>	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Barrow*</b>				X	X
<b>Round barrow*</b>				X	
<b>Bell barrow*</b>					
<b>Ring ditch</b>			X	X	X
<b>Flat burial</b>		X		X	X
<b>Cave</b>	X	X	X	X	X

<b>Tumuli**</b>	X	X	X		
<b>Enclosures</b>	X			X	X
<b>Pit /w stone slab</b>	X				
<b>Cremation pit</b>			X		X
<b>Megalithic reuse</b>	?	X			
<b>Stone circle</b>		X			
<b>Sources:</b>	Viliça, 2014	Armendariz Gutiérrez, 2022; Nonat et al., 2022	Germain-Vallée et al., 2007; Blanchet, 2022; Boulud-Gazo et al., 2022; Marcigny, 2022	Medina-Pettersson, 2014; Brück, 2019	Lynch & O'Donnell, 2007

### *Nordic Bronze Age*

<b>Axes</b>	<b>Denmark</b>	<b>Sweden</b>	<b>N-Germany</b>	<b>Norway</b>	<b>Finland</b>
<b>Urn pit</b>	X	X	X		
<b>Cist / stone coffin</b>	X	X			X
<b>Cairn*</b>	X	X			X
<b>Mound*</b>	X		X		
<b>Pit</b>				X	
<b>Barrow*</b>	X	X	X	X	
<b>Round barrow*</b>					
<b>Bell barrow*</b>					
<b>Ring ditch</b>					
<b>Flat burial</b>	X				
<b>Cave</b>					
<b>Stone circles</b>	X				
<b>Burnt mounds</b>		X		X	X
<b>Wooden coffin/ cist</b>	X		X		
<b>Stone ships</b>	X	X	X		
<b>Sources:</b>	Kaliff & Østigård, 2023; Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023	Price, 2015; Röst, 2017; Kaliff & Østigård, 2023	Price, 2015; Schmid, 2020	Price, 2015	Saipio, 2017; Salo et al., 2022

## Expanded table 12

### *Traditional Urnfield Culture I*

<b>Axes</b>	<b>LRB</b>	<b>NE-Iberia/ S-France</b>	<b>RSF</b>	<b>Austria/ Germany</b>
<b>Clustered/ isolated</b>	Clustered	Small clustered	Isolated & clustered	Clustered
<b>Re-use of burials</b>	X	X		
<b>Cemeteries with cremations</b>	X	X	X	X
<b>Cemeteries with urns</b>	X	X	X	X
<b>Sources:</b>	Louwen, 2021	López-Cachero, 2011	Mordant, 2013; Capuzzo & Barceló, 2022	Falkenstein, 2012; Sørensen & Rebay- Salisbury, 2023

### *Traditional Urnfield Culture II*

<b>Axes</b>	<b>Carpathian Basin</b>	<b>Czechia/ Poland</b>	<b>Italy</b>
<b>Clustered/ isolated</b>	Clustered & Isolated	Clustered	Clustered
<b>Re-use of burials</b>			
<b>Cemeteries with cremations</b>	X	X	X
<b>Cemeteries with urns</b>	X	X	X
<b>Sources:</b>	Cavazzuti et al., 2022; Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023	Schmid, 2020; Gediga & Józefowska- Domańska; 2024	Biatti Sestieri, 2013; Cavazzuti et al., 2022

*Atlantic Bronze Age*

<b>Axes</b>	<b>Portugal</b>	<b>NW Spain</b>	<b>W-France</b>	<b>Britain/ Scotland</b>	<b>Ireland</b>
<b>Clustered/ isolated</b>	Mostly isolated, but necropolis	Mostly isolated, but necropolis	Mostly isolated	Isolated, with smaller clusters	Isolated, smaller clusters
<b>Re-use of burials</b>	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Cemeteries with cremations</b>	X	?	X	X	X
<b>Cemeteries with urns</b>	X		X	X	X
<b>Sources:</b>	Viliça, Viliça, 2014; Lull et al., 2022	Armendariz Gutiérrez, 2022; Lull et al., 2022; Nonat et al., 2022	Germain-Vallée et al., 2007; Blanchet, 2022; Boulud-Gazo et al., 2022; Marcigny, 2022	Medina-Pettersson, 2014; Brück, 2019	Lynch & O'Donnell, 2007; McSparron, 2020

*Nordic Bronze Age*

<b>Axes</b>	<b>Denmark</b>	<b>Sweden</b>	<b>N-Germany</b>	<b>Norway</b>	<b>Finland</b>
<b>Clustered/ isolated</b>	Isolated & Clustered	Isolated	Isolated & Clustered	Isolated & Clustered	Isolated
<b>Re-use of burials</b>	X	X	X		
<b>Cemeteries with cremations</b>	X	X	X		
<b>Cemeteries with urns</b>	X	X	X		
<b>Sources:</b>	Price, 2015; Kaliff & Østigård, 2023; Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023	Price, 2015; Harvig, 2017; Röst, 2017; Kaliff & Østigård, 2023	Price, 2015; Schmid, 2020	Price, 2015	Saipio, 2017; Salo et al., 2022