

A Grave Complex of the Early Single Grave Culture at Skarrild Overby, Central Jutland

by HANS ROSTHOLM

Herning Museum has for some years been carrying out the excavation of settlements of the Funnel Beaker Culture and settlements and graves of the Single Grave Culture in Skarrild parish. Skarrild lies about 20 km south of Herning at about the centre of the area that has yielded most of the finds from the early Single Grave Culture (Glob 1944: 243; Becker 1954: 72). It has been found that both these cultures are well represented at two places – one on the eastern side of Skarrild bog, the other 1½ – 2 km to the NE at Pilgård and Lustrup (1).

East of Skarrild bog (in Skarrild Overby) surface reconnaissance and excavation have been carried out over an area covering at least 200 × 300 m. The finds are mostly from the Funnel Beaker Culture, but a small settlement material from the Single Grave Culture has also been found. In 1973 a ploughed-over barrow was excavated containing a grave that was datable to the early Single Grave period (battle-axe of type B, etc.) and there were stratigraphically earlier traces of settlement from different periods, including period V of the Middle Neolithic Funnel Beaker Culture (Rostholm 1977: 103–06; Davidsen 1978: 89–90). In the eastern part of the same area were excavated two ploughed-over barrows in 1975 and 1977. They had graves from the Ground Grave and younger Bottom Grave periods and settlement finds from the Single Grave Culture and from the end of the Funnel Beaker Culture (2). Thus both cultures have lived within the same small area east of Skarrild Bog. The Funnel Beaker Culture is represented by lots of settlement finds from periods I and V and sporadic finds from periods III and IV; not of least importance is a considerable material from the latest period of the culture (3). On the settlement area or within a few hundred meters there are graves from all five periods of the Single Grave Culture and a small

quantity of settlement pottery, mostly from the earlier part of the culture.

In 1979 excavation was continued in the southern part of the area east of Skarrild bog with support from the Danish Research Council for the Humanities. An occupation layer, post-holes, and various pits, mainly from the final period of the Funnel Beaker Culture, were found over a considerable area.

A grave structure with three graves from the early Single Grave Culture was also found (4). Grave 1301, which was the earliest, was surrounded by ring-ditch 1302. Superimposed over the east end of this grave and also inside the ring-ditch was grave 1388, while grave 1251 was placed close outside the ring-ditch to the SW (fig. 1).

Nothing could be seen on the surface before excavation, no barrow has ever been recorded here, and no trace of one was observed during excavation, so these may very well have been flat graves, though perhaps the possibility of a completely levelled barrow cannot be entirely excluded (5). The graves had been dug through an occupation layer, whose upper surface was ploughed up in recent times. Depths are measured from the bottom of the present plough soil – the original depths must have been somewhat greater.

Grave 1301 measured 195 × 140 cm, was orientated W-E, and had a depth of up to 30 cm. There appeared to be faint traces of a wooden coffin and patches of darker fill that could have been remains of the corpse. The coffin had been supported in the outer parts of the grave by stones of size 20–40 cm – 2 along the south side, 1 at the eastern end and 4 along the northern side. The latter included quernstone 1386. In the central part of the grave were found a battle-axe 1358, two amber discs 1359–60, an amber ring 1361, and a flint blade 1362 (fig. 2). At the eastern end of the grave a little over the bottom lay amber bead

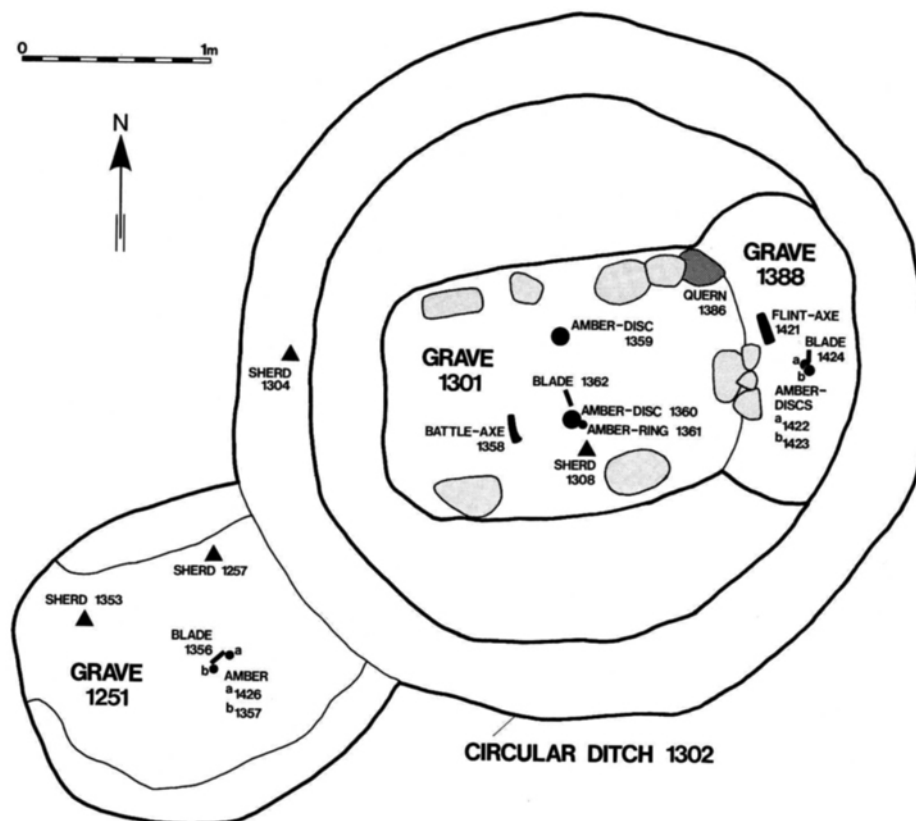


Fig. 1. Plan of grave complex from the early Single Grave Culture composed of 3 graves and a ring-ditch. Skarrild Overby, Skarrild parish, central Jutland. 1:40.

1385. It can have come by chance into the fill or could come from grave 1301 or 1388.

Battle-axe 1358 is of fine-grained rock and has slightly concave underside and splayed cutting edge. Its length is 12.4 cm and the shaft-hole is close to the butt, which is somewhat decomposed without a smooth surface as on the rest of the object. The shaft-hole is cylindrical and 1.8 cm in diameter. The axe is clearly of Glob's type B.

Amber disc 1359 has maximum and minimum diameters of 5.9 and 5.1 cm, and disc 1360 diameters of 5.7 and 5.5 cm. Both are 1.6 cm thick in the middle with flat under-side, convex upper-side, and in places a flat margin 5–6 mm thick. The central borings are conical with a diameter of 3 mm on the upper-side and respectively 8 and 6 mm on the under-side.

Amber ring 1361 has an external diameter of 2.5 cm and an internal diameter of 1.5 cm. Its thickness is $4\frac{1}{2}$ – $5\frac{1}{2}$ and its breadth 7–8 mm.

Blade 1362 measures $6.4 \times 1.9 \times 0.4$ cm with a 3 mm high scraperlike edge at one end.

Ring-ditch 1302, which surrounded grave 1301, had an external diameter of 3.70 m and a width of 35–40 cm. Its depth was mostly 45–50 cm, but differences in

level of up to 15 cm occurred. At the bottom of the eastern side of the ditch was found charcoal 1438, a couple of up to 17 cm long vertical pieces, presumably the remains of a post or something of the kind. There were no other certain traces of posts in the ditch.

Grave 1388 measured 160×85 cm and was orientated N-S. It occupied the space between grave 1301 and the ring-ditch, touching the inner edge of the latter and for ca. 25 cm overlapping the eastern end of the former. Its base lay 5–8 cm over the bottom of grave 1301 and 10–20 over the bottom of the adjacent part of the ring-ditch. There was no trace of coffin or skeleton. The grave was distinguishable only by its darker fill and grave goods. The latter were flint axe 1421, amber discs 1422 and 1423, and flint blade 1424 (fig. 2).

Flint axe 1421 is 15.7 cm long and of light grey/greyish flint. Its maximum thickness (about in the middle) is 3.3 cm. Breadth and thickness 2 cm from the butt are respectively 2.6 and 2.7 cm. The cutting edge is sharp, protruding, and 4.6 cm wide. The broad sides are polished on the lower half, but the rest is unpolished, including the very irregular butt half.

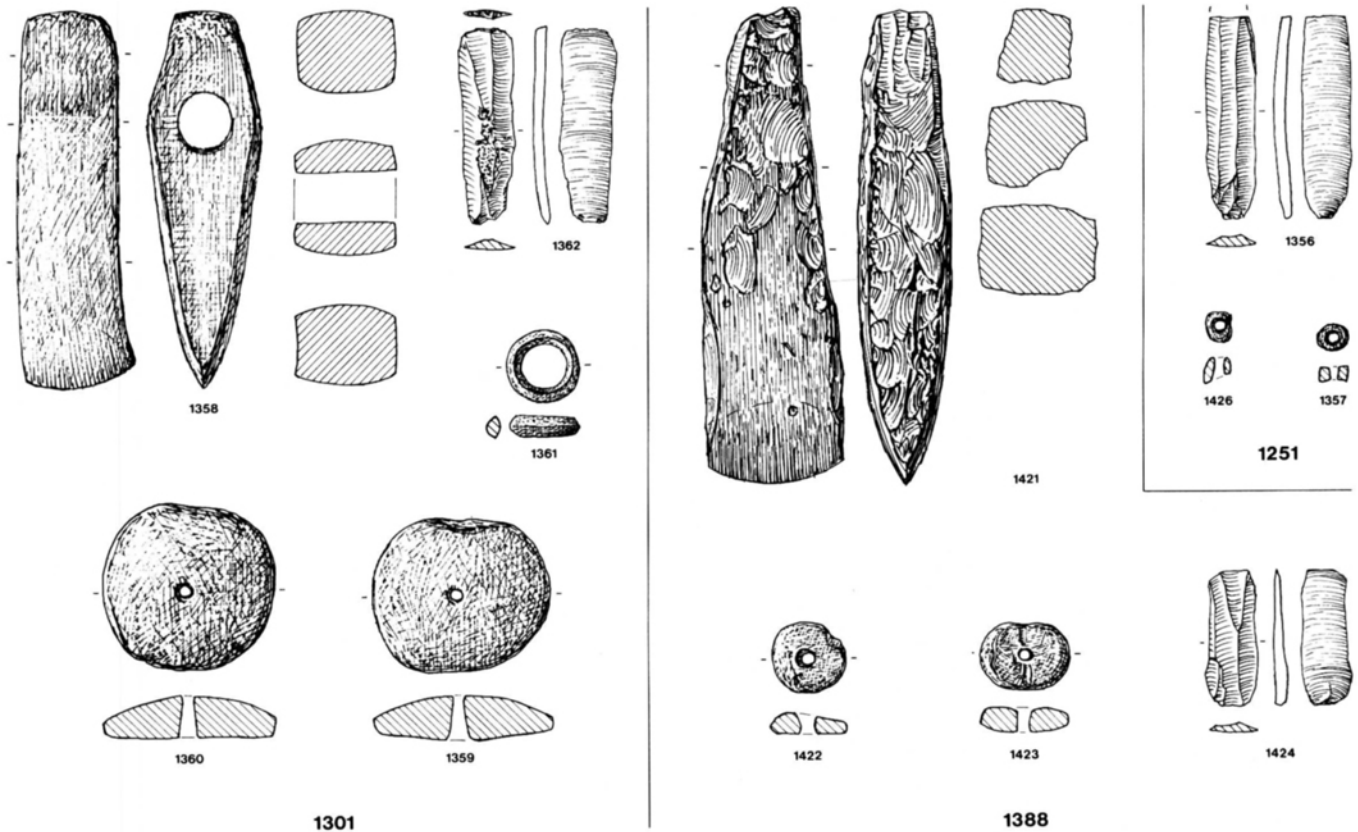


Fig. 2. Finds from graves 1301, 1388, and 1251. Ca 2:5 (Henning Ørsnes del.).

Amber disc 1422 is 2.2 – 2.5 cm in diameter and 4–8 mm thick, irregular, and has a slightly biconical hole $3\frac{1}{2}$ to 6 mm in diameter.

Amber disc 1423 is 3.0 × 2.3 cm in diameter and 9 mm thick with a hole $3\frac{1}{2}$ – 5 mm in diameter. There is a slight furrow on one side that may have been worn by a cord or something similar.

Blade 1424 measures 4.4 × 1.6 × 0.2–0.4 cm, thickest near the bulb.

Grave 1251 lay to the SW outside the ring-ditch (fig. 1) and measured ca. 175 cm in diameter and 30 cm in depth. The base lay 10–15 cm higher than that of the adjacent part of ring-ditch 1302. Around the edge of the grave floor (except on the W) ran a ca. 25 cm wide miniature ditch, which joined the bigger ring-ditch and in places reached the same depth as it. On the floor of the grave were found scattered pieces of charcoal, which appeared to derive from the coffin, and also amber beads 1357 and 1426 and flint blade 1356 (fig. 2.)

Amber bead 1357 is disc-shaped, 9–11 mm in diameter and 5–6 mm thick with a hole $3\frac{1}{2}$ mm across.

Amber bead 1426 is irregular, 9–11 mm in diameter and 5–9 mm thick, and has a slightly biconical hole $3\frac{1}{2}$ –5½ mm in diameter.

Blade 1256 measures 6.7 × 1.7 × 0.4 cm. The end opposite the bulb is broken.

The central grave 1301, surrounded by the ring-ditch, is certainly the oldest and is dated to the early Bottom Grave period by its battle-axe. The two other graves did not contain closely datable finds, but their placing is clearly dependent on the ring-ditch.

The three graves seem to be so intimately connected that it is unlikely that much time elapsed between the successive burials. The two graves within the ring-ditch held male gear, but the third grave with flint blade and the two amber beads is more probably a female grave.

This complex, which consisted of a primary grave

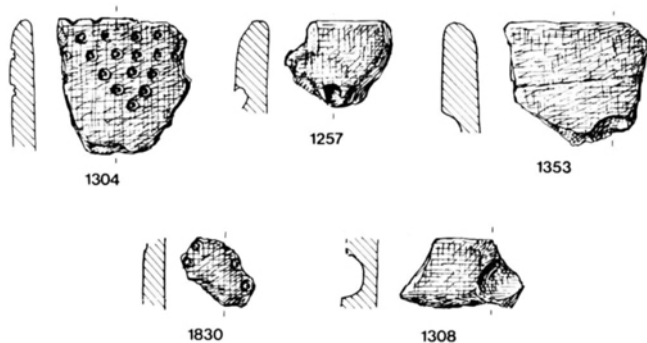


Fig. 3. Settlements sherds from the late Funnel Beaker Culture, found in the fill of grave 1251 (sherds 1257 and 1353), grave 1301 (sherd 1308), and of ring-ditch 1302 (sherds 1304 and 1830). Ca. 2:5 (Henning Ørnsnes del.).

with encircling ditch, a secondary grave inside the ring-ditch, and a third grave placed almost as an addition to the ring-ditch, seems to be a new variant among the grave forms of the Single Grave Culture.

It is hard to find parallels in the Danish material (6). From the Single Grave Culture in NW Germany are known ring-ditches with marginal graves, but these features differ clearly from our own in that there are no burials in the middle (Asmus 1954: 135 ff.).

The fill of the graves and ring-ditch consisted of grey-brown mould with settlement finds. Apart from a single undecorated body sherd, to judge from its ware from the Single Grave Culture, the sherds are all almost certainly from the close of the Funnel Beaker Culture. Five sherds bear ornament (fig. 3).

Sherds 1257 and 1353 were found in grave 1251, respectively high and low in the fill. The former is a thick rim sherd with impressions ca. 2 cm below the top which are jabbed obliquely from below. Sherd 1353 is a thick rim sherd from a large vessel and shows the edge of a finger-impressed pit with marks of the nail ca. 3 cm below the rim. High in the fill of grave 1301 was found sherd 1308, a thick body sherd with a finger-impressed pit with nail. High in the NW part of the ring-ditch was found sherd 1304, a thin rim sherd with faint notches on the rim and 15 round impressions, made apparently with a tubular bone, arranged in a hanging triangle below the rim. Among the sherds from the NW part of the ring-ditch is sherd 1830, a body sherd from the same vessel with four impressions that make up the edge of two hanging triangles.

Oblique jabs, hanging triangles made of small im-

pressions, and not least, fingertip impressions are dated to period MN V (Davidsen 1978: 100–102). Among places where sherds with these three kinds of decoration were found is an occupation layer from MN V found under a Single Grave barrow at Lille Hamborg, about 15 km further north (Rostholm 1977: 106–08 and 1982: 35–36 and 44–45).

The discovery described here of a burial complex from the early Single Grave Culture with an admixture of earlier finds from the late Funnel Beaker Culture reinforces other discoveries showing that the Single Grave Culture could at earliest have begun in the final phase of the Funnel Beaker Culture (Davidsen 1977; Rostholm 1977 and 1982: 35–37).

Translated by David Liversage

NOTES

¹ Resumé of investigations 1972–78 in Rostholm (n.d.). The work at Skarrild bog 1972–76 is briefly published in Rostholm 1977 and the Skarrild-investigations 1972–1980 in Rostholm 1982: 29–34, 45–57 and 62–66.

² Herning Museum's no. 1964 (Rostholm 1977: 97–98) and no. 1524 (Rostholm 1982: 80).

³ Herning Museum's no. 1521 and 1519 (northern and southern parts of settlement area). Rostholm 1977: 93 ff.; Davidsen 1978: 78 and Pl. 99, k-l; Rostholm 1982: 30–34 and (n.d.): fig. 1.

⁴ Herning Museum's no. 1519.

⁵ A grave with ring-ditch but no trace of barrow was excavated ca. ¼ km to the NE in 1974, also in Skarrild Overby. Herning Museum's no. 1629. Rostholm 1977: 102–03.

⁶ A possibly related feature was excavated in 1901 at Koldkur in Resen parish (between Holstebro and Viborg), where skeletal remains and amber beads were found high in a very wide (up to 110 cm) ring-ditch (Glob 1944: 170).

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