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Egshvile – A Bronze Age Barrow with Early Urn Graves from Thy

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In the north-western part of Thy, an area well known for its many grave finds, especially from Period III of the Early Bronze Age (EBA), Thisted Museum has recently excavated a ploughed-over barrow with some rich and rather unusual grave finds: A rich man's grave from Period III and two urn graves from Period II – a child's grave and an adult woman's grave with rich grave-goods, possibly the earliest known urn graves from the Danish Bronze Age (1).

TOPOGRAPHY

Egshvile lies at the end of a NW-SE oriented strip of land, 2,5 km wide, which separates two lakes – Nors sø and Vandet sø (fig. 1). To the west and north of these lakes lies a large area dominated by sand dunes and wind-blown flats which extends all the way to the North Sea Coast 7 km away. Today, large parts of this area are covered with forests planted at the end of the last century, but 3–400 years ago there were many instances of wind-blown sand covering the fields and causing people to leave their homes. The sand all but reached Egshvile, and to the north and west it undoubtedly covers areas that were occupied during the Bronze Age. Due to the sand dunes it is difficult to determine where the Bronze Age coastline lay.

Fig. 1. Map of the north-west part of Jutland, showing the location of the barrow at Egshvile, Thy. With a detailed map of the strip of land dividing the two lakes, showing all known prehistoric barrows. Reproduced with permission from the Geodetic Institute no. A. 404/85.

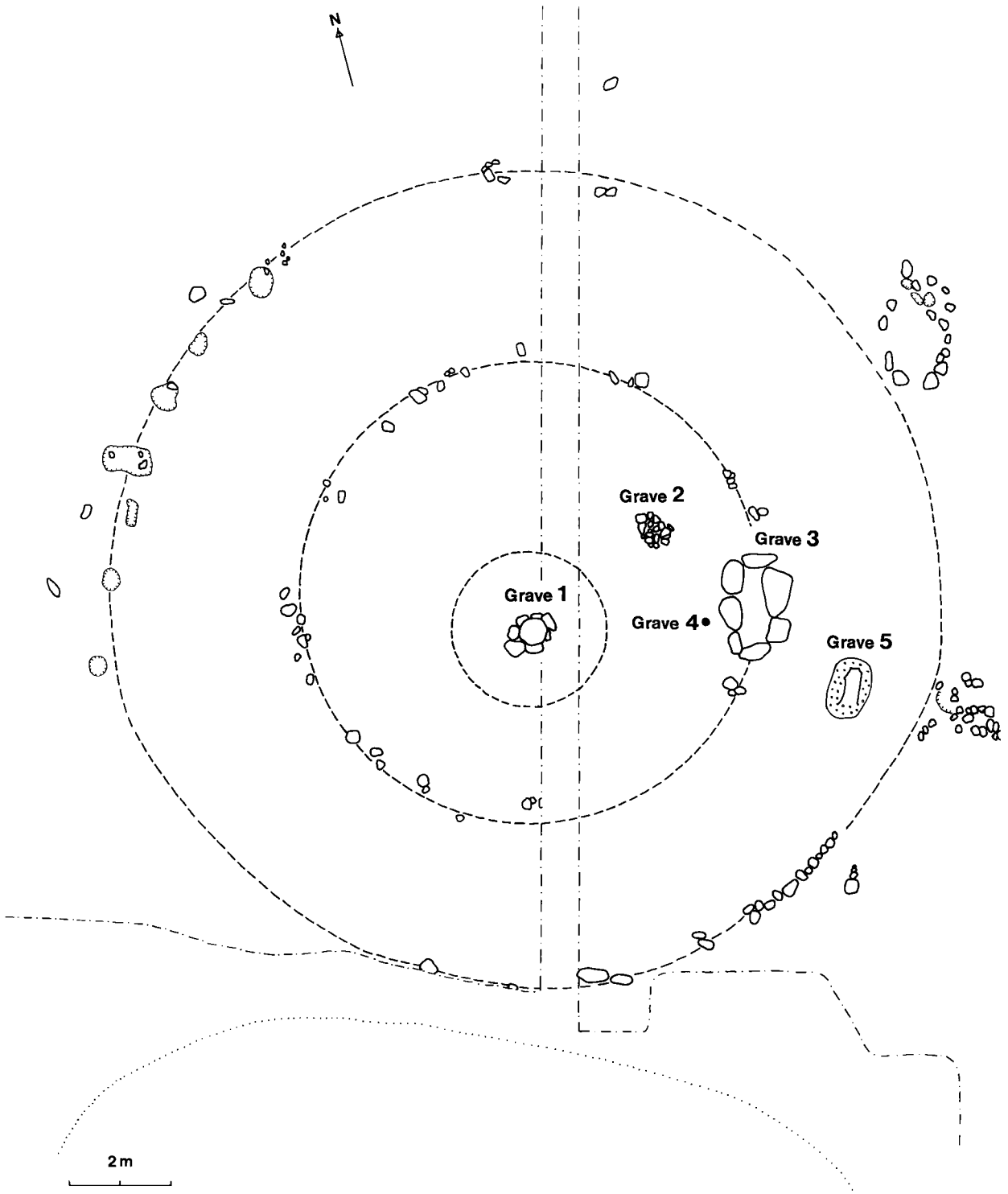


Fig. 2. Plan of the barrow. 1 – 3, phases of construction. Grave 1 – 3, early Bronze Age. Grave 4 – 5, late Bronze Age. ....., perimeter of preserved barrow immediately south of the excavated barrow.

The landscape consists of moraine hills, many of which are crowned by barrows, mostly in pairs or little groups. The subsoil is moraine sand with gravel and small stones, and further down chalky deposits, which in this part of Thy lie close to the surface. The Egshvile barrow was situated on top of a ridge on the edge of a northward-facing slope. Immediately to the south lies another barrow which is untouched by the plough and is therefore still intact. It is now protected by the law protecting ancient monuments.

HISTORY

The cause of the excavation was classic: A passer-by noticed a cluster of large stones lying in the field and contacted the museum. The stones had formed the lid of a stone-built cist of normal EBA type, and this was excavated in the early spring of 1989. In the autumn of the same year the rest of the mound was excavated. The barrow was found to consist of three phases, all dating from the EBA, with one grave corresponding to each phase. In addition there were two graves from the late Bronze Age inserted into the EBA mound (fig. 2).

PHASE I

In its first phase the barrow was very small – only 3 m in diameter and probably around 0,8 m high before the partial destruction. Its greatest height below the plough soil was now 0,4 m. It was built of turves and had no demarcation of the perimeter. There was no traceable vegetation layer on the surface of the first phase, but the fill could be clearly distinguished from that of the second phase, especially to the south. To the north, the extension of the mound was indicated by the preservation of a layer of excavated subsoil arising from the construction of the grave (figs. 3–4).

Grave 1: The grave was a small stone cist with a trapezoid ground-plan. It measured 50x30 cm internally and was 30 cm deep, with a small opening at the narrow end where the stones did not meet (fig. 6). The cist was covered by a single flat stone and it was surrounded by other stones without any load-bearing function. One of the stones in the side was too short, and an extra stone had been inserted. The stones included fragments of saddle querns. The grave was dug 0,3 m into the ground, the lower surface of the cap stone corresponding to the original ground surface prior to the construction of the barrow.

In the cist, on a layer of gravel 2–5 cm thick, stood the bottom and lower part of a large ceramic vessel, filled with cremated bones. On top of these lay one complete amber bead and half of another, plus 20 small pieces of unworked amber, some of which had fallen out of the urn and lay close by. The rest of the urn was present as large sherds packed around the bottom. One of them had been pushed down rim first, showing that it had been deliberately placed like this (figs. 5A–B). The cist was too small ever to have housed the urn in an unbroken state, since its height after conservation and reassembly was 42 cm, whereas the inside height of the cist, as mentioned above, was only 30 cm (figs. 5–6).

Upon examination, the cremated bones from the grave proved to be those of a child – probably a boy. Judging from the teeth, which included a milk tooth as well as permanent teeth which apparently had not emerged at the time of death, the child was around 5 years of age (2). Among the cremated bones were also bones from the leg of a calf – a phenomenon also seen in the graves in the second and third phases (see below) (3).

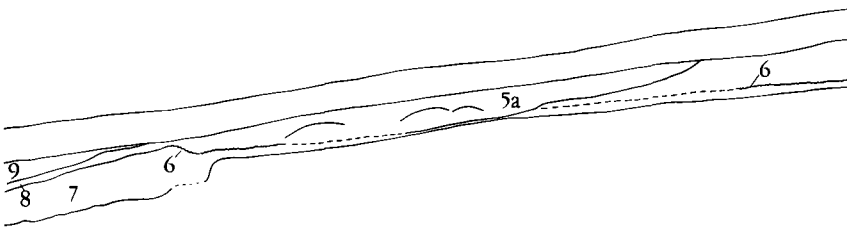
The dating of the grave is difficult, due to the very uncharacteristic grave goods, but as it must necessarily be older than the second phase of the barrow, it cannot be later than Period II of the EBA (see below).

PHASE II

Whereas in its first phase the barrow was so small that it would hardly have survived to the present day on its own, the second phase was more impressive. The barrow had now a diameter of 9 m, and a single row of kerbstones marked the perimeter. The height was probably between 1,5 and 2 m, and the center lay slightly to the north compared with the first phase, cf. fig. 2.

Like the first phase, the second was built of turves, and it covered another urn grave from the EBA. This was placed c. 1,5 m outside the foot of the first small barrow and was dug approximately 0,5 m into the ground. To the north and south of the grave, a layer of excavated subsoil could be seen under the turves, showing clearly that the grave was dug prior to the construction of the second phase of the barrow.

Fig. 3. Section through the barrow N-S. A – Grave 1; B – Kerbstones around phase II; 1 – buried soil under the barrow; 2 – excavated subsoil from the construction of grave 1; 3 – fill in phase I; 4 – fill in phase II; 5 a–b – fill in phase III; a – with turf structure; b – without turf structure; 6 – thin layer of hard-pan; 7–9 – a filled-in depression immediately north of the barrow. No traces of cultural activity.

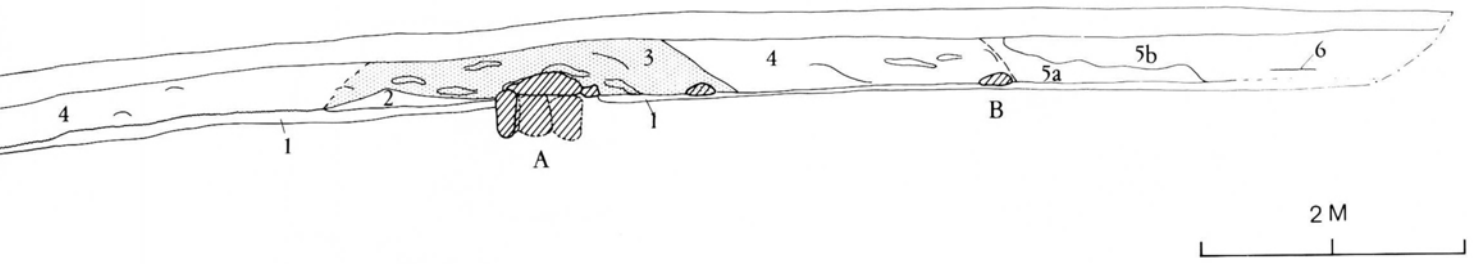


Grave 2: The grave was of quite a different kind compared to the first: A proper urn grave with a large vessel, 53 cm high, almost completely buried in the ground. It was covered with a small concentration of stones, 15 – 30 cm in diameter. In conjunction with the stones there was a layer of hard-pan, formed after the construction of the last phase of the barrow. This had helped to prevent loose earth from falling into the grave. Underneath the small concentration of stones was a ring of stones, some of which had fallen in. A larger, flat stone had served as a lid. The sherds of the rim and upper part of the urn could be seen between the stones (fig. 7). Further down the urn was partially set around with stones, a large flat one had fallen in and partially destroyed one side of the urn, fortunately without damaging its contents.

Due to the state of the urn and the surrounding stones it could not be taken up intact with its contents, and it was emptied on the spot, the grave goods being in a fair state of preservation.

A long fibula of bronze protruded from among the cremated bones which filled the lower part of the urn. Beside it lay a smooth, round object – a small vessel lying

Fig. 4. Profile through the barrow N-S with grave 1 and the kerbstones around phase 2.



upside-down and shielding two awls with wooden shafts which had originally lain in the vessel. Among the cremated bones were 6 glass beads, one bead of deer antler, and 10 small bronze spirals, all from the same object, probably a bracelet. Also among the bones were a bronze armring, an amber bead pressed into a lump of pitch, some small fragments of pitch sealant (all that remained of a small box of organic material), and lying on the bottom with the edge upwards, a single-edged bronze knife. Remains of organic material, probably textiles (not yet analyzed), were found adhering to the fibula and lying at the bottom of the urn.

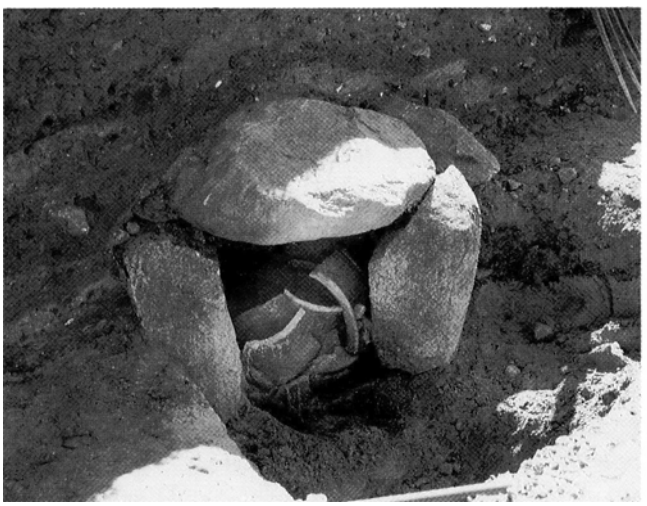
The cremated bones from the grave show that the deceased was an adult woman, which fits in very well with the grave-goods. Her age was difficult to determine, but she must have been between 30 and 50 years old at the time of death (2).

Animal bones were again among the cremated bones – they comprised the hind and the forelegs of a lamb (3).

The contents date this grave to the later part of Period II of the EBA, thereby giving a *terminus ante quem* for the first grave (see below).

PHASE III

It was the stone cist which originally attracted attention to the barrow. It had been dug into the side of the second phase of the barrow, partly destroying the ring of stones around its perimeter. The cist belonged to the third and final phase of the barrow, which now measured 16,5 m in diameter and was surrounded by an only partially-preserved ring of kerbstones which appear to have been larger than in the second phase. On the outside of the ring



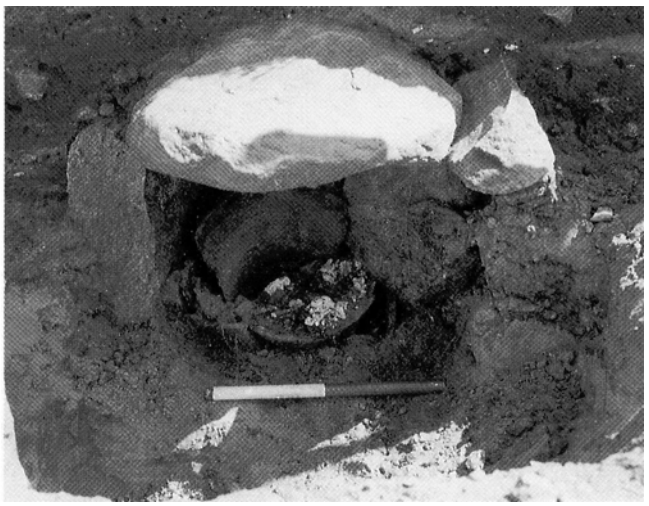


Fig. 5. Grave 1 after opening the cist from the west side. A. With sherds packed around the lower part of the urn. B. With the lower part of the urn and cremated bones after removing most of the packed sherds. One sherd is standing rim downwards behind the urn.

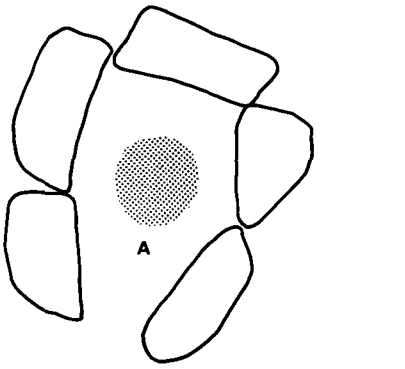


Fig. 6. Grave 1 – plan of the cist. A, bottom of the urn fig. 10.

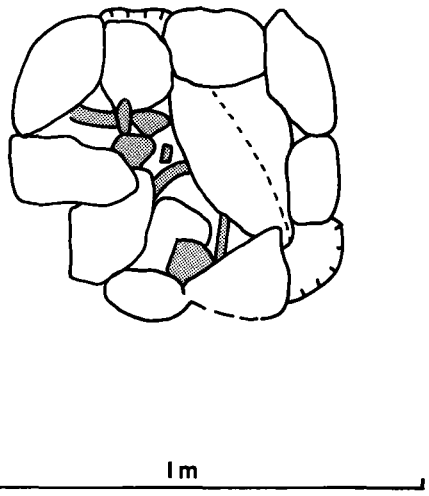


Fig. 7. Grave 2 – plan after the removal of the topmost layer of stones. Hatching indicates sherds from the rim and upper part of the urn.

the remains of a paving of smaller stones could be seen, but this was not very well preserved and was only partially examined (fig. 2).

Grave 3: The cist was oriented N–S and built of large, unworked stones – two in the east side, three in the west and one at each end. It measured 1,4 x 0,5 m internally and was 0,45 m deep (figs. 8A–B). The cist had been covered with three large stones which had been removed during ploughing shortly before the excavation. All gaps between the stones had been meticulously sealed with yellow clay and smaller stones, which to a great extent had prevented loose earth from entering the grave before the lid was removed. An overlying mound of stones, such as has been found covering many other EBA cists, was not present here.

Almost in the middle of the cist, on a layer of small rounded pebbles, was a heap of cremated bones. On top of these lay the rich grave-goods : A flange-hilted sword in a wooden sheath, a fibula, a small knife, two double studs, and six small spirals, all made of bronze, plus one spiral of gold, 6 cm long, and 15 small gold spirals. The cremated bones seem to have been wrapped in skins and a piece of cloth, but only small fragments remained where the organic materials had been in direct contact with bronze objects (4).

The cremated bones from the grave show that the deceased was an adult man, which corresponds well with the grave- goods. His age cannot be determined more closely than between 20 and 40 years, but the teeth were only moderately worn, showing that he must have been fairly young (2). As was the case in the urn graves, this grave also contained animal bones among the cremated bones – part of the cranium of a larger animal, the species of which could not be more closely determined (3).

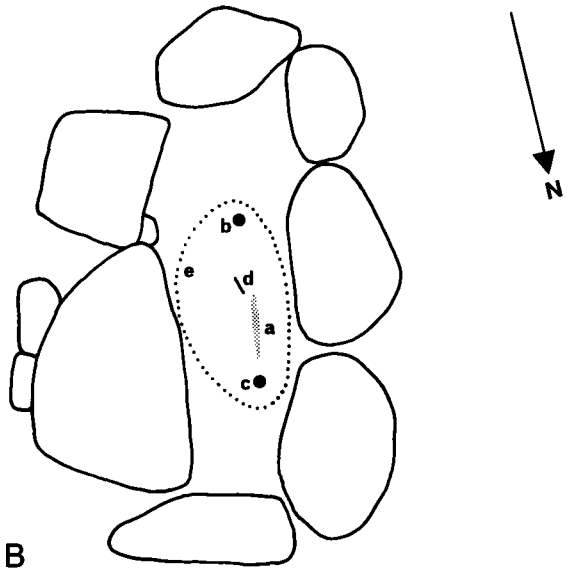
The grave- goods place this grave in Period III of the EBA (see below).

SECONDARY GRAVES

Grave 4: Immediately to the west of the stone cist from Period III , the remains of an urn grave were found. Most of the grave had been removed by the plough, and only the bottom and some loose sherds from the urn were found together with a small concentration of cremated bones. The urn had originally stood on six stones, and it was inserted into the barrow subsequent to the latter's construction. The grave can be dated to the late Bronze Age.

Grave 5: A little to the south-east of the large stone cist, a smaller one was found, dug secondarily into the third phase of the barrow. It consisted of a small oval pit, oriented NE-SW and filled with pebbles, among which stood thin limestone flags. These formed the sides and the northern end of a small cist, which measured 95 x 30 cm internally. The southern end and the lid had been re-

A



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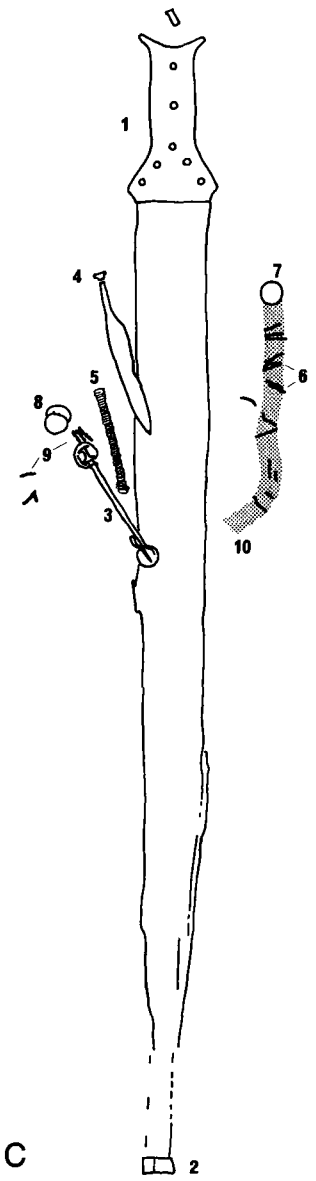

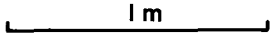

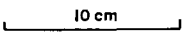

Fig. 8A–C. Grave 3 – the stone cist. A – the cist after the partial uncovering of the sheath. Seen from the north; B – plan of the cist with those parts of the grave-goods which were visible before the removal of the paraffinwax block; a – uncovered part of the sheath; b – rivet at the end of the hilt; c – ferrule; d – fibula; e – cremated bones; C – the objects from the grave *in situ*. Based on an outline drawing after an x-ray photo of the paraffin block, in combination with observations made during the excavation by Viborg Amts Conservation Unit, Skive. 1 – sword and sheath; 2 – ferrule; 3 – fibula; 4 – knife; 5 – large gold spiral; 6 – small gold spirals; 7–8 – double studs; 9 – small bronze spirals; 10 – traces of leather.

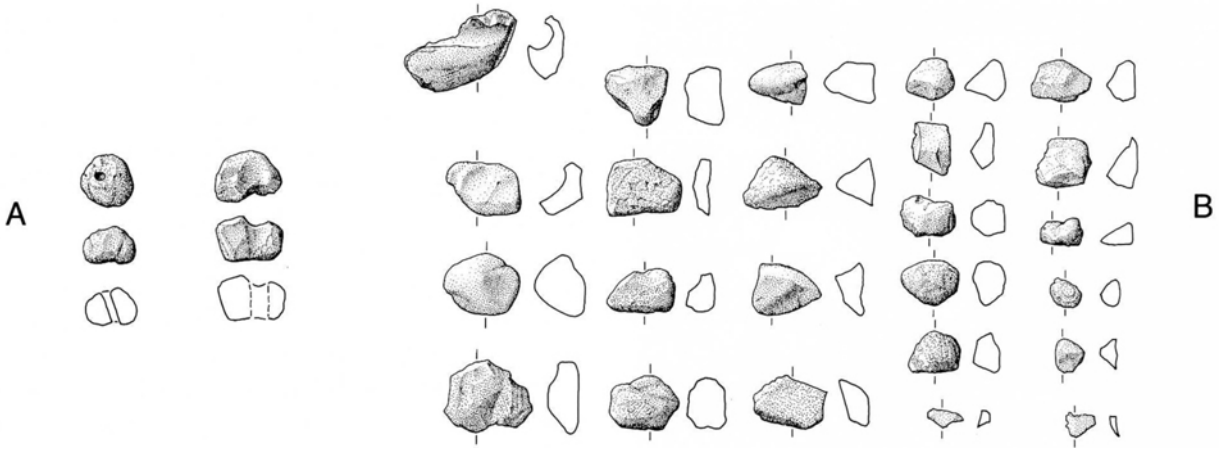

Fig. 9 A–B. Objects from grave 1. Th. Bredsdorff del. 2:3.

moved by ploughing. The construction was so weak that it could hardly be called a proper cist. The grave contained cremated bones, a pair of bronze tweezers, and some fragments of bronze, probably a razor. The grave can be dated to Period IV of the late Bronze Age (5).

THE ARTIFACTS

Grave 1 – the child's grave

Amber beads (fig. 9A): One small, irregular, rounded amber bead. Diameter 1,1 cm, diameter of the hole 1,5 mm. Half of one irregular, rounded amber bead. Diameter 1,3 cm, diameter of hole 3 mm. Possibly unfinished.

Unworked amber (fig. 9B): 20 small pieces of unworked amber, up to 2,6 cm in length.

Urn (fig. 10): A large four-partite vessel, 42 cm high. Diameter of rim 29,5 cm, largest diameter 38,5 cm, diameter of base 17 cm.

The rim is rounded, but rather flattish, and slightly everted, followed by a sloping shoulder and a convex belly. The lowest part of the side is concave, thereby accentuating the base which cannot, however, be described as an actual foot. The bottom is flat.

The clay is very coarsely tempered with granite, the large grains of which are visible on the inside surface as small lumps around which the surface of the clay has cracked slightly. The outside surface is smeared with a coarse coating also tempered with large granite grains.

Grave 2 – the woman's grave

Fibula (fig. 11A): Fibula of bronze, 12,9 cm long. The fibula has a broad head, flat on the reverse side, with a shape which can be characterized as a double hour-glass. It has 3 crests, the one at the end being a little shorter than the other two. The end of the head is flat. At the point where the bow enters the head it widens, almost creating a third "hour-glass", but without a distinct crest.

Fig. 10. The urn from grave 1. Frank Svendsen fot.

The head is unornamented apart from a faint line on the outer crest. The bow is rhombic in section, and it is ornamented with double lines on the two surfaces which face outward. At both ends the bow becomes round in section and continues in two coils, 1,4 cm in diameter, each coil with 6 turns.

Awls (fig. 11B): Two bronze awls with wooden shafts. In both cases the point had broken off, leaving a small piece of the awl sitting in the shaft. Both shafts are of wood and very well preserved. One (fig. 11B, left) is made of a split willow twig and has a conical shape, measuring 4,9 x 1 cm. Fine lines can be seen on the surface, which may possibly have been made with a sharp knife. They seem, however, to be random scratches rather than ornamentation. The other shaft (fig. 11B, right) is cylindrical, measuring 4,3 x 1,2 cm and made of a whole hazel twig (6). The diameter of both bronze awls is 2 mm, the section of the part outside the shaft is round while that of the part in the shaft is flat.

Armring (fig. 11C): Armring of bronze, in several pieces and partly damaged by fire. The original diameter was probably around 8 cm. The ring is round in section with a diameter of 3 mm. The outside is diagonally-grooved, but it cannot be determined whether the ring has had smooth ends.

Bracelet (fig. 11D). The bracelet consists of:

6 round glass beads, measuring between 10 and 12,5 mm in diameter. The diameter of the hole is 3 – 4,5 mm. Three beads are blue and two greenish-blue, the latter were probably originally blue like the others. The last bead is marbled in dark and light green. Unlike the others, this bead is not translucent.

10 small bronze spirals, mostly in a rather damaged state. Original length 10 – 11 mm, diameter 3,5 mm.

One tubular bead of deer antler 13 mm long, 9 mm in diameter. Diameter of hole 5 mm.

The latter was found on a double string, probably of leather (6), together with one of the glass beads, and separated from it by one of the bronze spirals. Three of the spirals were also found together, two on two parallel strings which were gathered in the third spiral. The remainder of the beads and spirals were found distributed randomly among the cremated bones, but there can be no doubt that they belonged to the same object, probably a bracelet.

Knife (fig. 11E): Single-edged knife of bronze, 16,3 cm long. The blade is curved, 11,2 cm long, with a concave edge, and it is 3 mm thick at the back. Two shoulders mark the transition to a flat, rectangular tang, 5,1 cm long, 8 mm broad, and 3 mm thick. The end is broken off, but may have been slightly wider than the rest of the tang. The knife is unornamented.

Amber bead in pitch inlay (fig. 11F): One cylindrical amber bead, 12 mm in diameter, 9 mm long. Diameter of hole 3 mm. The bead is well-made with a smooth surface. Bronze remains can be seen in the hole, and the bead is mounted in a conical lump of dark pitch, 31 mm in diameter, which appears to be made out of coiled strips (7). The hole in the bead continues through the pitch which, together with the traces of bronze, is consistent with a bronze rivet having been passed through both. The piece probably served as inlay in some object of organic material which has not been preserved.

Small pieces of pitch sealant (fig. 11G): One piece and two small flakes, seemingly of the same dark pitch as mentioned above. The small piece has a triangular section, is c. 5 mm broad, and represents an arc, 2 cm long, of a small circle which was originally c. 5 cm in diameter. On the two short sides there are closely-spaced, parallel marks in the surface which resemble impressions of woodgrain. Other marks seem to come from a seam where two pieces were sewn together. The two small flakes show the same wood impressions with a 1 mm groove (6).

There can be no doubt that the pieces served as sealant inside a small rounded box made of thin wooden strips which were sewn together. The arc piece of sealant was used at the transition from the bottom to the side, the small flakes are from the overlap where the side was joined. The box may have been circular with a diameter of approximately 5 cm, or it may have been oval, in which case the length cannot be determined. The height was at least 3 cm.

Ceramic vessel (fig. 11H): Small ceramic vessel. 5,5 cm high, diameter of rim 4,5 cm, largest diameter 6 cm, diameter of base 1,5 cm. The rim is rounded and everted, followed by a sloping, slightly concave shoulder, a rounded belly-turn with three short vertical ridges and a convex belly. The bottom is flat. The vessel has had one handle, fastened on the rim and the belly-turn respectively. The handle was broken off before deposition in the

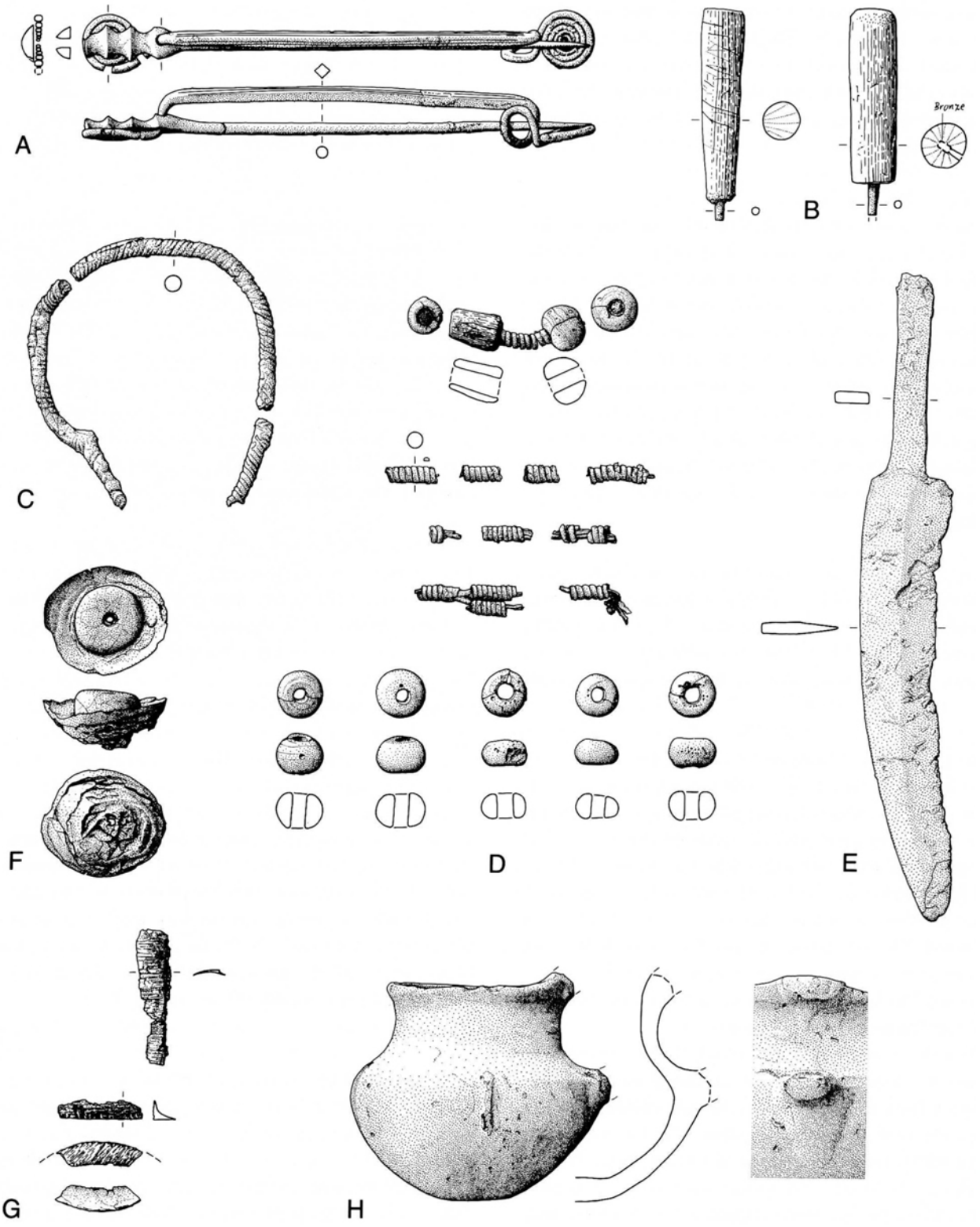

Fig. 11A–H. Objects from grave 2. Th. Bredsdorff del. 2:3.

grave, but judging from the fragments it may have been extended above the rim. The remains of the handle are rather worn, indicating that it was broken off some time prior to deposition. The clay is finely tempered and well fired, with a smooth, glossy surface. The colour seems originally to have been a dark grey. The vessel had originally contained the two awls, fig. 11B.

Urn (fig. 12): Large bi-partite vessel, 53 cm high. Diameter at the rim c.33 cm, greatest diameter 41 cm, diameter of base 18 cm. The rim is flat and neither everted nor inverted. The vessel has a slightly bi-conical form with a rounded belly-turn placed c.38 cm above the bottom. The bottom is flat. The clay is very coarsely tempered with granite, and badly fired, which gives it a great tendency to crumble. The outside surface is covered with a smeared coating, over most of which there are vertically-running, parallel lines. Part of the rim and upper part were destroyed by a falling stone.

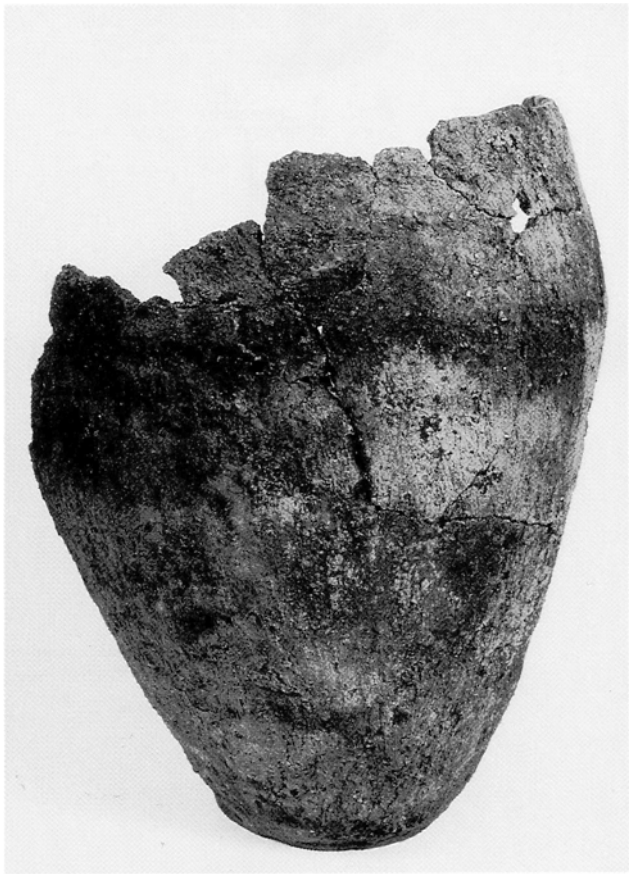

Fig. 12. The urn from grave 2. Frank Svendsen fot.

Grave 3 – the man's grave

Flange-hilted sword (fig. 13A): Flange-hilted sword of bronze, 57 cm long, original length including the pommel c. 61 cm, with remains of a hilt and pommel made of horn (6). The sword is very well preserved apart from the extreme end which has been broken off. The grip is 5 cm long with flanges 7 mm high. There are 3 rivets in the grip and 4 in the hilt-plate, another rivet was found at the end of the hilt. This originally fastened the pommel, and remains of horn can still be seen on it. The sides of the hilt are slightly curved, the shoulders sloping. The blade is 49 cm long and 42 mm broad immediately below the hilt. It has a broad, flat rib and no ornamentation. The edge is sharp and shows no visible signs of use or wear. On the surface of the blade can be seen short hairs sticking to the bronze – arising from a skin-lining of the sheath.

Sheath (fig 13B): The wooden sheath of the sword described above. The sheath extended beyond the point of the sword, its total length being 58 cm including the ferrule. The extension had almost completely disintegrated, the preserved length of the sheath being 46 cm. The total length of the sword and sheath was originally 65,6 cm.

The surface of the sheath is plain and shows no ornamentation. Remains of leather with diagonally-running hairs on the outer surface and remains of skin and hairs on the inside at the edge, together with the hairs adhering to the sword, show that the sheath was both lined and covered with skin. The sheath is made of hazel wood (6). The extended part was rhombic in section, corresponding with the ferrule in which the end of the sheath still sits. Immediately above the ferrule a 6 mm broad lashing, probably of plant fibres, can be seen (8).

The ferrule is made of bronze, has a rhombic shape and measures 13 x 14 x 8 mm. The side is ornamented with fine, horizontal grooves. At the end there is an aperture, 8 mm broad, where the extended part of the sheath ends.

Knife (fig. 13C): Small, single-edged knife, 9,9 cm long. The blade is curved with a concave edge and 4 parallel ridges across the upper end. The grip is oval in section and is quite plain. It ends in a flat, rhombic, rounded knob. The edge is partly damaged.

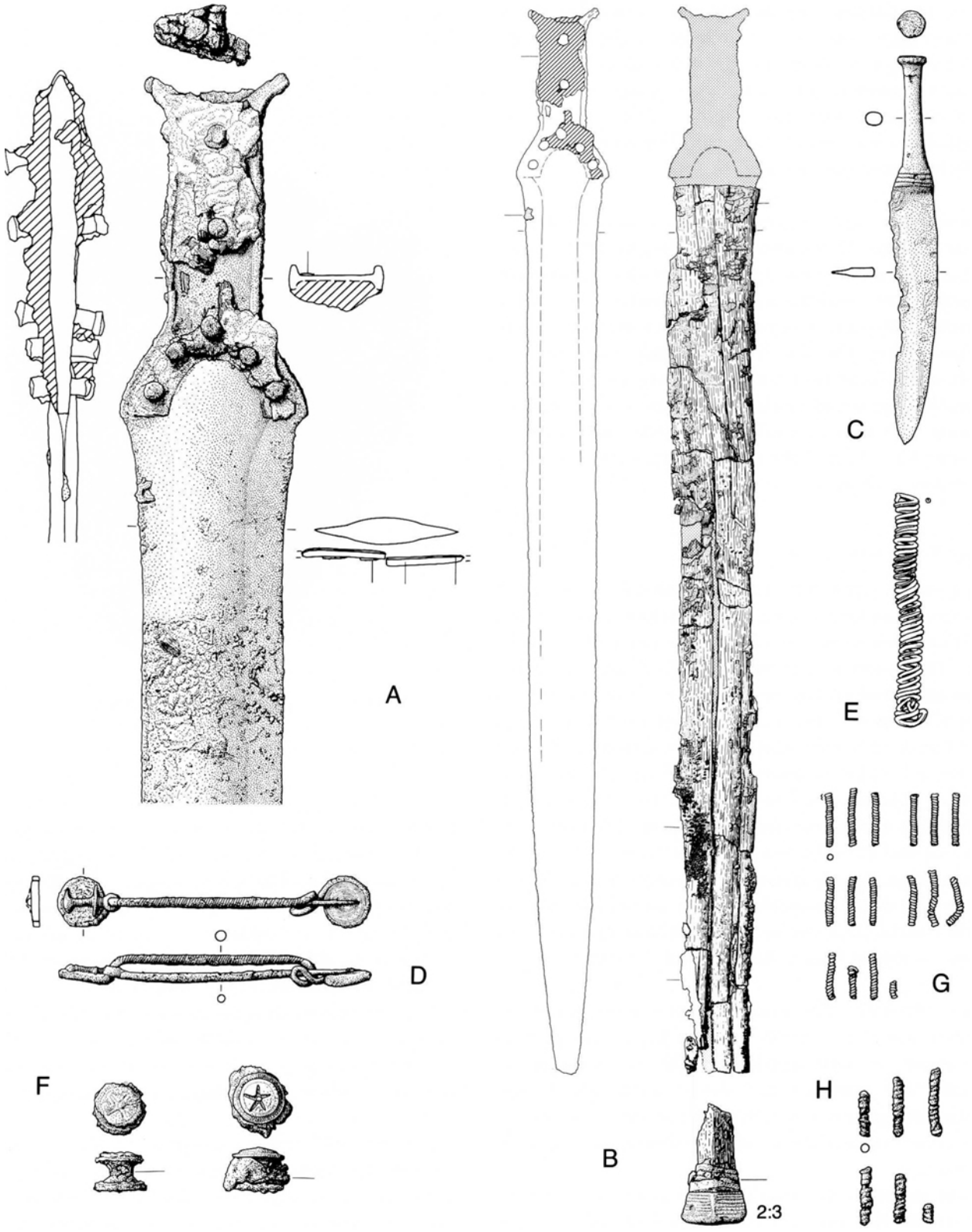

Fig. 13A–H. Objects from grave 3. Th. Bredsdorff del. A, C–H 2:3; B 1:3.

Fibula (fig. 13D): Fibula of bronze, 8 cm long, with a head shaped like a double cross. The bow is round in section and diagonally grooved. The spirals are beaten flat with the windings still visible, diameter 13 mm.

Spiral of gold (fig. 13E): Spiral roll of gold wire, 6 cm long, 0,6 cm in diameter. The wire is double, and it is broken at one end. Weight 10 g.

Double studs (fig. 13F): Two almost identical double studs of bronze, one well preserved, the other rather corroded. Diameter 13 mm, height 11 mm. Both have one slightly-domed disc ornamented with a 5-rayed star surrounded by a double row of beading. The other disc is flat and unornamented. Remains of leather can be seen on both studs (8), and they have belonged to a leather belt (see below).

Small gold spirals (fig. 13G): 15 small spiral rolls of gold wire, c. 14 mm long and 2 mm in diameter, (some of them in fragments). The spirals are made of a single wire with a D-shaped cross-section and are tightly- coiled, forming a small tube (8). The gold spirals belong to the same belt as the studs (see below).

Small bronze spirals (fig. 13H): 6 small spirals of bronze wire, c.14 mm long and 2 mm in diameter. All rather corroded and several are fragmented. Like the gold spirals, they are made of tightly-coiled single wire. The bronze spirals belong to the same belt as the gold spirals and the studs. Inside the bronze spirals are remains of organic material, possibly leather (6).

The two studs, the 15 small gold spirals, and the 6 bronze spirals belong to a leather belt of which only traces were found. The gold spirals lay in 5 groups of 3 at intervals of c.1 cm, along one side of the sword, in continuation of one of the double studs. In the same area traces of leather could be seen in a line corresponding exactly with the spirals and the stud (8). The bronze spirals were found on the opposite side of the sword in 2 groups of 3, together with the other stud on which, as mentioned above, traces of leather could be seen (fig. 8c). The spirals, which are rather delicate, must have been sewn on to the belt.

DISCUSSION

Grave 1 – the child's grave

The grave- goods do not provide a precise dating for this grave, as neither the amber beads nor the urn can be dated accurately at the moment. However, the rich woman's grave from phase II gives a *terminus ante quem* for this grave, making sure that it cannot be later than Period II of the EBA.

The *urn* (fig. 10) is distinctly EBA in character as regards the temper and the way the latter shows in the surface (9). The author is not acquainted with any exact parallels in the Danish material, but the urn is very similar to a find from Gottrupel, Kr. Schleswig-Flensburg – also an urn grave, presumably from Period II (Aner & Kersten 1973–1990, vol. 4 cat. 2220H). Unfortunately only the lower part of this urn is preserved. It does show, however, great similarity to the urn from Egshvile as regards proportions and temper. The urn from Gottrupel, however, shows no smeared coating. It contained a dagger blade with a trapezoid hilt-plate and two rivet holes, plus the burnt bones of one, possibly two, adults and a child. The dagger blade had been damaged by fire. (Aner & Kersten, op.cit. p.28). The Egshvile urn, therefore, is consistent with a date in the early Bronze Age, probably Period II.

There were no indications in the stratigraphy of a great length of time having elapsed between the burial of the child and the woman. On the contrary, the absence of a vegetation-layer on the surface of the barrow of phase 1 and the incorporation of so small a mound in a later burial point to a close connection, both chronologically and possibly socially. On the other hand, pollen analysis of samples from the fill and the soil beneath the barrow showed a marked change in pollen frequencies from phase 1 to phase 2 and 3, showing that some years must have elapsed between the two burials (Andersen 1991 and personal comm.).

The *amber beads* and the *pieces of unworked amber* (fig. 9 A–B) cannot be dated with any accuracy, but amber beads of a corresponding type are occasionally found in small numbers in graves from the EBA, some of them children's graves (e.g. Aner & Kersten 1973–1990, vol. 5 cat. 2675B and vol. 6 cat. 3017C). More unusual are the 20 pieces of unworked amber also found in the grave. Unworked pieces of amber, singly or in small numbers, are sometimes found in graves from the EBA. The most famous instances of this being the finds where the amber

pieces were found in leather pouches together with small bronze objects such as razors and tweezers and, in some cases, with objects that have presumably had magical uses (see Lomborg 1957, p. 177ff).

The occurrence of 20 pieces of amber in a grave is, to the author's knowledge, unparalleled in Danish finds from the early Bronze Age, the nearest example is a Period III grave on the island of Amrum, where 10 unworked pieces of amber, between 0,9 and 2,7 cm in length, were found in a man's grave together with several small bronze objects. Judging from the available information, the pieces of amber and the bronze objects appear to have lain in a bag or pouch of which no trace remained (Aner & Kersten 1973–1990, vol. 5:8 and cat. 2572C, compare Lomborg 1957).

This raises the question as to whether the pieces of amber were put in the Egshvile grave as valuables or because of their supposed magical properties, as has previously been discussed by other authors (e.g. Thrane 1984, p. 19). No definitive answer can be given to this question, but the way in which the amber pieces were strewn over the urn (see above) could indicate their being in some way connected with the grave ritual (10).

Grave 2 – the woman's grave

Most important for the dating of this grave is the *fibula* with double hour-glass-shaped head and rhombic bow (fig. 11A). It belongs to the broad-headed type which characterizes the later part of Period II (Broholm 1944 vol. 2, 126).

The fibulae of this type have been studied closely by K. Randsborg (1968), who shows that they occur in western Slesvig-Holstein and the southern, western, and northwestern parts of Jutland in Period II, whereas in Period III they are replaced by cross-headed fibulae in this area. In the eastern and middle parts of Slesvig-Holstein and the eastern and northern parts of Jutland, fibulae with hour-glass-shaped head are found together with objects characteristic of Period II, as well as those belonging to Period III, but in a milieu that is contemporary with early Period III finds with cross-headed fibulae of the western parts of Jutland and Slesvig-Holstein. This latter group of broad-headed fibulae are characterized by ornamental traits suggestive of Period III, such as many ornamented ridges and a very careful workmanship with great attention to detail (Randsborg 1968, 101ff.) One such fibula was found in Thy, in a grave which can be dated to Period III (Randsborg 1968, 81 & Abb. 40).

The Egshvile fibula, on the other hand, must be dated to Period II judging from its size and the almost completely unornamented head (11). The head has a very close parallel in a grave from Sylt dated to Period II (Aner & Kersten 1973–1990, vol. 5 cat. 2664A; Randsborg 1968, 135, note 346). This fibula, however, has a flat bow ornamented with two zigzag-lines. It is interesting to note that this grave is also a cremation burial, although not an urn grave, but in a stone cist (see note 17, Aner & Kersten 1973–1990, vol. 5, 69).

The awls (fig. 11B) are of normal Bronze Age type, and although they are most often associated with male equipment, they have also been found in other women's graves from Period II (Broholm 1944, 2:123). The most famous of these is the Egtved grave, where the awl lay in a small bark-box, very much like the two awls from Egshvile which had lain in the little vessel (Brøndsted 1958, 73). The fact that there were two awls in the Egshvile grave, but no other objects normally associated with manicure etc., indicates that these awls must have been tools, probably for the working of leather, wood, and bark – very important occupations in the Bronze Age, a fact to which the graves from Egshvile also bear witness (see also Hvass in Alexandersen *et al.* 1981, 22).

It is impossible to ascertain whether the points of the awls were broken off prior to or after deposition in the grave, but the latter seems most probable, the broken-off pieces having disappeared.

The fire-damaged *armring with diagonal grooves* (fig. 11C), is chronologically somewhat ambiguous. Armrings of bronze with diagonal grooves and plain ends are a common type in women's graves from Period III (Broholm 1952 no. 290). According to K. Randsborg, however, armrings with diagonal grooves can be encountered in Central European finds older than the Urn Field Culture, contemporary with the Nordic Period II (Randsborg 1968, 122, note 323.)

As was the case with the fibula, a close parallel can be found on the island of Sylt, where a fire-damaged armring with diagonal grooves was found together with, i.a. a round-headed fibulae in a cremation grave in a stone cist from Period II. (Aner & Kersten 1973–1990, vol. 5 cat. 2705). It is striking that in both cases stylistic similarities go hand in hand with similarities in funeral-rites – in the latter case even in a detail like the fire-damaging of part of the grave-goods, which was also a feature of the Period II

urn grave from Gottrupel, mentioned above (12). In conclusion it can be said that the presence of the armring does not change the over-all dating of the grave to Period II (confirmed by K.Randsborg, pers. comm.).

Glass beads (fig. 11D) are not very common in graves the EBA, but they do occur both in Period II and III, mostly in women's graves and often in combination with small bronze spirals and beads of other materials, mostly amber (Thrane 1962, 93 and notes). From finds in inhumation graves it can be seen that both of these have been used as necklaces, e.g. in a grave from Skrydstrup (Aner & Kersten 1973–1990, vol. 7 cat. 3521D) and in bracelets. The most famous example of this is the oak coffin grave from Ølby, Zealand, where one dark blue glassbead, two amber beads, and several bronze spirals were found in the region corresponding to the upper arm (Boye 1896, pl. XXVI) (13). In the Lüneburg area, glass beads, together with small bronze spirals, were often used in necklaces (Piesker 1958).

The graves from Skrydstrup and Ølby are both of Period II date, and they show that composite jewellery with glass beads can be found in eastern Denmark as well as in Jutland, although the distribution of EBA glass beads in Denmark is centered on south-east Jutland (see map in Sprockhoff 1961). In Thy a similar bracelet, but with smaller beads of a light blue-green colour, has been found in a rich woman's grave from Period III (Bech 1981).

Nothing can be said about the provenance of the glass beads at the moment as they have not been analysed, but there can be no doubt that they are imported.

The *bronze knife* (fig. 11E) is of an unusual type to which the author knows no parallel in the Danish material. The fact that it has two shoulders at the transition from blade to tang links it with the single-edged knives from Period II (Broholm 1944, vol. 2, pl.18), and distinguishes it from the tanged knives of Period III which are usually ornamented, and in which the tang follows the line of the back (Broholm 1944, vol. 2, pl. 29, 6–7).

The *amber bead in pitch inlay* (fig. 11F) is another object to which the Danish material does not seem to offer any parallels. As mentioned above, it probably served as an inlay in some object made of organic material – maybe wood or bone which has now disappeared, just as was the case with the little box made of wooden strips mentioned earlier of which the only remnants are the three small pieces of *pitch sealant* (fig. 11G). Similar fragments and even whole rings of sealant showing impressions of wood are known from a small number of Bronze Age graves (Sarauw 1929, 78f.).

Sewn boxes or buckets of bark or wood are fairly common in EBA graves under conditions favourable for preservation, such as existed in the oak coffins (Boye 1896). The box from Egshvile seems to be smaller than most, but this only shows that the variations in form and size were probably much greater than is apparent in the finds to date. All the known boxes are quite plain, but it is tempting to see the amber bead as a part of the box, perhaps inlaid in a knob on the lid.

With regard to the two *ceramic vessels*, the urn is of a well-known EBA type (9), whereas the small vessel, which had contained the two awls, seems to have no Danish parallels. 3 ornamental knobs placed on the bellyturn can be seen on a vessel from Borum Eshøj (Broholm 1944, 2, pl. 24:8), but these are round knobs, not vertical ridges, and the vessel from Borum Eshøj has no handles. Taking into consideration the lack of parallels and the unusually careful workmanship, it is possible that the small vessel from Egshvile was imported (K. Randsborg, pers. comm.).

In conclusion it can be said that grave 2 contained the remains and the grave-goods of an adult woman of high social status, buried sometime during the second half of Period II of the EBA.

Grave 3 – the man's grave

The objects in grave 3 (fig. 13A–H) are typical of male graves from Period III of the EBA : The *flange-hilted sword*, belonging to Sprockhoff's type IIa, the *elongated sheath* with the small *rhombic ferrule* together with the smaller bronze-objects – the *cross-headed fibula*, the small *single-edged knife*, and the *double studs* – are known from many finds and with some variety often occur together, constituting a warrior's equipment typical of the period (Broholm 1944, 1, e.g. grave 1283, 1347, 1464, 1622, 1692). In most cases, however, one or more of the objects are missing. The Egshvile grave is therefore richer than most – a fact which is emphasized by the occurrence of gold in the grave in the form of one large and 15 small gold spirals from the belt. Collectively, these finds make it one of the richest EBA graves from Thy.

The function of the *large gold spiral* cannot be determined with certainty. It lay between the knife and the fibula, the orientation following that of the knife, but it seems to have been worn separately, maybe on a string of

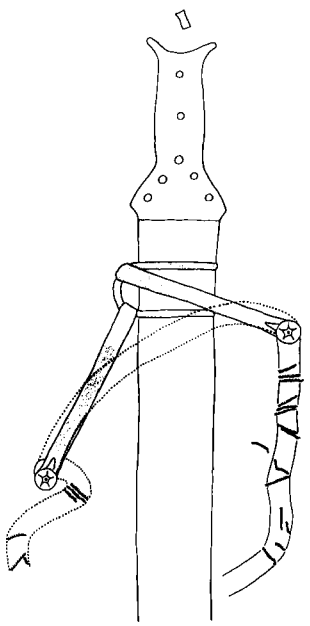

Fig. 14. Reconstruction of the sword hanging in the grave. The position of the metal objects are taken from the outline drawing of an x-ray photo of the objects in situ, cf. fig. 8C. The outline of the remains of the leather belt with the gold spirals is taken from the same figure. Originally the belt was probably at least 1,4 cm broad, corresponding with the length of the spirals. Stipling indicates a possible continuation of the belt, based on the position of the metal objects. Hatching, reconstruction of sword-hanging.

organic material. The one broken end may be the result of small pieces having been broken off as payment (cf. Lomborg 1957, 153) (14).

As regards the 15 *small gold spirals*, they have, as mentioned above, belonged to a leather belt to which the *6 small bronze spirals* and the *2 double studs* also belonged. The spirals occurred in two rows on either side of the sword, with a double stud at the end of each row. In the rows, the spirals were in groups of three with regular intervals, and under the gold spirals, traces of leather could be seen in a breadth corresponding to the length of the spirals, c. 1,4 cm. The length of the decorated belt or part of a belt cannot be determined exactly. Traces of the belt itself could not be followed very far beyond the gold spirals, neither could it be seen on the other side of the sword in connection with the bronze spirals (8) (cf. fig. 8C).

The grouping of the spirals and the studs shows that the two studs were an integral part of the belt, which probably carried the sword, corresponding well with the many finds in which a sword is found together with two or more studs (Broholm, 1944, vol. 1 graves cited above, Müller 1909, p. 97).

The question is then: How was the Egshvile belt worn, and how was the sheath fastened ? In the attempt to solve this problem, another find comes to our aid – a rich man's grave from Period III at Hvidegård, Zealand (Aner & Kersten 1973–1990, vol. 1 cat. 399; Herbst 1848). Like the Egshvile grave, this is also a cremation grave in a stone cist. It was excavated as long ago as 1845, but was very well documented according to the standard of the time (Herbst 1848). The grave contained, among other things, a sword in a very well preserved sheath.

On the upper part of the sheath there was a leather loop in which there was a narrow leather thong, c. 9 mm broad, which had originally been c. 20 cm long and had been bent double (all measurements are taken from the drawings in Aner & Kersten). This thong was fastened with a small double bronze stud to a broader leather strap – the belt itself, c. 15–18 mm broad, of which a 36 cm length was preserved. Another identical stud fastened the remains of another thong to a detached leather strap of the same breadth as the belt and no doubt a part of it. A small piece of this second thong was preserved in the loop of the sheath. It was interpreted during the excavation as the remains of an earlier hanging which had been torn off and substituted by a new one (Herbst 1848, 344. Visible on the drawing in Aner & Kersten, but not in Herbst). The fact that the sheath actually hung from two straps is confirmed by another find – a dagger sheath from Magleby, which has two loops of bronze on the upper part of the sheath (Müller 1909, 95 and fig. 101; Broholm 1952 nr. 247).

Returning to the Egshvile find it is striking that the pair of studs lie beside the upper part of the sheath with a distance to the sheath and each other that fits exactly with them having fastened the sheath to the belt by way of two thongs running through a loop on the side of the sheath (fig. 14), exactly as was the case at Hvidegård. The question remains as to how the belt itself was fastened. Whereas the Hvidegård find has a third, larger stud, which may have fastened the belt itself, nothing like that was present in the grave from Egshvile. It is unlikely that the small bronze studs also served to close the belt, but there may have been a third stud made of organic material (now disappeared), as was the case in some of the oak coffins (Boye 1896, 162).

Usually the sword hangings of the EBA are reconstructed as a diagonal belt across the chest, on the basis of

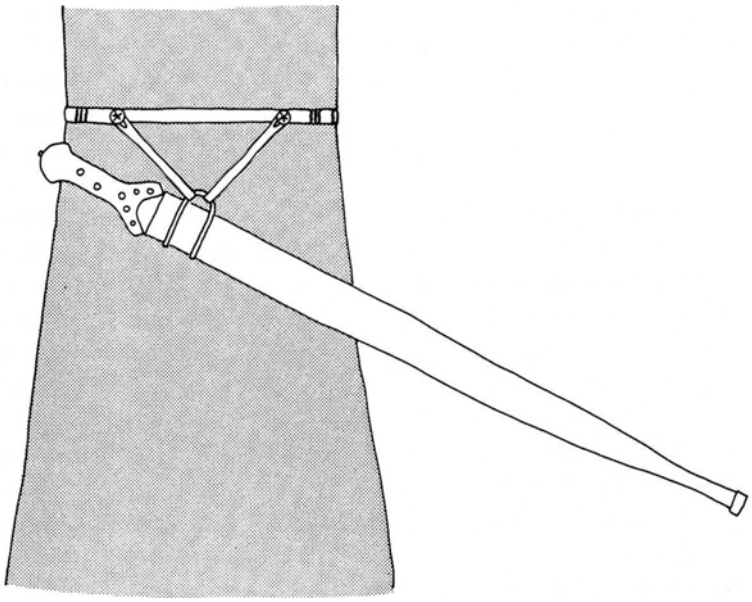

Fig. 15. Reconstruction of the way in which the Egshvile sword was probably worn. The angle between the body and the sword corresponds well with the rock-carvings and the carvings in the grave of Kivik, Scania.

the young man's grave from Borum Eshøj (Boye 1896, 56). This is not necessarily the only solution, however, and the way in which the sheaths from Hvidegård, and probably also Egshvile, are fastened is more compatible with a conventional belt round the waist (see reconstruction fig. 15). The placing of the gold and bronze spirals close to the studs also points to a conventional belt rather than a diagonal belt, where the obvious place for decoration would be across the breast, not on the lower part. It is likely that this kind of belt and hanging were also used in the other Period III graves with corresponding pairs of small double studs of bronze (Broholm 1944 vol. 1, e.g. grave 1347, 1464, 1622). This design may have been more widespread than is evident from the graves – one or both studs may have been made of organic materials and therefore have disappeared. Instead of the studs, two tutuli may have had the same function (cf. Fischer 1977 with ref.).

The spiral-decoration on the belt is unusual, but a few other finds of small gold spiral rolls are known from Jutland (Broholm 1944, vol. 1, 232–233 nos 53, 108, 140, 158. Vol. 2, 169). The best parallel to the Egshvile grave is another Period III grave from Nustrup parish, Haderslev county (Aner & Kersten 1973–1990, vol. 7 cat. 3487). A cremation grave in a stone cist contained a flange-hilted sword, an armring of gold, fragments of several small bronze objects, i.a. a fibula, a needle, and a small single-edged knife, plus 37 small gold spirals of the same type as those from Egshvile, only shorter. They were found lying on a stone, and nothing can be said about the way in which they were worn. There were no double studs in the grave, but as it was excavated by a layman in 1884, and considering the very damaged condition of the small bronzes in the grave, this can hardly be regarded as conclusive (Aner & Kersten 1973–1990, vol. 7, 56). What is obvious is the similarity in the cultural milieu and the social status of the deceased.

The only other grave with numerous small gold spirals known to the author is a find from Bække parish, Anst county (Müller 1909, 96; Broholm 1944, vol. 1 no. 2304; Aner & Kersten 1973–1990, vol. 8 cat. 3788). This grave contained 21 small gold spirals, two double studs of bronze, and a gold spiral of normal type, probably a finger ring.

These finds show that the occurrence of numerous small gold spirals is not an isolated phenomenon in the Egshvile grave. Both parallels mentioned come from the southern part of Jutland, which may not be a coincidence. Müller (1909, 96) mentions that small spiral rolls of gold and bronze seem to be more numerous in northern Germany, where there is an example of their having been used for a decoration of the same type as in Egshvile : In

small groups of four, forming small squares and placed in rows with small intervals – only in this case they were fastened to cloth.

Funeral rites and grave forms

The introduction of cremation burials into EBA Denmark is traditionally seen as a gradual process – a few cremation graves occurring in Period II, with an increasing frequency in Period III during which cremation graves rapidly became numerous, at first in long cists or coffins like those of inhumation graves, later in smaller cists or coffins, and finally in urns (e.g. Brøndsted 1958, 106 f). The urn graves follow the same pattern, only with a certain time lag: A sparse occurrence in Period III, developing into a common phenomenon in Period IV.

Excavating the barrow at Egshvile, therefore, made one feel a little like Alice in Wonderland. Things were turned upside down – in the center two urn graves from Period II, followed by a "normal" stone cist from Period III as the last EBA grave in the barrow.

If we compare the two urn graves from Egshvile, it is obvious that grave 1, the child's grave, is rather unorthodox compared to the more normal urn in grave 2. Actually, grave 1 could be described as combining elements from normal EBA cremation graves with the use of a ceramic vessel as a receptacle for the bones.

A small stone cist of very similar type was found in a barrow at Villerup in southern Thy (15). This grave, datable to Period II/early Period III contained the cremated bones of a ten month old child, and it was the primary grave in a barrow that was 4,1 m in diameter in its oldest phase, later achieving the dimensions of a "normal" EBA barrow. Among the later graves was a man's grave with a sword and a bronze pin- a cremation grave in a stone cist from Period III. The similarities to the barrow at Egshvile are striking, and show that Egshvile is firmly rooted in the local EBA milieu, the only exotic trait being the urn, which had obviously presented some practical difficulties at the time of the funeral.

The woman's grave, grave 2, on the other hand, represents the urn grave in a more typical form – a large vessel with cremated bones and grave-goods, set around with stones and covered with a flat stone. Only the rich grave-goods show affinity to contemporary inhumation graves. It may be worth noting that the bones of both grave 1 and 2 were rather badly cremated compared to grave 3 and other Period III cremation graves.

The two urns are – as far as published material goes – the oldest in the Danish EBA. The only other Period II urn graves from the Nordic EBA known to the author are 1: The grave from Gottrupel, Slesvig, mentioned above, and 2: A grave from Hammah, Kr. Stade in North-West Germany (16) (Pantzer 1984). It is impossible on the basis of these four occurrences to determine whether they should be seen as the beginning of a continuous process introducing the urn-grave custom into the Nordic EBA, but it is worth noticing that another trait connected with cremation graves in a more developed form also occurs in Period II, namely a marked shortening of the cist or coffin (17).

All three EBA graves from Egshvile contained animal bones among the cremated bones – from a calf, a lamb, and an unidentified larger animal respectively. The species of animals clearly show that the bones represent food – either provisions as part of the grave-goods, or the remains of a sacrifice or a ritual meal that took place at the funeral. Viewing the bones as part of the grave-goods seems the most reasonable interpretation, but this does not necessarily mean that the rest of the animal was not partaken of by the living in a ritual meal. Unfortunately, few analyses of bones from Danish cremation graves have as yet been carried out, compared with the vast amount of material available. Accordingly, it cannot be determined how widespread a phenomenon the occurrence of animal bones in EBA cremation graves is (18).

Cultural connections

In their work on The Prehistory of the North Friesian Islands, K. Kersten and P. La Baume (1958) repeatedly stress the close cultural similarities in the EBA between these islands and the former Thisted county, comprising Thy, Mors, and Thyholm (e.g. pages 34, 37, 47, and 58). Several details in the graves from Egshvile bear this out (see above).

Kersten and La Baume stress the importance of long distance exchange for the thriving communities of these densely populated islands. Thy was likewise extremely densely populated in Period III. It is possible that both the islands and Thy were stations along the same exchange route – going along the West Coast of Jutland, through Skibsted Fjord into the Limfjord, from where both Norway and eastern Denmark could be reached by water (Strand Petersen 1976).

Several elements in the finds from Egshvile also show

connections to South Jutland and North Germany – the glass beads in grave 2 and the small gold and bronze spirals in grave 3 are instances of this. Maybe these connections are also mirrored in the early urn graves from Thy, Slesvig, and Northwest Germany.

Imported goods such as the glass beads and perhaps also the small vessel from grave 2 are indicators of contacts going further south into Central Europe.

A family monument ?

The graves from the barrow at Egshvile contain many elements that shed additional light on different sides of EBA society and material culture in Thy specifically, and in Denmark generally. One aspect, necessarily of a rather speculative nature, has not yet been touched upon, namely the relations – social and personal – between the three persons buried in the EBA graves. The presence of a child, an adult woman, and an adult man naturally leads to the question, as to whether this might be a small family. Were the man and woman husband and wife, and was the child their son?

In the light of the datings of the graves, and the respective ages of the man and the woman, the first assumption does not seem very likely, whereas the woman and the child may have been mother and son, and in some other way related to the man in grave 3. Of course this remains purely hypothetical, but in any case it seems reasonable to assume that they all came from the same influential (chieftain's ?) family.

Pollen analysis

In addition to the graves, the barrow at Egshvile and the soil beneath it also provide important information about the EBA landscape and subsistence economy in this part of Thy. These aspects are dealt with by Sv. Th. Andersen in a separate article in this volume.

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NOTES

1. The barrow has no. 12 in Vester Vandet parish, Hillerslev district, Thisted county. Jour.nr. THY 2554, RAS no. P 2288/89. The excavation was financed by Rigsantikvarens Arkæologiske Sekretariat and carried out by the author and Peter M.D. Jensen, Sjørring.
   Preliminary accounts of the finds have been published in Historisk Årbog for Thy og Vester Hanherred 1989 and 1990.
   The drawings in this article of the objects from the three EBA graves were financed by a grant from the Danish Research Council for the Humanities.
   The english text was corrected by David Robinson.
2. The identifications of the cremated human bones from the three EBA graves were carried out by Verner Alexandersen, The Panum Institute, Copenhagen, and lic. med. Pia Bennike.
3. The identifications of the cremated animal bones from the three EBA graves were carried out by Knud Rosenlund, Zoologisk Museum, Copenhagen.
4. The grave- goods in grave 3 were taken up in a paraffin wax block and excavated at Viborg Amts Conservation Unit, Skive.
5. The secondary graves from the late Bronze Age are not considered further in this article.
6. The identification of organic material from the three EBA graves were carried out by Claus Malmros, The National Museum, Natural Sciences Research Unit, Copenhagen.
7. According to Claus Malmros, the dark material commonly used as inlay on swords, studs etc. should also be described as pitch, cf. Sarauw (1929).
8. Based on a report from Ove Madsen, Viborg Amts Conservation Unit, Skive.
9. According to a lecture by mag.art. Marianne Rasmussen at Krabbesholm Højskole, Skive, on the 24.01.1990.
10. In an EGK grave from Skjoldborg, Thy, small unworked pieces of amber were found mixed with the fill over the coffin (Bech & Olsen 1985, 42).
11. Personal communication by Klaus Randsborg who is thanked for illuminating discussions about the finds.
12. Not too much importance should be attached to this circumstance, however, as it seems to occur sporadically both in Period II and Period III, see Kunwald (1954, 95) and Thrane (1984, 134).
13. A bracelet with 8 amber beads, 1 blue glass bead, and 4 bronze spirals was found in a rich man's grave at Ry near Skanderborg (Fischer 1977).
14. A gold spiral of the same type, found on the island of Falster and possibly part of a hoard from Period III, can be seen in Aner & Kersten (1973–1990, vol. 3 cat. 1598). This, too, seems to have been broken at one end.
15. THY 1696. Villerup, no. 86, Vestervig parish, Refs herred. Report by Per Orla Thomsen and Jakob Vedsted in Thisted Museum.
16. This grave contained parts of a fibula with flat bow ornamented with concentric circles (the outline of the bow following that of the circles), a pair of tweezers with thick ends, and a dagger blade with a rounded hilt plate and two rivets. The urn is very similar to a vessel from a Period II grave at Thorup, Ribe amt (Pantzer 1984).
17. E.g. a Period II cremation grave from Lækjær, Thy (THY 1492, sb.nr. 1, Nors parish, Hillerslev district) with a beltplate and a dagger in a stone cist measuring 1,6 x 0,5 m internally, and a similar stone cist, 1,5 x 0,55 m internally, from Kampen, Sylt, containing the fibula with double hour-glass-shaped head mentioned above (p. 120) and a small tanged knife (Aner & Kersten 1973–1990, vol. 5 cat. 2664A). Lomborg (1964, 28) cites even smaller coffins, but of these, the ones from Skåninggårde and Stenløse are from Period III (comp. Aner & Kersten, 1973–1990, vol. 3 cat. 129 +276).

18. Lomborg (1964) cites an example of burnt animal bones lying beside an uncremated body (p. 24).
In the late Bronze Age Graves in Lusehøj, there was only one instance of animal bones being found among the cremated bones – part of the leg of a sheep (I.Tkocz and K.R.Jensen in Thrane 1984, 199).

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