



AKADÉMIAI KIADÓ

Acta Archaeologica
Academiae Scientiarum
Hungaricae

75 (2024) 1, 191–195

DOI:

[10.1556/072.2024.00017](https://doi.org/10.1556/072.2024.00017)

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BOOK REVIEW



Lochner, Michaela (Hrsg.), *Brandbestattung und Bronzemetallurgie. Die Urnenfelderkultur in Niederösterreich (1300–800 v. Chr.)*

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Lochner, M. (Ed.) (2021). *Brandbestattung und Bronzemetallurgie. Die Urnenfelderkultur in Niederösterreich (1300–800 v. Chr.)*. Archäologie Niederösterreichs, 5. Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Vienna. 349 pp. ISBN 978-3-7001-8276-4.

It is worth starting the review with the unusual title: *Brandbestattung und Bronzemetallurgie* [Cremation and Bronzeworking]. The subtitle specifies the topic: the book deals with the archaeological record of the Urnfield Period in Lower Austria. Therefore, the editors seem to have chosen the right main title because these are the callwords of the period in focus. When an archaeologist researching the Urnfield Culture talks to the general public about the period, it is almost certain that the questions that arise will quickly lead to a discussion about cremation burials and the vast amounts of bronze weapons and jewellery items. The same may also be observed within the interested part of the academic community, even if indirectly: a new tomb, cemetery, or bronze deposit always has a greater ‘news value’ than other finds of the period. In short, the two terms chosen for the title are a perfect introduction to this volume on the Urnfield Culture and period in Lower Austria because they send a clear message equally to the general public and the archaeological community. Each of the twelve chapters evokes a general question about which any researcher into the Late Bronze Age can speak *ad infinitum* while citing old, well-known, and new, unpublished finds he or she has discovered.

The introduction by Michaela Lochner paves the way for such a discussion. She overviews in detail the main moments in the research history of the Urnfield Period, provides reference points by presenting a summary of the relevant chronological frameworks, and provides the non-professional reader with some details of the professional jargon used by archaeologists through a collection of basic typological terms. She does this in such a light and easily accessible style that one stops worrying that the reader closes the pages for good at this point.

The order of the chapters is also unusual because it innovatively breaks with the traditional approach of presenting the Urnfield Culture through armed warriors or burials with lavish grave assemblages. It starts with describing the geographical environment, the climate, and the flora instead, creating a general context, a space in which the vast body of artefacts and knowledge can be placed. Michaela Popovtschak, Andreas G. Heiss, and Ruth Drescher-Schneider deliberately ask recurring questions to which they know the answers better than archaeologists, e.g., ‘What was the climate like in the Urnfield Period?’ or ‘What was the landscape like in the Late Bronze Age?’ They answer all these questions in a way that includes educating the reader about the difference between weather and climate; thus, by the end of the chapter, one will also understand what can be stated and what can only be hypothesised in context with the climatic and vegetation conditions of the Urnfield Period in Eastern Austria based on the available body of data.

This brings us straight to the next question: Where did Urnfield people live, and what did their homes look like? Katharina Adametz and Michaela Lochner have classified the many possible answers. The descriptions of the reconstructed building types and the excavated villages and settlement details of Urnfield communities in Lower Austria required citing analogies from the territory of the Czech Republic and Poland; however, this has only improved the volume because the lay reader would find it rather difficult to read the maps with hundreds or thousands of postholes, the results of large-scale settlement excavations in Austria, without knowing anything about of house types, masonry types, and previous

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building reconstructions. All this gives an excellent basis to present well casings, albeit it would be worth delving into the outstanding significance of wells as ‘time capsules’ in understanding the former environment and way of life. A similar feeling of incompleteness remains after the chapter that briefly describes the Lower Traisen Valley, where the authors mention that hoards and cemeteries will be discussed later but fail to do justice to the huge work and the complexity of the research needed for being able to visualise on a single map the Late Bronze Age landscape with its settlements and cemeteries. The other common settlement type of the period, hillfort settlements, is more difficult to describe in general terms because the morphology, extent and method of exploration, and diagnostic possibilities vary highly per site, leaving little space for observations that may hold for all of them. The case studies of Thunau am Kamp, Schiltern, Heidenstatt bei Limberg, Oberleiserberg, and Stillfried an der March offer a solution to this problem, demonstrating that the building history of fortifications and the evolution of the related technology may be researched through long excavation campaigns and well-designed probing and trench profiling the same way as in the case of later historical periods. A virtue of the five case studies is that they do not present the techniques of hillfort research uniformly. For example, by comparing surveys of large fortifications, one gets a tour from early maps (from the dawn of the 20th century) through aerial photographs to LiDAR surveys and, thus, a possibility to perceive the development in the related technology. It might have been worth devoting a small section to discussing what fortifications and architecture one can imagine behind the eroded forms on today’s fortified settlement archaeological sites when walking through the forests hiding them.

The next chapter, discussing the wide-ranging topics of lifestyle and exchange systems, deals with an exciting field of the era, which is but difficult to summarise briefly in a way that it remains accessible for the outsider. Daniela Kern and Michaela Lochner have approached it from the problem of how cognisable past everyday life is. A partial building in Thunau am Kamp is a good example of the rare, fortunate conditions when a building becomes destroyed quickly, and all furnishings and everyday objects remain *in situ*: the cooking pots on the open stove top, the large storage pots along the wall, and the small cutlery arranged next to the stove. Such rare situations allow one to write about the function of domestic pottery in a way that even a functional typological classification does not become a dry scientific paper. The presentation of feeding bottles, portable stoves, incense burners, pouring vessels, and butter churns shows that one can illustrate small details of daily work through hundreds of identical household ceramics pigeonholed into typological systems. This chapter presents pivotal information to a very important research question, namely, what are the differences in the amount and composition of raw materials (different kinds of metal, clay, textiles, wood, bone, and stone) available to households which are ‘visible’ to archaeologists, and where and how these were used? It is followed by an overview of the ‘processing industries’

related to the discussed raw materials, but with a noticeable dissimilarity in detailedness between the sub-chapters. Naturally, metallurgy—with casting moulds, tools, and activity zones within the settlement—has been strongly emphasised. The sub-chapter on spinning and weaving is similarly detailed, including a presentation of the related artefacts and the reconstructed technology. Compared to these, the description of the process of pottery making is less elaborate, not leading the reader through the related *chaîne opératoire* from clay mining through shaping and surface treatment to decoration and firing techniques. Also, damage, wear and tear resulting from use closely related to lifestyle, household use, repair methods, etc., should also be covered there.

Michaela Popovtschak, Andreas G. Heiss and Hans-Peter Stika drew a comprehensive and detailed picture of Bronze Age plant utilisation. The topic is difficult to present in an easily accessible style because it involves outlining a valid and transparent image compiled of a lot of individual data—and the authors of the chapter succeeded in doing that in an exemplary way. The discussion about the differences between wild and domesticated varieties of species and the possibilities of research on herbs and crop cultivation technologies is clear and easy to access. They clearly show how rare it is that the environmental conditions necessary for the persistence of archaeobotanical evidence occur and remain basically unchanged for three millennia. They also show how archaeobotanists use a suitable body of data to reconstruct grain production and processing technologies. They illustrate the topic with a case study, the analysis of the archaeobotanical records of the fortified settlements of Stillfried an der March and Thunau am Kamp, showing how unpredictable the amount of source material suitable for interpretation is in this field. While at Stillfried, even a recipe for a Bronze Age pot dish could be compiled, in the case of Thunau am Kamp, only some activity zones yielding archaeobotanical data could be identified. The other part of the chapter deals with a rarely discussed topic, the process of cultivation and harvesting, which cannot be researched in our region as one has to go for ploughing traces as far as the Netherlands and for illustrations to Sweden. The chapter concludes with an interesting but neglected topic: the research possibilities of weeds and fungal infections. More attention should be paid to this when creating models of Bronze Age ways of living; at the same time, we have very little data on to what extent weed infestation of crops or fungal infection of cereals affected the subsistence strategies of Bronze Age communities.

Those interested in the period are always astonished when realising that the majority of settlement finds are some kind of refuse, and even more amazed to discover that that refuse consists mainly of animal bones. Günther Karl Kunst went beyond the usual scientific approach that focuses on how many and what kind of animals were kept or hunted in a given locality. Accordingly, the chapter on archaeozoology presents a relationship between humans and animals as emerging from the skeletal remains of animals by presenting important data sources related to the slaughtering



and processing of animals and secondary animal products. This information is embedded in animal bone finds, making them indispensable for modelling the ways of life, the economic environment, and the accumulation strategies of Bronze Age communities. He illustrates the main message with case studies (each involving a single site), which may convince even the non-specialist reader of the pivotal importance of the ‘many broken bones’ in archaeology.

The presentation of plant and animal resources is followed by a chapter by Susanne Klemm and Peter Trebsche on how raw materials for metallurgy were obtained in the period. Although Lower Austria has never been particularly famous for mining and ore processing, the authors could link, with systematic and thorough research, the regions of Schnenberg and Semmering to extensive mining districts stretching across the Alps. Albeit finished bronze artefacts, treasures, and armed warriors represent a more frequently taken and rather effective way of educating the general public about Bronze Age metallurgy, the authors discuss the methods of mining and ore processing and the traces of both activities in a vivid and colourful style that leaves the reader with no sense of inadequacy. Reading this chapter as an archaeologist, one sees behind the text the countless days spent collecting data on the field and carrying out small excavations yielding important results of which the detailed maps have been built. In describing the raw materials available to Bronze Age metallurgy, the authors could have stressed more the rarity and remoteness of accessible tin deposits and the complexity and level of organising that securing a continuous supply required, which also played an important role in the emergence of long-distance exchange systems. The sub-chapter on gold is little more than a catalogue, as the presentation of the few gold artefacts is followed by a description of material analysis, and the question of the origin of the gold became lost amongst the names referring to distinct groups of analysed finds. The discussed raw materials also include iron. The possibility of a Caucasian origin arises in context with some daggers and horse harness fittings recovered from youngest Urnfield features, while the last sentences of the sub-chapter reflect a kind of wondering why and how these iron artefacts appeared across Central Europe in such a short time. Had the author included the numerous research results – a new metal depot horizon, a new skeletal burial rite, and several sieged fortified Late Bronze Age settlements – on the equestrian nomad material culture of Caucasian origin appearing in a vast area including the Lower Danube Region, Hungary, and Slovakia, the ‘rapid’ spread of iron would have probably seemed less difficult to explain. The discussion of graphite, a raw material used for the surface treatment of pottery, is similarly sketchy; however, that may be understood as the topic is not among the best for promoting the archaeology of the period. Nevertheless, the few graphite artefacts from Lower Austria could be presented in a better context if the author had looked eastwards and included only the related Polish, Slovak and Hungarian literature of the last decade.

Ernst Lauermaann and Marianne Mödlinger have taken on themselves the task of exploring one of the topics of

Late Bronze Age research with the highest marketing value: weaponry and warfare. The chapter opens with two important lines: 1, the authors make the lay reader aware that the weapon system the emergence of which is described in the chapter is so effective that it has only been superseded by gunpowder, and 2, one cannot talk about ‘wars’ in the study region during the Late Bronze Age because one cannot prove that the investigated clashes matched every criterion related to the concept; therefore, all such events shall be referred to as ‘armed conflicts’ instead. The extensive sub-chapter lining up the descriptions and depictions of the long wars of the period in the Middle East and Egypt may seem strange at first sight, but it becomes perfectly justified as this is the only way to create a necessary context for the numerous offensive and significantly fewer and more fragmentary defensive weapon finds presented next. However, it must be noted that if the Tollensee battlefield was included amongst the analogies, then the related sites and finds from the Eastern Mediterranean and the Minoan, Mycenaean, and Scandinavian representations should not have been omitted either. The authors not only present a detailed description of offensive weapons but also put proper emphasis on armour, which was unknown in the region until the emergence of bronze sheet technology. While the reader gets a comprehensive overview of the related findings and phenomena from France to the Aegean, they are still left with a feeling of want at the end of the chapter as the tumuli of the warriors buried in the territory of neighbouring western Slovakia and the noblemen interred in full weapons (including offensive weapons and armour) in the area of western Hungary (Transdanubia) are completely missing. One may also add to the list of missing analogies the depots from northern Hungary and eastern Slovakia, the sword and spearhead sets of which allowed researchers to reconstruct whole armed groups. Therefore, the chapter looks as if the authors were completely unaware of the armed Urnfield elite that lived right east of the area of Lower Austria at the time.

The ninth chapter, in which Michaela Lochner summarises her current knowledge on the cremation rite, is one of the eponymous chapters of the volume. As burial customs underwent a major transformation in the Urnfield Period, it was only possible to unfold the topic in a complex and extensive study. The introductory sub-chapters provide a great example of how to present the approach of Bronze Age communities to death to the general public. However, it would perhaps been useful to explain there, besides citing Hindu parallels, the importance of the rites of passage (after van Gennep’s work) and the concept and process of social death. The part on the burial customs of the older Urnfield Period is difficult to follow even for an archaeologist, as the author jumps from example to example between Lower Austria, Burgenland, western Slovakia, and Transdanubia. Yet it is of particular importance because M. Lochner publishes here a chronological framework that counts as unusual when it comes to dating early Urnfield finds, breaking with the chronological system linking the Br D and Ha A1 periods and separating the Br D period into Br C/D1 and Br D2 phases. She also corrects the traditionally accepted



understanding of the relation between the Ha A2 and Ha B1 periods by including a separate Ha A2 period before the often-used Ha A2/B1 and classifying it into the early Urnfield Period. Any change and specification is justified in this case, as one does not have to search for long to find a related example. Yet, separating the finds related to the Br D period or distinguishing between the archaeological records of the Ha A2 and Ha A2/B1 periods would be difficult in most sites and assemblages. Therefore, the table summarising this innovative chronological framework is important, but it would be useful to see it in a separate study backed up by traceable (and citable) primary data in sufficient quantities. The presentation of large cemeteries, accompanied by well-designed infographics of some outstanding burials, is an important part of this sub-chapter. Completing the clear text with easily accessible graphics represents a clever solution. The photo series of Hollabrunn cemetery excels among the illustrations because it reports on the *en bloc* removal of graves, the X-ray analysis of the removed soil blocks that contain what has remained of the burials, and the precision unearthing of the feature in the conservator's workshop, thus making the complex process the excavation of an urned cremation grave may involve understandable to outsiders. The introduction of the younger Urnfield Period begins with the second part of the chronological table discussed earlier. Like in the older phase of the culture, if one speaks about a separate Ha A2 period, distinguishing a similarly distinct Ha B1 period that follows the Ha A2/B1 transition seems necessary; besides, the author uses the Ha B2/3 period in its original form, i.e., divided into distinct Ha B2 and Ha B3 periods. One can only repeat the previous statement: examples may be presented for every separate chronological unit in this unusually detailed framework, but the assigning of find assemblages with relatively little dating value into these (in a temporal sense) small categories may be problematic, as in several cases it seems more than challenging to decide with certainty whether an assemblage belongs to the Ha A2/B1 or the Ha B1 period, and the problem also arises with the Ha B2 and Ha B3 periods. Writing about the younger Urnfield Period must have been a true delight for the author because the changing funerary rites of the Ha A2/B1 period resulted in many attractive urn graves packed with vessels, bronze jewellery, and weapons. A survey map of the Franzhausen-Kokoron cemetery gives even the wider public an idea of how large the urn cemeteries of the younger Urnfield Period could have been. This sub-chapter is completed by well-designed and elaborate infographics by the author.

Understandably, the editors slotted the chapter on anthropology right after the one presenting the burials. Karin Wiltschke-Schrotta and Silvia Renhart built the chapter on the contrast represented by the diversity of research possibilities on the Urnfield Period. Historical anthropology has little to work with in context with most of the Urnfield Period due to the widespread use of the cremation rite; however, in the final phase of the culture, there is a distinct horizon with the skeletal remains of numerous bodies interred in settlement pits from Dobrudja through the

Great Hungarian Plain to Lower Austria, which represent a valuable source for anthropological research. The authors gave the chapter a fitting opening: a CT scan image of the cremated remains of a body in a bowl, which gives the reader the perfect idea of what an anthropologist delving into the period has to work with. As the topic is, in essence, scientific, the authors made a glossary of the (unusually many) anthropological and archaeometric terms appearing in the text, thus helping the reader to get familiar with the subject. The reason for the lack of data, i.e., the method of cremation, is satisfactorily illustrated through the experimental cremation by Pany-Kucera, although it would have been worth including references to Kristóf Fülöp's work; however, one must keep in mind that the authors are anthropologists, which may explain for the lack of archaeological research among the cited examples. This sub-chapter is followed by a table that continues through several pages. It is an important summary of the anthropological data available from the period, but readers from outside our profession will likely skip reading it and perhaps will not stop either to pore over the charts and description of the anthropological analysis of the Franzhausen-Kokoron cemetery. The analysis of the deceased thrown into a pit in the fortified settlement of Stillfried an der March may prove to be considerably more interesting. This data set is important not only from an anthropological point of view but also because it is a great example of the marks a series of conflict-related events (perhaps a Prescythian attack in this case) might leave on atypically interred individuals. The archaeological interpretation of the presented cases is missing from the fundamentally scientific report, being discussed in the following chapter. One of the scientific 'values' of the destruction horizon linked with these skeletal remains in settlement features is that it represents a possibility for observing the traces of some bone diseases which did not persist on the remains of the hundreds of cremated individuals.

By the time they reach the penultimate chapter, readers will have a knowledge of the Urnfield Culture deep and varied enough to understand Monika Griebel's detailed study on society, beliefs, and religion—although this choice of title is less than fortunate because, considering the body of data available on the period, one should not use a more definite term than 'symbolic event' or 'symbolic act'. It is difficult to understand why the first sub-chapter focuses on horse equipment of Caucasian origin and the spread of chariots and riding in the final Urnfield Period and the Early Iron Age. The author then jumps back to the older and younger Urnfield periods and summarises the differences in representation behind diverse burial practices and customs related to furnishing the grave to demonstrate why the existence of a Late Bronze Age elite can be accepted based on the evidence of site types and artefact assemblages. Despite the unfortunate title of the sub-chapter 'Cult and Religion,' the author thoroughly explores and presents the many facets of the act of sacrifice, the central element of which is a renunciation of goods by giving them away, accumulating them, removing them from use, rendering them useless by damaging or destroying, always done within



an actual social or transcendent framework. For a better understanding of the theoretical approach, M. Griebel has compiled an appendix where she illustrates through examples that offerings, votive offerings, rites of passage, rites related to crises, and customs and events linked to the daily life of households may all involve accumulating or giving away goods. This detailed and classification-like summary is followed by a discussion of treasures and depots, i.e., the archaeological remains of the most characteristic symbolic acts of the period. In light of how diverse the subject is, the author chose the best possible solution to deal with it: she presents as many types of deposition as possible based on the find material of the region, perfectly illustrating that the distinction between the many 'rites' described at the beginning of the chapter is not merely a baseless hypothesis. A separate sub-chapter is sentenced to vessel deposition, understandably, as the find assemblages consisting of vessels for drinking, eating, mixing, and serving food and beverages are the best sources to research the symbolic events of a community. Identifying the 'place of sacrifice,' the symbolic space, using archaeological methods is a similarly fascinating target of research on social history. From an archaeological point of view, it is a rare phenomenon and difficult to describe; therefore, its discussion has remained rather theoretical in the context of Lower Austria. A surprising theory is shared with the reader in this sub-chapter: the author interprets the deceased (described in the anthropological chapter) and the large quantities of charred grain in the settlement pits of Stillfried an der March as remains of ritual events instead of traces of an armed conflict, part of a horizon outlined by a series of similar events at the turn of the Bronze and Iron Ages. Naturally, the chapter contains a discussion of all known depot and grave finds with depictions of the sun, the moon, birds, chariot wheels, miniature weapons, or people in a stylised way. The whole chapter reflects how the author was striving to keep the text clear about the basic concepts so that the general public may also understand the topic; to do her justice, one must keep that in mind when words like 'religion,' 'cult,' and 'sacrifice' seem too strong for the professional ear.

The opening of the final chapter, by Sigrid Strohschneider-Laue, is a very good reflection on how our understanding of the Urnfield Period has improved lately, although the title is telling: we only know some pieces of a puzzle, and every new detail we learn about opens our eyes to others to be found. One can only hope that the lay reader will get this far in the

volume and read the first few paragraphs carefully, for it is rare to find such a clear and lucid articulation of the methodology and scientific aims of archaeology. To explain how the Urnfield cultural package could appear almost simultaneously in a vast area in a relatively short time, the author reflects on previous centre-periphery models and completes the list of possible reasons, including fashion, prestige-based competition, arms race, and rapidly evolving exchange systems, with an important concept: conformity. The final sub-chapter clarifies important issues that could have been discussed at the beginning of the volume. The section entitled *Ist das wirklich alles?* (Is that really all?) explores how small part of material culture the archaeological record represents and how lacking our knowledge about textile, leather, and wooden artefacts is. It also explains why the countless pottery fragments are so important and why one has to employ every possible method to examine a broken bronze sword. The analogy of a theatrical play should really be part of the introduction of the volume: if one imagines the research on the Late Bronze Age as a play, diverse fields of science create the scenery and archaeology adds a small part of the stage props, while the characters remain invisible throughout the show or appear only for a time long enough for the audience to take a quick glimpse at them.

In summary, while the volume comprises chapters that meet the high standards of academic study, some are only slightly deeper than popular science. However, this hybrid editing seems to work. The texts are easy to understand for any reader, while the large number of first publications of excavation and artefact images renders it a valuable source for professionals, too. The extensive footnote references and thematic bibliographies contribute greatly to the volume to become part of the research on the Eastern Urnfield Culture in no time. Only a few things made it to the other pan of the scales. First, it is striking for a reviewer from Central-Eastern Europe to see that the research on the Urnfield Period in western Slovakia and western Hungary seems to be nonexistent to the majority of the authors, even the ones delving into topics with an archaeological record much more significant in these regions than Lower Austria. Even if all our important studies have been published in English or German in the last twenty to twenty-five years, we seem unable to break through the mental barrier that, as research has proven, did not exist in the Urnfield Period.