

SOME NEW ASPECTS OF THE CORDED WARE CULTURE IN CENTRAL EUROPE

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In the following the Corded Ware Culture (CWC) will be treated from the symbol-relation-structure paradigma. CWC is a wide designation partly of chronological significances and partly the name of several Middle European cultures. The time span is approximately 2800-2400 BC (in calibrated C-14 years) and the culture include: Bohemia-Moravia CWC, Southwest German CWC and Middle German or Saale CWC.

The material studied comes from graves. This is the case for most of the material in the period treated. Graves and gravegoods are regarded as symbols of the view on death and therefore also on life held by certain society. It is therefore possible to gain an insight in the world of the living or at least to see an idealized image of society. The image is often broken and daily life peeps through the way in which the leftbehind treat the dead. The words: »In life and so in death» are very significant for the cultures treated here.

Theory

The concept of structure is closely connected with diachronic and synchronic levels — progress in time and section through time? If we regard the Middlegerman CWC as a synchronic level it is possible to study the general symbols, relations and structures of the culture before a chronological analysis is carried out. The normal archaeological method is the opposite, which can be an obstruction in understanding the culture and even directly lead to false conclusions.

The present Middle German CWC chronology (fig. 1)

A short recapitulation of the accepted ideas concerning CWC in the Saale-Unstrut area will show that it can be divided into 3 phases similar to jutlandish Single grave Culture. Oldest is a hypothetic »Kalbreith group» of »undergraves», often without gravegoods or with a blade as only gravegoods (Fischer 1951, 1956, 1958). Many archaeologists have justified doubts about this phases, and have put forward instead a »Gemain-europäische Horizont». This common European Horizon, must be connected with the basic theory, that the culture, or more correctly the bearers of the culture, come from some more or less undefinded areas to the South East (Buchvaldek, 1966, 1967; Glob, 1944). The idea of migration (Jensen, 1982) and the common European Horizon

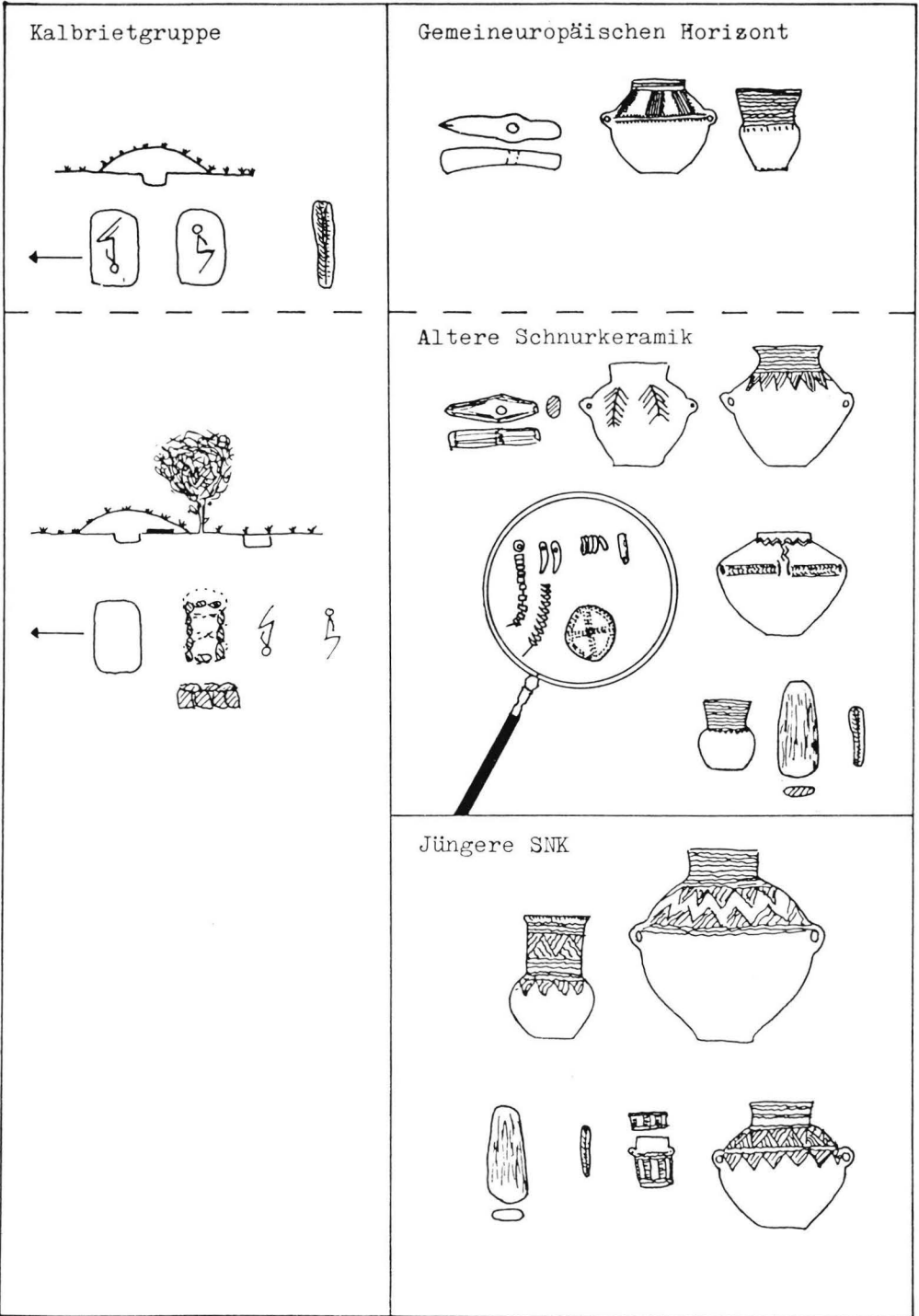


Fig. 1. The European Chronology on the Corded Ware Culture in general after Fischer and Buchvaldek.

(Becker, 1954) is rejected by other scholars but there has been no real discussion of the different theories.

The next phases is the older CWC. This is defined by the presences of corded beakers, corded amphorae and battleaxes with facets and also fringechains (perforated caniden teeth in long chains) (Fischer, 1951, 1958; Buchvaldek, 1966, 1967). The younger CWC do not contain battle axes, a negative feature, stressed many times in the litterature, and the ceramics are the so-called Mansfelder ceramics (Fischer, 1951, 1958; Fischer, 1959; Buchvaldek, 1966, 1967).

Theory

Returning to the theory, we must look at society as a structure or substructure made up of different relations between humans or groups of humans. Other, more invisible, infrastructures also determine the appearance of the relations and the symbols. Some structures/relations are more important than others. By glancing at our own culture and regarding the social anthropological evidence from a large number of lowtechnological societies some relations appear as »universal». Age and sex are important in prehistoric societies as well as in the present. Many features can be explained by age and sex relations. In the analysis of prehistoric societies these are of decisive importance in the establishment of models concerning the development of the society, and also in the »understanding» of the archaeological culture. Ethnicity and socialstructure (in a wider sense) are also important relations (Hodder, 1982). There is a large possibility that precisely those relations discussed above are expressed specifically in graves, but it must be stressed that the ravages of time may have left us no possibility to investigate this. There is a lack of organic material in most of the graves. With some luck bones are preserved. We are therefore left with a small selection of the original gravecontext. Before we continue I want to point out that other relations, e.g. economic and settlement relations, also are of importance, but they are not discussed here because the material is limited, and because the sex and age relations are considered to be fundamental, also within the economical structure, where the groupings of sex and age usually are conspicuous.

Sex and age relations in Middle German CWC

Using the objects and informations that individual graves contain and systematizing these, it is possible to separate possible groupings. The most common objects are different types of ceramics, especially amphorae and beakers, battle axes, ordinary axes, blades and different kind of jewellery. The information mostly concerns the shape and kind grave, the orientation of the grave and skeleton if any; wheather the skeleton is placed in left hocker, right hocker or outstrected, the arrangement of gravegoods etc.

Combining this information with anthropological determinations of sex and age of the skeletons, with the generally accepted ideas that weapon belong to men and jewellery to women, it becomes possible to survey the material. It is generally known that men are placed in right hocker, while women are placed in left hocker. The two sexes are usually oriented E-W. Men with their heads placed towards west, women with their heads placed towards east — both sexes facing south (Fischer, 1956; Buchvaldek, 1967).

The starting point of this analysis is therefore quite unambiguous, but it has been found that some men are placed in left hocker (about 10 %) and some women in right hocker (only a few percent) (Fischer, 1956).

The distribution of gravegoods are: battle axes in men's graves and jewellery in women's graves. Ceramics are found in both men's and women's graves. Examining the ceramics more closely, and in this case the decorations are chosen, the information mentioned is supplemented, elaborated and in some cases questioned, which can be explained from other conditions.

The analysis (Siemen, 1984) of style shows that different decorations with the same placing on the same type of vessel have different geographic distributions. Different types of lower finishing exclude each other spatially. By comparing different placing of decorations on different types of vessels it is possible to divide the Middle German corded ware into many smaller groups, where the differences are regarded as expressing ethnical differences.

Sexdifferences are also expressed in the decorations. It turns out that the men have vessels with many different kinds of decorations, while the decorations on vessels found in women's graves are more uniform and mostly consist of decorations that are very common in the male context. A number of patterns are specific indicators of male burials: Decorations on the edge of the vessel and the earlier mentioned Mansfelder decorations. The placement on the vessel is also significant in connection with the sex.

The number of vessels in the graves varies. In the Middle German CWC there are 2.0 vessel per men's grave and 1.5 per women's grave. In Bohemia the corresponding numbers are 2.0 and 3.0. There is thus a significant difference concerning the women's graves. In this case the ceramics in the women's graves show regional differences.

The other gravegoods shows, in the same way as the decorations and type of vessel, the presence of many small local areas. Therefore, the gravegoods can be used in analysing sex relations and geographically determined differences. Age relations are also shown in the gravegoods. By once again using the anthropologically determined graves, this time also regarding age, we see the age relations in connection with sex.

The position of the body in the grave is different for different age groups: While adult men are found in right hocker, boys and old men are found in left hocker. Adult women are placed in left hocker, while girls and old women are placed in right hocker.

The gravegoods also shows age differences: Battle axes and Mansfelder ceramics are only found in the group of graves containing adult men, while fringechains are found only in graves with adult women. Bowls and pearls are found only in men's and children's graves. Graves containing only a few animal teeth and/or a few disks of shells are either men's or children's graves, while graves with many animal teeth/shell disks always contain a woman. Graves where only a blade is found contain either a boy or an old man.

Summing up the results, it appears that what was originally regarded as a chronological sequence is an expression of the way in which different ethnical groups show sex and age relations.

Graves containing a blade was used as a symbol of the oldest CWC, but they are in reality reserved for boys and old men. Graves containing battle axes, »Strichbündel-amphora« etc. were taken to represent the older CWC, while Mansfelder style was regarded as the younger phase. In the present study the two last mentioned phases turn out to be ethnical markings of different territories, as well as male indicators. The basis of the earlier chronological division appears to be different from what accepted earlier.

The next step is the establishment of a new chronology; this will not be discussed in the present paper, but I can say that a division of the Middle German CWC into the groups has been made on the basis of the results described.

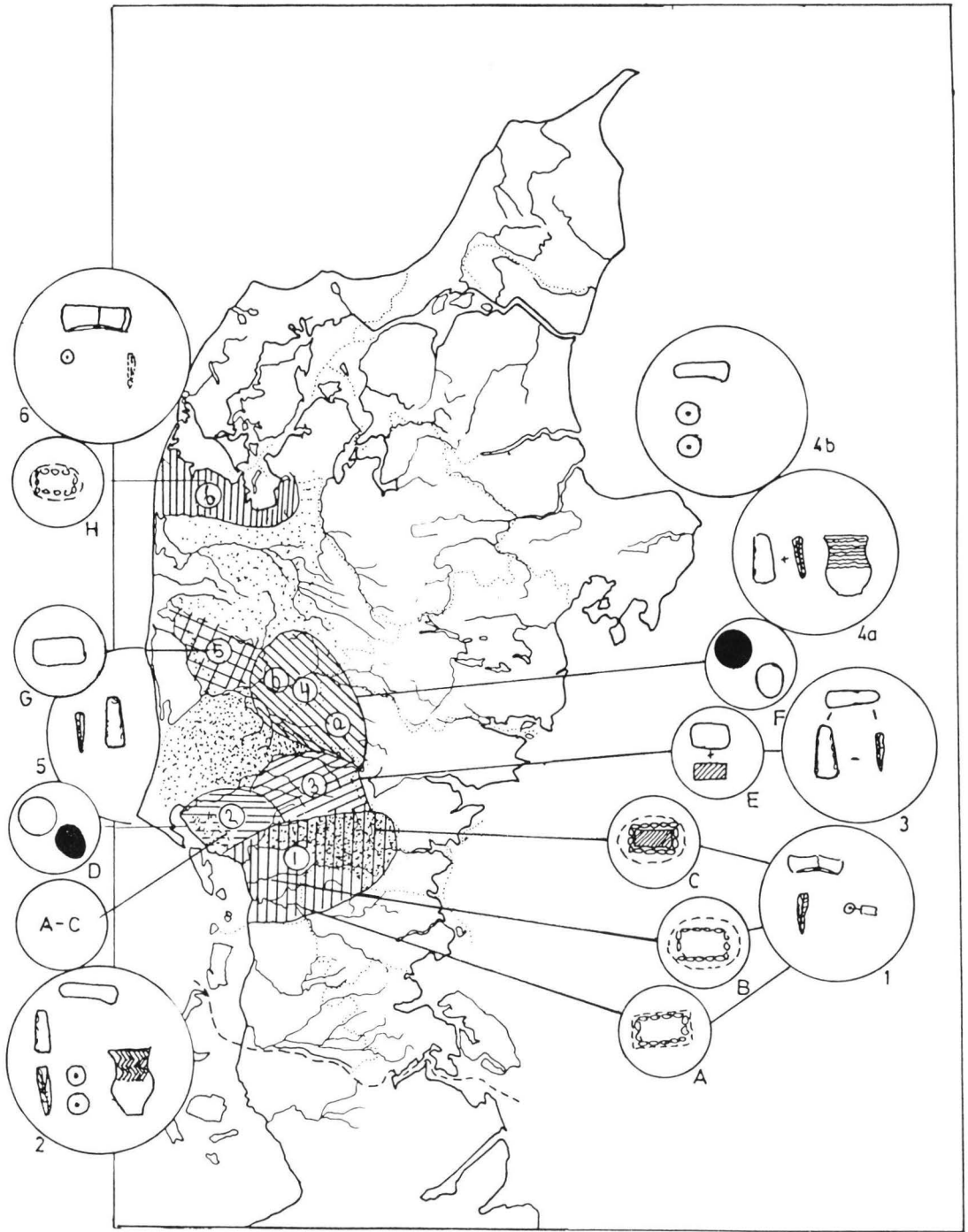


Fig. 2. The different regional groups in the Singel Grave Culture in Western Jutland.

Jutlandish Single Grave Culture (fig. 2)

Turning to other beakercultures, e.g. the jutlandish Single Grave Culture, small local groups are also found — not by analysing the ceramics, but through the different shapes of the graves and the combination of the gravegoods. It is possible to divide West Jutland into areas with circular, oval and rectangular grave pits and into areas with and without framegraves and stonebeds. Combinations and overlappings are also found. The gravegoods are, as in the Middle German CWC, clearly male dominated and consist of battle axes, flint axes, blades, maceheds disks, rings and pearls of amber and ceramics, with the three first mentioned as dominating objects.

Investigation of the position of the body in connection with the gravegoods indicate that men are placed in right hocker, oriented W-E with their heads towards west. Women are placed in left hocker with their heads towards east. Anthropological sex determinations cannot be made, because the dead are preserved only in the shape of a »corps shadow» (Siemen, 1984; Glob, 1944).

The above mentioned is characteristic for the older Single Grave Culture. The situation is quite different in the younger Single Grave Culture, where the shape of the graves becomes difficult to recognise. While most graves in the older phase are dug into the underground with a low mound above, the graves in the younger phase are placed in the mound or on the original surface. Stones are not often found in these graves, and the filling in the grave pit (if one such exist) is very often difficult to recognise. In the gravegoods battle axes and blades still dominates, amber is more rare, whereas ceramics are found more often.

If the ceramics are analysed, in the same way as the Middle German ceramics, many small local groupings can be found; we therefore see the Single Grave Culture divided into many local groups along the same general lines, but each with certain variations that clearly shows the local societies and their continuous development.

The jutlandish Single Grave Culture and the Middle German Corded Ware Culture (and other beaker cultures) exhibit amazing similarities, in spite of their different appearance.

Conclusion

Returning to the structure-relation-symbol concept, we find the same mainstructures, but different substructures. Relations in different circumstances are reflected through the analysis of the material world of symbols. By this we get the possibility of comparing the individual groups.

The first step in the analysis was a comparison within the whole time span of the culture (1st synchronic level). Next came a chronological division of possible phases (1st diachronic level). Within these phases one must then make synchronic and diachronic analysis within the range of the material and models.

The idea in this paper has clearly been archaeology as a social and cultural science. Only the social development and the social structural conditions have been treated. Important features such as economical structure, the placing of the society in relation to the surroundings etc. have not been treated. It is not because these points are not interesting, but it is my opinion that these questions, which also are covered by the words culture-nature, first can be treated after a general analysis of the »cultural fashion». Economical systems and their connection with specific societies, groups or persons are best treated through an analysis of a smaller part of a culture, but is understood on the background of a general synchronic and diachronic analysis of a society.

It should hereby be possible to make a detailed chronology, which gives us possibility of working with one or two generations at a time.

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