

“Sacred white stones”

On Traditions of Building White Stones into Graves

BY ANNE CARLIE

Abstract

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This paper discusses the practice of white stones in Iron Age burial traditions. The point of departure is a recent excavation, undertaken by the present author, of a cairn with large amounts of quartz at Tiraholm in south-west Småland. The excavation results, together with a local case study, show several interesting circumstances concerning the practice of building quartz into grave monuments. The tradition seems to occur more frequently during the Pre-Roman and Roman Iron Age periods. Apparently, the white colour was seen by contemporaries as sacred, showing the presence of divine and cosmological powers.

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Introduction

Few archaeological remains are as qualified as graves when it comes to approaching the conceptual world of prehistoric man. However, it is no easy task to understand the mental structures underlying a specific grave type or burial tradition. Graves consist of complex ideological structures, whose meanings are governed not only by social and cultural norms, but also by religion and the prevailing religious ideas of a society.

In the past, a distinction was often made in archaeology between graves as a source for studying social structures and power relations, and graves as a result of religious practices and beliefs. In recent years, following in the wake of postprocessual archaeology, in combination with increasing interdisciplinary cooperation with scholars of comparative religion, this view has been complemented by the understanding that

religion in traditional societies cannot be separated from its context. A consequence of this view is that religion and society constitute different aspects of the same reality. On the other hand, it is our choice of perspective, as scholars and archaeologists, that decides whether our interpretations of an archaeological context will be connected with religion or with society in general (Dommasnes 1991, pp. 50 f.).

For my part, I find graves interesting because they offer special opportunities for a glimpse into people's religious ideas in ancient times. In the southern and central parts of Sweden, burial traditions during the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age are characterized by monuments with a rich symbolic language. On the one hand, variations on this symbolism are found in the external grave structures, with the building of

ship-settings and different types of stone-settings – round, square, with triangular and so forth. On the other hand, artefacts with strong symbolism, for instance grinding stones and hammerstones, are often found built into the monuments. During the 1980s and 1990s, the rich symbolic language of Bronze Age and Iron Age graves has been discussed in several interesting works (Petré 1984; Bennet 1987; Artelius 1996; Kaliff 1992 and 1997). Here one can see a gradual displacement from social and cultural explanations towards religious and ritual practices. The interpretation of internal and external grave symbols, as parts of a religious burial language within a death cult, is in particular emphasized in Anders Kaliff's works. Among other things, he discusses different symbols of fertility used in order to secure the rebirth of the dead.

A type of archaeological find which connects with and complements the rich symbolism of Bronze and Iron Age burial cult is the use of white stones in graves. Except for some minor works, the occurrence of white stones in graves, has not been subject to any closer analysis in Sweden. Hopefully, this paper will to a certain extent fill this gap.

The pre-understanding

My interest in white stones was awakened after I came across the phenomenon in different works. I found a first source of inspiration in Lennart Lundborg's licentiate thesis *Undersökningar av bronsåldershögar och bronsåldersgravar i södra Halland* (1972). In connection with his excavations of three mounds at Kårarp, Halmstad, Lundborg reported several interesting cases where quartz had been found in Bronze Age mounds. From his presentation it was clear that the quartz could be connected to secondary burials, from the Pre-Roman and Roman Iron Age (Lundborg 1972, pp. 58 f.).

However, as I began searching for comparative examples, I soon found that the field documentation as a rule was insufficient concerning

the amount and deposition of quartz. A probable explanation for this could be that the excavators did not regard the quartz as significant, and therefore did not make any detailed records of the find conditions. In the winter of 1997, when I received information on a cairn with considerable amounts of quartz at Tiraholm, on the western side of Lake Bolmen, I saw this as a good opportunity to make field observations of my own on how the white stones were used in the burial traditions.

At that time, my pre-understanding of the practice of white stones in burial cult was much influenced by discussions and interpretations in previous archaeological works. Without going into the details of different studies, it should be mentioned that white stones at an early stage were thought to have a religious meaning. In particular, the interpretations of Theodor Petersen concerning so-called "sacred white stones" as phallic symbols integrated in a fertility cult set the tone for later contributions (Petersen 1906; Ewald 1929, p. 267; Arbman 1945, pp. 104 f.; Skjöldsvold 1963). According to other interpretations, the stones had either a magical or a guarding function, or were used as burial gifts (cf. Hjørungdal 1991, pp. 88 f.).

The understanding of white stones as having some kind of religious or magical meaning was of great importance for my choice of digging methods, in order to obtain optimal information about how the quartz was deposited. I searched for answers to several different questions. How was the quartz used in the grave? Was it used as building material or deposited as burial gifts? In what amounts did the quartz occur and how was it built into the monument? Was it fully visible or deliberately concealed? Did the cairn contain one or more burials, or different phases in the construction? In what phase of the grave construction had the quartz been deposited? Furthermore, I also asked myself whether the quartz had been exposed to special treatment, for example ritual burning, and if it had been quarried on the site or transported there.

The grave context

The investigated cairn lies north of the Tiraholm manor in Södra Unnaryd parish, in one of the larger cemeteries (RAÄ 129) in Västbo Hundred, Småland (Fig. 1). The cemetery contains some 35 round cairns and stone-settings, varying between 4 and 15 metres in diameter (in the National Heritage Board Register of Ancient Monuments, cemetery 129 consist of 45 graves, which according to my observations is too high a number).

The cemetery, which is about 170 metres long and 50 metres wide, lies on the top and southern slope of a small ridge, on a promontory in the western part of Lake Bolmen. The two largest cairns lie solitary in the north-eastern part of the cemetery. They most likely belong to an early phase of the cemetery, which hypothetically could be placed in the Early Bronze Age. In the southern and central part, two moraine ridges run in an east–west direction, separating the grave-field into a southern and northern part with a depression in between. On these ridges the rest of the graves lie gathered in groups, while visible structures are lacking in the hollow area. Judging from the shape and spatial position of the graves, they could belong to the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age.

The promontory, on which the cemetery nowadays is situated, probably constituted parts of a small island in older times. The presence of fluvial sediments to the south of the cemetery speaks in favour of this interpretation, along with the fact that the water level in Bolmen, prior to the lake lowering during the nineteenth century, was at least one metre higher than today. This means that the southernmost of the graves, including the now excavated cairn, was right up against the former shoreline.

The presence of cemetery 129 show that, perhaps already during the Early Bronze Age, there was an established settlement in the area surrounding Tiraholm. This picture is further strengthened by the occurrence of some grave localities in the vicinity of the farm, among others

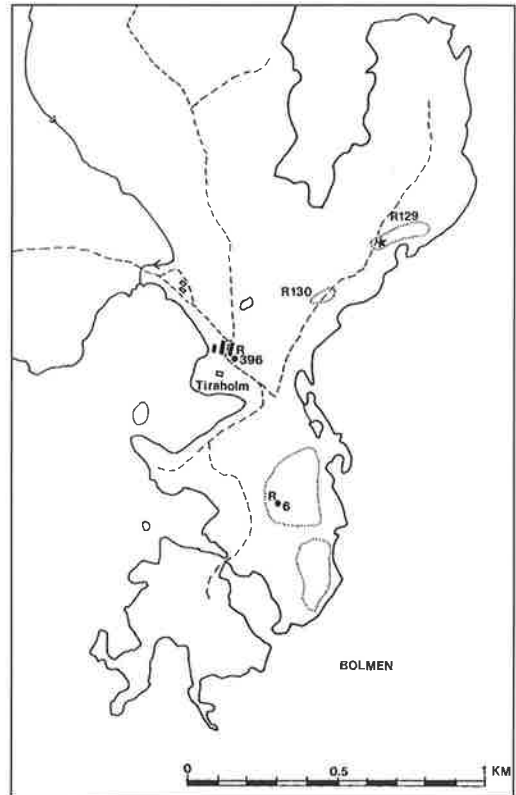


Fig. 1. Map showing the Tiraholm area. The now excavated cairn is situated in a large cemetery with cairns and stone-settings along the western shore of Lake Bolmen (R129). Originally the cemetery was built on a small island, which due to lowerings of the lake has grown together with the mainland. Drawing: Anne Carlie.

a cairn-like stone-setting (RAÄ 396) and a group of graves, consisting of a square stone-setting, a stone circle and two standing stones (slabs) (RAÄ 6). Furthermore, settlement continuity into later periods is confirmed by the presence of a Viking Age mound cemetery (RAÄ 130), partly excavated by Revd L. F. Palmgren in 1875.

During his visit to Tiraholm Palmgren also excavated two cairns at cemetery 129 (mounds 44 and 45). He writes:

Two of these cairns [Sw. *rör*] were opened and consisted only of stone, without mixed earth, but as previously mentioned to a great extent, and in particular within, consisting of small stones of fist size. In both cairns were found *uncremated corpses*, which



Fig. 2. During the cleaning of the surface layer, large amounts of quartz were found along the edges of the central pit. Both the quartz and other stone in this part of the grave were heavily damaged because of plunder diggings. Photo: Lennart Carlie.

had been placed on the bottom of the old topsoil. These bones did not resemble the ones found in the earth-mounds, but rather the bones from the Stone Age graves. Here and there, in both cairns were the remains of, as it seemed, *pots* or other cast *iron vessels* and a *pot-foot*. Furthermore, there were pieces of a fine substance, much like the ones found in the cairns at Österås. These graves probably belong to another time than the close lying earth-mounds, and a more complete investigation would perhaps give information on their age, which in my opinion is a good deal higher than the earth-mounds. (Palmgren 1878–80, pp. 99 f.) (my translation)

Unfortunately, we do not know which graves Palmgren excavated, or where in the cemetery they were situated. Nor does this old excavation give any clues concerning the dating of the graves and the cemetery. However, what can be

stated without doubt is that the cairns opened by Palmgren did not contain any quartz. If this had been the case, it would clearly have been evident from his report.

The investigation in 1998

The now investigated cairn lies in the south-western part of the cemetery, on the brink of an old water bank. Before the excavation started, the cairn was thought to be almost round, about six metres in diameter and 0.1 to 0.8 metres high, with overgrown slopes. In the middle section there was a large pit, about three metres in size and one metre deep. A large number of quartz pieces were found on the edge of the pit, probably having been deposited in connection with treasure digging in older times (Fig. 2).

In an early phase of the excavation it was

evident that the cairn was much larger in size than could be seen on the surface. Furthermore, the cairn was overlapped by two adjacent graves, so the investigation had to be concentrated in the south-western quadrant. Also, this section was evaluated as the best preserved one, in order to contribute qualitative information about the construction of the cairn and the quartz deposition.

The excavation of the south-western quadrant showed a complex building sequence of the

cairn (Fig. 3). Under a layer of grey sand of varying thickness (0.1 to 0.2 metres) there was a concentrated layer of crushed quartz pieces mixed with grey sand. The quartz varied in size, from small chips of 2 to 3 centimetres, to smaller boulders about 10 to 15 centimetres large. Under the quartz layer followed a compact stone packing containing rich amounts of quartz. The packing was built of fist-sized stones, placed closely together in 2 to 4 layers, and could be

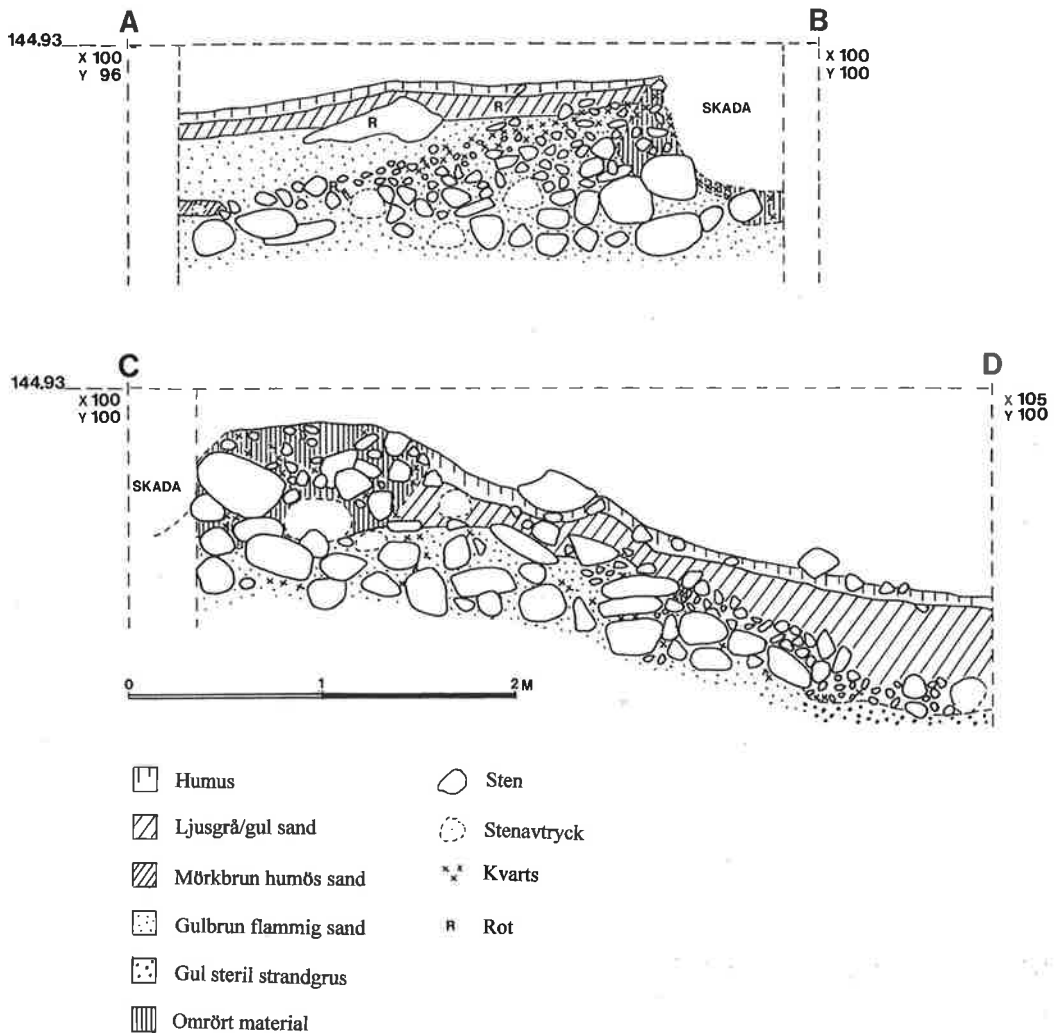


Fig. 3. The east-west (A-B) and north-south (C-D) profiles through the cairn, with the damaged middle section. The profiles illustrate the complex construction of the cairn, with varying sizes of stone. The quartz layer was found immediately on top of the central cairn. Originally the white stones were visible on the surface. Later on, the slopes of the grave were secondarily covered by up to half a metre of shifting sand from the shore close by. Drawing: Anne Carlie.

characterized as a central cairn. The total amount of quartz from the quartz layer and central cairn was 224 kilos.

Under the central cairn followed two layers with considerably coarser stone, at the same time as the amount of quartz decreased. At first the stones in the rough packing were between 0.2 and 0.4 metres in size. In between these stones were found small stones of fist-size, placed in such a manner that the packing became very tight. In this layer were also found small depositions of quartz along the southern kerb, both between and under the stones (Fig. 4). One almost got the impression that the quartz had been poured between the larger stones, as well as scattered, before the stones were put on the spot. The bottom layer consisted of still larger stones, which had been placed directly on the former water bank. This layer had no stones lying in between, which gave the packing a more spacious character. Under the stones in the bottom layer were found several accumulations of quartz along the southern kerb of cairn, i.e. close to the former shore. The quartz had been spread on the water bank just before the stones in the packing were put in place. This meant that the quartz was fixed under and around the stone edges. From the bottom layer yet another 28 kilos of quartz were gathered. Furthermore, some isolated fragments of burnt bone were found. Unfortunately, the bones were too small to identify.

No certain stone circle could be seen belonging to the cairn. Outside the coarse packing, in the bottom layer, followed a packing of smaller stones, which continued outside the excavation area. The character and delimitation of this packing could not be determined, due to practical circumstances. The packing either belong to a stone kerb, or to a natural bank of rubble stones in the former waterline.

Beneath the bottom layer, towards the centre of the cairn, rich amounts of dispersed charcoal were found in the underlying yellow beach gravel. However, as no distinct traces of fire could be seen on the site, it is highly uncertain whether the charcoal have any chronological

connection with the cairn itself.

Unfortunately, neither the central grave nor any dating artefacts were found during the excavation. Still, the cairn probably belongs to an early phase of the cemetery, as the kerbs, to both the north and the east, are overlapped by adjacent graves.

The grave construction

The excavation results show that the grave was built with great care, and that the quartz found was used in a conscious manner as part of a burial ritual. The grave was probably close to round, with a size of at least eight metres in diameter and one metre high. The cairn was erected directly on the shore, with its southern kerb lying immediately next to the ancient waterline. Altogether, the documentation indicates that the cairn was built at one and the same time. The building process was initiated with a layer of coarse stones being placed on the ancient water bank. Before the stone packing was put in place at the southern kerb, pieces of white quartz were scattered on the ground, so that the stones came to rest directly on top of these. Later on, yet another layer of coarse stones was placed on top of the bottom layer. This packing was placed with great precision, so that the empty spaces between the stones were filled with small stones. Handfuls of quartz were then scattered partly along the southern kerb, partly in some of the cavities between the larger stones. Some highly fragmentary burnt bones were also scattered at this stage. A fragmentary quernstone was deposited in the western kerb. Furthermore, a large stone with a grinding groove was placed at the centre of the grave.

On top of the coarse stone packing a compact central cairn was built, consisting of small stones lying close together in several layers. Finally, the middle section and slopes of the central cairn were covered with a concentrated layer of crushed quartz exposed towards the water and shore to the south. The amount of quartz was so great that directly after the construction it must have



Fig. 4. During the excavation of the bottom stone-packing, accumulations of quartz were found along the southern kerb, as well as in cavities between the stones. Photo: Anne Carlie.

been quite visible, especially to visitors approaching the cemetery by water.

The quartz depositions

Altogether, the excavation at Tiraholm shows several interesting facts, not only concerning the quartz deposition, but also the cairn construction. In my opinion, these facts should be seen as a result of meaningful actions in the burial cult. In the first place, we are dealing with a very large amount of crushed quartz, at least some 500 kilos, which in different ways was built into the monument. The quartz was probably, like the rest of the stone material, collected in the locality. According to geological expertise, the quartz is of a local type, characterized by heavy cracking and contents of mineral grains in the form of red feldspar (pers. com., K.-A. Kornfält, SGU, Lund).

Regarding the presence of quartz in the cairn, different kinds of deposition could be discerned:

1. pieces of quartz deliberately placed in the bottom layer, like symbolic bedstones for stones in the packing;
2. handfuls of crushed quartz placed in cavities between the stones in the bottom layer;
3. pieces of quartz closely packed together on the top and slopes of the cairn surface, like a covering mantle.

The first two manners of deposition were particularly marked along the southern kerb of the cairn, while they were totally lacking closer to the centre. Furthermore, the cairn was built of very distinct layers, in which the stone material varied considerably in both size and character. The construction of the cairn, along with the quartz depositions, give a strong impression of the grave construction being planned and staged as a social and public event. Every step in the process, from the choice of location in the cemetery to the collection of building material and the erection of the cairn, bears witness to a carefully prepared strategy. Perhaps one should imagine the burial construction as being supervised by a chosen individual, who had close contacts with the gods and was familiar with the prevailing regulations required in connection with the practice of burial traditions. As Anders Kaliff, among others, has argued, the shape of the grave, along with the funeral rituals, reflect the collective ideas of society, concerning what happened to people after death (Kaliff 1997, p. 68). However, the grave structure could also be given a more individual design, being connected to the sex, age and social position of the deceased. Thus, the “grave-language”, using the terminology of Kristina Jennbert, could be used to illustrate both collective and individual structures of burial traditions in ancient times (Jennbert 1988, pp. 88 f.).

Concerning the meaning of the quartz, the experiences from Tiraholm clearly show that

white stones were regarded as sacred or magical by people of that time. The intentional depositions of quartz in the bottom of the cairn points towards this interpretation. Thus, I understand them as traces of rituals, in connection with the consecration of the burial site as a sacred ground. Why large amounts of crushed quartz were required on the surface of the monument is more difficult to explain. Perhaps the explanation should be searched for on an individual basis, that is, from the needs of the deceased. However, I will return to this question later in the paper.

The concept of “sacred white stones” – variations in form and function

In order to broaden my understanding of the use of quartz in ancient burial traditions, I began searching for comparative examples from other parts of Scandinavia. A survey of previously investigated Bronze and Iron Age graves showed a wide distribution of the phenomenon, from the provinces of Halland and Blekinge in the south to Bohuslän (cf. Lundborg 1972, pp. 58 f.), Södermanland and Uppland in the north, as well as the south-western part of Norway (Petersen 1906; Schetelig 1912). A recent study from the two latter Swedish provinces shows ten graves with quartz, dating from the Late Bronze Age until the Migration Period/Viking Age (Westman 1998, pp. 6 ff.). Moreover, single observations of graves with quartz depositions are known farther to the north, from Dalarna and Västerbotten (cf. Lamm 1973, p. 48).

As regards the shape and character of the white stones, considerable differences exist between the different regions. The concept of “sacred white stones”, was introduced in 1906 by the Norwegian archaeologist Theodor Petersen (1906), referring to a special kind of cultic stones occurring in south-west Norway. The stones are of phallus shape and could be up to one metre high. They are normally found on top of, or inside, mounds from the Roman Iron

Age and Migration Period, and are seen as symbols of a male fertility cult (cf. Larsen 1994 with references).

A totally different type of stones, which because of their light colour have been connected with “sacred white stones”, are grave globes. Above all, these stones appear in the central parts of Sweden and in Gotland, but also in Norway and Finland, where they are often found on top of mounds and stone-settings. Several different interpretations have been put forward concerning the function of grave globes. While Hans Christiansson (1948, pp. 123 ff.) would see the stones as offering substitutes for bread to the deceased, Bo Petré (1984, p. 195) instead emphasizes the round shape of the stones, as a symbol of the female sex and fertility. The interpretation of grave globes as fertility symbols is also held by Anders Kaliff (1997, p. 89), who draws attention to the egg as a symbol for life and rebirth, in connection with death cult.

A third type of white stones, to which the Tiraholm grave belongs, consists of natural or crushed quartz-pieces which are built in varied amounts into the burial monuments. This category has recently been discussed in a student paper by Kerstin Westman, Stockholm University, who has performed a comparative analysis of graves containing quartz in three different provinces – the Mälaren valley, Bohuslän and Halland (Westman 1998). The paper is important as a first step towards a superregional study. However, in its present state, the analysis is based on too limited a body of material to allow more general conclusions concerning similarities and differences between the regions.

Graves containing quartz in southern Halland

As a consequence of my superregional survey, I started to speculate on whether quartz had been found in other graves in the district surrounding Tiraholm, and if the phenomenon could be delimited chronologically. Also, I was curious as to whether there were any connections between

the practice of quartz and the age, sex and/or social position of the deceased.

With these questions as a basis, I began collecting comparative material from the region surrounding Tiraholm, corresponding to the southern parts of Halland, from the Hallandsåsen ridge to the Åtran valley, as well as the adjoining areas around lake Bolmen in Västbo Hundred, Småland. Within this territory I found no less than 25 graves with quartz (at 12 locations) (Fig. 5), consisting of eight mounds, one cairn, eleven round stone-settings, three square stone-settings, one cremation grave close to a boulder and one Iron Age dolmen. Thus, the remaining parts of this paper are devoted to a comparative case study, in order to find possible patterns concerning the use of quartz in graves. In order to facilitate the following discussion, the material is presented under three headings, with the practice of white stones being related to the following grave categories: (a) mounds, (b) round and square stone-settings and (c) other grave-types. Under each heading the presentation has been adjusted chronologically according to the time of investigation.

Quartz depositions in mounds

In southern Halland mounds normally belong to the Bronze Age, as in other parts of southern Scandinavia. This has been confirmed by a great number of investigations, carried out from the late 19th century up to today (cf. Lundborg 1972). In spite of a large number of excavated mounds, only a limited number of these contain depositions of white stones. Altogether there are eight mounds, of which seven have been excavated (Table I).

The mounds all date to the Bronze Age, some to an early phase, some to the transition period III/IV. It is interesting that the quartz in most of the graves can be connected to secondary burials from the Early Iron Age. This is the case in the Esprahögen, the Kårarp mounds and Vapnö mound, as well as in the two mounds at Sannarp and probably also the Båstad mound.

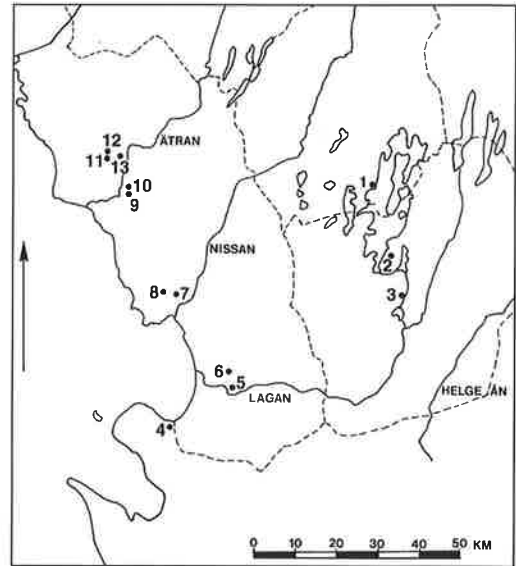


Fig. 5. Map showing the distribution of grave localities discussed in the local case study: 1. Tiraholm, S. Unnaryd parish; 2. Ramsberg, Angelstad parish; 3. Bölminge Bäckgård, Nöttja parish; 4. Båstad, Båstad parish; 5. Esprahögen, Laholm lfs; 6. N. Skogaby, Veinge parish; 7. Kårarp, Övraby parish; 8. Vapnö, Vapnö parish; 9. Sannarp, Årstad parish; 10. Sörby, Vessige parish; 11. Folkared, Sibbarp parish; 12. Sibbarp, Sibbarp parish; 13. Höstena, Ljungby parish. Drawing: Anne Carlie.

In Esprahögen, Laholm rural parish, a mound of medium size from the Early Bronze Age, the quartz was found in the upper layer. The deposition consisted of 196 small pieces of naturally rounded silicon stones, gathered into a small cairn covering a split bone/antler along with cremated bones and charcoal (grave I). In spite of the absence of date-indicating artefacts, the burial was probably constructed during the Early Iron Age, like three other secondary burials found in the mound (Ewald 1929, pp. 257 ff.).

In his report on Esprahögen, Victor Ewald also mentions a mound in Båstad parish, north-west Scania, in which hundreds of white silicon stones were found like a cairn on top of the mound. No excavation was done, but the stones were discovered as a result of children's digging in the mound (Ewald 1928, p. 209; Ewald 1929, p. 267).

Table I. Mounds and cairns with white stones discussed in the case study. Abbreviations: A=Age; E=Early; BR=Bronze; ROM=Roman.

Locality	Monument/No./ Dating	White stones	Deposition	Secondary grave Dating	Reference
Esprahögen	Mound /-/ E BR A	196 pieces	placed in a miniature cairn covering a secondary cremation burial	E IRON A	Ewald 1929; SHM 18 578
Båstad	Mound/-/ BR A?	Several hundred	in the top layer	Undated	Ewald 1929
Kårarp	Mound/A2/ E BR A	c. 70 kg	in the top layer in connection with a secondary cremation burial	ROM IRON A	Lundborg 1972; HM 17 107
Kårarp	Mound/A3/ E/L BR A	142 pieces	in the top layer in connection with a secondary cremation burial	IRON A	Lundborg 1972; HM 17 108
N. Skogaby	Cairn/-/ BR A	1 piece	on the bottom of an urn vessel in connection with a secondary cremation burial	ROM IRON A	Arne 1925; SHM 17 845
Sannarp	Mound/A80/ E BR A	c. 900 g	in the brim; in a secondary cremation burial	E IRON A	Streffert & Strömberg 1999
Sannarp	Mound/A86/ E BR A	c. 1.2 kg	in the top layer; a few pieces in secondary cremation burials	E BR A E IRON A	Streffert & Strömberg 1999
Sannarp	Mound/A93/ E BR A	c. 8.8 kg	in the top layer covering a secondary cremation burial	ROM IRON A	Streffert & Strömberg 1999
Vapnö	Mound/-/ E BR A	c. 12 kg	in the top layer in connection with a secondary cremation burial	E IRON A	Lundborg 1972; HM 17 109

Additional mounds with quartz have been excavated at Kårarp, Övraby parish, to the east of Halmstad. In a group of three mounds, from the Middle Bronze Age (period III/IV), two graves contained depositions of quartz. In these cases as well, the quartz was connected to secondary burials from the Early Iron age (Lundborg 1972, pp. 38 ff.).

Prior to the investigation, mound 2 was 13 to 15 by 21 metres in size and 1.5 metres high, containing a central burial from the Bronze Age period III. In the middle section of the central cairn, three urn graves were found dating to the Middle or Late Bronze Age. Furthermore, a secondary burial from the Roman Iron Age was found in the central and upper part of the mound, in a packing of small stones (A6). This grave consisted of a stone circle, containing a sooty layer with cremated bones, a band-shaped brooch with fire damage, pieces of a dark-brown clay vessel with curved neck and an S-shaped profile, together with a whetstone made of sand-

stone. Next to the grave, rich amounts of quartz and feldspar were found, partly scattered, partly gathered within a concentration of 5 x 5 metres in the central part of the mound. The debris came to a total of some 70 kilos and was, according to Lundborg, packed closely together in one and the same layer. He sees this as a result of the quartz being deposited on one and the same occasion. As Lundborg himself puts it, "After the quartz was put on the mound, it would have had a snow-like appearance" (Lundborg 1972, pp. 52 ff.; my translation).

Mound 3 was previously damaged by cultivation. The grave was 10 by 6 metres in size with a kerb to the north, and covering a central cairn from the Middle Bronze Age (period III/IV) with three or four urn graves. In the upper part of the mound a secondary burial was found, presumably from the Iron Age (A1). Besides cremated bones, the burial contained a red-yellow opaque glass bead, some potsherds and a hammerstone. In the same layer were also found

142 pieces of scattered quartz. In spite of the quartz being in considerably smaller quantities, the similarities to mound 2 are conspicuous, as was also noticed by Lundborg himself (1972, pp. 60 ff.).

Like Kårarp, the mound at Vapnö church was previously part of a small group of graves. When excavated in 1968 the grave was 21 to 22 metres in diameter and 2.8 metres high. A central grave from the Early Bronze Age (period III) was found in the middle of the mound, containing the cremated bones of a young man with a bronze sword. In this case too, scattered pieces of quartz up to a weight of 12 kilos were found in the upper parts of the mound. The quartz was covering a secondary grave from the Early Iron Age, consisting of a stone-setting, four metres in size, and with a partly preserved stone circle. Apart from some pottery of Early Iron Age character, the grave contained a small accumulation of stones, with cremated bones and pieces of quartz to a weight of 1.4 kilos (Lundborg, archive report 1968; Lundborg 1972, pp. 77 ff.).

The graves presented so far have either been solitary or part of small grave groups. However, in southern Halland depositions of quartz are also known from mounds in cemetery settings. The cemetery at Sannarp, Årstad parish, is one of few cemeteries which have been totally excavated. During the investigation in 1990, by the National Heritage Board, sixteen grave structures were documented, three of which were mounds, seven round stone-settings, two oval stone-settings, one rectangular stone-setting, one fire pit lying beneath a boulder, and two block graves. The analyses are not yet concluded. However, preliminary results show a dating of the cemetery from the Early Bronze Age to the Migration Period (Streiffert & Strömberg 1999).

Depositions of quartz were observed in several graves, including the three mounds (A 80, 86 and 93). These were all built during the Early Bronze Age, but later reused for secondary burials during the Late Bronze Age, the Pre-Roman and Roman Iron Age. As in previous cases, the

quartz was primarily found in the upper strata of the mounds (A 86:1254 g; A 93:8793 g), or on a kerb (A 80:911 g). Pieces of quartz were also found in several secondary graves (A 80:b–f urn pits: 28 to 380 g; A 86:c urn pit in a cist: 22 g and A 86:f urn pit: 45 g), all dating to the Early Iron Age, except for A 86:c, which belongs to the Early Bronze Age. The stratigraphic connection of the quartz to an Early Iron Age context was particularly evident in mound A 93. Here the white stones were scattered immediately on top of the internal grave structure, consisting of an urn pit from the Roman Iron Age. Judging by the composition of grave gifts – an iron sickle, an iron knife, a pointed iron object and a knife with an S-shaped blade – we are probably dealing with a female grave (Streiffert & Strömberg 1999).

Quartz depositions in round and square stone-settings

Stone-settings are among the grave types which are still very poorly explored in southern Halland, in spite of the fact that about sixty structures have been excavated during the last few decades (Nilsson 1998). Although a relatively limited number of stone-settings have been excavated, white stones have been found in no less than one quarter of these. Altogether, we are dealing with eleven round and three square stone-settings, all situated in groups of graves or in a cemetery context (Table II).

The dating of the graves spans from the Late Bronze Age to the Roman Iron Age, although with the majority in the Iron Age. Unfortunately, the documentation of quartz is poor in several of the investigations, probably because the excavators did not see the white stones as meaningful. Consequently, it is difficult to read any particular details concerning how the quartz was deposited. For example, this is the case in Sörby, Sibbarp and Höstena, where the information about pieces of quartz and quartzite is presented in very general terms. Thus, according to the report from Sörby, “considerable

Table II. Stone-settings with white stones discussed in the case study. Abbreviations: A=Age; E=Early; BR=Bronze; P ROM=Pre-Roman.

Locality	Type/No.	White stones	Deposition	Dating	Reference
Folkared	Round/A11:2	unknown	scattered in the packing	Undated	Augustsson 1977 HM 18 471
Folkared	Irregular/A11:5	4 stones/220 g	covering a cremation grave	E IRON A?	Augustsson 1977 HM 18 471
Folkared	Rectangular/A11:3	26.7 kg	in the top layer	IRON A?	Augustsson 1977 HM 18 471
Höstena	Round with a central cairn and brim	750 g	in the packing	IRON A?	Petersen 1970; HM 17 341
Ramsberg	Rectangular	large amounts	in the top layer	IRON A?	Skoglund 1996
Sannarp	Square/A85	c. 100 kg	in the packing	P ROM IRON A	Streiffert & Strömberg 1999
Sannarp	Round/A52	c. 750 g	in the packing	E IRON A	Streiffert & Strömberg 1999
Sannarp	Round/A54	c. 50 g	in the packing	E IRON A	Streiffert & Strömberg 1999
Sannarp	Round/A83	c. 1 kg	in the packing	E IRON A	Streiffert & Strömberg 1999
Sannarp	Round/A84	4 g	in the packing	E IRON A	Streiffert & Strömberg 1999
Sannarp	Round/A95	c. 35 g	in the packing and in two cremation graves	E IRON A	Streiffert & Strömberg 1999
Sannarp	Oval/A76	c. 240 g	in the packing	E IRON A	Streiffert & Strömberg 1999
Sibbarp	Round	c. 12 kg	unknown	Undated	Stenfell 1979; HM 18 490
Sörby	Round with a central cairn and brim	numerous	in the packing	E BR A E IRON A	Thålin 1966

amounts of quartzite” were found during the cleaning of the turf-layer as well as in the bottom layer (Thålin 1966). In the report from Höstena, we likewise have information about roughly 750 grams of quartz from the filling material of the grave (Petersen 1970). Finally, in Sibbarp, we know from the list of finds that no less than twelve kilos of quartz were collected as surface finds during the excavation (Stenfell 1979).

Information on white stones is somewhat more ample and varied at Folkared and Sannarp. Two square stone-settings are especially interesting, while like the cairn at Tiraholm, they contained large amounts of quartz in the upper layers. Similar observations have also been made in a square stone-setting at Ramsberg, Angelstad parish, Småland, to the south-west of Bolmen.

The quartz was observed in 1993 by personnel from Småland Museum, in connection with damage due to ploughing of a clearing. The grave is part of a small cemetery with standing stones, probably dating to the Early Iron Age (Skoglund 1996, p. 5).

The cemetery at Folkared, Sibbarp parish, was excavated in 1976 by the Halland County Museum. The investigation comprised all the graves in the cemetery, five round stone-settings, one square stone-setting, one standing stone with an urn grave and one cremation grave without visible marks on the ground. The cemetery contained few date-indicating artefacts, but can be dated by radiocarbon analysis to 800–180 b.c., corresponding to the Late Bronze Age and Pre-Roman Iron Age (Augustsson 1976,

1977). Depositions of quartz were found in one round (A11:2), one irregular (A11:5) and one square stone-setting (A11:3). The largest amount of quartz was found in the latter grave, with no less than 26.7 kilos of white stones placed in the upper stratum. Unfortunately, this grave structure contained no dating artefacts. If we look at the irregular stone-setting, the quartz was found in connection with a central internal burial structure, consisting of a sooty area with burnt bones. The burial was marked with a slab, about half a metre in size. On top of as well as under the slab were found four pieces of quartz with a total weight of 220 grams. The grave has not been dated, but according to the excavator, it may belong to the Pre-Roman Iron Age (Augustsson 1977).

In the cemetery at Sannarp, Årstad parish, quartz was not only found in the three mounds mentioned above, but also in five round stone-settings (A 52, 54, 83, 84 and 95), one oval stone-setting (A 76), one square stone-setting (A 85) and finally in a cremation pit marked with a boulder (A 73). The graves in question seem primarily to have been erected during the Pre-Roman and Roman Iron Age periods (Streiffert & Strömberg 1999).

The greatest amount of quartz was found in the square stone-setting (A 85) (approximately 100 kilos). The grave filling was built of stones in four layers. Large quantities of quartz were especially found in the third layer, which in the middle section had been exposed to high temperatures by burning. Quartz was also documented in the two upper layers as well as in two parallel internal kerbs in the east section. In contrast to the stone-setting at Folkared, this grave contained two burials. In the centre an urn cremation pit was found (A 85:a) with pottery and burnt bones, probably from an elderly man. A radiocarbon date from the grave filling gave a dating to the Pre-Roman Iron Age (calibrated value with one sigma 400–129 BC). In strata 2 and 3 were found a fire deposit layer approximately 1 x 2 metres in size (A 85:b), containing burnt bones from an adult, presumably an elderly

individual, together with pottery and fragments of a bronze triangular brooch. This grave also belonged to the Pre-Roman Iron Age (cf. a radiocarbon date: calibrated with one sigma 507–233 BC). According to Bo Strömberg the bones probably belong to the same individual (oral information march 2000).

The amount of quartz was considerably smaller in the other stone-settings, varying between four grams and one kilo (A 52, 54, 76, 83, 84 and 95). In all structures, except for A 95, the quartz was found scattered in the grave fillings, usually consisting of two and four layers. In A 95 the white stones were registered in two of the altogether seven urn pits found in the grave.

Quartz in other types of grave

Apart from mounds and stone-settings, depositions of quartz have also been documented in connection with other grave structures. In the cemetery at Sannarp approximately half a kilo was found in a cremation pit marked with a boulder (A 73) (Streiffert & Strömberg 1999). A different kind of find was made in 1918 by T. J. Arne, during excavations of a small cemetery with Iron Age dolmens at Bölminge Bäckagård, Nöttja parish, Småland, to the south of Bolmen. At the excavation three out of four dolmens were affected. In dolmen no. 2, a bronze tinplate with a rivet hole, probably belonging to a locking device, was found immediately under the roof boulder that had dropped down. At a depth of 0.1 to 0.25 metres there was dark sandy soil and burnt bones together with 130 pieces of white quartz. Underneath were found more bones and some larger stones. At 0.5 and 0.6 metres' depth a layer of charcoal and burnt bones was documented along with a bronze mounting, perhaps the upper rim of a drinking horn, a bronze rivet, a piece of iron, a small ring with two mounting straps and fragments of a bone comb. Judging from the burial finds, this grave can be dated to the Late Roman Iron Age (Arne 1919, pp. 130 f. and 136).

A find of quite different character was dis-

covered in 1925 during excavations by Arne at a cemetery in Norra Skogaby, Veinge parish, consisting of 16 low earth-mixed cairns from the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age. A total of six graves were investigated. In the upper layer of a Bronze Age cairn (approx. 7 metres in diameter and 1 metre high) was found a secondary burial, in the form of a biconical clay vessel with supporting stones. Besides burnt bones and several iron artefacts, a glossy silicon pebble was found lying on the bottom of the urn. The finds of a brooch with profiled shape and a belt mounting date the grave to ca. 200 AD (Arne 1925; Arbman 1945, pp. 62 f.).

Quartz has been found at some other sites in southern Halland and surrounding areas. However, none of these contribute any further information. Concerning the chronology, it should be mentioned that pieces of quartz were found in the fillings of a large number of cremation burials (43 of 140 graves) in a Viking Age cemetery at Sannagård, Vinberg parish. The quartz was found as both cores and flakes. Since we are dealing with solitary pieces, it cannot be excluded that they were deposited in the grave fillings by coincidence (Artelius and Arcini 1996).

Discussion

Although the number of graves with quartz from southern Halland is of limited size, I feel that some tendencies concerning the practice of white stones can be discerned on this basis. Firstly, the question of chronology is considered. Then I try to distinguish recurrent patterns in the treatment and deposition of white stones within the burial customs.

Chronological aspects

In Halland, the practice of building white stones into graves has been documented in different types of graves, from mounds, cairns and stone-settings to Iron Age dolmens and cremation pits next to standing stones. In spite of the variation in the external grave types, there is no doubt that the tradition has strong chronological support

in the Early Iron Age. In particular, this connection is clear when white stones were found in mounds and cairns from the Bronze Age. In all cases, the stones were deposited together with secondary burials from the Pre-Roman and Roman Periods. Also, when white stones were found in round and square stone-settings, the chronological connections with the Early Iron Age were evident (cf. Folkared and Sannarp). However, there are also several examples of stone-settings from the Late Bronze Age being used for secondary burials during the Early Iron Age (cf. Sörby, Höstena and Sibbarp). Due to deficiency in the archaeological documentation, it was difficult to interpret whether the quartz was deposited in connection with the original grave construction or later on.

The practice of building quartz into graves within the case study area corresponds chronologically to similar finds made in Bohuslän, Västergötland, Södermanland and Uppland. According to Runcis and Westman, graves with quartz in the Mälaren area probably belong to a later period, with its main focus in the Migration Period. On the other hand, graves with crushed quartz already appear during the Late Bronze Age. Thus, the chronological picture is probably more complicated (Runcis 1996, pp. 22 f.; Westman 1998, p. 22).

The treatment and deposition of quartz

The practice of using white stones shows great variation, not only in the choice of material and quantity of stones, but also in how these were built into the grave monument. The number of white stones differs considerably between the different graves. The largest numbers were found in the cairn at Tiraholm and in the square stone-setting at Sannarp, with some 500 and 1000 kilos respectively. Large quantities of quartz were also found in one of the mounds at Kårarp (70 kilos), as well as in the rectangular stone-setting in Folkared (30 kilos). However, the rest of the graves contain much smaller amounts, varying from 12 kilos to less than a hundred pieces.

Concerning the character of the stones, we

are usually dealing with quartz with an intense white colour. Generally the quartz was crushed into smaller pieces, with three exceptions, consisting of small natural rounded pebbles (Esprahögen, Båstad and Bølminge Bäckagård). Furthermore, in two cases we have information about light feldspar and quartzite. Apart from crushing, the quartz was normally not exposed to any other treatment, except for the square stone-setting at Sannarp (A 85), in which the middle layer of the grave filling showed evidence of intense heat treatment. As a secondary burial was found in this layer, it seems likely that a fire was made on top of the quartz before the funeral.

Also, the deposition of quartz shows several variations. Most conspicuous is of course those cases in which the white stones were put as a covering mantle on the top and slopes of the grave. Besides at Tiraholm, this phenomenon has been documented in at least three Bronze Age mounds with secondary burials from the Early Iron Age (Sannarp, Kårarp and Vapnö), as well as in three rectangular stone-settings (Folkared, Ramsberg and Sannarp).

In some cases the white stones were also found on top of, or close to, an internal burial structure. Either the stones were placed as a cairn of miniature size (Esprahögen, cf. also Bølminge Bäckagård), or as solitary pieces in the burial (cf. Folkared, grave 11:5 and Norra Skogaby). The stones could hardly have been visible in these cases, but should rather be seen as part of the building structure or perhaps as grave gifts.

The building of “sacred white stones” into graves

The analysis of quartz in graves clearly show that white stones, during the Early Iron Age, were ascribed a strong symbolic meaning. At the same time, white stones were not used in all burials, but only in some graves. This circumstance inevitably bring us to the central question of this paper: what function or meaning was connected to the white stones in burial traditions of that time?

In previous scientific works the white colour is often seen as a symbol of fertility, which in funeral rituals was used in order to symbolize the circle of life and rebirth of the dead. Comparisons have been made, for instance, with the prevailing tradition in Norway, especially Vestlandet, during the Early Iron Age, consisting of so-called “sacred white stones”. These stones, with their phallic shape, are seen as symbols of fertility in connection with a death cult (Petersen 1906; Hjørungdal 1991, p. 88; Larsen 1994).

An interpretation of white stones as symbols of fertility gains indirect support from the fact that such stones are often found at sacrificial sites from the Early Iron Age. Holger Arbman pays attention to this phenomenon in his study of Käringsjön, and at the same time mentions several Danish sites – for example Vimosen, Nydam and Hjortspring – where similar finds of small white stones were made in connection with the offerings (cf. Arbman 1945, pp. 103 f.). White stone of quartz and limestone has also been found in large numbers at several Swedish offering sites, as well as in Norway (Hagberg 1967, p. 36).

Another interpretation put forth sees the white stones as having magical and protective forces (Skjoldsvold 1963, p. 216). There are several interesting facts from Tiraholm that indirectly support the idea of the stones being primarily of a magical guardian character: (1) the quartz as symbolic bedstones for stones in the bottom layer; (2) handfuls of quartz scattered in the grave; and (3) quartz as a covering mantle on the top and slopes of the cairn. Through the case study, the use of white stones is shown to have further variations, in the form of solitary stones or accumulations of stones, found immediately on top of or within the internal burial structure itself.

Of course, there is nothing contradictory about white stones also having functioned as symbols of fertility and rebirth. The meaning was probably far more complex and ambiguous than we today are capable of interpreting from

the archaeological material. The connection with solitary burials and monuments is of particular interest, since it suggests that the use of white stones may have been linked either to particular individuals in society, or to specific needs of the dead. Here a more thorough study of the tradition, viewed in relation to the sex, age, social position and cause of death of the deceased, would have been interesting. However, the basis for such a discussion is lacking in the material used in this case study. Consequently, one can only speculate about whether white stones were used to mark the social status of the dead; or perhaps individuals with special gifts, possibly of importance for cult practice on the farm. However, white stones may also have had a magico-religious or cosmological function in the burial tradition. With this perspective we obtain a quite different scenario, in which the white stones, because of their significant colour, were ascribed internal magical powers. Perhaps this power was needed in particular situations, as for example when the deceased had suffered a difficult and painful death, in order to facilitate the journey to the land of death or the rebirth of the soul.

The interpretation of white stones from a magico-religious perspective gains indirect support from the excavation at Tiraholm. In order to understand the meaning of the quartz, it must be seen in relation to the construction and building of the monument as a whole. As previously mentioned, the cairn was built of several distinct layers with stones of different sizes. Perhaps the intention of this construction was to create a private microcosm of the dead, where the separate strata of the grave represented the construction of Mother Earth, and where the mantle of quartz on the top and slopes of the cairn symbolizes the surrounding and protective vault of heaven.

The interpretation of white stones as having sacred or magical powers is also supported by other sites. In Gotland, for example, slabs of white limestone were often used as building material in graves from the Bronze and Iron Age.

However, the stones were not used at random in the grave fillings. Rather, they were used in a distinct manner for designing different construction details, as internal and external stone-circles, kerbs and stone-cists of various kinds. This particular use of white limestone indicates that the slabs were not only used as ornaments, but had ritually protective functions, by surrounding the grave or other particularly vulnerable parts, such as the internal burial deposition.

Without drawing any far-reaching conclusions further ahead in time, I would like to close the paper by drawing attention to a passage in Snorri's *Edda*, which shows that the white colour was regarded as sacred during the Viking Age as well. Thus, Snorri speaks about the ash tree Yggdrasil; beneath each of the three roots there was a well – called Hvergelmir, the spring of Mimir and the spring of Urd. The last one in particular was seen as very sacred, because the gods had their place of court there. "It is said further that the Norns who live near the spring of Urd draw water from the spring every day, and along with it the clay that lies round about the spring, and they besprinkle the ash so that its branches shall not wither or decay. But that water is so sacred that everything that comes into the spring becomes as white as the film (which is called 'skin') that lies within the egg-shell. As it says here:

*I know an ash-tree
known as Yggdrasil,
tall tree and sacred
besprent with white clay,
thence come the dews
that fall on the dales;
it stands ever green
over Urd's spring."*

(From Jean I. Young's translation 1973, pp. 45 f.).

According to Oddgeir Hoftun, the reference to the egg and its white skin should be understood from the meaning of the egg in pre-Christian cult, as a symbol of life and fertility. Furthermore, he sees the whole essence of the picture of white

water being poured from the well of Urd and upon Yggdrasil as having a wider meaning, where the life-giving water is used in order to preserve the cosmos. In classical literature there is indirect evidence of several Germanic tribes at the time of birth of Christ, who saw the white colour as sacred and charged with cosmic and divine power (Hoftun 1997, p. 43). The Greek author Strabo tells us about the Cimbrians, who had female fortune-tellers or priestesses wearing white clothes (after Glob 1965, p. 153). In his book *Germania* (written in 98 AD), Tacitus says that the Germanic tribes kept white horses at public expense in sacred groves who were the confidants of the gods (after Hoftun 1997, p. 44).

Final remarks

The evidence of written sources supports the idea of white being regarded as sacred in the world-view of Iron Age man. Whiteness in an artefact or material was the sign of particular internal forces. In other words, sacredness showed itself through the white colour, and when the Sacred appeared to man, contact and communication with the gods was made possible (Eliade 1968, pp. 8 f. and 20 f.).

Most likely, the white colour was a symbol of the superior divine and cosmological forces in existence. Judging from the archaeological sources, the sacred power of whiteness was particularly effective in connection with cults of the dead. There is a great deal to indicate that the white colour was used in funeral rituals, because of its internal power to guarantee the prevailing cosmology, with the continuance of life and rebirth of the dead, or passage to another world. It is in this perspective, I believe, we should understand the use of white stones in Iron Age burial traditions.

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