

## The Gallery Graves of Hesse and Westphalia: Expressions of different Identity (ies)?

October 20th, 2010

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### Zusammenfassung

Der Begriff der Identität wird in vielen Facetten bereits seit einigen Jahren auf seine Anwendbarkeit in der prähistorischen Archäologie intensiv diskutiert. In dieser Abhandlung soll versucht werden, einige dieser Facetten im Bezug auf die spätneolithischen Galeriegräber in Hessen und Westfalen aufzugreifen. Dabei sollen ausgewählte Aspekte betrachtet und auf Aussagen hinsichtlich bestimmter Identitätsebenen untersucht werden: Eine strukturelle Analyse der Bauweise, Beigabensitten und Bestattungsrituale sowie deren räumlichem Gefüge ermöglicht Vergleiche zu benachbarten, ebenfalls kollektiv bestattenden Gemeinschaften, die letztlich zur Herausstellung identitätsstiftender Merkmale herangezogen werden können.

### Summary

The concept of identity, in many aspects, has been intensively discussed for several years for its applicability in prehistoric archaeology. In this paper, I would like to try to take up some of these aspects with reference to the late Neolithic gallery graves of Hesse and Westphalia. Some selected facets are examined to enlighten distinct scales of identity: a structural analysis of building techniques, deposition of grave goods and burial rites together with their spatial distribution offers comparisons to coexistent neighbouring communities with collective burials. These comparisons finally may point out identity-forming features.

### Introduction

In Germany, the discussion concerning the use of the term "identity" and its implications in archaeology, especially in the prehistoric branch, has flourished in the last years (e.g. Burmeister/Müller-Scheeßel 2006; Rieckhoff/Sommer 2007; Krauß/Nakoinz 2009). In this contribution, it is not possible to reflect about all the different arguments, beliefs and concepts of identity. But some aspects of identity, presenting the basis of the interpretation given in the context of the gallery graves, have to be mentioned.

An elementary aspect of identity is the fact that it arises from social experience and social activity, in its connection to adaption and differentiation: identity becomes manifest in action. As we want to examine megaliths and identities, therefore ritual and funeral spheres of identity, it is necessary to choose examples concerning this topic. According to Antonia Davidovic, who wrote an inspiring article about identity and its understanding in archaeology (Davidovic 2006), it can be stated that especially the participation in funeral rites

as standardised and stereotyped activities – nota bene: not the rites themselves – is identity-forming. But how can we, as archaeologists, reconstruct such participations and finally identity? From this point of view, it seems, in my opinion, impossible in most of the cases.

In prehistoric archaeology, only finds and features can tell us something about identity-forming activities in the past. As Ph. della Casa argues in a short note<sup>1</sup>, several so-called cultural codes are used to display different aspects of autonomy and social affiliation. This can take place in rituals and / or in a material space.

In order to analyse possible differentiable scales of identity with the help of the material space, it is necessary to connect them with spatial scales. Concerning the gallery graves of Hesse and Westphalia, it is possible to distinguish several of these. The core is a collective tomb, with its architecture, buried individuals and grave goods. Several tombs at one place form a necropolis, a graveyard where connections between building techniques, burial customs and grave goods can be drawn. Several graveyards can be subsumed under a regional group. These groups form a supra-regional distribution with many similarities, but also with particular differences.

Which material spaces, in the case of the gallery graves, can be examined to tell something about identity-forming activities? On the basis of the spatial scales cited above, it is possible to study building techniques, burial customs and grave goods in relation to each other.

Collective tombs could only be built by team work, as their dimensions and the building material indicate. So we can examine building techniques, building materials and its provenance to enlighten the amount of work. Special details of construction may indicate further similarities or differences, and differing contacts to neighbouring communities.

Burial customs can be analysed concerning the condition and the position of the bodies buried. Here it may be useful to look after possible differences concerning age and/or gender.

The grave goods indicate on the one hand an individual sphere when they can be directly connected to a buried person. Here, connections with age and gender could point out a different social status. On the other hand, the position of grave goods in wider distance to individuals, especially in the entrances, shows a rather collective character of depositing. This may indicate a social sphere.

Not included in the discussion are thoughts about the raw material distribution of grave goods, although it is possible to show different connections to neighbouring communities (Schierhold in print).

## **Building techniques**

Today, about 40 gallery graves and related forms are known in Westphalia and Hesse (Schierhold in print). They occur on the northern border of the so called “Mittelgebirgszone” or Central German uplands. They can be divided into several regional groups, which lay about 30 km apart from each other. Within the groups, there are also places with only one tomb, but usually two tombs in close vicinity to each other are known. Some places even have three or more tombs at one place, for example Schmerlecke or Warburg.

The gallery graves are, as one of the most important elements of construction, sunk into the ground, and covered with a mound. They are 10 to 35 m long and 2 to 3 m wide. The building material consists (in the majority of the cases) of slabs of limestone or sandstone. The chamber can often be reached via a porthole. There are two main types. The so-called type Züschen is characterised by an ac-

<sup>1</sup> Ph. Della Casa, Abstract „Identitätssache: Körper, Kleidung und Marker im sozialen Kontext“, lecture given at the WSVA conference in Nuremberg 25th-28th May 2010 in the Bronze Age session; main theme „Identitätsmuster in der Bronzezeit – Vom Fundmaterial zur Konstruktion“.

cess on the smaller, axial side and an antechamber or vestibule. The so-called type Rimbeck has an access on the longer, lateral side like a Funnel beaker passage grave.

The spread of some details of construction of the tombs is evident while comparing collective tombs in Westphalia, Hesse and the neighbouring regions of Western Thuringia, Southern Lower Saxony, the Neuwied Basin and the northernmost part of Bavaria. In all these areas, sometimes even more far away, typical elements of construction of gallery graves from Hesse and Westphalia are used in other tombs, for example the tradition of sinking the tombs into the ground in Western Thuringia, portholes in Southern Lower Saxony or, in many cases, the axial entrance, sometimes with a vestibule. But there are also influences from the north: the Rimbeck type with its lateral entrance and a passage is very often seen in Northwestern Lower Saxony and in the Netherlands. In Westphalia, it is mixed with the porthole tradition. This kind of entrance is only seen in Westphalia, but not in Hesse. On the other hand, the Züschen type is very often built in Westphalia: it is striking that both types are often used at the same place in a distance of only few metres, for example in Warburg, Atteln, and Kirchborchen. Chronological reasons (one type is older than the other) are not given, as verified at Warburg where AMS-datings revealed the same early dates, so that both types were in use at the same time (Raetzel-Fabian 1997, 175 ff.; ders. 2000, 128 ff.). So there seem to be other reasons, for example different rites of the burying communities, or perhaps even a different provenance of the builders?

That there were, on the other hand, direct and close contacts between the builders of the gallery graves, and that they passed down their knowledge to others, who needed it, perhaps even to the next generations, is shown by small details of construction. In Warburg especially, the corners are built with dry stone walls in a slightly rounded manner, at Warburg III even with megalithic stones (Günther 1997, fig. 138). That elements of construction like these were used not only at Warburg becomes clear with a look at Warburg I. It shows so called façade stones beside the vestibule walls, an element found in exactly the same way at Wewelsburg I, about 30 km away in the Paderborn group (Günther/Viets 1992). These two tombs even had the same orientation.

Recent excavations at a necropolis of the Soest Group at Schmerlecke (between Dortmund and Paderborn, Westphalia) give another very interesting aspect of these relations in between a regional group. From Schmerlecke, three tombs are known until now. Two of them are built more or less conventionally from megalithic slabs of limestone. But there is another tomb only a few metres away which is built from dry walls and is therefore not a megalithic one: bigger slabs could not be found yet. It is about 4.5 metres wide, thus it was surely not covered with capstones. In the Soest Group, near Völlinghausen, a very similar tomb only 3 km from Schmerlecke was excavated in the early 1990 (Hömberg 1992, Hömberg 1993, Hömberg 1994, Knoche 2008 fig. 5.48.1). The eastern narrow side of this tomb is built in exactly the same way, and the lateral dry stone walls are rounded. They are constructed as if to imitate the forms of erratic blocks or boulders. This is extraordinary, because boulders of this size are not common in this region, and all other tombs of the Soest Group are built with megalithic slabs of limestone, so the builders could have easily used this building material. The reason for this is not yet clear: did the builders have no access to the quarries? Or didn't they have the knowledge to build with big slabs any more, perhaps for chronological reasons? Was their community too small to organise the work? Or, as seems also possible, were the builders not only in-

fluenced by tomb building in the TRB area but did they even move in from there? This may be further indicated by the great length of the tomb: it measures about 25 metres.

All these questions open new possibilities of thinking about social differences, or even different identities between the burying communities of one group, perhaps even different provenances of the builders.

### Burial customs

In the majority of the cases, 80 to 100 individuals can be identified in a gallery grave, but due to bad preservation and chaotic find circumstances we only can speak of minimum numbers (Schierhold in print). All data known until today show a similar age structure of the burying communities. All age classes are represented. Many children died, about 10 to 30 % of the population. Most people reached an age of 30 to 40, some over 60, very few grew older than 60. It has to be mentioned that the amount of male and female burials is more or less in balance. The data point to the conclusion that every member of a community was buried in a gallery grave, without reference to age or gender.

Because of the long-lasting practice of burying in gallery graves, not many skeletons in anatomical order are preserved until now. But with the data known today it is possible to show wider similarities concerning the burial customs occurring in every regional group.

In nearly every tomb with preservation of bones, inhumation burials are common. The bodies are often found in a supine position, lying on their back. Only one individual is known lying face-down (Henglarn I: Günther 1992, 57). They were positioned parallel to the chamber axis. In many tombs, the heads are recorded pointing to the entrances, if it was on the axial side. But there are also some individuals known lying with their feet to the entrances. Obviously, an astronomical orientation of the dead was not intended because the tombs are not orientated in certain directions (for directions see Günther 1997, fig. 136; 137). Furthermore, it has to be mentioned that among the Rimbeck type tombs with lateral entrances, it was necessary to turn the bodies around 90 degrees. In some cases, one can assume regional preferences: In Calden II and in Altendorf, children were buried across the chamber axis (Pasda 2000, 332 f. fig. 1a, 1c, 3; Jordan 1954, 12 ff.). On the other hand, several adults, women and men, as well as children were placed like that in four other tombs (Niedertiefenbach, Henglarn I, Warburg III, Warburg IV; Schierhold in print). These data show that we can locate special body positions in almost every regional group, and until now, it does not seem to be determined by age or gender.

In some cases, it is still possible to reconstruct the position of the arms. Many different positions are known, even in one tomb (Schierhold in print). The left or the right arm can be bent, while the other one is lying close to the body, we also know both arms being bent. Sometimes, the arms are crossed. The hands have several positions; on the pelvis, near the stomach, chest or shoulders. Females and males, adults and children are testified with several positions of the arms; it is not possible to detect an age or gender similarity among one tomb or in comparison to others. But in two cases, the positions of the arms may show a certain preference: in Henglarn I, it seems to be typical that the right arm is bent. The position of the hands is mostly located on stomach or pelvis (Günther 1992, inserts 7–9). In Niedertiefenbach, several times both arms are bent, hands lying on pelvis, chest or shoulder (Wurm et al. 1963, fig. 27, 29, 31).

Cremation burials are only very sparsely known. Only one tomb shows cremations without any exception. This is the tomb of Lohra near Marburg (Uenze 1954). It differs also concerning the grave goods (many vessels, especially cups) and thus must be seen as a single case. In Calden II near Kassel, four cremation burials are testified. No age or gender preference could be stated (Pasda 2000, 338). Furthermore, we know of some burned bones from other tombs, but only little fragments, and it seems that the reason for this can be found in fireplaces, where some bones were cremated by accident.

### **Grave goods**

Concerning the grave goods, an overview of finds representing the individual sphere will be given first. These are finds which can be seen as a personal belonging because of the find circumstances respectively the direct connection to buried persons. It has to be mentioned that grave goods, in general, are not very common among the gallery graves. Nevertheless, some similarities, but also differences concerning this topic can be stated (Schierhold in print).

As personal equipment, several ornaments must be named. Mostly animal tooth pendants, often from dogs, were worn. These pendants are found connected with males, females and children of differing ages lying next to heads, necks, or legs and arms. Therefore it can be stated that they served as necklaces, hair decoration, or were fixed to clothes. Mandibles, often from foxes, are interpreted as amulets. Their find circumstances near the waist point to a wearing in belt bags or something similar. Furthermore, we know of some tombs with copper and amber objects, unfortunately these cannot be assigned to distinct individuals. Their use may have been similar to other pendants.

The hunting sphere is represented by several arrowheads of which are known triangular ones in Northern Hesse and parts of Eastern Westphalia, and trapezoidal or transverse ones known mainly from Westphalian tombs. Furthermore, there are some bone arrowheads. In Warburg, for example, all three types were found lying next to each other, so we can assume that the arrows were worn in a quiver.

Representing the working sphere, axes and adzes can be named, moreover some bone tools like awls and chisels are known. Some larger flakes from the Maas region and other silex artefacts complete the work equipment.

For all these finds, relations between age and / or gender could not be stated yet; the same is true for the uses of certain pairs, for example tooth pendants and mandibles which occur often as equipment of one individual. Axes and adzes, in addition, are so very rare known that they rather seem to indicate not only an individual sphere but a collective one (see below).

To summarize, the analysis of distinct individuals and their grave goods was not very helpful to differentiate possible identities. But a look on quantitative and qualitative criteria shows „richer“ and „poorer“ communities. It is obvious that the access to copper and amber objects was not possible for every community, as they occur in less than seven tombs, and mostly even together. The tomb „Wewelsburg I“ can be stated one of the „richest“ tombs with more than 20 finds of copper or copper fragments, more than 30 amber beads and about 400 tooth pendants (Günther/Viets 1992).

On the other hand, some grave goods seemed to be favoured in regional groups whereas the other tombs did not show this. This is the case, for example, for the tombs of Altendorf and Züschen I where lots of bone tools were found (Schierhold in print).

The adzes and axes mentioned above occur very sparsely and are not connected to distinct individuals. In the majority of cases, we can state the same for the pottery. Only few vessels are found, we can assume 5 to 30 per tomb. So, clearly not every person was accompanied by a ceramic grave good. The pottery is found near the entrances, especially near the porthole slabs, on both sides. Only very few vessels were found deep inside the chambers. They were perhaps formerly connected with individuals. In these cases, the burials seem to be late: Some globular amphorae are scattered in one tomb, or Corded Ware Culture burials are accompanied by pottery. This deposition near the entrances points to distinct rituals of a collective sphere.

Concerning the provenance of the vessels, we can state that in Westphalia, several TRB ceramics like funnel beakers are known. In most tombs, pottery of the Wartberg Culture is found, as there are storage vessels and different forms of cups and bowls. In some tombs, collared flasks are known. Bernburg drums and other pottery from north eastern neighbours are known from northern Hessian inventories.

As stated above, identity becomes manifest in action. Therefore it is useful to examine the finds and features which could hint to certain activities around the tombs. In this case, it is enlightening to have a look at neighbouring communities and their finds around the tombs and then to compare them to the gallery graves. For this purpose, an example is selected that indicates, with the help of the material space respectively pottery, ritual activities which were surely able to point out differences to neighbouring communities.

As we know, lots of pottery is found among the TRB Passage Graves of the West Group. A.L. Brindley (Brindley 2003) interprets the many different sizes of the pots and their form as being made for distinct drinks and meals, and many different rituals concerning the living (food and drink) and the dead (meals and drinks as offerings) can be imagined. She found out that the individuals' burials in the *hunebedden* were accompanied by ceremonial activities which involved the use of pottery by sometimes large numbers of people. The style, form, size, and possible sets of the pottery suggest the evolution of a funerary ritual over more than 400 years:

In Brindley's horizon 1 (3400–3350 calBC) few offerings in larger storage vessels were common. In Horizon 2 and 3 (3350–3200 calBC) drinks to mix in several vessels and vessels for meals indicate ritual feasting, sometimes with large numbers of people, which represents the peak of ritual activities. In Horizon 4 (3200–3050 calBC), fewer participants were involved, and there was a change of drinking rituals: amphorae and flasks indicate perhaps a sealing and therefore an offering of the drinks, or they were not mixed any more, but ready to drink. In Horizon 6 (3050–2900 calBC), the use of few large vessels and coarse ware point to a, by Brindley, so called "wine-and-nuts-reception". In Horizon 7, no more drinks and only food offerings were common.

In comparison to these activities, the Wartberg Culture rituals show differences: During the first phase of the older Wartberg Culture (3400–3200 calBC), only very few tombs with pottery are testified; little beakers with overhanging rims are known here. The peak of ritual activities is reached between 3200 und 3000 calBC, slightly later than in TRB. Large storage vessels, bowls, and a lot of different cup forms are known. The little amount of vessels does not allow suggesting regular ritual meals, but sporadic drinking rituals, perhaps with one cup for several persons, might have been possible. Drums, coming from the East, are a new element in rituals. After

3000 calBC, in the younger phase of the Wartberg Culture, cups are not common any more, and only few large storage vessels and bowls are known. In Westphalia, globular amphorae are dominant, probably containing distinct drinking substances.

How these differences between many vessels in TRB tombs and the sparse distribution in Wartberg tombs are to be interpreted, is difficult to answer. Nevertheless we can assume different rituals which might have been identity-forming.

### Summary and Conclusions

The following points can be stated: The building techniques as well as burial customs and grave goods show, in a wider view, many similarities among the gallery graves. Differentiations to neighbouring communities can, as one striking point, be shown with grave goods, as demonstrated above with the example of pottery.

But if we look closer, several differences not only between regional groups, but even between tombs built in closest vicinity to each other can be seen. These differences occur in the position of buried individuals, in their personal equipment and in the building techniques of the tombs. In hardly any case, connections between age, gender and other aspects could be drawn, so that from this point of view, no special indications of identity are given.

It can be assumed that the burying communities knew each other, but each community seems to be distinguishable. But how is it possible to recognize which of the parameters lightened up here really did create identity?

A. Davidovic, in her contribution to identity in archaeology, points out some crucial points which archaeologists, in my opinion, should keep in mind when interpreting finds and features: „Space and ritual as expressions of identity firstly offer a connection between the material world and the identificative world. Such concepts of space, respectively rituals, cannot be transferred to archaeological sources without problems: only the actors' subjective attribution to distinct meanings can create identity-forming characteristics. Space and ritual should not be seen determining and therefore limiting man's activities. ... A localisation of identity based on a material space will be difficult, because the reconstructions of subjective attributions stay speculative.”<sup>2</sup>

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## Impressum

ISSN 1868-3088

Redaktion: Martin Furholt, Kiel  
 Techn. Redaktion und Layout:  
 Holger Dieterich, Kiel

Urheberrechtliche Hinweise:  
 Siehe [www.jungsteinsite.de](http://www.jungsteinsite.de), Artikel