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in Honour of her 70th Birthday**

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Stamp decorated Early La Tène flask from Hidegség
Eisenstadt, Burgenländisches Landesmuseum

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“Soul Stones”: Unmodified Quartz and Other Lithic Material in Early Iron Age Burials

BETTINA ARNOLD

Unmodified or minimally modified pebbles, cobbles and flakes have been noted sporadically in European Iron Age archaeological excavations (MAIER 2004, 141–142). They appear in unmodified form in late Hallstatt burial contexts like the Magdalenenberg (SPINDLER 1972, 1973, 1976) as well as in late Iron Age settlement contexts like Bibracte, where an egg-shaped white stone mounted in a bronze pendant setting was discovered (RIECKHOFF 2002, 138 Cat. No. 35). Often, but not exclusively, made of quartz crystal or quartzite, these stones are frequently white or light colored; some are naturally perforated while others have been modified for suspension. Flint flakes in Iron Age burial contexts represent an analogous category; although they are typically worked in some fashion they probably were kept for a purpose unrelated to their original function. The position of these stones in relation to the body in burial contexts varies, but the most common locations are the head (in at least one case the mouth cavity [PAULI 1975, 126]), the waist or groin area and the feet, in order of decreasing relative frequency. They appear far more often in the graves of women and children than in those of men, but in general they remain a neglected category of analysis both in terms of their recovery during excavation and in terms of their interpretation afterward. One goal of this preliminary study is to increase awareness of the potential significance of this object category and to encourage archaeologists to record, curate and publish the occurrence of such stones.

The first serious attempt to produce a compendium and interpretation of this object category was presented by Ludwig Pauli in his study of Celtic folk beliefs (1975). His analysis focused mainly on the amuletic qualities of modified or only slightly modified stones, especially quartz or quartzite, intentionally placed in graves, a perspective that has since become the accepted scholarly point of view. Eight burials containing such objects were recently uncovered during excavations in two burial mounds in the vicinity of the Heuneburg hillfort (ARNOLD *et al.* 2000, 2001, 2003) and are the main focus of this analysis. The Magdalenenberg mega-mound on the eastern edge of the Black Forest is included in the inventory as well (*Table 1*), since there are numerous similarities between the HaD1 female burials in this mound and several of the HaD1 female burials in Speckhau Tumulus 17 and 18 (ARNOLD 2005) as well as in the neighboring Hohmichele tumulus.

Table 1. Burials in the Magdalenenberg with unmodified lithic material (N = 9).

| Gr # | Gender | Position | Description | Source |
|------|-------------------|-------------------|--|--------------------------|
| 54 | M (dagger) | R upper pelvis | Geröllschlegel/Arbeitsspuren 9.5 cm | SPINDLER 1972, Pl. 36.2 |
| 61 | M (razor) | R foot | Beilähnlicher Gegenstand aus Felsgestein 6.5 cm x 3.7 cm | SPINDLER 1973, Pl. 10.3 |
| 65 | F (bracelet set) | Foot | Quarzitgeröll 8.2 cm | SPINDLER 1973, Pl. 16.3 |
| 70 | F (bracelet set) | Inside left thigh | Sandsteingeröll 7.5 cm | SPINDLER 1973, Pl. 28.7 |
| 74 | ? | R upper pelvis | Felsgesteinschlegel/partly modified | SPINDLER 1973, Pl. 36.4 |
| 83 | M (iron pin) | SW o/skull | Geröllschlegel | SPINDLER 1976, Pl. 1.4 |
| 100 | F (head ornament) | Near hands | Felsgesteingeröll 8.5 cm | SPINDLER 1976, Pl. 34.10 |
| 125 | F (head ornament) | No info | Tear-drop shaped kristalliner Stein | SPINDLER 1976, Pl. 77.5 |
| 127 | F (earrings) | No info | Buntsandsteingeröll | SPINDLER 1976, Pl. 82.3 |

The unmodified quartz pebbles and cobbles recovered during the “Landscape of Ancestors” excavations carried out between 1999 and 2002 are discussed here in the light of previous references to such unmodified material in the Heuneburg mortuary landscape. Gustav Riek used the term “soul thrones”, or “Seelenthron”, to describe the relatively large, boulder-sized cobbles he uncovered in the course of the Hohmichele excavations in Grave 1 (23 cm high) and Grave VI (20 cm high) (RIEK 1962, 121–122). The likelihood that far more Iron Age graves contained such objects than have been recorded is demonstrated by the fact that the elite female grave from the Rauher Lehen tumulus is the only grave recorded in Kurz and Schiek’s publication on the entire Heuneburg mortuary landscape as containing an unmodified stone grave good (2002) (they did not include the Hohmichele in their catalogue as it had already been published elsewhere). It seems especially unlikely that Tumulus 4 in the Giessübel-Talhau mound group, which was systematically excavated in 1954 by Siegwalt Schiek, contained no unmodified stone inclusions in spite of the large number of female and children’s graves recorded (11 female and 4 children’s graves out of a total of 24 burials) (KURZ – SCHIEK 2002, 116–131). Pauli notes that amulets or amulet-like objects are predominantly found in the graves of children or women in all regions, and that among the female burials the majority are in their child-bearing years (1975, 152). This suggests that Schiek either did not record such objects during his excavations of Tumulus 4, or that he did not consider them worth mentioning in his print publications on this mound; his field notes might bear re-examination.

Ludwig Pauli argues for the significance of unmodified quartz and quartzite in the burials of women and children at the Dürrenberg in Austria (1975, 126), a point also made by Riek, who explicitly calls for careful excavation with an eye toward identifying such material (1962, 122). Pauli notes that in some cases white quartz pebbles were recorded in association with but not actually in late Hallstatt/early La Tène burials, as in the case of the cemetery of Haulzy, co. Servon-Melzicourt, where the appearance of a white quartz pebble in the burial fill signaled to the excavators that they were about to uncover a burial urn (GOURY 1911, 28 cited in PAULI 1975, Ftnt. 143). Pauli provides numerous examples of elite burials containing unmodified lithic material, indicating that wealth and/or status was not a factor in determining whether or not such objects were included. These elite burials include the elite female grave of Reinheim in the Saarland, which contained unmodified jasper, chert, jet and iron ore objects (KELLER 1965, 16; PAULI 1975, 64, 66, 126, Fig. 17); the Worms-Hernsheim burial, which contained the poorly preserved skeletal remains of possibly two individuals buried with a Schnabelkanne, numerous objects of personal adornment typically found in female burials and a quartz crystal (PAULI 1975, 66, 126; SCHAAFF 1971); and the gold neckring burial of an adult female at Esslingen-Sirnau (PAULI 1975, 38) (Table 2). Probably the best example of an elite grave containing amulets of stone is the Vix “princess”, although in that case the stone was worked into large beads (one of serpentine and three of diorite [PININGRE – PLOUIN 2003, 238]). The grave also contained seven amber beads, which are assumed to have had prophylactic value in prehistoric Europe and which often occur in women’s and children’s graves in especially large numbers (PININGRE – PLOUIN 2003, 238); a good example is Magdalenberg Grave 97, which contained a fabulous collier consisting of approximately 70 amber beads (SPINDLER 1976, Pl. 24). Hohmichele Grave VI and the wealthy female burial unsystematically recovered from the Rauher Lehen tumulus (KURZ – SCHIEK 2002, 58) represent two examples of elite graves in the Heuneburg area with unworked or minimally modified lithic inclusions.

One of the main problems with this grave good category is the difficulty of identifying what constitutes a normative pattern, particularly when dealing with larger stones that seem more likely to have been used to mark the boundaries of the burial or may have served some other purpose, as in the case of the small boulder at the head/shoulder of the dagger burial in Speckhau Tumulus 18 Grave 4 (Fig. 1.a). This grave was placed very close to another at precisely the same depth, and it is possible

that the small boulder was intended to provide a way to locate the first grave before the second was put into place in order to avoid disturbing the body. The inconsistent material, size and shape of such inclusions further complicates both the identification and interpretation of this phenomenon, as does the fact that both unmodified and slightly modified stones appear to have been used in Iron Age contexts (Table 2) (PAULI 1975, 127). It is also possible that certain natural stones were included as grave goods due to their shape as much as the material of which they were made, in particular those that are the size and shape of an egg. It seems likely that the appearance of egg-shaped objects in burials at around the same time as the introduction of the domesticated chicken to west-central Europe may be linked in some symbolic way related to fertility or rebirth. The fact that fired clay “eggs” are found in some regions in which egg shaped stones also appear in some burials supports this idea; a good example is the western Hunsrück-Eifel region, where three egg-shaped fired clay objects were found in a burial at Obersirf-Irsch (HAFFNER 1976, 340, Plate 80.4–6) while an egg-shaped Rollkiesel was placed in a tumulus burial in Altrier (HAFFNER 1976, 398, Plate 128.3). Naturally perforated stones, which Pauli refers to as “Trudensteine”, fossils and anachronistic implements of chipped stone flint or groundstone, in the form of arrow points and axe heads (the former appear to be differentiated by gender and are much more common than the latter), also appear to have functioned as prophylactic grave inclusions (PAULI 1975, 127). Perforated stones in particular appear to have a much wider distribution than unmodified pebbles or quartz cobbles, as can be seen by PAULI’s discussion of mortuary contexts in France (1975, 68–76), which describes four such graves, all containing females or subadults (Table 2).

Table 2. Other late Hallstatt/early La Tène burials with modified and unmodified lithic material.

| Tum/Gr # | Gender | Position | Description | Source |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|--|--|
| Rauher Lehen | F (glass/amber beads) | No info | 1 egg shaped rock crystal | KURZ – SCHIEK 2002, Pl. 8.83 |
| Hohmichele Gr VI | F/M (beads/arrows) | NW Wheel 4 (♀ side) | 1 bowling pin shaped Quartzitgeschiebe | RIEK 1962, 69 |
| Hohmichele Gr X | ? Single bronze ring | East of cremated remains | 3 flat backed Quartzitgeschiebe arranged as ▲. 13–15cm long | RIEK 1962, 76, 102 |
| Hohmichele Gr XIII | F? (bracelet set) | South of cremated remains | 1 Granitgeschiebe (6cm) & 1 Quartzitgeröll (15cm) | RIEK 1962, 79, 104 |
| Echterdingen Unsys. exc. | F? (ankle rings) | Unknown | 1 Kieselanhänger | ZÜRN 1987, 68, Pl. 84 |
| Asperg 1963 exc. | F? (beads) | Unknown | 1 quartz frag; 3 quartz crystal frgs; 2 Kieselbatzen (1 gray-black, 1 white); 1 naturally perforated brown stone | PAULI 1975, 42; ZÜRN 1987, 93–94, Pl. 135A |
| Asperg T5 Gr 2 1951 exc. | ? (no modified grave goods) | Hand of deceased | 1 stone pebble | PAULI 1975, Pl. 12.9; ZÜRN 1987, 91 |
| Esslingen-Sirnau | F (bracelet set/skeletal morphology) | Pelvis | 1 naturally perforated Hornstein | PAULI 1975, 38, Pl. 131–7 |
| Blumenfeld Langholz T“O” 1908 exc. | F? (bracelet set) | Near waist in bag? | 1 quartz crystal | PAULI 1975, 45, 126 |

| Tum/Gr # | Gender | Position | Description | Source |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|---|--|
| Nagold "Vorderer Lehmberg" | F? (bracelet set) | Unknown | 1 perforated Muschelkalkhornstein | GOESSLER 1940, 94, Pl. 26; PAULI 1975, 54 |
| Nebringen Gr. 17 | F (bracelet set/ankle rings) | Neck | 1 naturally perforated limestone pebble | PAULI 1975, 52, Pl. 16.5–12 |
| Müllheim "Reckenhag" 1908 exc. | F? (bracelet set) | Unknown | 2 naturally perforated pebbles; several flint and jasper scrapers/blades | PAULI 1975, 46, Pl. 14.14–21; WAGNER 1908, 170 |
| Reinheim | F (bracelet set/beads) | Left of head in organic container(?) | 1 perforated quartzite pebble, 1 gray stone pendant, 1 jasper sphere, 1 flint sphere, 2 jet fragments, 1 ammonite fragment, 2 iron ore fragments, 1 flint flake | KELLER 1965; PAULI 1975, 64, 66, 126, Fig. 17 PENINGRE – PLOUIN 2003, 239 |
| Worms- Herrnsheim | F?/M? (belt chain) | Left hip | 1 quartz crystal | SCHAAFF 1971; PAULI 1975, 66, 26 |
| Kurzgeländ T19 Gr6 | F (bracelet set/earrings) | Unknown | 1 perforated stone | PAULI 1975, 57 |
| Ohlungen T3 Gr2 | F (bracelet/ankle rings) | Attached to neckring | 2 perforated pebbles | PAULI 1975, 17 |
| Vix | F (bracelet set/beads) | Neck | 3 diorite beads and 1 serpentine bead | PENINGRE – PLOUIN 2003, 238 |
| Libčeves 1923 exc | F?/M? (belt chain/ cranial morphology) | Left thigh/chest | 1 basalt fragment/1 quartz fragment | LAUBE 1929; PAULI 1975, 92–93, 126 |
| Hallstatt Grs. 114, 576, 849 | Unknown | Unknown | Mica fragments | PAULI 1975, 126 |
| Dürnberg Gr. 8 | F? | Unknown | 1 naturally perforated pebble | PAULI 1975, Pl. 6.5 |
| Dürnberg Grs. 32/1–4, 52/5 | 1 F; 4 children | Head/Mouth? | 1 naturally perforated stone with bronze wire; quartzite fragments | PAULI 1975, 126 |
| Andelfingen Gr. 10 | F? (Scheibenhalsring) | Head | 3 fist-sized cobbles | PAULI 1975, 35–36; SCHAAFF 1974, 155 Ftnt. 8 |

The eight graves containing unmodified pebbles or cobbles from the excavations in Tumulus 18 of the Speckhau group near the Hohmichele illustrate the difficulties of dealing with this category of grave inclusion even when the objects have been recognized as potentially significant and their position and material has been noted (*Table 3*).

Table 3. Unmodified lithic material in Speckhau Tumulus 18 (N = 8).

| Tum/Gr # | Gender | Position | Description | Source |
|--------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Speckhau T18 Gr 4 | M (dagger) | Right of head | 1 large stone block | ARNOLD – MURRAY n.d. |
| Speckhau T18 Gr 5 | F (bracelet set/ head ornament) | Chest area | 2 egg shaped sandstone? pebbles | ARNOLD – MURRAY n.d. |
| Speckhau T18 Gr 7 | F (bracelet set) | Kegelhals vessel at left foot | 2 white quartz pebbles | ARNOLD – MURRAY n.d. |
| Speckhau T18 Gr 9 | F (bracelet set/ belt) | Left hand | 1 quartz? pebble | ARNOLD – MURRAY n.d. |
| Speckhau T18 Gr 12 | F (ankle rings) | B/w ankles | 1 white quartz pebble | ARNOLD – MURRAY n.d. |
| Speckhau T18 Gr 13 | F (bronze neckring) | 2 to right, 2 to left of feet | 4 stone cobbles | ARNOLD – MURRAY n.d. |
| Speckhau T18 Gr 15 | M (razor) | Vessel at feet | 5–7 stone cobbles | ARNOLD – MURRAY n.d. |
| Speckhau T18 Gr 17 | F (bronze neckring) | Between thighs | 1 split rose quartz cobble | ARNOLD – MURRAY n.d. |

The majority of burials in the sample from Tumulus 18 contained egg-shaped and sized pebbles (4 graves), while three graves contained larger cobbles marking either the head or the feet. Two of the three graves with large cobbles were probably male based on the presence of a dagger in one (*Fig. 1.a*) and an iron razor in the other; the third was probably a female child based on the size of the chamber and the presence of a bronze neckring, two bronze bracelets and a large number of beads of various materials, including amber, glass and jet (*Fig. 1.b*). The most unusual example was Grave 17, which contained the body of a richly outfitted, probably female individual with a bronze neckring, two imported fibulae, a set of bronze hair- or earrings, and a leather belt decorated with thousands of bronze staples and a belt plate with a hook end with tremolo decoration (*Fig. 2*). Placed carefully between the thighs of this individual was a fist-sized rose quartz cobble that had been split in half and positioned with the split side uppermost (ARNOLD *et al.* 2003).

The Speckhau Tumulus 18 burials indicate that shape, material, and color all could have been significant variables in determining the inclusion and placement of these stones in certain types of graves. Egg shaped white pebbles presumably had a different meaning than split rose quartz cobbles, for example, while boundary markers of large cobble to boulder size can be assumed to have served a specific symbolic function as well. The variables involved include the following:

- 1) Number of stones present (single, clustered)
- 2) Position of stones in relation to the body (between the legs, at the head, at the feet, to the side of the body)
- 3) Features of the stone themselves, including
 - a. Material
 - b. Size
 - c. Modified/Unmodified
 - d. Shape
- 4) Association of the stones with other amulet-like objects (beads of amber, glass or other material; spindle whorls; pendants; organic remains; miniature figures or bronze fibulae, bronze rings etc.)

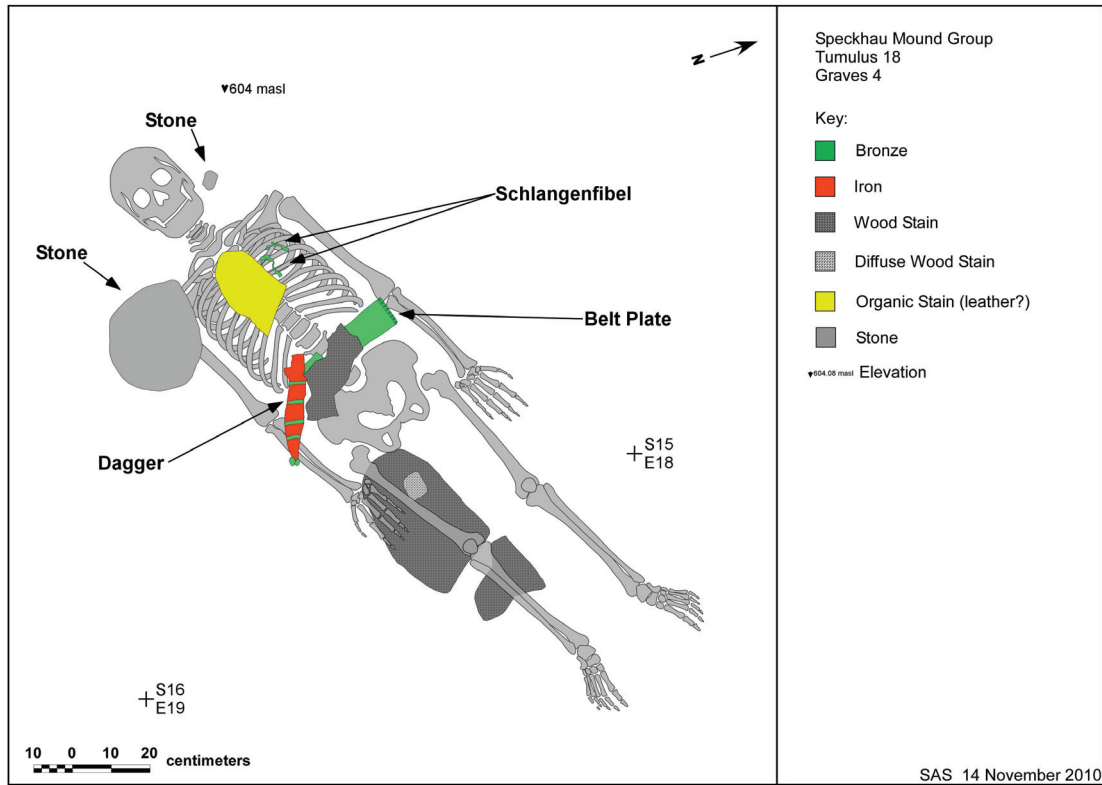


Fig. 1a. Speckhau Tumulus 18 Grave 4 (Drawing: S. A. Schneider).

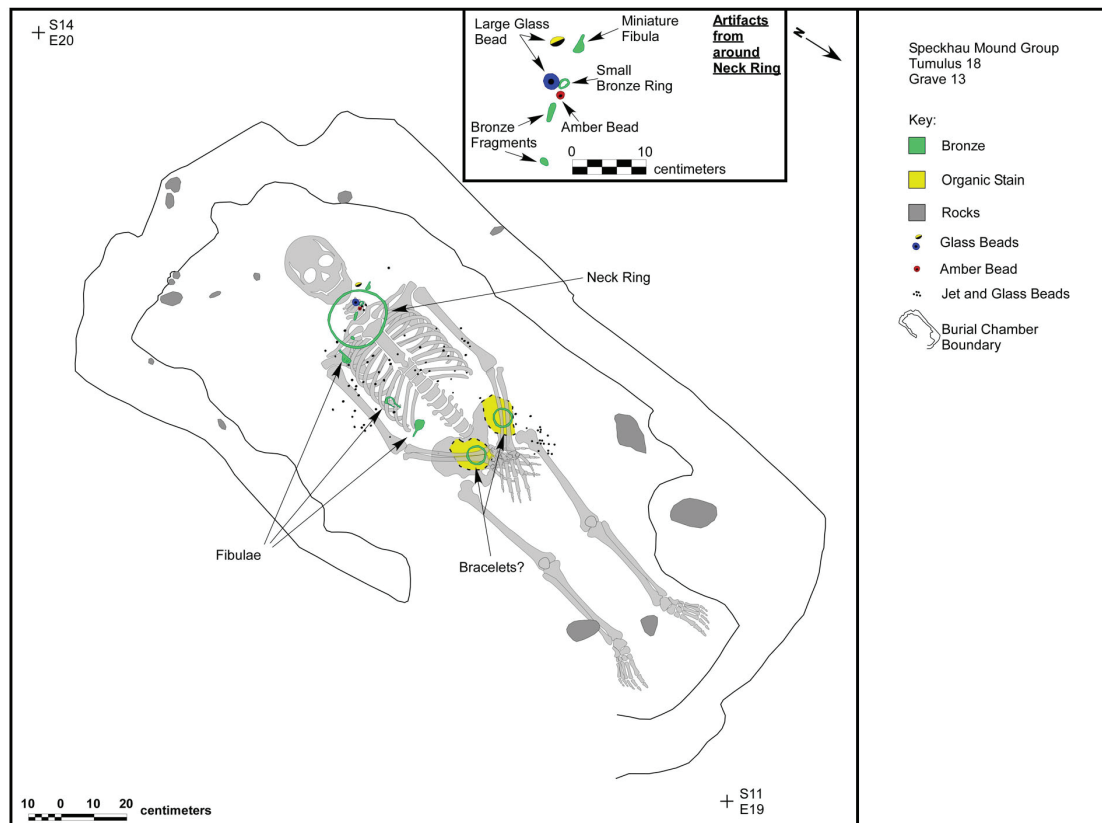


Fig. 1b. Speckhau Tumulus 18 Grave 13 (Drawing: S. A. Schneider).

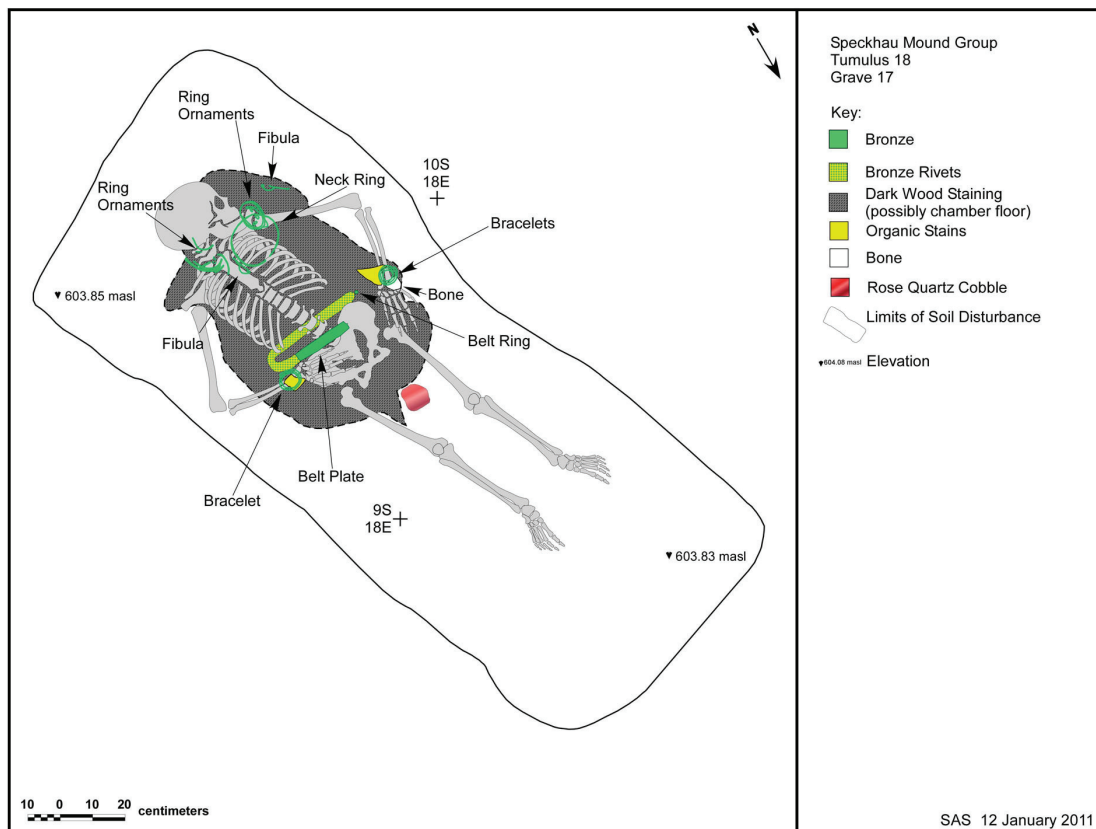


Fig. 2. Speckhau Tumulus 18 Grave 17 (Drawing: S. A. Schneider).

My goal here is not to interpret the placement of unmodified or slightly modified stones in the Heuneburg burials, since the list of possibilities has previously been outlined by PAULI (1975, 154–180), who stresses the impossibility of identifying the specific meaning of individual amulets in the absence of written texts or living informants (ibid.:162). Rather, I wish to call for a renewed sensitivity to the possible significance of such objects in excavations of Iron Age graves and to stress that this sensitivity should go beyond merely noting the presence of such objects. As I have attempted to show here using the example of the burials in the vicinity of the Heuneburg, and particularly the Speckhau mounds near the Hohmichele, the number, shape, size, type and position of these stones within the burial all appear to have potential relevance to their interpretation. Laurent Olivier’s study of the Hochdorf grave goods was one of the first attempts to distinguish between grave good categories on the basis of their proximity to and association with the body of the deceased (OLIVIER 1999). The unmodified stone pebbles and cobbles can be categorized as objects both bound to the body (in cases when they are perforated, suspended in some way as amulets or placed in the mouth) and not bound to it, especially in cases where the stones are found at the head or the feet or some distance from the body itself. The fact that such inclusions cut across major social categories (gender, age, status, role), even if women and children appear to be disproportionately represented, is potentially significant, as is the fact that the practice is so widespread in the Iron Age of central Europe (Table 2).

Even a relatively superficial review of the cross-cultural literature reveals that the practice of placing unmodified or slightly modified pebbles or cobbles in burials has a surprisingly extensive geographic and temporal distribution, appearing in areas as disparate as the American Southwest and Mississippian cultures before European contact and the African burial ground in New York City. Moreover, in some

areas of Europe the practice extends well into historic periods. In 1923 on the Isle of Man, Canon Grensted reported the following: “This custom then, of interring white stones with the dead was used in the Island in the last days of the Neolithic or the beginning of the Bronze Age, when their custom was to cremate the dead. But the custom lasted on into Christian times” (1923, 43). Numerous examples are known from Ireland (BRANNON 1980, 62; MARSHALL – WALSH 1998, 106; Ó DONNCHADHA 2007, 9–10). The unworked quartz shards recorded in a thirteenth century AD churchyard excavated in Donegal in 2003 are a good illustration of how important it is to recognize the potential significance of such inclusions. Not only were quartz fragments found in two-thirds of the graves recovered from this cemetery, they had been deliberately placed in one hand of the deceased and the excavators found a deposit of seventeen quartz shards in what they describe as a “box shrine” in the center of the cemetery. Ó Donnchadha concludes “This clearly implies that the placing of quartz in the hands of the deceased was not a surreptitious local custom but rather an integral part of the funeral ritual, carried out with the willing cooperation of the clergy” (2007). A thorough review of excavation reports, both published and unpublished, of Iron Age burials in central Europe would certainly yield an even greater sample today than that available to Ludwig Pauli in 1975. I suggest the time has come for a comprehensive re-examination of this relatively neglected group of objects.

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