

Project description

Lise Harvig: *Cremation in a bio-archaeological perspective – from excavation and analysis to concepts of death, rite and praxis*

Religion and cosmology in the Bronze Age and the religious change towards the Iron Age has recently regained interest. The graves are in this context unique, since they are tangible remnants of religious acts in prehistory. Previously it has not been possible to gain much knowledge on religion and religious practice in the late Bronze Age from the cremation burials and the cremated bones alone. However, the number of excavated sites increases rapidly, and the large samples of cremated bones recently excavated are a unique resource if they are combined with new biological anthropological methods and modern theoretical archaeology and seen in their proper context.

Thus the aim of the project is to develop methods to study ritual practice, religion life and death in prehistory from the cremation burials. Since cremation practice varies regionally and chronologically in Scandinavia, the Danish island Funen is chosen as research object, due to the extent cremation practice dominating the area from the Bronze Age onto around 400 AD. Hence, the development on Funen is continuous and chronologically interesting. Thus the Bronze Age of Funen is the primary focus of the project, yet perspectives in time and space to neighboring regions and later periods will frequently appear.

CT-scans of urns prior to excavation will be applied as a new method with great potential to answer questions about cremation and burial practice when it comes to degree of fragmentation of the bones and the deposit of these in the urns.

Recently developed osteological analyses on cremated bones will be applied, and the more traditional methods like color, fragment size and weight of the bones will be applied in the interpretation process of the grave sites in their archaeological context and the surrounding landscape.