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Pieter van de Velde[1]

Much ado about nothing: Bandkeramik funerary ritual

A victory is twice itself when the achiever brings home full numbers.
W. Shakespeare: *Much ado about nothing*.

1. Introduction

My aim in the present paper is to discuss local burial practices in the Central European Neolithic and as a sideline to criticise some of our approaches to those practices. The setting consists of two contemporaneous Bandkeramik communities at less than a day's walk from each other, located on two separate loess patches – the Graetheide in Dutch Southern Limburg, and the Aldenhovener Platte in the German Rhineland, about twenty kilometres to the East; in time the later half of the Younger Bandkeramik, roughly seven thousand years ago.

In a number of texts I have attempted to deduce Bandkeramik social structure from the inventory of one of their graveyards (Van de Velde 1979; 1990). With the intention to test my earlier ideas I have recently expanded my data basis to include a second cemetery, Niedermerz in the Rhineland, located approximately 40 km east of Elsloo, and of similar date (Van de Velde 1996).

The representativity of my data has sometimes been questioned, the argument being that the number of recovered Bandkeramik graves is short – indeed, very short – of what is to be expected on the basis of demographic estimates; moreover, from a small sample only limited inferences can be drawn. Apart from this methodical problem, objections have been raised regarding content, too. Of course it is impossible to go into all of them (Van de Velde 1996 provides an extensive discussion), but from among them I will briefly discuss gender and kin as important bases for further inferences. I will also go into the representativity problem here, to see whether the quantitative critique holds water, and if so, what can be done about it. But first I will say a few words on the substantial issues of sex, gender, and lineage alignment.

2. Sex, gender and kin: much ado

To me, 'social structure' has an ethnological or sociological ring: in the archaeological field of funerary analysis there is more to it than chronology (relative or absolute), sex, and wealth of the graves in a cemetery. Rather the relations between the burials are involved, with hierarchy, group membership and kin relations as major focus: *syntax*, not *semantics* in the words of Eco (1973, 61). Single graves, as isolated data sets, cannot elucidate social structure at all as the latter is rooted in relations and their reproduction by society. Individuals may be instrumental there, possibly even be agents (*sensu* Giddens 1984, 9), yet agency works in and through relations.

The first time I attempted a funerary analysis (Van de Velde 1979) it was of the cemetery of Elsloo, in the southern Netherlands, excavated in the 1960's (Modderman 1970). There, the ground water had dissolved all of the skeletal material and no physical anthropological determination of sex and age was possible. However, sex, *i.e.*, physical anthropological sex, is a biological category whereas my interest is with the social world, gender being often wrongly equated with sex. As a social construct (La Fontaine 1978), gender should be approached through the investigation of social data; physical anthropology can only be indicative rather than conclusive[2]. Almost two thirds of the graves in the Elsloo cemetery held grave gifts, so clues to social categories were available. In the Niedermerz data (which will also be examined here), tooth enamel from thirty graves could still be analysed as to the biological sex of the deceased (Dohrn-Ihmig 1983, 107); here, too, about two thirds of the graves held grave gifts.

In a statistical analysis of the Elsloo cemetery it was possible to relate the gifts and the distribution of the graves to the division of labour (i.e., gender) in Bandkeramik society: high adzes and arrowheads pointed to male occupations, red ochre and rubbing stones indicated female pursuits. Several other categories were 'freely' sprinkled over the two gender classes (tab. 1). It is important to note that not every category from the relevant 'kit' (Pader 1982, 98) is present in every grave, but only a selection[3]. Thus, female graves did occasionally contain both a rubbing stone and red ochre, more often either of the two, and sometimes none. Similarly so for the other kits. Also, graves of different gender were clearly paired although single graves also occurred; most of these latter were not marked to gender and therefore may have held the remains of un-initiated, or of old people.

For the Niedermerz cemetery the derivation of gender was only partially possible: while 30 male graves could be deduced from the accompanying grave gifts (in this cemetery arrowheads and flat adzes), female graves had no such

Table 1. Grave gifts by gender at Elsloo, presence/absence data; in grey gender-neutral categories (from Van de Velde 1996, table 5).

	female	male	other
lumps ochre	15	2	–
rubbing stones	12	–	–
arrowheads	–	10	–
thick adzes	1	16	–
plain ceramics	11	17	7
decorated ceramics	14	15	8
blades	12	7	1
flat adzes	7	7	1
	34	38	41

Table 2. Gender marking and pair-bonding in the Elsloo and Niedermerz cemeteries (data mainly from Van de Velde 1996 plus references).

	ELSLOO		
	male	female	other
gender marked	25	22	
not-marked	13	12	41
totals	38	34	41
marked, paired	30	31	
marked, single	8	3	
other single			41
	NIEDERMERZ		
	male	female	other
gender marked	29	?	
not-marked	11	27	45
totals	40	27+	45–
marked, paired	27	27	
marked, single	13	?	
other single			45

Table 3. Distribution of decorative designs by gender in two Bandkeramik cemeteries; C: curvilinear design; R: rectilinear design (data for Elsloo from Van de Velde 1979, 195).

	ELSLOO			
	M	F	x	
C or R	7	16	3	26
C & R	6	–	2	8
	13	16	5	34
	NIEDERMERZ			
	M	F	x	
C or R	9	8	14	31
C & R	4	–	3	7
	13	8	17	38

markers, and only 16 could be inferred from their being closest partner to a male grave[4] nearby. Therefore, the number of both male and female graves in this cemetery should be higher than these counts: unidentifiable male graves may be companion to unrecognisable female burials in at least another 11 pairs of graves.

As noted above, sex and gender are rarely differentiated in archaeological burial analyses although "… the cultural use of the body is part of any society's social construction of reality" (Shanks/Tilley 1982, 134; also cf. Barrett 1990). Thus, Dohrn-Ihmig (1983, 107) notes that among 22 graves from Niedermerz which could be anthropometrically determined, four odontological attributions were at odds with the grave gifts. From her text it can be inferred that the discrepancies are attributed to problems of measurement rather than to a prehistoric cultural reworking of biological categories. Even in a sophisticated study as Shanks and Tilley's of Swedish and British megalith funerary customs gender is glaringly absent and implicitly equated with anthropometric categories (Shanks/Tilley 1982). In more general accounts, the sex/gender issue is usually immediately passed over (see esp. Pader 1982, 16-17, 90; or Morris 1992, 261 where the index says: 'gender, *see* sex'). In my opinion this silence is an instance of what Murray has described as 'the threat of the past' (Murray 1993): if gender definition in other societies is not as rigid as it is in ours, then our society's definition of gender may be/is culturally biased. Lacking a thorough discussion of gender in archaeological burial contexts (as, e.g., Gero/Conkey 1991 for pre-funeral archaeological societies) the important dimensions are not readily apparent. However, for both Niedermerz and Elsloo I would maintain that – at least in burial – Bandkeramik gender classes were on an equal footing as the quantitative and qualitative distributions of grave gifts over gender are very similar within these cemeteries, contrary to Dohrn-Ihmig's assertion. Moreover, although gender differences are marked they are not very much emphasised: quite a number of graves attributable to either role on other grounds (mainly pair-bonding) have no gender-specific furnishings (tab. 2).

I also tried to ascertain the kin relations between the people interred in the Elsloo Graveyard. Here, the decoration of the pottery appeared indicative (fig. 1): in female graves either curvilinear or rectilinear designs were found, in male graves the two often occurred together (tab. 3) – precisely the kind of "nonvaluable distinctions" predicted for horizontal differentiation (O'Shea 1984, 46). The very same pattern is repeated in the Niedermerz cemetery. Such a 'strong pattern' (Morris 1992, 202) demands an explanation.

To start with, in a society practising exogamy either the males or the females will leave their birth group at marriage and become ascribed to the group of their partner (Fox 1967; Lévi-Strauss 1967). At their life's end those who moved out

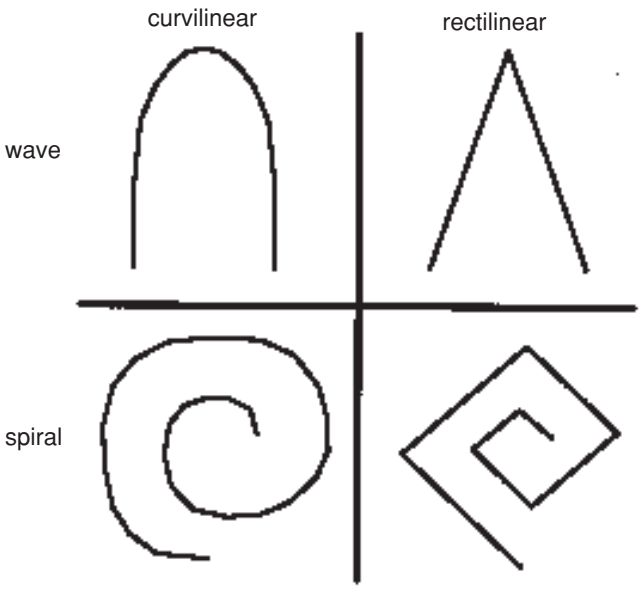


Figure 1. Basic structures of Bandkeramik pottery decoration design (after Van de Velde 1979, fig. 5 and 1986, fig. 1).

will therefore be associated with two groups (those of birth and marriage; in technical terminology: of affiliation and affinal association). In a patrilinear society the females will move out of their kin group, and become associated with the other moiety; in a matrilineal situation the males do so (cp. the traditional change or doubling of the name of the female partner in our societies at wedding as a token of the new patri-like affiliation; in the Bandkeramik it is not names, but the design of pot decoration which is used instead. Of course these signs are tokens only for arrays of rights and duties). In the Elsloo and Niedermerz cemeteries alike the males have been simultaneously associated with both attributes whereas females are marked with either of the two by exclusion. Therefore, the men must have changed their allegiance – as with matrilineal arrangements. The clear differential distribution of the decoration on pots in these graveyards must be interpreted, I think, as a kind of 'ideal' representation of their social practice[5]. They used, and were used by their artefacts to demonstrate conformity to tradition.

As a matter of fact the subject of kin affiliation is hardly ever broached in archaeological literature. After a few early attempts (Longacre 1968; Whallon 1968) interest has turned towards hierarchy. O'Shea noted in a thoughtful paragraph on the topic that status hierarchy is much easier to retrieve than is horizontal differentiation such as kin or clan affiliation. This is due to the archaeological characteristics of the associated symbols (O'Shea 1984, 252-254). Similar statements can be found elsewhere (e.g. Chapman/Randsborg 1981), and even negative pronouncements: "… one … *definitely* cannot reconstruct descent or post- marital rules, be they the real or the ideal version" (Pader 1982, 54; emphasis added). Certainly, the subject has its own difficulties, and enquiry into the subject may not be possible for every society, yet an *a priori* negation is premature: our limits are not set by the archaeological record but by our (lack of) imagination, as Binford has reminded us (1975, 251).

3. Representativity: much ado about nothing?

To the East of the Graetheide where Elsloo is situated, lies the Aldenhovener Platte, where extensive excavations have brought to light many Bandkeramik remains. Of late, Lüning and Stehli (1989) wrote that the single cemetery discovered there, Niedermerz (Dohrn-Ihmig 1983), cannot be considered representative (being "außerordentlich", 'extraordinary' in their words) of the Aldenhoven Plateau Bandkeramik: only 112 graves should stand for an estimated five to ten thousand people. The Aldenhovener Platte has entirely been removed by open pit mining of lignite, supervised archaeologically by a team led by Lüning. So it is virtually certain that only one Bandkeramik cemetery has been laid out on the plateau, catered for by perhaps ten or more hamlets. Hence it can be inferred that a large number of presumably fairly shallow graves must have fallen victim to agriculture between then and now, according to Lüning & Stehli (1989, 88).

The Elsloo cemetery (with 113 graves) is situated on the adjacent loess-plateau to the West of the Aldenhovener Platte. Presently, the Graetheide is densely inhabited, and although it has not been shovelled away, we may be pretty certain that a second Bandkeramik cemetery would not have escaped notice. But even if it had, then the fact remains that there are far too few graves in comparison with an original population of, say, 10,000 Bandkeramians (summed over 12 generations). Therefore Lüning & Stehli's remarks on representativity are also applicable to the Dutch data, although I have reservations about their approach.

Being in the order of 1% the paucity of graves in relation to the vast number of original inhabitants may seem fatal to any attempt at generalization, yet statistical theory says that a sample of 100 elements is generally sufficient to pronounce upon statistical issues (Hays 1973) – not the sampling level (the relative proportion of the population that is incorporated) is important but rather the absolute number of elements, the size of the statistical universe being of no consequence in this respect. There is only one condition, that the elements have been randomly selected in relation to the dimension under scrutiny. And here lies a problem, for I do not believe that the selection of the people to be buried in a Bandkeramik cemetery was random in any statistical sense. When

sociological, ethnographical, or demographic research questions are to be answered from a graveyard, it should first be established that the relevant funerals have occurred randomly, as regards precisely these dimensions. And this is well-nigh impossible. On that score Lüning & Stehli are apparently right, after all.

But there is more to this problem, for it can be suggested that these cemeteries contain nearly complete populations instead. The Elsloo Graveyard, for instance, lies on a spur to the NW of a settlement (Elsloo) about 250 or 300 metres away; other Bandkeramik villages are all much farther away, truly 'behind' Elsloo. In the latter village between 8 and 11 houses have stood, with approximately 5 or 6 occupants each, together some 40 to 60 people. As the use life of the cemetery can be put at about three generations between 120 and 180 people have died in the village during this period – not many more than the 113 burials uncovered by Modderman. No proof can be presented, yet the fairly likely implication is that only the people from Elsloo have used the nearby cemetery. If so, the figure of the missing dead is quite low. Therefore, those that have been uncovered are not so much representative of a background population as of themselves only.

The Niedermerz situation is much more complex: the distance to the nearest settlement (Langweiler 8) is about 500 metres, and another two or three hamlets (rather single farmsteads; cf. Stehli 1989) are at 700 to 800 metres away (unlike the Elsloo situation) and many more are at greater distances. From this the archaeologists inferred that the cemetery might have served the whole *Siedlungskammer* or settled area, comprising some 5 to 10 hamlets, and counting cumulatively more than 1,000 people over the six generations during which the cemetery has been in use. Yet only 112 graves have been recovered; the other people should have ended up cremated in shallow grave pits – many times ploughed over since those days, so that no traces have been left. This view is expressed in the Niedermerz excavation report (Dohrn-Ihmig 1983), and repeated in the overview article by Lüning & Stehli (1989). However, even if they are right, then still there is statistical theory, but also the (psychologically important, statistically uninteresting) sampling rate has been raised from one hundred over ten thousand (1%) to 112 over 1,000 (11%). Conversely, if the situation were like that in Elsloo, then only Langweiler 8 should be taken into account with between 7 and 11 houses at any one moment. The cemetery was in use for 6 generations, so between 250 and 350 corpses[6] have had to be disposed of in that period, double or triple the number of excavated graves. In that case, Niedermerz is no more exceptional than Elsloo, and in both cases the inferences from the graveyards can be related to the nearby settlements without much ado.

Of course this matter cannot decisively be settled, neither in Niedermerz nor in Elsloo, and my model remains quite hypothetical; yet I think that the two arguments presented here (statistical theory, and archaeological specification) go a long way to diminish the weight of Lüning & Stehli's statements regarding non-representativity and the implied unreliability of the cemetery data. However, not all problems are solved: one might now inquire about the representativity of Elsloo Village for the entire Graetheide settlement area or of Langweiler 8 for the Aldenhovener Platte – those villages are precisely the largest settlements there, they have been inhabited longer than any of the other ones, they alone have a cemetery, etc. Therefore they certainly are not representative of the regional situation in general (for further discussion, see Van de Velde 1990).

4. On polymodal funerary rituals: something ado about nothing

When, for the sake of argument the previous propositions are provisionally accepted, there still is the problem of the missing dead from Elsloo and Langweiler 8. This absent community can be broken down in at least two components: (a) those from the earlier periods, approximately six to nine generations in the two areas; and (b) those departed in the other villages and hamlets while the cemeteries were in use, perhaps for three to four generations. A biased research record can be dismissed as cause, as discussed above.

Usually, the low figures are explained with the following argument: Since we do have a fair amount of cremations (e.g., at least 47 from Elsloo, 10 from Niedermerz), and as the ashes are generally in shallower pits than are the corpses (e.g., corpses on the average at 125cms, cremations at 55cms[7] at Elsloo), it is to be expected that most cremations have been lost before their archaeological resurrection. And the conclusion drawn is that apparently most Bandkeramians have been cremated and buried in the topsoil to be ploughed out later (e.g., Lüning/Stehli 1989, 88; Modderman 1970, 71; Neumann/Wiegand 1940).

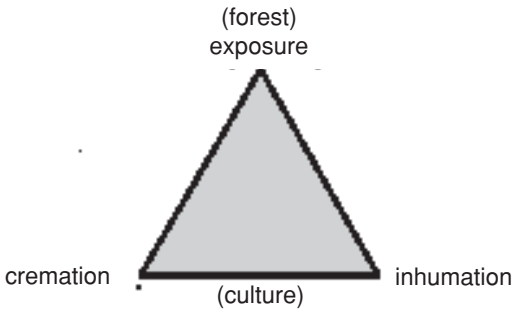
As our current western mortuary practices are rather similar to those of the Bandkeramik at first sight (except for the gravegifts, of course; or the odd massacre: Wahl/König 1987; Windl 1996), the argument is readily accepted. In my opinion, though, it is seriously flawed, as several questions remain unanswered: (a) why do we have cremations from the Younger LBK period, and hardly any from the Older and Oldest periods (cf. Modderman 1970, 71-72)? Or (b), why do we have many more graveyards from the Younger LBK than from the Older/Oldest phases? And (c), restating a previous paragraph, why is the number of burials so diminutive with respect to the presumed population, even in the Younger LBK? Thus factored out, the argument is suggestive of an alternative conclusion: LBK societies

generally (and originally exclusively) disposed of their dead in yet another, third way, which in the course of time came to be supplemented with cremation and corpse *burial*. That is, we should assume an additional ritual which leaves hardly any substantial traces in the archaeological record, apart from the well-known interment in graves.

From a general perspective it can be observed that alternative customs (including funerary rituals) have more to do with social aspirations and emulation than with ideology or religion (Metcalf/Huntington 1991, 17; Morris 1992, 46-47). For instance, the recent shift from inhumation to cremation in many western societies has no counterpart in a changing deology but rather goes with capitalism's uprooting of kin and neighbourhood relations. Also, it is ethnographically well attested that the ritual disposal of the dead is independent of the ideas about life and death among the mourners (e.g. Metcalf/Huntington 1991; Ucko 1969; Van Gennep 1909). So, in one single community the first corpse may be disposed off in a coffin burial, the second may end on a pyre with the ashes collected and buried, the third one may be shipped to the End of the World in an old canoe, all with similar ideas about Afterlife and/or Rebirth (e.g. Kinnes 1981). Causes for different treatment have to do with contingency as much as with custom: the availability of wood for a pyre, the agricultural season, the cause and kind of death, or the social position of the deceased (a.o. Binford 1972; Van Gennep 1909). Earlier burials serving as examples to provide a sense of continuity through ritual (Barrett 1994) and custom.

For the Bandkeramik I suggest that their original and always most frequent custom of disposal was exposure of the corpse to the birds and the other natural elements on a scaffold in the field outside the settlement[8]. This hypothesis is not (directly) testable in a Popperian way, but it is more specific as it explains the chronologically differentiated counts of Bandkeramik burials, while fewer pre-conditions are implied; consequently it is more attractive than the traditional post-depositional alternative. Possibly, the frequent Bandkeramik stray finds in the fields around the settlements might even be read as traces of this practice (J. Lüning, pers. comm. April 1994), but this phenomenon should still be systematically investigated, also from the viewpoint of the present hypothesis. The point is that such a practice would not be acceptable in our own culture: consequently we are not disposed to expect it among other groups, including the Bandkeramians. This certainly is a rather ethnocentric objection, and thus irrelevant (also refer to Morris 1987).

There are a few somewhat abstract developments of the present hypothesis: cremation and subsequent burial of the ashes, as well as inhumation in a formal cemetery can be described as literally *marked* funerals. In the Bandkeramik



the graveyards were apparently not used for other purposes since there are no other finds in these areas; also the graves remained visible for a long time as there are no cross-cutting pits. From our present point of view the hypothetical original ritual can be characterised as *un-marked* as no specific hallowed grounds seems associated with it – which does not speak out on the amount of ritual observances and behaviour that were ever associated with it. As such this traditional deposition of the dead provides the stage on which the rituals of cremation and corpse burial introduced in the Younger Bandkeramik period were set.

One could also relate to a structuralist argument here: burning and coffins as *cultural* treatments of the corpse may be seen opposed to the exposition of the body to a *natural* transform, providing a neatly closed, complete conceptual and classificatory scheme (fig. 2). The opposition of cultural (marked) disposition to nature (un-marked) can even be reconstructed as a funerary triangle: the natural transformation at the top, and the basis further differentiated in a fiery and an earthly transformation of the deceased, quite reminiscent of the culinary triangle (Lévi-Strauss 1968, 406).

5. Final remarks: there is something to do about nothing

Obviously most of my statements cannot be 'proven' directly against archaeological data. However, speculation has its place in science, too (Popper 1972). I summarise my main points and add some more arguments.

Firstly, regarding gender – as emphatically different from biological sex – it can be observed that in the Elsloo cemetery the burials are quite often found in pairs, and that these pairs are always constituted by burials of opposite gender. The distances within these pairs are on the average slightly more than two metres, and between graves of equal gender almost six metres; in my view this pairing is suggestive of marital couples. In the Niedermerz cemetery the women cannot positively be identified, I fear that the relevant gifts have dissolved in the soil. Still, from a distance

analysis at least 27 pairs of graves can be singled out, within each of them one interment which may tentatively be identified as male (Van de Velde 1996). In line with anthropological understandings I consider gender categories relevant for and pertaining to fully initiated (adult) people only, with children and old people beyond (re)productive age separate categories. The three kits of gifts with which the deceased were indexed in Elsloo, can be considered representative of three major social fields: the ritual or ceremonial (for the females), field labour (for the males), and the house (a general set, also occurring in non-gendered graves); constituting a thumb nail picture of Bandkeramik social life.

Secondly regarding matrilinearity the argument is already one removed from the directly observable, the inference being dependent upon the gender classes. Possibly, the dissimilarity of the distributions of the defining characteristics (recti- and curvilinearity of pot decoration) over the gender classes might be accidental. However, to bring about such an accident something very strange must have happened either in the past or in my analysis: the probability of such a distribution being accidental is 6 in 1,000 for Elsloo, whereas for Niedermerz the chances are 2,5%. Counter examples have not been found in the data, and there are no misfits. Given that matrilineal customs have consequences throughout society, they are articulated and thus reproduced in many social fields. The implication is that these customs are fairly resistant to change over time. Therefore, since Graetheide and Aldenhovener Platte Bandkeramik probably evolved from a common ancestral society, similar kinship customs are to be expected, as indeed demonstrated by the two cemeteries[9]. The coherence of the argument plus its several empirical corollaries may be taken to back up the inference of the gender specific grave gifts.

Thirdly, in Bandkeramik studies the inference of another, distinct funerary ritual next to cremation and inhumation is new. I wondered why the large majority of their graves should have been eradicated by the plough – given that the few burials and cremations we do possess have been quite well preserved. The known cemeteries are associated with large and long-lasting settlements (perhaps *the* largest and *the* longest inhabited in each settlement area), and burials from the smaller hamlets and from the older phases are missing altogether. As an explanation, a funerary ritual which was general in the older phases is proposed which was *partially* replaced in the younger phases by inhumation or cremation. This earlier, alternative ritual may have been officiated around the corpse laid on a scaffold or a tree – which does not imply the absence of *rites de passage*, as from the known burials these rites have not been (directly) ascertained either. In addition, it can even be proposed that the stray finds of Bandkeramik tools and sherds outside the settlements should be read as remnants of these otherwise untraceable rituals, which suggests a future line of research.

Fourthly, a third ritual occurred to me when thinking about the representativity of the Elsloo cemetery, where apparently only a minute part of the original population has been buried. A closer look reveals that perhaps the inhabitants of one nearby and contemporary settlement must have been deposited there and not the complete population of a region. A similar proposition can be formulated for Niedermerz/Langweiler 8. If so, these cemeteries do not consist of small samples from the background populations, but rather represent specific villages in their entirety; the problem of representativity is transferred then to the relations between these cemetery/settlement couples and the remainder of the Bandkeramik hamlets on their respective plateaux (Van de Velde 1990).

Fifthly and finally, I inferred an equal footing of males and females at Elsloo from the quantitative and qualitative distributions of grave gifts over gender. However, when in Niedermerz female markers have disappeared, so male (or female) appurtenances may have vanished from the former cemetery, too. In that case an hierarchical opposition should be considered with one element general or all-embracing, and the other specific and topmost (Allen 1985). Thus, from the Niedermerz data the latter element may have been male gender and the general one female – in fact a possible implication of Dohrn-Ihmig's interpretation of that graveyard. While there is certainly no *a priori* reason to prefer the egalitarian opposition over the hierarchical ordering of gender, an argument against this model is that there are at least 11 unmarked 'male' graves at Niedermerz, and 13 at Elsloo, squarely at odds with the proposed male speciality and superiority. Therefore the former should be retained.

notes

1 I am pleased to acknowledge discussions on the present subject with Marjorie de Grooth, Alexander Häusler and Jens Lüning; also my text has much benefited from comments by Ineke Abbink and Diederik Meijer.

2 There are considerable problems with physical determination; see Shennan 1975, Wahl 1981/1984, or Welinder 1989.

3 Cf. David Clarke's notion of 'polythetic set' (Clarke 1968, 37). From it, the generally low correlations among gift categories in Bandkeramik graveyards can be understood.

4 In the excavation report Dohrn-Ihmig also presents a determination of gender/sex (she is not explicit on this topic) of the burials at Niedermerz. For various reasons I disagree with several of them chiefly, because the wealthier graves are all considered males *because of* their wealth, but also because gift categories are lumped

in her analysis (a fuller discussion is to be found in Van de Velde 1996). In three cases my gender determination is not in accordance with the anthropometric analysis.

5 This is not to say that they do leave their homestead in all cases; the changeover may also be signified by the adoption of the name of their new partner, as in western societies. An eventual change of address is tied to the rules of locality: patrilocal arrangements oblige the bride to move over to her husband, matrilocal rules have the male shift hearth. The rules governing locality need not be identical to the incest/exogamy custom. Moreover, not everybody will reproduce previous custom, but generally will try to get the best of the situation as she may seem fit – one can speak of tendencies only. Hence, in a matrilineal society actual marriages will be found arranged more frequently according to a matrilineal pattern than following any other rule; but diverging instances will always be present.

6 In private communication by people of the Aldenhovener Platte Project the use life is estimated at probably four generations, instead of six; especially the synchronisation of the earlier graves is contested as they have been dated by shards in the pit *fillings* instead of through gravegifts. If the four generation figure is accepted, then considerably less deceased are to be accounted for: 175-230 people, at the most twice the number of occupants in the cemetery.

7 Corresponding figures for Niedermerz are 95 cms and 55 cms respectively, all corrected for erosion and alluviation (Dohrn-Ihmig 1983, 48-50; Modderman 1970, 4). Depth differences are not significant, though, as the variances are large.

8 In a personal communication, Dr A. Häusler suggested anthropophagy as an alternative. According to him, there is abundant evidence for cannibalistic practices among the Bandkeramians. In my reading of the ethnographic literature, anthropophagic practices are most often associated with the corpses of people from *other* communities, exogamously, and not with regularly deceased members of the own group. Even in the most belligerent societies, in the large majority of cases death is incurred by natural causes, not by slaughter.

9 The settlement data appear to corroborate the present inference: a patrilocal and matrilineal structure of kin relations fits best to the observed distribution of pottery decoration in the village of Elsloo (Van de Velde 1979).

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