METAALTIJDEN 7

BIJDRAGEN IN DE STUDIE VAN DE METAALTIJDEN

REDACTIE:
M. HENDRIKSEN, E. NORDE & N. DE VRIES

STICHTING METAALTIJDENONDERZOEK NEDERLAND

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Inhoudsopgave

Middle Iron Age (500-250 BC) cemeteries in the Southern-Netherlands, the Rhineland and Flanders

Lasse van den Dikkenberg

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Introduction

Until recently very little was known about Middle Iron Age cemeteries in the Southern-Netherlands, Flanders and the Rhineland. In the 1990's it was still assumed that the Meuse-Demer-Scheldt area was largely depopulated during this period and the lack of graves in the archaeological record reflected a lack of habitation (Roymans 1995, 7-9). A decade later, Gerritsen proposed that resettling caused a decrease in the number of settlements and therefore in the number of burials, not a total abandonment. According to Gerritsen, people relocated from the sandy soils to the loamier parts of the landscape and the riverine area (Gerritsen 2003, 224). Gerritsen was the first to provide an overview of Middle Iron Age cemeteries in the Meuse-Demer-Scheldt area. According to his study there were 34 known Middle Iron Age cemeteries in the study area (2003, 223). So far these studies have attempted to broadly characterise the burial ritual in this period. But they haven't produced quantitative data (*e.g.* Gerritsen, 131-5; Hessing & Kooi 2005, 649-652). Since then no overview has been published, but recent discoveries have significantly increased the available dataset (*e.g.* Heirbaut 2011; Jezeer & Verniers 2012; Knippenberg 2014; Meurkens 2011; Van der Leije 2016). These new discoveries provide valuable insights in the burial ritual in this period. This article will give an overview of the characteristics of the burial ritual in the Middle Iron Age in the Southern Netherlands and Flanders.

In order to identify micro-regional differences in funerary traditions the study area has been divided into eight micro-regions (tab.1). The dataset consists of 67 sites with,

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in total, 505 cremation graves and 19 inhumation graves (Van den Dikkenberg 2018). In addition, funerary monuments in which no actual burials have been found have also been included in the study. This article will provide an overview of the burial ritual during the Middle Iron Age. It will provide quantitative insights into aspects of the burial ritual in this period. This contribution starts with a section on the location and size of Middle Iron Age cemeteries. This is followed by a section on burial monuments and the preservation of graves in this period. The next part discusses grave types and grave goods. The topics of elite graves and inhumation graves are only briefly mentioned, mostly because other studies have already discussed these topics (*e.g.* Ball 1999; Van den Broeke 2014).

Dating

Many of the characteristics of the Middle Iron Age are not necessarily shared during either the Early Iron Age or the Late Iron Age. For example, the elite graves which seem to refer to the traditions in the Marne-Moselle and Hunsrück-Eifel regions are restricted specifically to the Middle Iron Age. Also, the emergence of Marne pottery is a specifically Middle-Iron-Age phenomenon (Ball 1999; Gerritsen 2003; Van den Broeke 2012). Because the Middle Iron Age has its own period-specific characteristics, it should also be studied as a separate period, not merely as an intermediate phase. Unfortunately, Middle Iron Age graves rarely contain datable grave goods. Furthermore, ^{14}C-dates are not always available. Graves which are included in this study are either dated based on the typology of monuments, objects or ^{14}C-dates. In some cases monuments have been included which don't contain grave goods. These monuments are either dated based on typology, datable material from the ditch filling or their location within a well dated cemetery. In some cases an entire cemetery could be dated to the Middle Iron Age, in these cases all graves, even if they were not dated individually, have been included. Some cemeteries such as Weert Laarveld (500-200 BC), Itteren Emmaus 2 (500-200 BC) and Nunhem Voort (310-190 BC) have been included completely even though they were probably in use up until the transition to the Late Iron Age (Meurkens, Tol & Lammers 2009; Tol 2009; Wilgen *et al.* 2016). Including these cemeteries made it possible to study graves which don't contain any grave goods, and which are therefore usually not dated. Including cemeteries which were in use for long periods of time would have distorted the picture too much. Therefore, for cemeteries such as Sittard Hoogveld, site 4 (800-100 BC), Oosterhout de Contreie (1100-250 BC) only graves which could be dated specifically to the Middle Iron Age have been included (Roessingh 2012; Tol 2000).

Cemetery location and size

In fig. 1, the Middle Iron Age cemeteries of this study are plotted in green and twenty excluded sites are included in light grey. These excluded sites date to the Middle Iron Age but because they were poorly documented they have not been included in the dataset. There is an evident clustering of sites in the riverine area. In the Early Iron Age habitation was mainly located on the sandy plateaus. It appears that in the Middle Iron

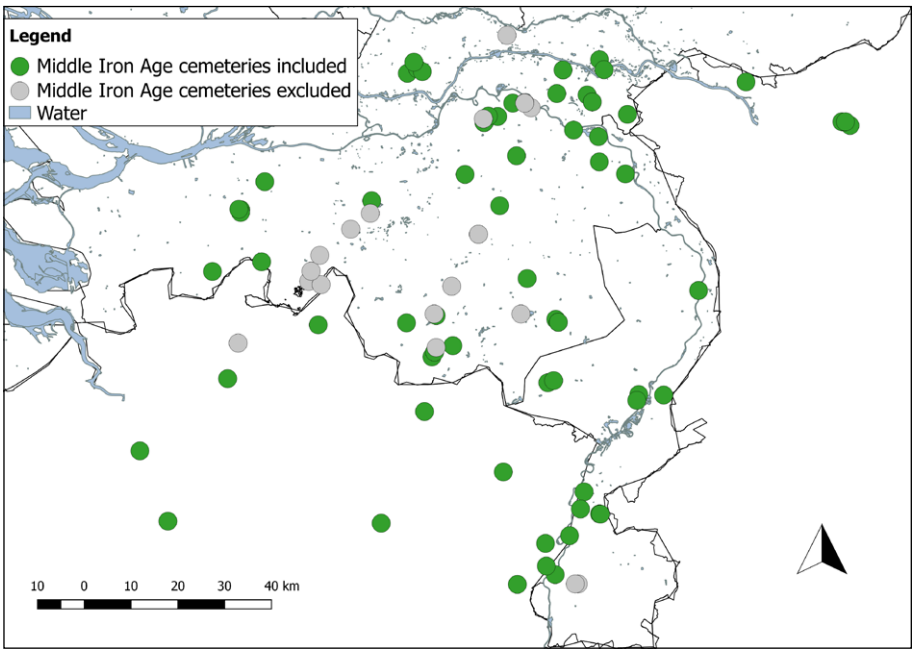

Figure 1. Distribution of cemeteries in the Middle Iron Age (Van den Dikkenberg 2018, 44).

Age a shift took place in which people resettled in the loamier parts of the landscape and the riverine area (Gerritsen 2003, 224).

Previous studies have noted that Middle and Late Iron Age cemeteries in the study area, and also in the eastern Netherlands, were occasionally located near older burial monuments. In most cases they were located in and near older urnfields (Van Beek & De Mulder 2014, 303-6; Van den Dikkenberg 2016, 180; Norde 2018, 124-5). In some cases older barrows were also selected as burial locations (Meijlink 2002, 768-786). In this study, 26 of the 71 cemeteries were located near an older urnfield or barrow, which is 37%. It seems that older urnfields and barrows were still favoured as burial locations, which may explain why the sandier parts of the landscape continued to be used for burial. In some cases there appears to be continuity between the Early and Middle Iron Age. In the cemetery of Slabroek it is clear that the two Middle Iron Age graves simply represent the last phase of usage before the urnfield was abandoned (Van den Broek 2011). In Nijmegen-Kopsplateau and Lommel-Kattenbosch the Middle Iron Age graves break with urnfields, in terms of tradition and location. They are still constructed near the older urnfield, but they are geographically separated from the older graves (De Laet & Mariën 1950, fig. 45; Fontijn 1995). Here it seems more likely that there is discontinuity in the use of these cemeteries. Even though burial monuments in this period become scarce, older monuments were still recognized as territorial markers. This practice can be seen as a continuation of the ancestor cult which was present in the Early Iron Age, a practice which, to some extent, seems to have continued up until the Roman period (Hiddink 2003, 50-51).

Cemetery size

In terms of size it was expected, based on previous studies, that Middle Iron Age cemeteries were relatively small when compared to urnfields (*e.g.* Gerritsen 2003, 134; Hessing & Kooi 2005, 650). According to Fokkens the average urnfield size is estimated to be about two hundred graves (1997, 363). It should be noted here that regional differences in this respect exist within the study area. In Flanders the average urnfield size is only c. 24 graves (De Mulder 2011, 207). Based on the current dataset, Middle Iron Age cemeteries consist of nine graves on average. This is partially a methodological bias. In cases where cemeteries were in use for a long period (for example when older urnfields continued to be used in the Middle Iron Age) only graves dated to the Middle Iron Age have been included. Considering that Middle Iron Age graves often lack datable grave goods it can be expected that part of the undated graves from these cemeteries also date from this period. Unfortunately, ^{14}C-dates are scarce which makes it difficult to include these graves in period specific studies. This is a problem which also has been noted for cemeteries and graves in the Eastern Netherlands (Norde 2018, 124). Keeping this problem in mind a distribution of cemetery size has been made in fig. 2. It is clear that, even though the dataset might be biased towards smaller cemeteries, the average size is a lot smaller than that of urnfields.[1] The largest known Middle Iron Age cemetery in the research area, Nunhem-Voort in Limburg, contained 59 graves (Wilgen 2016), which is still less than the average urnfield. This cemetery is dated to the transition period between the Middle Iron Age and the Late Iron Age. It seems that

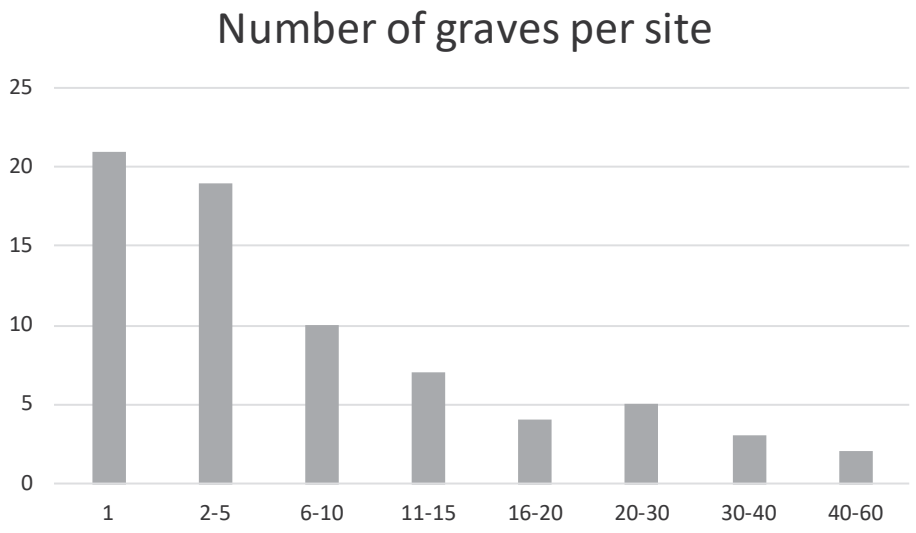

Figure 2. Middle Iron Age cemetery size: × = number of graves, y = number of cemeteries (Van den Dikkenberg 2018, 49).

1 Some cemeteries did contain more graves which could not be securely dated. Cemeteries such as Sittard Hoogveld, site 4 (800-100 BC) and Oosterhout de Contreie (1100-250 BC) were in use for a long period of time (Roessingh 2012; Tol 2000). Here only the graves which could be dated to the Middle Iron Age were included, hence those numbers represent a minimum.

from this period onwards larger cemeteries become slightly more frequent. From the Late Iron Age larger cemeteries such as those from Nederweert Rosveld 5/6 (n=111) and Panningen Stokx (n=74) are known (Hiddink 2014, 186-88).

Monuments and preservation issues

In total, 195 Middle Iron Age burial monuments have been found in the study area. This means that c. 30% of the graves had a burial monument (tab. 1). However, it should be noted that this is largely a reflection of the preservation. Only 78 of these monuments still contained one or multiple graves. In the other cases the graves were not preserved. These monuments were dug deeper than the pits for the cremations. Hence in many cases only the monuments have survived. These preservation issues appear to reflect a geographical bias. In tab. 1 we see that in the riverine areas of Geldermalsen and Nijmegen graves are well preserved and in the cases where a monument is present the graves of those monuments are preserved as well. In the sandy areas of Western Noord-Brabant, Western Flanders and Oss a lot of monuments are found without graves. It seems that in the riverine areas graves are preserved better than in the sandy areas. In general it seems that monuments surrounding Middle Iron Age graves were an exception rather than the rule. This means that burials from this period are less archaeologically visible than for example urnfields. This is a phenomenon which has also been noted in the Eastern Netherlands (Van Beek 2009, 432).

Micro-region	Number of graves*	Number of monuments	Monuments with graves	Percentage of monuments with preserved graves
Western Noord-Brabant	75	62	14	23%
Western Flanders	33	11	3	27%
Oss	48	20	8	40%
Northern Limburg and Eastern Noord-Brabant	171	69	29	42%
Southern Limburg	54	7	5	71%
Geldermalsen	71	1	1	100%
Nijmegen	128	11	11	100%
German Rhineland	45	0	0	-

*Table 1. Monuments per micro-region and percentages of preserved graves (Van den Dikkenberg 2018, 54). *This includes cremation burials, inhumations and monuments in which no actual burials have been found.*

Monument Typology

If we look at monument typology, we see that square (n=95) and rectangular ditches (n=47) are the most common types. In addition circular monuments (n=33) are also quite common (tab. 2). For those monuments which had entrances more than 60% of these were directed towards the south-east. This is a phenomenon which is also observed for Early Bronze Age Barrows and urnfield ring ditches (Bradley 1998, 149-50; Gerritsen 2003, 128). It seems that this preference for directing the entrance of burial monuments towards the south-east is a continuation of an earlier tradition.

Monument type	Count	Percentage
Square ditch with one or multiple entrances	61	33%
Square ditch	34	18%
Rectangular ditch	28	15%
Circular ditch with entrance	19	10%
Rectangular ditch with entrance	19	10%
Circular ditch	14	7%
Circular mound	6	3%
Oval ditch with entrances	3	2%
Longbed	1	1%
Square posthole structure	1	1%
Trapezium-shaped ditch	1	1%

Table 2. Monument typology and count of monument types (Van den Dikkenberg 2018, 56).

Graves, typology and burial gifts

The cremation graves are classified according to the typology developed by Hiddink for Late Iron Age graves. In addition to that the category inhumation graves can be added (Hiddink 2003, 9-10; Hiddink 2014, 189; Van den Broeke 2014). The typology of Hiddink consists of three main grave types:

- type A consists only of selected cremation remains without remains of the funeral pyre;
- type B consists of both selected cremation remains and remains of the funeral pyre, which are usually deposited on top of the selected cremation remains;
- type C consists of remains of the funerary pyre from which cremation remains have not specifically been selected (Hiddink 2014, 189).

For the eight micro-regions pie-charts of the grave types have been plotted on a map (fig. 3). A north-west vs. south-east division is more or less visible here. In the north-west type A graves clearly dominate, consisting of more than 50% of the total, while B and C types of graves are scarce. In the south-east type A graves consist of less than 50% of the graves. Inhumation graves are more or less exclusively found in the Geldermalsen and Nijmegen area, only one inhumation grave is found in the area Northern Limburg and Eastern Noord-Brabant. For inhumation graves it should be noted that these are generally not preserved in sandy soils. Hence these are more likely to be discovered in the clay soils of the riverine area. However, inhumations can also be found in the form of a silhouette of the deceased, as was the case in Someren Waterdael (Van den Broeke 2014, 166).

Urns

Of the cremation graves only 19% were buried inside an urn (n=94). It is possible that the other cremations were buried in organic containers but these have not been preserved. The fact that urn burials are scarce in this period has been noted in previous studies and this is a phenomenon which continues into the Late Iron Age (Hiddink 2014, 189). During the Early Iron Age urns were much more frequent, although at

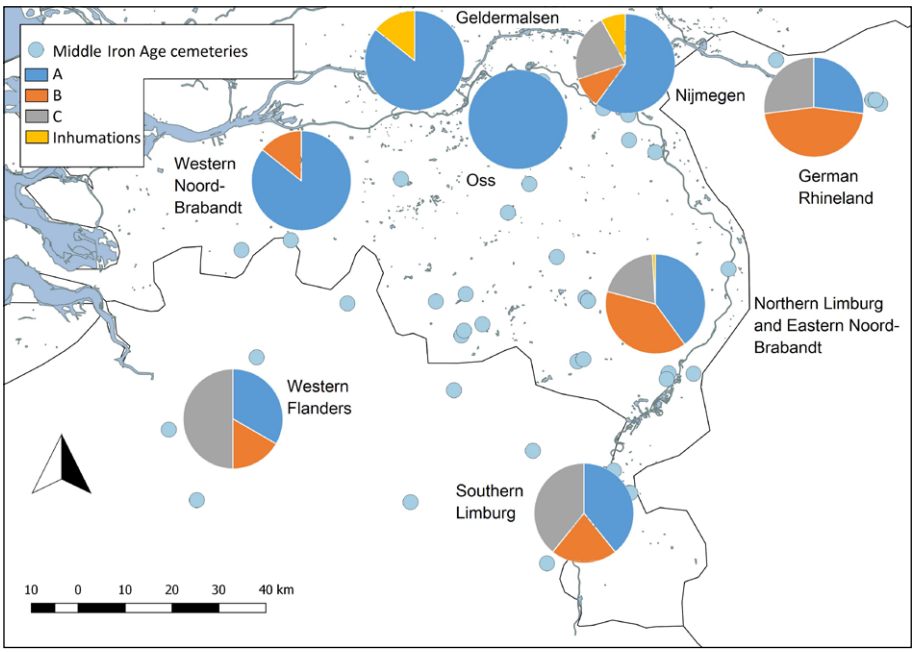

Figure 3. Micro-regions and the distribution of grave types (Van den Dikkenberg 2018, 61).

the end of the Early Iron Age the number of urn graves already declined (De Mulder 2011, 221-2, 271; Gerritsen 2003, 125-8). In the German Rhineland urns appear to be much more frequent. In this region, 24 out of 45 graves contained urns (thus 53% of the burials).

Grave goods

Grave goods seem to be relatively common in this period, because 318 of the 524 graves contained grave goods (61%). However, it should be noted that this largely reflects a research bias as many graves could only be dated because they contained grave goods. Still, the total of 665 grave goods that have been listed provide insight into the preferred gifts that would be placed in the grave. The largest group of grave goods consists of pottery, mostly related to food consumption (n=250). Another large group of grave goods consist of animal bones, which are thought to reflect funerary meals or food offerings (Hiddink 2014, 196-7; Van den Helm & Van Dijk 2017, 113). In 101 graves, dispersed over 22 cemeteries, animal bones have been found. On average 36% of the graves, in these 22 cemeteries, contained animal bones. This is interesting as a study of Middle and Late Iron Age graves in the Eastern Netherlands indicated that animal bones were only rarely found in graves (Norde 2018, 125). In terms of species pigs were the most frequently occurring species (30%). Sheep and goat came in second (12%). The large group of medium mammal bones which could not be identified to species level (20%) probably mainly belonged to these two groups. Cattle was only found in 6% of the graves. Other species were highly exceptional, in all cases they consisted of unique finds such as a single piece of antler, marten bones, bird and fish bones. The distribution of animal species is consistent with the patterns noted for Iron

Age cemeteries in general and for the Late Iron Age specifically (Hiddink 2014, 197; Van den Helm & Van Dijk 2017, 110).

A small group of grave goods consists of objects related to appearance. The main groups are bracelets, fibulae, ear or hair rings and belt hooks. Fibulae are generally scarce but in the German Rhineland they are found in 18% of the graves, while in the rest of the study area they are found in less than 2% of the graves. Objects related to appearance were found more frequently in female graves (n=8) than in male graves (n=4). Another group of objects consists of knives, these are found in seven graves, three of which were classified as elite graves.

It seems that grave goods were generally related to funerary meals or food offerings. This appears to be an important aspect of the burial ritual. Other grave goods are scarce and they mostly reflect objects which would have been worn by the deceased. Certain grave goods, such as bronze drinking vessels, torques, wagons and weapons are traditionally associated with elites (Bloemers 2016, 33-34; Geerts & Veldman 2012, 36; Heirbaut 2011, 126; Tol 2000, 114-5). These will be treated in the next section.

Elite graves

In this study elite graves are defined as graves which contain either weapons, wagons, metal drinking vessels, horse or riding gear, torques or multiple objects which relate to bodily adornment. In total 36 graves were classified as elite graves. Elite graves and grave goods often show a typological affiliation with the Hunsrück-Eifel and Moselle-Marne areas. It is interesting to note that these grave goods are rarely found as complete

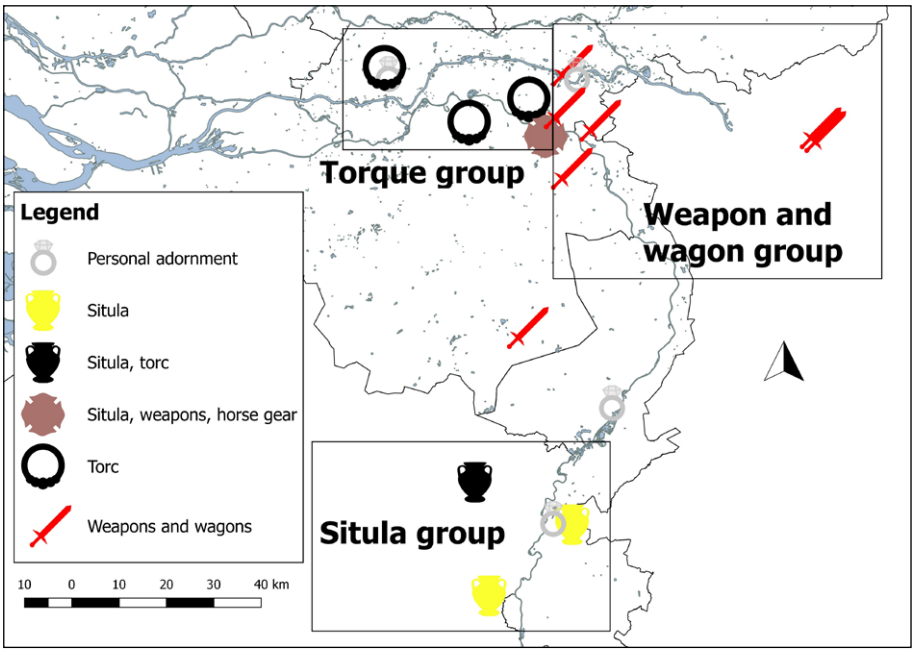

Figure 4. Elite burials in the Meuse-Demer-Scheldt area and bordering Rhineland. The graves seem to be divided in three regional groups based on their associated burial gifts (Van den Dikkenberg 2018, 100).

sets. Only the Overasselt grave contained both a situla, horse gear, weapons and objects related to appearance. In figure 4 the elite graves are plotted according to the grave goods with which they were found. It seems that they form distinct regional groups. Weapons and wagon parts are found mainly in the north-east. Here twelve graves contained weapons, only one grave outside this area contained a weapon, a dagger which was found at Someren-Waterdael I. Bronze vessels are almost exclusively found in the southern area along the Meuse, here five graves with bronze vessels were found. Torques are found nearly exclusively in the riverine areas. Here eight torque graves were found while only one grave outside this area, from the Wijshagen-de-Rieten cemetery, also contained a torque. It should be noted that these patterns are observed based on a very small dataset, due to the rarity of these graves.

These groups appear to be a new phenomenon which is not observed in Early Iron Age graves. In the Early Iron Age bronze vessels were for example also known from Baarlo, Venlo and Oss, thus they were not a local characteristic for southern part of Dutch Limburg and Belgium Limburg (Van der Vaart-Verschoof 2017, 117). In the Early Iron Age weapons were also not restricted to the eastern Dutch riverine area and the bordering German Rhineland. In Heythuizen, Maastricht, Neerharen-Rekum, Oss and Weert weapons were also found in elite graves (Van der Vaart-Verschoof 2017, 73-77).

Conclusion

This article aimed to provide an overview of the present knowledge about cemeteries in the Middle Iron Age in the Meuse-Demer-Scheldt area and the bordering Rhineland. Cemeteries in this period are small in size and often located near older burial monuments. Monuments and urn burials are scarce. The burial ritual in this period is highly varied and it appears that the differences might to a large extend reflect regional differences or regional groups. To some extend these also reflect differences in conservation. It appears that in Western Flanders and Western Noord-Brabant graves are less well preserved as in the riverine areas. This might partially explain why cemeteries in this period appear to be more frequent in the riverine area. This is seen both in the 'regular' graves as well as in the distribution of elite graves. Grave goods largely seem to reflect funerary meals. A second group might be related to what a person was wearing when they were buried. Other types of grave goods are very scarce.

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