

# TO BE BURIED INSIDE A LONG-FORGOTTEN WORLD

Studying the reuse of passage graves wearing “Bronze Age glasses”

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The theories presented about the reuse of Neolithic monuments during the Bronze Age in Scandinavia are mainly universal, i.e. applicable to all periods during prehistory. I argue that there is no point in isolating reuse as something separate from society. The focus of my study is the Mysinge passage grave on the island of Öland. I have also studied the reuse of other graves on Öland and of passage graves in Falbygden. I propose that the passage grave was linked to the underworld and that some of those buried in the chamber of Mysinge during the Bronze Age were people travelling by sea.

*Keywords: Reuse, Bronze Age, Cosmology, Passage graves, Öland, Falbygden, Mysinge*

## INTRODUCTION

Why would the reuse of older graves *during* the Bronze Age be isolated *from* the Bronze Age? Of course, the question in itself is quite absurd. Logically, the phenomenon can only be understood as part of the context in which it existed! Just as every single activity must be interpreted within its unique context; a burial today in the graveyard of a church from the 15th century should be interpreted as an occurrence of today, an occurrence with the potential to tell us a lot about ourselves in the present, but not about the people living in the 15th century. This might seem obvious when speaking about modern times, and no one would



Figure 1. Map of southern Sweden. Triangle: Falbygden. Quadrant: The island of Öland.

argue against it, but when venturing back in time, when interpreting prehistory, today's research about the distant past makes this seem far less obvious.

This article will focus on the reuse of the Mysinge passage grave, Öland, SE Sweden, during the Bronze Age. To do this I will investigate the practice of reuse on Öland and in passage graves in Falbygden, Västergötland, and put the results in relation to what is seen in Mysinge (figure 1). My main goal will be to see what this might tell us about the relationship that people during the Bronze Age had towards the abstract subject of non-existence. I find it necessary to accomplish this within the framework of what we know or think we know about Bronze Age soci-

ety and cosmology. There has been research dealing with the reuse that occurred during the Bronze Age in megalithic tombs, for instance, but it has very seldom been done within the Bronze Age framework. One explanation is the fact that excavations of megalithic tombs (or other Stone Age burials or places) are often directed by Stone Age researchers, who also tend to be the ones writing about it. However, I stress the point that we would definitely benefit from looking at the reuse of graves during the Bronze Age wearing “Bronze Age glasses”.

I have chosen the Mysinge passage grave as a focal point because it makes a good entryway into the discussion about the reuse of megalithic monuments during the Bronze Age. Ten individuals buried in the chamber have been dated to the Bronze Age (Eriksson *et al.* 2008). These ten dates indicate continuous use of the chamber from 1800 to 1000 BC, from the beginning of the Bronze Age to a bit into the late Bronze Age, while the earliest dated individual has been dated to ENII, at around 3500 BC. The timespans here are, to put it mildly, mind-blowing. Of course, the Mysinge passage grave is not isolated from its context and therefore I have also studied other examples of the reuse of graves on the island of Öland and of passage graves in Falbygden. I will only focus on activities that occurred during the Bronze Age, or activities that are otherwise important for understanding the significance and use of the monument during the Bronze Age, for example, earlier activities that somehow affected later usage.

I begin the article with a presentation of the Mysinge passage grave. Thereafter I will discuss the act of reuse from various perspectives and explain how I employ the concept of reuse in this article. From this follows a presentation of previous research and results of my own studies of Öland and Falbygden. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of the results of the study.

## THE MYSINGE PASSAGE GRAVE: 2,500 YEARS OF BURIALS

The Mysinge passage grave, Resmo RAÄ 85, is situated in Resmo parish on the south-western coast of Öland, SE Sweden (figure 2 & 3). It lies very close to the only other megalithic tombs found on Öland (see figure 1), two more passage graves (RAÄ 84 and RAÄ 81) and one dolmen (RAÄ 32). However, only Resmo RAÄ 85 has been subject to excavation. It is also the best-preserved of the four megalithic tombs found on Öland. The chamber and parts of the mound were excavated in 1908 by Ture Johnsson Arne (Arne 1909). Since then two more excavations



Figure 2. Map of the south-western coast of Öland. The four megalithic tombs are marked with dots. Map taken from FMIS.

have taken place. Arne returned to examine the entrance in 1937 but the excavation was never published and only a few pictures along with a brief description are left from it (Arne 1937). In 2004 Kenneth Alexandersson excavated the entrance more thoroughly, as well as the mound (Alexandersson 2005).

During the excavation of the chamber in 1908, Arne found the skeletal remains of what he interpreted as 30–40 skeletons (Arne 1909). However, later research done by Torbjörn Ahlström shows that at least 56 individuals were buried in the chamber and most likely more than that (Ahlström 2009:82). Arne also found burnt bones in a pot higher up in the stratigraphy of the chamber, which he suggested was a secondary burial from the late Bronze Age (Arne 1909). Ingrid Bergensträhle has tried to reconstruct the pot and from the result she could only find parallels to a certain type of urn from the Viking Age (Bergensträhle 1986:9–11). However, due to Arne’s analysis and comparisons with other forms of secondary cremated burials higher up in the stratigraphy of the chamber (Montelius 1885, 1906) I deem a date to the late Bronze Age for this burial most probable.

A concentration of burnt bones was found outside the chamber “pretty deep down” (Arne 1909:90, my translation) in the mound just outside and between the chamber’s south-western stones (Arne 1909:90).

In his excavation in 2004, Alexandersson also discovered burnt bones close to that location but a bit further to the south-east (Alexandersson 2005:6, 8, appendix 1). This probably originates from a secondary burial in the mound. In this context it is important to stress that a very small portion of the mound has been subject to excavation; more cremation burials of the kind found by Arne and Alexandersson most likely remain in the mound.

While excavating the entrance area in 1937 Arne found Funnel Beaker pottery, burnt bones and flint, which are typical finds in front of the entrances of passage graves, and usually interpreted as deposits connected to rituals performed within the Funnel Beaker culture (EN–MNA) (Arne 1937). In 2004 Alexandersson discovered an entrance cairn covering most of the deposit of pottery, flint and burnt bones, and the cairn was also overlapping one of the facade stones (Alexandersson 2005:8–10). As will be demonstrated in this article, entrance cairns are very common in front of Swedish passage graves and, as the covering of the deposit and the facade stone in this case clearly illustrate, a secondary construction detail not connected to the initial building of the monument. The entrance cairn of Mysinge passage grave has not been more closely dated than after the deposition of pottery, which occurred during the time of the Funnel Beaker Culture.



Figure 3. Mysinge passage grave. Photo: Gustav Wollentz.

During the last couple of years, the Archaeological Research Laboratory at Stockholm University has increased our knowledge of the Neolithic on Öland through a range of C14 and stable isotope analyses of skeletal material. The skeletal material from the Mysinge passage grave has played an important role in this context (Lidén 1995; Kanstrup 2004; Eriksson *et al.* 2008; Linderholm *et al.* 2011; Fornander 2011). Thirty-four of at least 56 individuals from the chamber have been radiocarbon-dated, as presented in Eriksson *et al.* 2008:

- 12 individuals were dated to the period EN II to MNA (3500–2900 b.c.).
- 11 individuals were dated to MNB (2900–2300 b.c.).
- One individual was dated to the beginning of LN (2300–2200 b.c.).
- 10 individuals were dated to the Bronze Age. The dates span the whole early Bronze Age and a bit into late Bronze Age (1800–1000 b.c.).

This makes Mysinge, together with Landbogården and Rössberga from Falbygden, one of the earliest dated passage graves in Sweden (Bägerfeldt 1987, 2001; Persson & Sjögren 1995, 2001:81–86, 161; Linderholm *et al.* 2008; Fornander 2011:58). The ten dates spanning 1800–1000 b.c., after what seems to be a decline in usage of the chamber during the LN, are of particular interest in this article.

The isotope analyses are used to study diet and dietary changes during the lifetime of an individual, as well as mobility. Six of the 10 individuals from the Bronze Age in Mysinge showed a non-local origin and seven of 10 had experienced residential changes during his/her lifetime (Linderholm *et al.* 2011). There are still many questions left unanswered to interpret these results but, to use the words of Fornander: “the high representation of mobile non-locals at Resmo seems striking” (Fornander 2011:61).

## REUSE: THE UNAVOIDABLY PROBLEMATIC WORD

The word reuse brings with it the baggage of having a secondary ring to it. And secondary doesn't seem as important as primary. However, what is considered primary and what is perceived as secondary are created by us who are interpreting the monuments today. Most often we call the original usage of a grave the “primary” phase, which is the phase when the original meanings of a monument were held intact. This could be a pitfall since we often note that a monument goes through radical changes in its “lifetime”, and some seem to have been intended from the very beginning (Bradley 2002; Goldhahn 1999, 2006). At other times

an object or monument seems to have been constructed only in order to be destroyed (Bradley 2002). What is the “primary” phase in such cases? To deem what is a primary phase of a monument and what is a secondary phase says more about researchers’ need for clear and linear timelines than about the people building and using the monument. Furthermore, every single phase of a monument, no matter whether the original meaning is intact or not, has the potential of saying as much about the people living around the monument and using it as the first phase. So each phase is in that sense as important as the next one, they just convey different things since they exist within different contexts. As Ludvig Pappmehl-Dufay says about Mysinge passage grave: “I think that by regarding the long-term use of the site as ‘secondary’, we are missing the most important notion: every generation has had their specific and unique relation to this site, and the place has a biography of its own in which activities in and around the tomb are deeply embedded” (Pappmehl-Dufay 2011:138).

To use a word like reuse is certainly neither unproblematic nor unquestioned. In this article it will be employed for the use of a grave over a long period a time, perhaps repeatedly, as is the case of Mysinge, perhaps just one time but hundreds of years after the initial construction. Reuse could have the form of another burial being integrated into the original grave (either buried according to the same customs as previously or in a completely new way), as a secondary construction detail (for example entrance cairns), or as some other form of activity (for example the pecking of cup marks). Only the activity that can be closely linked to the particular passage graves will be studied in this article, not the forms of reuse that can be noticed by looking at the landscape, for example how Bronze Age monuments can allude to passage graves in the way they are oriented (Bradley 2002).

In the case of Mysinge the words “continuous use of the chamber for at least 2500 years” do in many ways present a fairer picture of the situation than the word reuse. It is important, however, to underline that there seems to be a gap during the LN for about 400 years (although further C14 dates could possibly fill this quite distinct gap somewhat) so even the word “continuous use” is not as fair as one could wish.

## RECREATING THE PAST

In order to understand the act of reusing monuments, it is important to keep in mind the way meanings change and transform over time. Richard Bradley writes that memories conveyed through verbal tradition

often become corrupt within 200 years (Bradley 2002:8), and that new meanings are thereby unavoidably born. There is significance in noting whether the particular monument seems to be respected in the acts of “reuse” or not. Destroying a monument could indicate an act of distancing from old times. If the monument is respected the act of reuse can be seen as a way by chiefs to legitimize their power by connecting themselves to the long-gone ancestors. In this way the act of reuse can be just another tool to gain power. Sometimes even “acts” of ignoring monuments can convey a meaning. Naturally, to a high degree this is a discussion about “memories” and how memories can be used, and as Cornelius Holtorf writes, memories can be seen as projected towards the future (Holtorf 1996, 2000–2008). Chris Gosden and Gary Lock distinguish genealogical memories from mythological memories: genealogical memories are based on known names of remembered people, of blood-kin and social relations: “In non-literate societies the main device employed through which to recount history is that of genealogy, in which relations of blood and kin are specified and become the basis for recounting stories of these known individuals” (Gosden & Lock 1998:5). However, genealogical history is in constant movement, and long-dead relatives gradually disappear from memory. That which lies beyond the known evolves into the mythical, which in its obscurity involves a lot of free movement and creativity in *recreating* the past (Gosden & Lock 1998:4–6).

With the Bronze Age cosmology in mind, the phenomenon of reuse of megalithic tombs during the Bronze Age becomes all the more fascinating. How are graves from the Stone Age incorporated in the Bronze Age cosmology, monuments that originate from a radically different time with other concepts of life and death, and what role does this play in the cosmology? Despite the interesting questions and the importance of the answers to them seen in broad perspective, it could play a vital role in getting closer to the cosmology in general, the questions have not been asked or thoroughly dealt with.

## PREVIOUS RESEARCH

I will now present a few examples of previous research concerning reuse during the Bronze Age in order to highlight a tendency in the research that this article will dislodge itself from. Elin Fornander presents interesting theories grounded in the result of her doctoral thesis (Fornander 2011). Her analysis is based on isotope analyses which showed a high degree of non-local origin for the individuals buried in the Mysinge pas-



sage grave during the Bronze Age, and she suggests that those buried in the passage grave could be people newly arrived on Öland. These people would be lacking local genealogical memories and, by extension, named ancestors and local areas to be connected to when being buried. In that interpretative context the passage grave could work instead as a way of linking the individual to mythological ancestors. As an alternative theory she proposes that it could be the non-local origin of travelling people that in some way leads to special treatment (Fornander 2011:59–62).

Another example can be seen in Åsa Berggren's doctoral thesis (Berggren 2010). However, she does not base her interpretations on examples from a strict grave context but from sacrifices in one and the same bog, Hindbygården in Malmö, where activities stretch from the Mesolithic to the Bronze Age. During the early Bronze Age there was high deposition activity in the bog, but not generally of prestigious artefacts. According to Berggren, this indicates that the rituals in the bog were open to a relatively large part of the population. The bog was also used for burials during the early Bronze Age. Berggren suggests that this could have been done to create a mythical history for the bog, and thereby legitimize continuous use of it. The identity of the buried individuals was integrated with the bog, and after a while they became one with its mythical history. This could be seen as an example of people actively creating a mythical history, all the while performing rituals around the bog through which they maintained a genealogical history. And in such a way a mythical and a genealogical history were linked (Berggren 2010:343–347).

Karl-Göran Sjögren discusses reuse in his doctoral thesis, which is a thorough study of the passage graves in western Sweden and Falbygden in particular (Sjögren 2003). He connects entrance cairns, a construction secondary to the initial building of the grave that closes the entrance, to an act of transforming the passage graves to stone cists, the prevailing burial custom during the Late Neolithic. Furthermore, he suggests that burials in the mound instead of the chamber were practised during later times because that was the common custom during those times. In short, he interprets the changes to the construction represented by entrance cairns as a method of adapting the graves to prevailing customs, and he suggests that this is the case in using the mound instead of the chamber for burials later on (Sjögren 2003:106–113). Sjögren does not venture into discussions about cosmology; however, if it is “only” a question of adapting the old to the new way of things, perhaps in the process legitimizing the new, his interpretations of reuse do not necessarily say anything significant about the cosmology. However, I will discuss his interpretations more thoroughly later on.

All these results are very interesting and well thought-out, and I value their contribution to the discussion of reuse. They have also helped me in my work. Other than that, they have one thing in common: they are *universal* in the sense that they can be applied to reuse during all of Swedish prehistory. They can be applied to the Stone Age, the Bronze Age as well as the Iron Age. They are not really *limited* to concepts specific to certain periods or cosmologies during prehistory. Both Fornander and Berggren discuss specific cases of reuse during the Bronze Age, interpreting the usage with an answer unspecific to any certain time. They both use the distinction that Gosden and Lock (1998) make between a mythological and a genealogical past to interpret the activity, theories that can be applied to all periods of prehistory since they are universal theories about how human beings perceive time (Berggren 2010; Fornander 2011). Sjögren has a more practical and empirical approach, and does not discuss cosmology or different “pasts”. Even if his theory is specific when it comes to the type of graves (passage graves during the Early and Middle Neolithic, stone cists during the Late Neolithic and mounds during the Bronze Age and Iron Age), it is a universal theory since it stands separated from the society and the cosmology in general, and is applied to all times unconnected to each context except for the

Table 1: Reuse on Öland during the Bronze Age.

Reuse BA Öland	Period of usage	Individuals buried
Algutsrum	LN–EIA	16: Stone cist 3: Cairn
Karlevi	LN–LIA	3: LN 1: LBA  ?: IA
Hässleby	LN?–LIA	Around 23, of which at least 10 are infants
Gösslunda Rör	EBA–LIA	12
Blå Rör	EBA–LBA	5
Mysinge PG	ENII–IA?	56: Chamber 1: Mound, many are probably left undiscovered
Torsborg	MNB–LBA	10: MNB–EBA 1: LBA At least 25 individuals
Resmo RAÄ 81	Neolithic – ?	Not excavated

?: Not certain

form that the different graves have. In this article I try to make a point by presenting theories that are not universal, but on the contrary *specific* to the Bronze Age.

## THE MEGALITHIC TOMBS IN ÖLAND AND FALBYGDEN

When studying the Bronze Age on Öland it is significant to note that there has not been much previous research, but this does not reflect a lack of finds. Nils Åberg made a comprehensive list of stray finds, showing a substantial number, quite a few of which we would identify as “prestigious” objects (Åberg 1923). One reason for this lack of spotlight on the Bronze Age on Öland could be the fact that the Iron Age dominates the prehistoric landscape here, and Bronze Age graves mostly occur as islands among graves from the Iron Age (Andersson 1987; Åstrand 1989; Erlandsson 2007). Also, many graves show activity during both periods (see table 1), for example, Algutsrum (Hagberg & Wærn 1974; Eriksson *et al.* 2008; Pappmehl-Dufay 2010) and Gösslunda Rör (Jansson 1978; Åstrand 1989; Erlandsson 2007), further making the Bronze

Type of graves	Rock art	BA Dates
LN–EBA: Stone cist LBA–EIA: Encompassing cairn		4 individuals in stone cist Ca 1800–1000 b.c.
LN: Inhumation LBA: Cremation burial encompassed by a small cairn IA: Encompassing mound		A possible cremation burial from LBA
LN?–LIA: Stone cist LIA: Encompassing cairn		Artefacts indicate a possible LBA date
Cairn	1 cup mark	3 (certain dates)
Cairn	Ca 10 cup marks	5
ENII–EBA: The chamber LBA–IA?: Chamber? + mound		10 individuals in the chamber, 1800–1000 b.c., probable entrance cairn and secondary burials
4 stone cists 1 secondary burial, possible stone cist 2 cremation burials During LBA the graves are covered by a stone packing		5 individuals 4: 1800–1400 b.c. 1: 800 b.c.
Passage grave near RAÄ 85, Mysinge PG	50–100 cup marks on top of roof stones	Cup marks?

Age on Öland less clear to interpret but at the same time all the more rewarding. Despite the general lack of research, a few important studies have been carried out. The one that has gained the most attention is probably Thomas B. Larsson's doctoral thesis (Larsson 1986), where he splits Öland into two central areas, one in the northern and one in the southern part. Another important work is Johan Åstrand's BA thesis (Åstrand 1989), which is the most comprehensive work to date about the Bronze Age on Öland and one that has been of great importance for later research, including this article.

The Mysinge passage grave is the oldest structure that was used for burials during the Bronze Age on Öland as far as we know (table 1). The next oldest example on Öland of graves known to have been used during the Bronze Age is the burial place at Torsborg, where the earliest burial is a stone cist from MNB. However, the situation there is quite different, since the usage is represented by stone cists continuously constructed alongside each other, until, probably during the late Bronze Age, they were all covered by a stone packing, in which secondary cremation burials were later placed (Petersson 1956; Kanstrup 2004; Eriksson *et al.* 2008; Fornander 2011). In other words, it does not mark a usage of the same chamber as is the case at Mysinge, which signifies a distinct

Table 2: Reuse of passage graves in Falbygden during the Bronze Age.

Reuse BA Falbygden passage graves	Burial chamber		Burial mound	
	EBA	LBA	EBA	LBA
Landbogården				
Frälsegården				1
Ormarör	–	–		1?
Hjelmars Rör				2?
Gravbacken	–	–		
Norra Lundby		2		
Tomten	–	–		1?
Rössberga Rör	2?	1, 1?		
Långe Rör	–	–		
Toras Grav				
Hornborga	–	–	1	
Kung Björns Grav	–	–	1	

\* Dated entrance cairns, to the extent it is possible.

\*\* : The individual dated to early Iron Age was buried in the passage.

\*\*\* : The stone with cup marks was found in the passage.

?: Not certain.

– : The area not excavated.

The estimates of the total number of individuals buried in the chamber of passage graves are based on the least possible number.

difference. This is not surprising, however; megalithic tombs are monumental in form and prominently placed in the landscape, which makes them impossible to ignore for people living their everyday life around them. They are the perfect example of graves that are remembered, first through genealogical memories and later mythological ones (see Gosden & Lock 1998). It is only logical that there are meanings connected to the megalithic tombs on Öland during the Bronze Age, and since the Mysinge passage grave is the only one excavated so far we can merely guess what traces from the Bronze Age could possibly be found in the other three. In this context the passage grave RAÄ 81 is of particular interest. Here traces from secondary usage are clear: on the roof stones some 50–100 cup marks have been pecked (Bergenstråhle 1986).

I have also studied the reuse of passage graves in Falbygden (table 2) in order to relate the results to the reuse of the Mysinge passage grave. There are around 250 passage graves in Falbygden located within an area of 50 × 30 km. The exact number varies between researchers, but clearly Falbygden is unique in Sweden. Blomqvist estimated the total amount of passage graves in Sweden altogether at 294, which leaves us with more than two thirds of the known passage graves located in Falbygden (Blomqvist 1989; Persson & Sjögren 2001; Ahlström 2009:11–

	Entrance cairn		C14 dates of individuals in chamber and passage	Rock art
	possible	certain dated*		
X			7/12: ENII–LN, 1 EIA**	
X			15/44: MNA, 1 LN	
–				1 cup mark
	X	EBA	8/26: MNA	3 cup marks
	X	LN–IA		
–				1 cup mark***
	X	MNB–IA		1 cup mark
	X	LN–IA	31/131: ENII–LBA/EIA	
	X	EIA?		
	X	MN–IA		
–	–			
–	–			

12). In 1989 a total of 27 passage graves had been subject to excavation in Falbygden, but 77% of these excavations occurred before World War II (Blomqvist 1989). Most of the examples of reuse that have come to light have been due to the impressive and vital work carried out from 1985 and onwards. This work involves new excavations, performed within a project that started as a collaboration between the Archaeological Department at the University of Gothenburg and the County Museum of Skaraborg. The work done between 1985 and 1998 is published in *Falbygdens gånggrifter Del 1, Undersökningar 1985–1998* by Per Persson and Karl-Göran Sjögren (2001). Below I will present the results of my studies of Öland and Falbygden in relation to each other, dealing with one significant aspect at a time.

## BURIALS IN THE CHAMBER

In Falbygden there are no passage graves known to contain as many buried individuals during the Bronze Age as Mysinge (table 2). The only example with C14 dates from the chamber falling within the Bronze Age is Rössberga (Valtorp RAÄ 2) (figure 4). Of at least 131 identified individuals, 31 were C14-dated. It is important to bear in mind that some of these dates have a large standard deviation. Only one date can be placed within the Bronze Age for certain. Two dates fall at the transition between LN and EBA, while one falls at the transition between LBA and IA. The remaining dates from Rössberga mainly fall during the MN (Persson & Sjögren 1995, 2001; Ahlström 2001, 2009:155–169; Linderholm *et al.* 2008; Fornander 2011). Of course, this is just 31 individuals of at least 131, and the use of the Rössberga passage grave during the Bronze Age could be more continuous and less sporadic in reality than these dates indicate. However, with the present results, the same continuous use that can be noted in Mysinge, with 10 out of 34 C14-dated individuals originating from the early Bronze Age, cannot be seen in Rössberga.

Luckily, C14 dates are not the only method by which we can trace activity at passage graves during the Bronze Age. During the excavation at Mysinge, Arne found a pottery vessel with burnt bones in the uppermost part of the chamber that he deemed as deriving from the late Bronze Age (Arne 1909). This bears close resemblance to Norra Lundsby 41 in Falbygden. Here, in the chamber near the roof stones, Oscar Montelius found nippers of bronze together with burnt bones. Five feet away he came across a knife and a saw of bronze. Even if there were no burnt bones in the latter case he interpreted them as two burials from



Figure 4. Rössberga passage grave. Photo: Gustav Wollentz.

the late Bronze Age, placed there by dislodging some of the roof stones. The passage grave was later covered by a mound, most likely in connection with two burials from the early Iron Age that were found just above the roof stones of the passage grave. In addition to this, Montelius discovered, on the bottom of the passage just where it meets the chamber, a stone with at least nine cup marks on its upper side (Montelius 1885, 1906). Furthermore, close to the passage grave, in a stone fence, a couple of stones with cup marks have been found (RAÄ Norra Lundby 41:1). Kristian Kristiansen proposes that stones with cup marks were placed as the last act of the burial rituals close to the dead body as a terminative act (Kristiansen 2005). The stone with cup marks at Norra Lundby is not linked to the identified burials from the late Bronze Age, since those were placed higher in the stratigraphy of the chamber; a cairn had probably even closed the entrance by that time. With that stone in mind it is possible that the chamber was also used during the early Bronze Age but that no traces indicating this are left except that stone. C14 dates from the individuals buried in the chamber would therefore be interesting. Perhaps a continuous use of Norra Lundby 41 could be traced from the Neolithic and through both the early and late Bronze Age, and, as the encompassing mound suggests, into the Iron Age.



Figure 5. Hjelmars rör passage grave. Photo: Gustav Wollentz.

A pair of tweezers of early Bronze Age type was found in the entrance cairn of Hjelmars Rör (Falköping 3:1) (figure 5). Furthermore, two stones with cup marks were discovered in (Persson & Sjögren 2001) or near the same entrance cairn (Strinnholm 1995). Since no grave had been placed in the entrance cairn and tweezers are usually found in grave contexts, I believe that it was placed there as a grave gift for a burial inside the chamber of Hjelmars Rör. For some reason this burial came to be the last to be placed in the chamber before the passage was closed by the above-mentioned cairn in which a pair of tweezers and perhaps also stones with cup marks were placed for the dead. As a consequence I suspect that if all individuals in the chamber of Hjelmars Rör were C14-dated at least one would fall within the early Bronze Age.

## BURIALS IN THE MOUND

In the mound of the Mysinge passage grave just outside and west/north-west of the chamber, both Arne and Alexandersson found burnt bones (Arne 1909; Alexandersson 2005). These could be traces of the same burial since they were discovered close to each other and neither of them was delimited, or it could represent two separate burials. Secondary buri-



als in mounds or cairns were common during both the late Bronze Age and the Iron Age on Öland, which is shown in the cairn Gösslunda Rör (Jansson 1978; Åstrand 1989; Erlandsson 2007) and in a late Bronze Age cairn at Algutsrum, built encompassing a stone cist from the end of the Late Neolithic (Hagberg & Wærn 1974; Eriksson *et al.* 2008; Pappmehl-Dufay 2010). The burial(s) found in the mound of the Mysinge passage grave have not been securely dated, but a date to the late Bronze Age or early Iron Age seems most likely if it is compared with passage graves in Falbygden. Here burials in the mound are very common, and Sjögren argues that it could explain the lack of typical Bronze Age and Iron Age graves in the area (Sjögren 2003). Sjögren could very well be correct in his analysis; however, we do not know much for certain about the activity in the mounds. To date, few burials in the mound of passage graves can be securely dated to the Bronze Age. The practice seems to have been somewhat more common during the Iron Age. In two cases burnt bones were found in connection with stones with cup marks, at Ormarör (Gökhem 78:1) (Sjögren 1992; Persson & Sjögren 2001:119–124) and at Tomten (Torbjörntorp 1:1) (Persson & Sjögren 2001:128–134). Even if these cases certainly do not give us certain dates, the fact that they represent cremations in connection with cup marks indicates late Bronze Age dates for both burials. At least three secondary burials were found in the mound of Hjelmars Rör, one being the skeleton of an infant and two being cremations. The cremations could possibly be dated to the late Bronze Age because of burnt bones of sheep/goat found beside them, which is regarded as typical of the Bronze Age (Sjögren 1992; Strinnholm 1995; Persson & Sjögren 2001).

Three possible burials in the mound of the Falbygden passage graves can however be more directly dated to the Bronze Age. The first case is Hornborga 53, where a tutulus (period II) was found (SHM 10158). The grave has not been subject to excavation. The most likely explanation for the tutulus is that it derives from a secondary burial placed in the surrounding cairn during the early Bronze Age. The second case is “Kung Björns Grav”, Falköping stad 18, where a double button was found in the encompassing cairn during a restoration of the passage grave in 1951. The button has star ornamentation and can be dated to period III. It was discovered together with a flint scraper and a few pieces of burnt bone (Sahlström 1954). The third case is Frälsegården (Gökhem 94:1), a passage grave that was removed at the beginning of the 20th century and excavated in 1999 and 2001 (Axelsson & Sjögren 2001; Sjögren 2008; Ahlström 2009). At the beginning of the 20th century an ornamented razor and a spindle whorl were discovered where the passage grave had been situated (SHM 18119). The razor can be dated to period IV and it

probably originates from a secondary burial in the mound during the late Bronze Age (SHM 18111).

The many uncertainties concerning the dates make it a bit risky to interpret the activities in the mounds, but there seems to be a tendency in Falbygden that the mounds of passage graves were mainly used for burials during the late Bronze Age and on into the Iron Age. The probable burials at Hornborga 53:1 and Falköping 18:1 mark the only recorded exceptions.

In most cases only small portions of the mounds have been excavated, and the goal for the excavator has generally been to note construction details, or reach the layer underneath the mound in order to obtain datable material. The baggage of the concept “secondary” is a big burden here; it is as if those graves are not especially important just because they are not contemporary with the construction and original use of the passage grave. It is in fact spectacular how often burials in the mound appear in the trenches, considering how small parts they usually cover, and in most of the “fully” excavated passage graves in Falbygden many burials are without any doubt left in the mound. A shift in perspective would certainly benefit us here.

## ENTRANCE CAIRNS

Entrance cairns are very common and seem to have been constructed at most passage graves in Falbygden. In those cases where they have not been found it can often be due to special circumstances of recovery. The entrance areas at Landbogården (Gökhem 17:1) and Frälsegården (Gökhem 94:1) were both severely damaged, and at Landbogården the complete lack of pottery was interpreted as due to extensive ploughing (Bägerfeldt 1987). In other cases the entrance area was not inspected at all; for example, Montelius did not excavate the entrance area of Norra Lundby 41 since such procedures were not the common practice at the end of the 19th century. It is also apparent that they are hard to date properly. Often it is only possible to conclude that they are younger than the Funnel Beaker pottery found underneath them. Dates stretch from MNB (Tomten) through the Bronze Age (Hjelmars Rör) and maybe even into the early Iron Age (Långe Rör, Valstad 8:1) (Persson & Sjögren 2001). Sjögren suggests that the entrance cairns might have been built to transform the passage graves into stone cists. This was mainly practised during the Late Neolithic since stone cists were the common burial practice during that period in the area, and later the mound was used, since that was the common procedure during those times (Sjögren 2003). To sup-

port these results he largely uses the passage grave of Landbogården, a grave that seems to have been closed during MNB or LN by the burial of two individuals in the passage over which a stone of the passage was placed. Even after the entrance was closed the chamber was still used, according to Sjögren. However, since the dates of Landbogården have a huge standard deviation there is no single certain date of a burial in the chamber later than the burial under the stone in the passage closing it (Bägerfeldt 1987; Persson & Sjögren 1995, 2001; Linderholm *et al.* 2008; Fornander 2011). To further problematize the matter Ahlström questions whether the “burial” in the passage is a deliberate deposition or just bones that were preserved because they were covered by the stone (Ahlström 2009). If that is the case the dates of the bones do not necessarily date the closing of the passage. Actually, there is no single case in Falbygden of burials in the chamber securely dated to the period after the passage was closed. Rather, burials in the mound generally take place after the passage is closed, and there are no burials in the mound indicating a Neolithic date. There seems to be a link between the closing of the passage grave and the time when the mound starting to be used for burials.

Even if Sjögren’s analysis could possibly be applied to Falbygden, it is difficult to connect it to Mysinge. The chamber instead of the mound was used for burials during the early Bronze Age, a time when burials in mounds were the common custom, as can be noticed in the nearby monumental grave, Mysinge mound (despite its name, it seems to be a cairn, see Vaara 2004), of probable early Bronze Age date. Using the chamber and not the mound for burials is obviously a conscious act that cannot be applied to adapting the grave to prevailing burial customs. Furthermore, why use a cairn to close a grave if you want to transform it into a stone cist? Would not a boulder be a lot more “stone-cist-like”? I have only come across one example of the passage entrance being closed by a boulder in Falbygden, and that is Toras grave (Skärv 82:1). Interestingly, an entrance cairn was also found here, overlapping parts of the blocking stone (Persson & Sjögren 2001:34–37). The entrance of Toras grave is thereby blocked by both a large stone and an entrance cairn, the latter being secondary to the boulder. Logically, if the stone was meant to transform the passage grave into a stone cist, the entrance cairn must have had a completely different function; why do the same thing twice?

Based on the studies of Falbygden presented here, the entrance cairn of the Mysinge passage grave could originate from MNB as well as the early Iron Age. However, the burials in the chamber seem to decrease at the beginning of the late Bronze Age; after relatively continuous use of the chamber, except for a gap during the LN, the custom was trans-

formed. After this change, cremation burials in the mound are instead practised, and at least one of these is placed in a ceramic vessel high in the stratigraphy of the chamber, most likely positioned there by dislodging some of the roof stones. I therefore propose that the entrance cairn was constructed at the beginning of the late Bronze Age as a *terminative* act.

Since entrance cairns are constructed in such different times and within various cosmologies, no universal answer can be given for them. At Mysinge the entrance cairn seems to have been constructed during a time when there was a shift in burial customs. Anders Kaliff has suggested that beliefs in reincarnation were introduced at the transition between early and late Bronze Age, as seen in the shift to cremation burials, since these, according to him, represent physical manifestations of the soul's liberation after death (Kaliff 1997). Even though there is debate about whether the transition from the early to the late Bronze Age marked any considerable change in the cosmology (see Goldhahn 2005; Kaul 2005; Grønnesby 2009), it is obvious that some sort of change happened connected to the concept of death and burials (and maybe to the importance of the individual, see Victor 2002) as seen in the treatment of the dead. Perhaps such changes could lead to a need for terminative manifestations directed towards the old way of things? At Mysinge, this might have been expressed through the closing of a passage grave, a monument that must clearly have been connected to the past.

## PASSAGE GRAVES AND THE UNDERWORLD

“The old way of things” would mean burials in the chamber, burials placed there by dragging, pushing or carrying the dead body through a narrow passage into a tight and dark chamber full of decomposing and decomposed bodies. The images conjured up in our mind's eye are not especially pleasant at all, and I do not think anyone of us would like to do the same with a dead relative of ours. However, it is important to look at the act itself and the feelings and senses it could invoke, while not forgetting that some senses are individually linked. This is expressed by Catherine Bell, who criticizes the division between thought and action that prevails in many discussions of rituals (Bell 1997). Åsa Berggren, inspired by Bell, focuses on the *acts* and the senses they invoke when performing rituals, and she considers acts as filled with meaning in themselves, as something that both reproduces and transforms the world. When understanding and recognizing rituals, as burial practices are examples of, the importance does not lie in repeated performance (because everyday activities are also repeated) nor in the degree of for-



Figure 6. The passage of the Mysinge passage grave, as seen from the chamber. Photo: Gustav Wollentz.

mality (because every single act can become ritualized) but in the act itself, in how it generates differences in the body of the individual performing it and in the contrasts against other activities (Berggren 2010; Berggren & Brink 2010; see also Gröhn 2004).

The passage graves must undeniably have been connected to the past, and as monuments thousands of years old they might very well have become physical manifestations of a mythological past. These are monuments that people lived their everyday life around and told stories about in the evenings. They are *living* monuments, and the meanings attached to them were transformed along with the cosmology and society. This can be traced until present times, and this article is proof of that. To catch the meanings that were attached to them during the Bronze Age we need to look at the *act* itself. These are monuments that you enter by crawling through a narrow passage, into a dark chamber filled with the dead from a mythological past. Consider the *act* of entering the chamber and the *universal* feelings invoked in such an act. It is fair to consider the megalithic monuments linked to the past and to death during the Bronze Age, as well as to the underworld. Let us now look at previous theory concerning the role of the underworld in the Bronze Age cosmology.

## WATER AND DEATH

My aim is to link the reuse of megaliths in the Bronze Age to the Bronze Age. There seems to be a general consensus that a monumental change in cosmology occurred at the beginning of the Bronze Age, around 1600–1500 BC (Gurstad-Nilsson 2001; Goldhahn 2005). This momentous shift in cosmology, in what can be perceived as an attempt at a uniform expression all over Scandinavia, has been compared in magnitude by Goldhahn to that which occurred when Christianity gradually replaced the Norse religion during the Viking Age (Goldhahn 2005:21, 52–53). It is within this context we must regard the so-called reuse of megaliths during the Bronze Age.

A lot of research concerning the Bronze Age has focused on the sun, and indeed this connection is of great significance for our understanding of the period and its people. This is very much expressed in rock art (Goldhahn 1999, 2005; Nordenborg Myhre 2004), grave forms (Goldhahn 1999, 2005; Kristiansen 2005; Grønnesby 2009) and iconography on objects as well as their morphology (Kaul 2004, 2005). However, Geir Grønnesby argues that water was a symbol just as essential as the sun. Just like the sun, water can both take and give life. He therefore considers water and the sun as representations of the transformation between life and death, but they symbolize different aspects of it: “Given the role water must have had in the mythology, it is not unreasonable to consider the water/sea as a representation of the underworld, night and death” (Grønnesby 2009:76, my translation). So, while the sun is often connected to life and sometimes to rebirth by researchers, water is often connected to death and the underworld (Goldhahn 2005).

There are grave monuments indicating a relationship between water and death. The fact that many oak coffins are found intact with an amazingly high degree of preservation in monumental mounds in southern Scandinavia during the early Bronze Age suggests that pouring water over the burial must have taken place as a central element at the end of the ritual. It is as if the people actively created a symbolic underworld in the burial chamber for the dead individual to rest in (Goldhahn 2007; Grønnesby 2009). Furthermore, the importance of the liminal zone of the water’s edge, at the border between the world of the living and the dead (see Bradley & Skoglund & Wehlin 2010), is clear, and can be noticed in how slabs of rock were most likely taken from the water’s edge on the island of Visingsö and transported 30 km in order to be incorporated into the grave mound at Sagaholm, Småland. The slabs were decorated with rock art, mainly horses, and positioned surrounding the

burial, before they were all built into the monument, never meant to be seen by the living (Goldhahn 1999, 2005, 2006):

it is clear that the original liminal position of the sandstone for the Sagaholm mound's picture rocks, in the transition between this world and the underworld [...], are recapitulated in a very precise and convincing way through the liminal positioning of the rocks in the surrounding stone circle, where they came to mark a border between the living and the dead (Goldhahn 2006:187–188, my translation).

The dual relationship between the sun and the water as expressed above could possibly also be seen in the two rock art locales Järrestad (Skåne) and Hästhallen (Blekinge). When Bradley analysed Järrestad he noticed how foot soles were directed *from* the graves *towards* the sea, something he interpreted as symbolizing the journey of the dead individuals from their resting places in the graves into the sea of the dead: “they may record the path from the grave to the world beyond” (Bradley 2000:145). In contrast to this, while Järrestad is connected to *death* by Bradley, König connects the rock art in Hästhallen to *life*. This is due to a high amount of sun symbols being dragged by ships and in how the foot soles seem to be directed towards the sunrise:

In Järrestad it is the soul of the dead that is on its way towards eternity in the sea, but what or who is walking in Hästhallen? Maybe [...] the desire of the living to turn towards the sun and unite with it (König 2007:66).

Järrestad with its connection to death and water and Hästhallen with its connection to life and the sun could thereby, in their contrast to each other, illustrate significant aspects of the complexity of the Bronze Age cosmology. This complexity is also expressed by Goldhahn who has split up the Bronze Age cosmology in the following way, where each part is connected to the next, and a clear link between “the underworld, the past, death, water, ships and deposits” can be seen:

The world above : The world of the living : The underworld  
 Future : Present : Past  
 Rebirth : Life : Death  
 Heaven : Earth/Stone : Water  
 Sun : Horse : Ship  
 Grave : House : Deposit  
 (Goldhahn 2005:48, my translation)

Finally, we can find ethnographical examples supporting a connection between water and the underworld; a complex cosmological link between the water and the underworld exists within various “indigenous”

people living in the circumpolar zone (Jordan 2003). In the next part I will discuss the symbol of the ship, as it is clearly connected to the element water, is often linked specifically to the underworld, and is of high significance in the cosmology.

## THE SYMBOL OF THE SHIP

The importance of the symbol of the ship is clear during the Bronze Age. By studying razors from the late Bronze Age in Denmark Flemming Kaul has presented theories suggesting that people during the Bronze Age believed that the sun travelled through the sky and the underworld with the help of a ship and various animals (Kaul 2004, 2005, 2009). Dag Widholm thinks that ships most likely symbolized the travel of the dead person's soul to another world (Widholm 1998:148). Beneath the Bronze Age cairn Hjortekrog (Småland) 14 complete ships had been picked on the surface of the rock as well as a cup mark in the middle. That there is mythological link between death (as shown by the cairn) and the symbol of the ship is indicated here (Widholm 1998; Bradley & Widholm 2007).

The significance of the symbol of the ship is also expressed through burials in ship-formed graves that emerged during the late Bronze Age. These ships made out of rock are most often oriented towards older graves in the areas. One example of many is the large stone ship at Snäckedel (Småland) which points towards a monumental cairn most likely dated to the early Bronze Age (Bradley & Widholm 2007). What this interesting fact shows us is not only the possible link between the symbol of the ship to and *death*, as expressed above, but also a link with the *past*. An area further suggesting this is Ansarve Hage, where the only megalithic tomb found on the island of Gotland, east of Öland, is located. In the chamber of the dolmen, scattered bones C14-dated to the early Bronze Age as well as a tutulus dated to period II were discovered amongst the Neolithic burials. What further makes this dolmen fascinating from the perspective of reuse is the presence of four ship settings from the late Bronze Age located in its immediate surroundings. Three of them have been constructed just south of the dolmen, and together they form a somewhat uneven line pointing towards the megalithic tomb (Martinsson-Wallin & Wallin 2010; Wehlin 2011).

Finally, Widholm proposes that people connected to ritual activity were buried in ship settings and rectangular stone settings. He believes that ship settings and rectangular stone settings often appear together and always in central places, and that they together symbolize impor-



tant aspects of the Bronze Age cosmology. Therefore, he interprets them as burial places for people involved in ritual activity (Widholm 1998).

## RITUAL SPECIALISTS AND THE UNDERWORLD

There are other fascinating examples of graves from the Bronze Age where the buried individuals have been interpreted as connected to ritual activity. In the bottom of the grave chamber of a grave mound in south-western Norway, Molkhaug in Rogaland, a considerable amount of shells of the common periwinkle (*Littorina littorea*) was found placed together with such things as the cheek tooth of a calf, a tooth from a horse, two claws and bones from a bird (Nordenborg Myhre 2004; Goldhahn 2007; Gunnarsson 2010). Another example is the grave mound of Maglehøj in Sjælland, where the bottom of the grave chamber was filled with a layer of water-polished stones, which had been placed upon a layer of charcoal. Furthermore, to seal the grave chamber a layer of seaweed 18 cm in thickness had been placed on top of its cover. The finds in the chamber where the bones from a cremated individual had been placed included a belt pouch in which were found teeth and various bones from a number of different animals (horse, weasel, lynx, snakes and more), and the similarities with the finds from Molkhaug are thereby undeniable. Goldhahn argues that the seaweed and the water-polished stones suggest that the chamber was a symbolic manifestation of the underworld (Goldhahn 2007:186–188). These two may be the most striking examples, but there are other cases where Bronze Age burials of individuals interpreted as “ritual specialists” can be connected specifically to the element “water”, for example in a mound at Jægersborg where seaweed was found surrounding the primary burial (Gunnarsson 2010).

The connection between water and *ritual activity* was highlighted here because it further signifies the possible link between water and the underworld. That people interpreted as “ritual specialists” were perceived to have some sort of bond with the powers of the underworld is after all very likely. I will now go back to the focus for our attention; the Mysinge passage grave, and try to bring all these threads together.

## BACK TO MYSINGE

Let us now place the above-mentioned link between the sea and the underworld in connection with the large proportion of non-locals

among those buried in the Mysinge passage grave. Fornander noted, through isotopic analyses, a high degree of mobility among the individuals buried in the chamber during the Bronze Age. Six out of ten were of non-local origin, and seven out of ten displayed isotopic signatures indicating considerable residential changes during their lifetimes (Fornander 2011:61). To quote Fornander: “The fact that several foreign and travelling individuals have been interred in an older megalith monument on the island is in itself a highly interesting observation, especially when compared to the more localised Scanian communities.” (Fornander 2011(II):23). Even if these results do seem striking, and isotopic analyses from Skåne and Falbygden show much less residential change (see Sjögren *et al.* 2009; Linderholm *et al.* 2008), more comparative data would be welcome. However, I will pose two separate interpretations based on these results that may or may not be possible to combine:

1. Some of the individuals buried during the Bronze Age died *inland* and were transported there overseas, in order to be buried in the chamber of the Mysinge passage grave.
2. The fact that some of those buried “further appear to have moved between different geographical regions outside Öland during the course of life” (Fornander 2011:61) indicate that some of the individuals were *travelling* people, (a theory already proposed by Fornander (Fornander 2011), and if so it is not at all unlikely that these travels were mostly undertaken by sea.

While I elaborate these two interpretations I would like you to keep these words by Lisa Nordenborg Myhre in your mind:

For the seafarers along the coast of Southwest-Norway death will always be present – a state of being in the borderland of death [...]. In general travels at sea implies dangers that create uncertain situations between the known and the unknown; where layers of new and old experiences are blended with what is seen and what is imagined. Seafaring is always to balance on a borderline between life and death. To travel is a state of in-between-ness (Nordenborg Myhre 2004:180).

If interpretation 1 is valid, some of those buried in the grave during the Bronze Age were people who died inland and made their last journey to Öland overseas. The dead individual would be helped there by people who were steering the ship and treating the body. That last journey undertaken by sea must have been a liminal phase of a burial ritual (Van Gennep 1960). There are many cases in Sweden during the

Bronze Age where dead people were transported overseas to be buried on islands (Bradley & Widholm 2007), and it does pose the question why some people appear to need to travel overseas in order to be buried according to traditions, and who these people might have been (if, that is, the identity is of significance). The *act* of transporting a dead individual over water, with the sea's connection to death and the underworld, and the feelings such an act invokes in contrast to other burial rituals, is most likely the key to our understanding. Furthermore, *if* that is the case in Mysinge, why use the chamber of a passage grave from the Neolithic for the final resting place? Maybe the connection to the underworld is the common thread joining the separate pieces together, as regards both the last journey over water and the choice of burial place.

If interpretation 2 is valid, some of the individuals buried in the chamber of the Mysinge passage grave during the Bronze Age were people who travelled by sea. These were important people, since controlling the trade routes was of great significance during the Bronze Age, especially for chiefs contesting for power (Gurstad-Nilsson 2001; Gröhn 2004). They were people who dared to venture into the unknown, taming an element that was highly respected, perhaps even adored like the sun. The fact that the diet of the buried individuals in the chamber during the Bronze Age seems to have been based solely on terrestrial protein sources (Eriksson *et al.* 2008) could serve as an indication that the sea was a holy zone (see Grønnesby 2009). The water was also a powerful element capable of killing people (see Ling 2008:233), which most likely often occurred. These travelling individuals were therefore both important and respected, and I propose that they were treated with their own kind of burials, connected to what they had been doing in their lives: connected to the sea on which they had spent their lives. If the chamber of the Mysinge passage grave was connected to the powers of the underworld, it would seem to have been the natural burial place for people spending their lives on the very element connected to the underworld.

Burials are not mainly an act for the dead, but for the living (see Berggren & Brink 2010), so why did living people bother crawling through that dark passage, dragging, pushing or carrying a dead person into a chamber of death? Perhaps it was out of respect for the dead person and the role connected to the water he/she had had, perhaps out of fear for the power of the sea and the underworld and what might happen if this ritual was *not* performed, or perhaps it was on the directive of the individuals who knew the value of keeping good connections with the people who dared to spend their lives taming the unknown.

## THE LARGER PERSPECTIVE

So how can the Mysinge passage grave help the discussion of reuse during the Bronze Age in a broad perspective? The connections to water, death and the underworld can mainly be applied if the chamber of the passage grave is used for burials, since secondary burials in the mounds do not invoke the same feelings in the act. Being buried in the mound of passage graves is in this context similar to being buried close to the underworld without entering it, to attain the final resting place on the staircase leading downwards: *beside* instead of *inside* a mythological past connected to dangerous and highly respected powers. As presented in the analyses, the use of the mound does generally seem to take place after the passage has been closed. Perhaps closing the passage to and from the underworld as a terminative act could serve as an important ritual demonstrating the power of the individuals performing it, while at the same time marking the end of one way of usage and the start of a new one. Furthermore, to be buried afterwards in the mound of a closed connection to the underworld might have been a prestigious act validating authority and respect.

Few burials have been discovered in the chambers of passage graves during the Bronze Age in Falbygden, and sulphur isotope analyses of the buried individuals in Frälsegården and Rössberga mainly show local descent (Linderholm *et al.* 2008; Fornander 2011). It is worth mentioning that strontium analysis gave a somewhat different picture (see Sjögren *et al.* 2009), but the results are still not comparable to those from Mysinge. Perhaps the close link between Öland and the sea could be a factor accounting for this difference between the areas. It would be logical that there is higher degree of use during the Bronze Age of the *chambers* of passage graves that are located close to the sea, especially those near important trade routes.

It is important to stress that I am not looking for universal answers. Peter Skoglund underlines the significance of local variation when discussing the Bronze Age cosmology based on his studies of ship-formed graves during the Bronze Age (Skoglund 2005). I would add that variation is not only a question of space (the meanings attached to one passage grave on Öland could be radically different from the meanings attached to those in Falbygden), it is also a matter of time, and the meanings that were attached to the Mysinge passage grave during the early Bronze Age could be remote from the meanings that were attached to it during the late Bronze Age. Finally, there can be *multiple* meanings attached to one and the same grave during one and the same period, meanings that may even seem to contradict each other (for an ethnographical ex-

ample see Barth 1987). We must never forget the individual aspect: even though there might have been common stories about these monuments in the evenings, how people *interpret* the same story on an individual level might vary significantly from person to person. Therefore I believe that the connection to water can be *one* reason for burials in chambers of passage graves during the Bronze Age but certainly not the only one. Because of the presented connection to death, water and the underworld, it does not seem unlikely that people connected to ritual activity could have been buried in the chambers of passage graves, which is possible to connect to interpretation 1. Maybe the identity of ritual specialist could be one reason for the need for a liminal phase in the burial ritual where the dead specialist had to be transported overseas (crossing the underworld) in order to be buried? Finally, I see a similarity between the use of the chambers of passage graves and the use of ship-formed graves, as both forms of burials appear to have a cosmological link to water, the past and, consequently, to the underworld. In Mysinge, the use of the chamber seems to have ended at the beginning of the late Bronze Age, when new burial customs gradually appear in Scandinavia, as stated above. Perhaps the emergence of ship-formed graves on the eastern coast of Sweden replaced the need to use the chamber of the Mysinge passage grave, and maybe that could be *one* reason for the closing of the passage.

## ENDNOTE

In this article I have highlighted the reuse of the Mysinge passage grave during the Bronze Age and placed it in relation to the phenomenon of reuse in general on Öland as well as in passage graves in Falbygden. Previous research concerning reuse during the Bronze Age has often been universal and thus isolated from the context in which the phenomenon took place. I have however analysed reuse as an integral part of the context in which it existed. I have linked the burials in the chamber of the Mysinge passage grave to the underworld and people connected to travel by ships on water, but I am not looking for universal answers. What might have led to a burial in one passage grave is not necessarily the answer to what led to a burial in another. Few burials have been discovered in the chambers of passage graves during the Bronze Age in Falbygden, and maybe the close link between Öland and the sea could be one reason for this. Specific theories concerning the significance of reuse are important to present and discuss. Throughout this article I have shown that viewing the phenomenon as an integral part of the Bronze Age is a valuable and necessary method for getting closer to the

various meanings behind the act, and a method with the potential to be a key opening previously locked doors into the Bronze Age cosmology, and as a result into the minds of people living thousands of years ago.

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