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MOVEMENT, EXCHANGE AND IDENTITY
IN EUROPE IN THE 2ND AND
1ST MILLENNIA BC

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MOVEMENT, EXCHANGE AND IDENTITY
IN EUROPE IN THE 2ND AND
1ST MILLENNIA BC

BEYOND FRONTIERS

edited by

ANNE LEHOËRFF AND MARC TALON

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Preface

The political vocabulary of Europe in the early part of the 21st century has resonated with themes of boundary and difference, of boundaries between states, concepts of ‘them’ and ‘us’, a concern to resist change, to maintain the *status quo*. The concerns of today do not reflect the nature of the long sweep of European history, however. Archaeologists and historians have long known about the ebb and flow of people as they moved across the continent over the millennia, of the ever-changing and porous borders between groups of people, the exchange of goods, ideas and the evolution of identities over time.

More particularly, the integration of professional archaeological research into the planning legislation of many European countries since the *Valetta Convention for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage of Europe* in 1992 has resulted in an explosion of new knowledge about our European ancestors and the way they lived their lives. It was the recognition of the implications of this new data for the close maritime connections between peoples living in the Transmanche zone of northwestern Europe during the Bronze Age – around 3500 years ago – that led to the creation of the European project ‘Boat 1550 BC’ project in 2011. The project sought to bring together this new evidence of the strong ancient cultural links between the peoples of the region and present it to a wider audience. It brought together seven partners from three countries: the University of Lille 3/Maison européenne de l’homme et de la société de Lille, the Institut National de Recherches Archéologiques Préventives (INRAP), the Département du Pas-de-Calais and the town of Boulogne-sur-Mer from France, the Canterbury Archaeological Trust and Canterbury Christ Church University from England, and Ghent University from Belgium. It was financially supported by the European Union Interreg IV A ‘2 Mers Seas Zeeën’ programme and the Conseil régional du Nord-Pas-de-Calais.

It was in the context of the ‘Boat 1550 BC’ project that a major academic conference was planned in collaboration with APRAB (l’Association pour la Promotion des Recherches Archéologiques sur l’Âge du Bronze) that brought together academic and professional archaeologists from all over Europe (and beyond) to discuss the new discoveries and

research into the connections between people in the past. Its remit went beyond the study of the Transmanche zone and indeed the Bronze Age, but instead extended right across Europe, reflecting on a period of two millennia, from the middle of the 3rd millennium BC to the middle of the 1st millennium BC. The conference was held on 3–5 October 2012 at the Université du Littoral in the beautiful historic town of Boulogne-sur-Mer, France.

The proceedings of the conference are a co-production of Oxbow Books and APRAB, with the financial support of the Ministère de la Culture et de la communication, INRAP, and the UMR (Unité Mixte de Recherche) 8164 Halma.

The conference organisers would like to thank The Université du Littoral, the Centre de la Mer Nausicaa, and the service archéologique de la Ville de Boulogne for their assistance and the warm welcome extended to this international symposium.

Thanks should also go to the conference steering committee for their work in making the conference a success; Sylvie Boulud, Peter Clark, Alain Henton, Isabelle Kerouanton, Thibault Lachenal, Emmanuelle Leroy-Langelin, Armelle Masse, Claude Mordant, Pierre-Yves Milcent, Théophile Nicolas, Brendan O’Connor and Rebecca Peake.

Peter Clark, Mark Duncan and Jane Elder of the Canterbury Archaeological Trust are also acknowledged for their help in bringing this volume to publication.

Taken together, these varied contributions offer a new and different perspective on the relationships between the peoples of Europe in the distant past, a perspective that we hope will find a wide audience and help inform all about the prehistoric context of our modern world and our appreciation of European identity today.

Lastly, we pause to remember and celebrate the lives of two outstanding scholars of European prehistory who have recently passed away; Richard Darrah, perhaps best known for his ground-breaking work on the Dover Bronze Age boat, and Colin Burgess, whose magisterial command of the European Bronze Age inspired generations of archaeologists. We hope this volume represents a modest tribute to their outstanding contribution to our knowledge of Europe’s ancient history.

On migrations: Sigfried Jan De Laet (1914–1999): his role in Belgian Bronze Age archaeology after the Second World War and the diffusion of cultural characteristics

Guy De Mulder and Jean Bourgeois

Abstract

In the second half of the 20th century Prof. Dr S. J. De Laet was the director of the Seminar for Archaeology at Ghent University. His research interests covered a wide chronological range from the Neolithic to the medieval period. Concerning the first part of the Bronze Age, his research focused on the Hilversum culture, mainly in cooperation with his Dutch colleague, W. Glasbergen. Another of his topics of research were the Urnfield cemeteries, mainly in western Belgium. His archaeological thinking about both subjects was strongly influenced by the idea of migrations.

Keywords: S. J. De Laet, history of archaeology, culture, migrations

Résumé

Dans la deuxième moitié du vingtième siècle, le professeur S. J. De Laet était le directeur du Séminaire d'Archéologie d'Université de Gand. Ses centres de recherche couvraient un large arc chronologique du Néolithique à la période médiévale. Pour la première partie de l'Âge du Bronze, ses recherches étaient centrées sur la culture d'Hilversum, surtout dans une collaboration avec son collègue néerlandais W. Glasbergen. Un de ses autres sujets de recherche portait sur les cimetières, surtout dans l'ouest de Belgique. Ses réflexions archéologiques sur tous ces sujets étaient influencées par les idées sur les migrations.

Mots-clés : S. J. De Laet, l'histoire d'archéologie, culture, migrations

Introduction

The concept of migrations as the major motor for cultural changes is already present in much 19th century archaeological literature. A detailed overview of the evolution of these concepts would be completely out of the focus of this paper and the literature about it is extensive (amongst many others: Kristiansen 2009; Renfrew and Bahn 2012, 463–7; Trigger 2006, 217–34). The role of major archaeologists such as Oscar Montelius (Gräslund 2014) and Vere Gordon Childe in this matter does not need to be stressed (Bintliff 2014). At the very

moment when this concept is having a kind of new revival, thanks to studies of Strontium isotopes or DNA, it seemed interesting to follow the history of this idea through one of the major archaeologists for the Bronze and Iron Age in Belgium.

In Belgium, the idea of migrations was much favoured in 20th century archaeology. Alfred de Loë, keeper of the collections at the Royal Museums for Art and History in Brussels, wrote a comprehensive and major opus on the prehistory of Belgium (de Loë 1931). Terms as 'invaders', 'occupation' and 'migrations' are very present in this book.

We quote (de Loë 1931, 146, our translation):

‘Hallstatt people or Proto-Celts probably came from the east, along the Danube. The Gallic Celts and Belgian Celts came probably from the north. Whatever, all these invaders are of a type that anthropologists would call *Hallstatt type*. They were tall and strong; they had ... blond, almost red hair, blue eyes and a white skin.’

On the contrary, for the beginning of the Bronze Age, interestingly, de Loë stresses the fact that bronze must have been introduced by commerce and that, therefore, there was no new ethnic input (de Loë 1931, 11).

Many other examples of the same kind can be cited: the concept of migration and invasion of superior cultures over minor cultures was generally accepted in Belgium. Sigfried J. De Laet and Marc E. Mariën both began their archaeological careers after the Second World War and played a major role in the success of that diffusion and migration model, in scholarly literature as well as in large audience papers.



Fig. 2.1. De Laet at the excavation of Hofstade in 1947 (© Department of Archaeology, Ghent University).

In this paper, we would like to stress the place and role of S. J. De Laet in Belgian archaeology of the Bronze Age and Iron Age, and analyse where his preference for migration as a factor for cultural change originated.

S. J. De Laet: a brief overview of his career

‘Pure luck played an important part in determining my scientific career’. With this quote S. J. De Laet began an overview of his career published in *Antiquity* (De Laet 1985). He was born in Ghent on 15 June 1914 and passed away on 13 May 1999. De Laet started his studies at Ghent University and obtained the degree of ‘*licentiaat*’ in Classical Philology in 1936. In 1937 he became a doctor with a thesis on the Roman senate (De Laet 1937) (Fig. 2.1).

After a short period as a school teacher his academic career started in 1942 as a research fellow of the National Fund for Scientific Research (NFWO) at the Ghent University and 1 year later as assistant of Professor Hubert Van de Weerd.¹ During the first years De Laet published regularly about Roman historical subjects. His first archaeological paper also focused on a Gallo-Roman topic, i.e. the Gallo-Roman artefacts excavated in the 19th century at the Gallo-Roman *vicus* of Asse and preserved in the museum of Aalst, where he had been working as a teacher (De Laet 1942; 1943). During the Second World War he had his first contact with prehistoric archaeology. Kurt Tackenberg (see <http://www.ulb.uni-muenster.de/sammlungen/nachlaesse/nachlass-tackenberg.html> and http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurt_Tackenberg) was one of the so-called ‘guest-professors’ at the university during the German occupation. Tackenberg’s papers on the subject of the *Germanenforschung* inspired De Laet to study prehistoric archaeology from a critical point of view (De Laet 1985). This resulted in a first paper on the Bronze and Iron Age in western Europe (De Laet 1944). This first paper was clearly much indebted to the concept of superior civilisations and migrations. We quote (our translation):

‘Our country did not form in the prehistoric times neither a political nor a cultural unity. It was always subject to the influence of superior civilisations that flourished in North-western Germany, then South Germany or North-east France and radiated to our country. Major migrations also touched our countries, from the Illyrians, the Celts or the Germans.’ (De Laet 1944, 56)

In 1947 he was appointed lecturer (full professor in 1951) at the Institute for Art History and Archaeology still at Ghent University. This led to the creation of the Seminar for Archaeology with its own excavation team within Ghent University, faculty of Arts and Philosophy. From then on De Laet’s research focus shifted completely to archaeology. He published on different general and methodological archaeological themes, next to a large

series of contributions on subjects of national archaeology, ranging from the Neolithic until the medieval period. His research on the Bronze Age focused on Early Bronze Age/Middle Bronze Age barrows and Late Bronze Age Urnfield cemeteries (Fig. 2.2).

S. J. De Laet and the Early and Middle Bronze Age barrows in Flanders

From 1946 on, S. J. De Laet had regular contact with the leading Dutch archaeologist Albert Egges van Giffen (1884–1973), professor at the universities of Groningen and Amsterdam (Brongers 2013; De Laet 1973; Knol *et al.* 2005). In this period he participated in some of his excavations in the Netherlands (De Laet 1985). This cooperation influenced the research methods as for example by adopting the ‘quadrants method’ to excavate barrows.

In 1951 De Laet excavated for the first time a Late Neolithic – Early Bronze Age barrow at the site of Ruien/Kluisberg (Fig. 2.3) (De Laet and Roosens 1952). Ruien is located on one of the tops of the Flemish Ardennes in western Belgium, an area where already in the 19th century some preserved barrows were excavated at the site of Ronse/Muziekberg (Fourny 1985). This funerary monument at the Kluisberg was already discovered in 1949 during digging by an amateur archaeologist, but a scientific excavation was carried out only two years later, in cooperation with the National Service for Excavations (Service National des Fouilles – Nationale Dienst voor Opgavingen) (Fig. 2.4). In 1953 and 1954 two barrows in the eastern part of Flanders at Mol/Postel were excavated (Fig. 2.5). (De Laet 1954a). The last barrow excavated by De Laet and his team was located at Eksel/De Winner (De Laet 1961a). This brought De Laet to write a new short

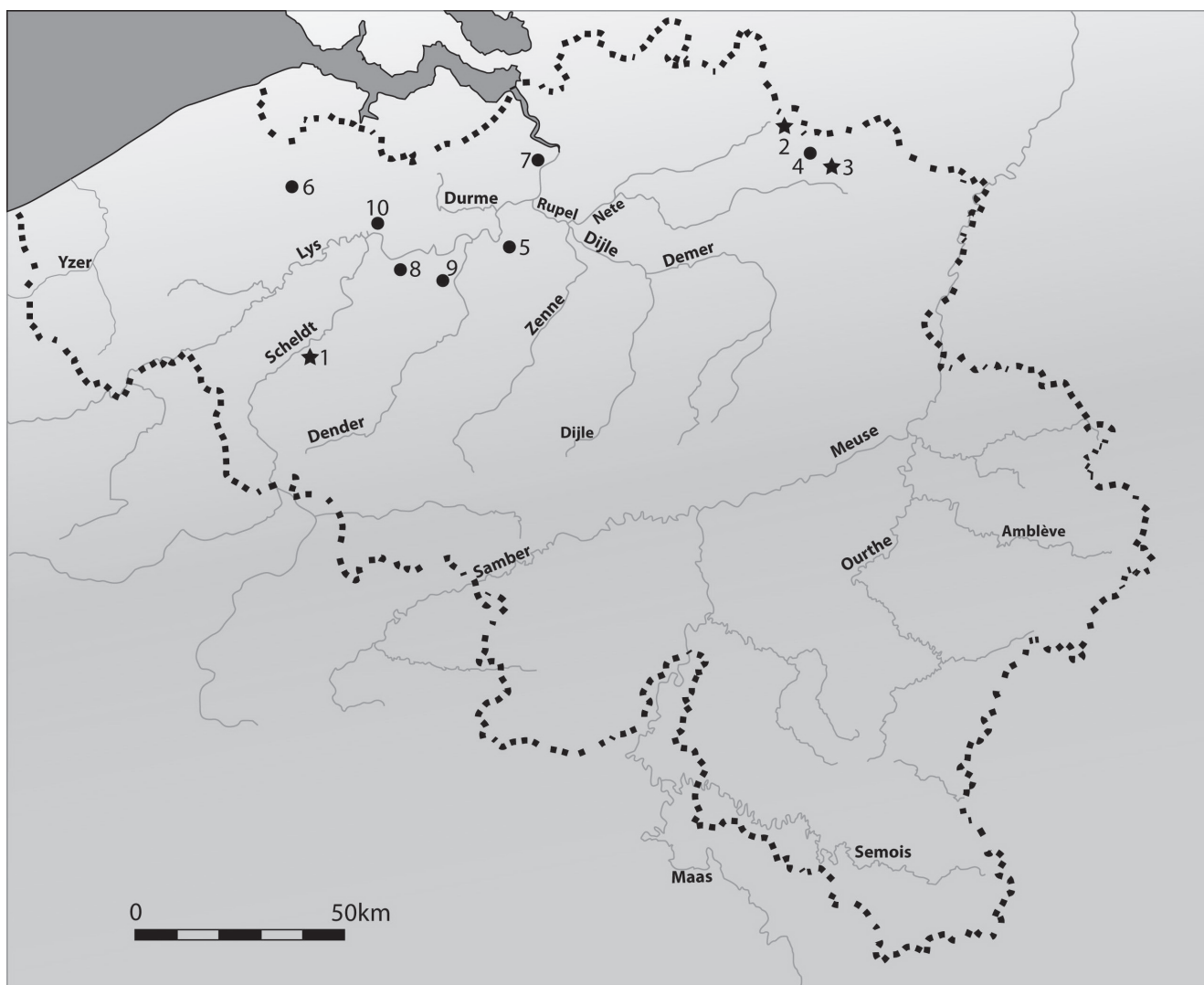


Fig. 2.2. Localisation of the Bronze Age sites excavated by De Laet and mentioned in this paper (Drawing: J. Angenon). 1. Ruien/Kluisberg; 2. Mol/Postel; 3. Eksel/De Winner; 4. Lommel/Kattenbos; 5. Malderen; 6. Aalter/Oostergem; 7. Temse/Velle; 8. Massemen; 9. Hofstade; 10. Destelbergen.



Fig. 2.3. Visitors at the excavation of the Bronze Age barrow at Ruien/Kluisberg. Right: S. J. De Laet (© Department of Archaeology, Ghent University).

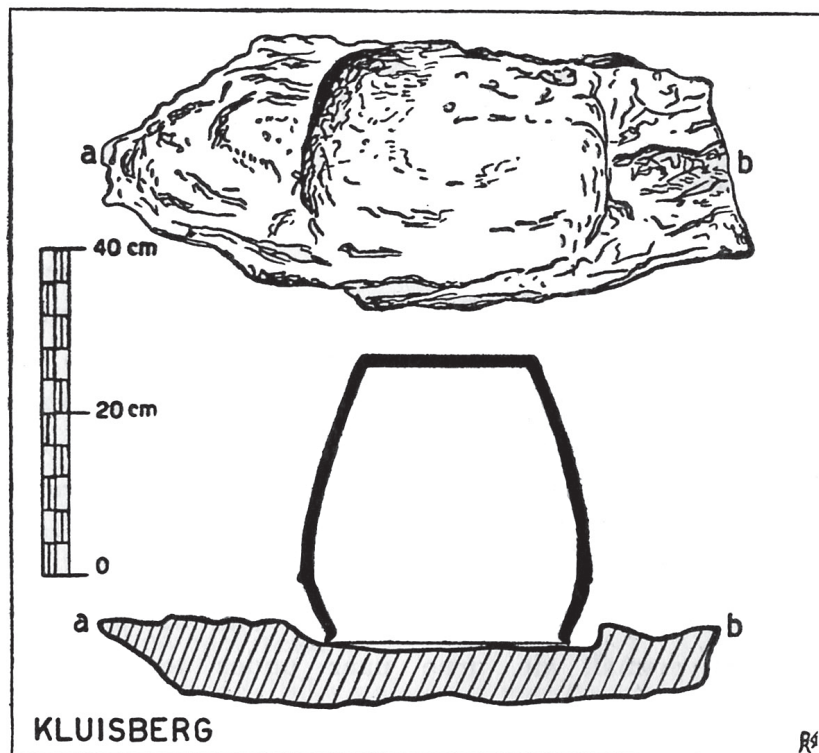


Fig. 2.4. Reconstruction of the inverted urn on a stone base (De Laet 1954b, Fig. 4).

synthesis on the Bronze Age based on recent excavations (De Laet 1954b).

Through his relationship with A. E. van Giffen, S. J. De Laet came also in contact with Willem Glasbergen (1923–1979) who was working, first as a student and later as an assistant of the former. In the early 1950s Willem Glasbergen focused his research on the barrows in North-Brabant (the Netherlands). Glasbergen defended his PhD thesis in 1954 with a study on the barrows of Toterfout-Halve Mijl, the so-called ‘Eight Beatitudes’ (Glasbergen 1954a; 1954b). Fully in the line of the idea of migration, he introduced the concept of the Hilversum culture which was, according to him, introduced by English immigrants who had moved over the Channel as bronze traders. English influences were visible in the local pottery style from the Middle Bronze Age and also in the funerary traditions (Theunissen 1999; 2009).

S. J. De Laet and W. Glasbergen cooperated to study Bronze Age burial rituals and barrows in the south of the Netherlands and the Belgian Campine region. Both also integrated new scientific approaches such as the use of radiocarbon dating and pollen analysis to reconstruct the landscape, but also as chronological markers. De Laet

and Glasbergen stressed similarities in the funerary ritual along both sides of the border and the presence of English influences in the funerary practices (De Laet and Glasbergen 1957; 1959). This hypothesis was further developed; based on new research results from northern France the arrival of the immigrants was located in the region of Boulogne-sur-Mer. They passed through the western part of Belgium, where a so-called group of English immigrants settled in the Flemish Ardennes, and moved across the Scheldt into the Campine region (De Laet 1961b).

The concept of migration continued to live in his later publications, for the Bronze Age as well as for the Iron Age (De Laet 1982).

The impact of the cooperation with A. E. van Giffen and especially W. Glasbergen is not to be underestimated, although the idea of migrations is already present in De Laet’s earliest papers on the Bronze Age. Interestingly, De Laet refers in these early papers, alongside mainly German archaeologists, to Belgian authors such as A. de Loë, although V. Gordon Childe and his study of the Bronze Age in 1930 are mentioned only once. Specifically, the work of E. Sprockhoff (1942) is then considered by him

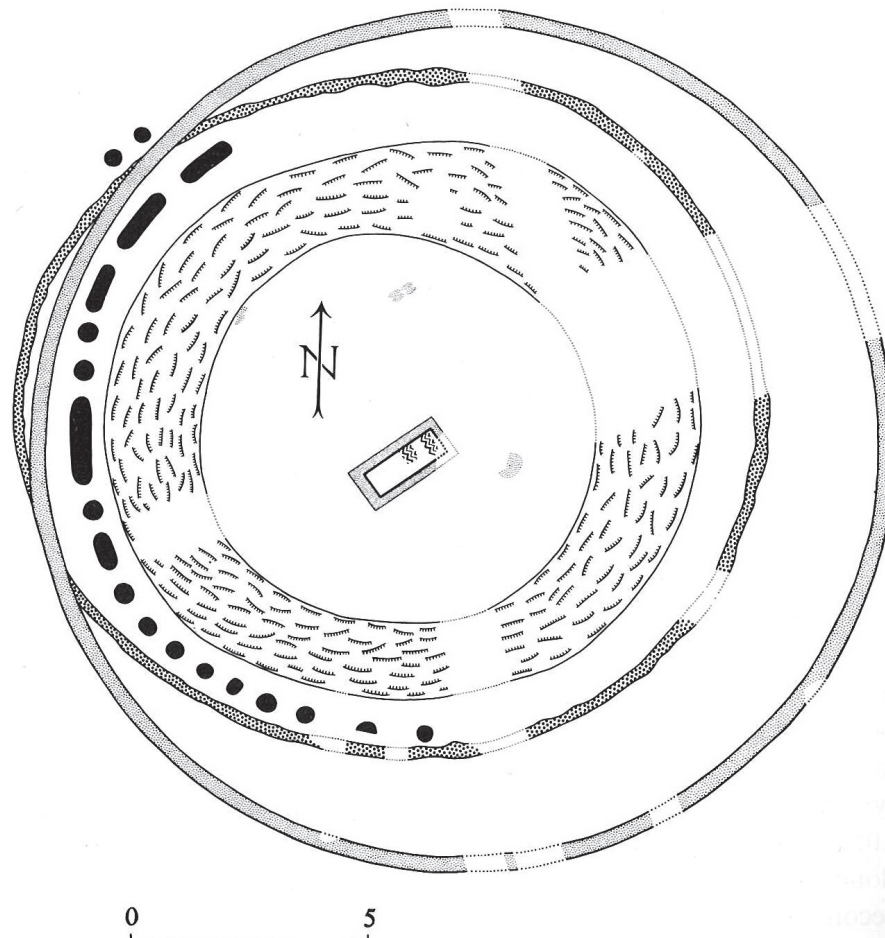


Fig. 2.5. Plan of barrow II at Mol/Postel (De Laet 1954a, fig. 6).

as a major contribution (De Laet 1944, 59). In his later papers, references to English archaeologists, such as C. F. C. Hawkes or J. D. Cowen make their appearance, along with W. Glasbergen (De Laet 1954b; 1956). Sprockhoff is still cited, but the impact of German studies seems to vanish.

Recent research has changed ideas about the Hilversum culture which is seen nowadays as local farming communities with their own specific material culture and funerary practices which evolved through time by indigenous human processes and by influence from outside (Theunissen 1999; 2009). Since 1980 aerial photography in western Belgium has proven that a testimony of levelled barrows is preserved in (or better under) the landscape. The ditches surrounding the barrows are visible as circular structures from the air. At the present more than 1000 monuments are recorded in the region of geographical name (Cherretté and Bourgeois 2005; De Reu 2012; De Reu *et al.* 2011). These monuments in western Belgium are related to funerary monuments in northern France and southern England. They belong to the Channel–North sea cultural area, characterised by mobility of people, ideas and goods (Bourgeois and Talon 2009; Lehoërff *et al.* 2012).

These observations partly revive the former idea of migrations from De Laet and Glasbergen but in another setting that places the accent more on mobility of material and immaterial goods and values than on people.

Urnfields in the province of East Flanders

Another topic of De Laet's research was the Late Bronze Age and urnfields, mainly in western Belgium. After the Second World War research into urnfields was on the rise again. Publications by German scholars such as Wolfgang Kimmig (1940) and Emil Vogt (1930) and, to a lesser degree, R. Stampfuss (1927) or O. Doppelfeld (1934) in the 1930s and 1940s set the agenda and the focus on Switzerland and Germany. M. E. Mariën makes much reference to German scholars such as W. Kimmig (1948).

Wolfgang Kimmig had written a few stimulating papers about the French Late Bronze Age, which he had been studying in the French museums during the German occupation in the Second World War (Kimmig 1951). In Belgium, the first papers on the Late Bronze Age urnfields were published at the same time (Mariën 1948; see Leclercq and Warmenbol in this volume). The paper by W. Kimmig (1951) on the French Late Bronze Age '*Où en est l'étude de la civilisation des champs d'urnes...*' echoes interestingly a paper published some years earlier by Marc E. Mariën '*Où en est la question des champs d'urnes ...*' (Mariën 1948).

New excavations of urnfields were carried out by different institutions in the first decade after the end of the Second World War (De Mulder 2011). S. J. De Laet and Ghent University were amongst them. One of the first urnfields to be excavated by De Laet was the site of Lommel/Kattenbosch in the province of Limburg (De Laet and Mariën 1950). With the exception of an isolated find of an urn grave at Malderen (province of Flemish Brabant) (De Laet 1960) De Laet's later urnfield research concentrated in the province of East Flanders. The first site to be excavated was at Aalter/Oostergem (1952–1954). Later he excavated at Temse/Velle (1955), Massemen (1957–1959) (Fig. 2.6) and Destelbergen (1960–1984) (Fig. 2.7 and 2.9) (de Laet *et al.* 1986; 1958a; 1958b; 1958c; De Mulder and Bauters 1997).

These new excavations combined with the study of ancient archives and preserved urns resulted in some new hypotheses on the urnfields in Flanders. In 1948 M. E. Mariën ascribed the cemetery of Temse/Veldmolenwijk, excavated in the late 19th–early 20th century, to the *Niederrheinische Grabhügelkultur* (Mariën 1948). In 1958 S. J. De Laet and his team proposed a different hypothesis. The urnfields in the province of East Flanders formed a different regional group, called 'the Flemish group' (De Laet *et al.* 1958a). This regional definition was based on the different types of graves that displayed other ways of deposition of cremated remains, a scarcity of the grave goods and different

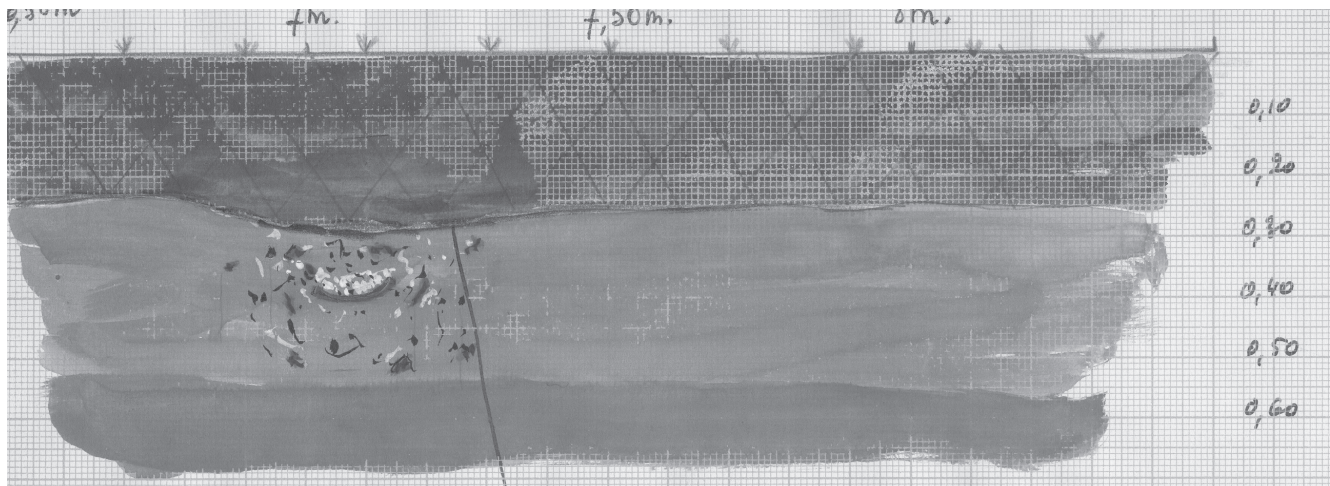


Fig. 2.6. Original drawing of cremation grave 25 at Massemen (© Department of Archaeology, Ghent University).

pottery styles. The publication of this research led indirectly to the discovery of the urnfield of Destelbergen. An amateur archaeologist contacted De Laet about an old find of urns at a place called Eenbeekeinde during sand digging in 1927–28. A first trial excavation began in 1960 and resulted in the discovery of a well preserved urn grave. This was the start of a long term excavation project that would continue until 1984 (de Laet *et al.* 1986; 1958c). Destelbergen is still the largest excavated urnfield in the province of East Flanders, with 105 cremation burials, a circular structure, six so-called ‘longbeds’ (*Langgraben*) and six quadrangular funerary structures (Fig. 2.7).

De Laet’s papers on the Late Bronze Age in the late 1950s and early 1960s (De Laet and Glasbergen 1959; De Laet 1963) contain many references to migrations and invasions. References to W. Kimmig are almost completely missing. Obviously, De Laet and Mariën, the two major scholars in the Late Bronze Age at that time, published.

In the later 1960s, a student of De Laet, later a collaborator of the Seminar for Archaeology, Marcel Desittere, continued research on the Late Bronze Age. His masters thesis was dedicated to the bronze weapons of the Bronze Age and Early Iron Age in the Low Countries (Desittere 1959). Interestingly, bronze artefacts received little attention from De Laet. Desittere’s later doctoral thesis covered the urnfield culture between the Lower Rhine and the North Sea during the Late Bronze Age (Desittere 1968). In contrast with S. J. De Laet, German scholars such as Stampfuss and Kersten are much more present, though W. Kimmig is also missing (Desittere 1968). Both De Laet and Desittere interpreted the urnfield culture, following in this the mainstream of concepts

in European continental archaeology, as a migration from Central European groups which mingled with the local Middle Bronze Age population. The interaction between immigrants and autochthonous elements resulted in the development of four separate regional groups with their own cultural characteristics in funerary ritual and pottery style. These groups were classified as the Flemish group, a North-western group, a Middle Belgian group and the Famenne group (De Laet 1974a; Desittere 1968). M. Desittere, who was also using metal objects in his reflection on what happened in the Late Bronze Age, started over the years to mitigate the idea of immigrants. The title of his paper published at the IVth Atlantic colloquium is clear: ‘*Autochtones et immigrants...*’ (Desittere 1983). He stresses the fact that two elements of the material culture, a local and a non-local element, can be distinguished in the southern part of the Low Countries. We quote (our translation):

‘This kind of cultural image cannot be explained by the theory of a “large scale” invasion that would have installed, in one piece, a new material culture in an area without culture. This kind of cultural vacuum is only possible in a region with low population density... Foreign elements are such a strong part of the Late Bronze Age material culture that they can only have been introduced by immigrants... As a conclusion, the material culture of the Late Bronze Age in the southern part of the Low Countries developed under the common influence of autochthonous elements and immigrants, bearers of the Urnfield civilization.’ (Desittere 1983, 79).

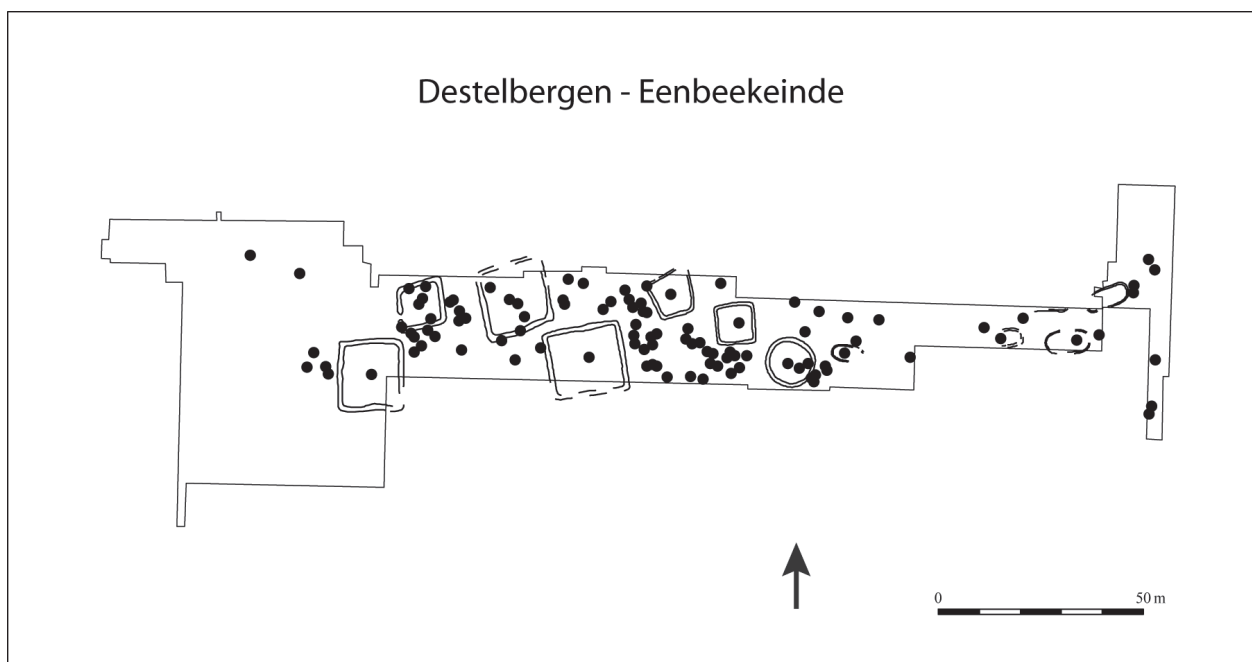


Fig. 2.7. The urnfield cemetery at Destelbergen/Eenbeekeinde (Drawing: J. Angenon).

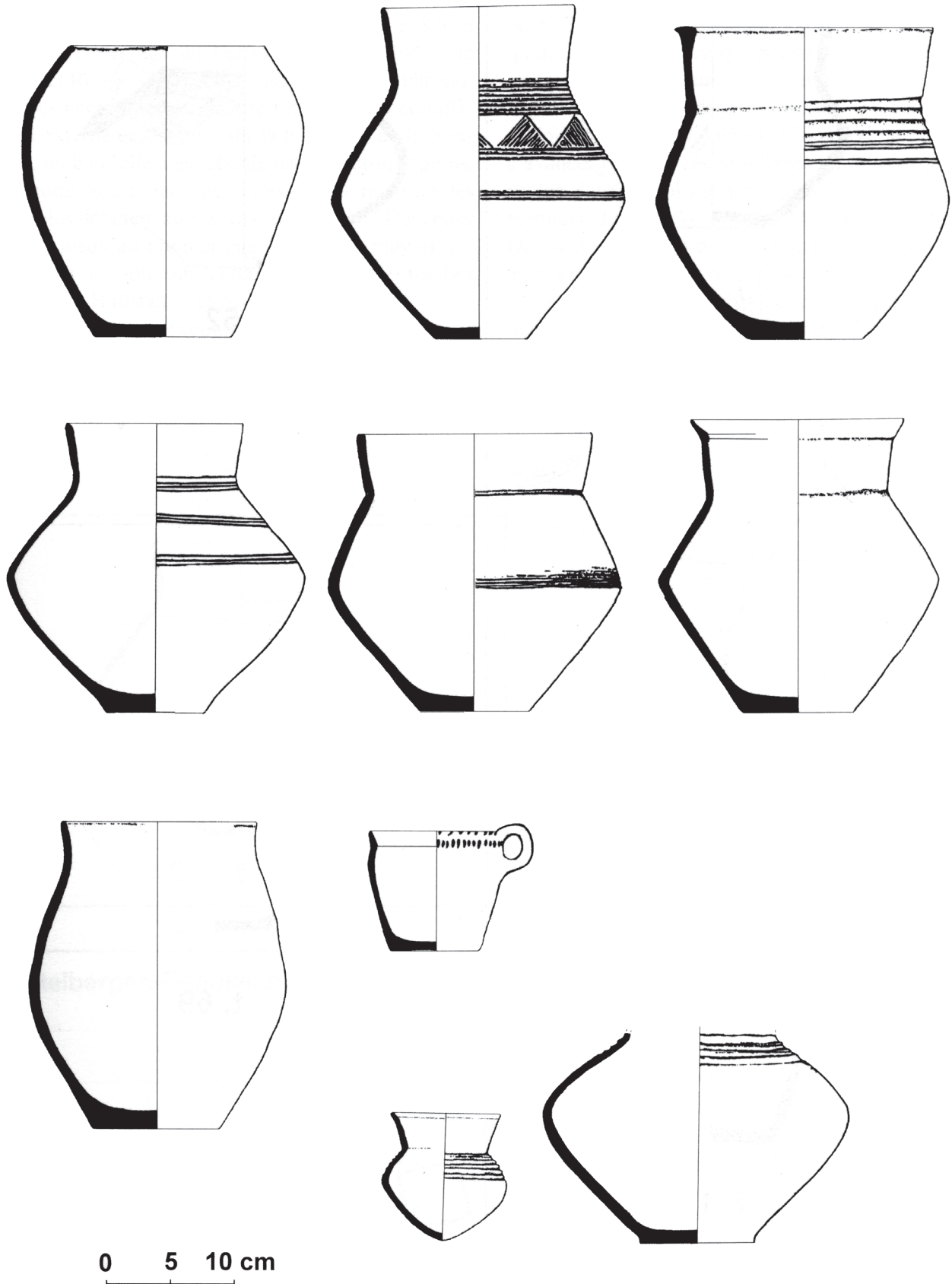


Fig. 2.8. Some RSFO-influenced pottery in the so-called Flemish group (Bourgeois 1989).

As for the former period of the Bronze Age the concepts of migrating groups of people have been reviewed. P. Brun proposed, in the 1980s, a model based on socio-economic dynamics between a Continental cultural and economic area and an Atlantic cultural complex. The idea of the urnfield culture was replaced by the concept of the ‘groupe Rhin-Suisse-France orientale (RSFO)’ the core region from where the socio-economic changes spread out in a westerly direction (Brun 1988). This model is accepted by the French archaeological community and also functions quite well for the Belgian Late Bronze Age. In the Netherlands, the influence of the RSFO is less visible and is also not much used as a concept in German archaeology.

RSFO cultural influence spreads through Central Belgium (Warmenbol 1988) in the Scheldt valley, but is less dominant. Pottery in RSFO style does not reach the same level of quality as in the southern Meuse valley and is only found in limited numbers in funerary contexts (Fig. 2.8) (De Mulder 2011). Atlantic influences are still visible in the material culture from this area, being it ceramic form or the copying of bronze objects (De Mulder 2013). The definition of the regional urnfield groups is also questioned. The River Scheldt at Antwerp was seen as the border between the Flemish and the North-western group. Recent research has proven that this region east of the River Scheldt was a transitional area between two different regional cultural entities. In this area there is also influence visible of the RSFO group, which is not ascertained in the eastern part of the so-called North-western group (Leclercq 2014; De Mulder 2013).

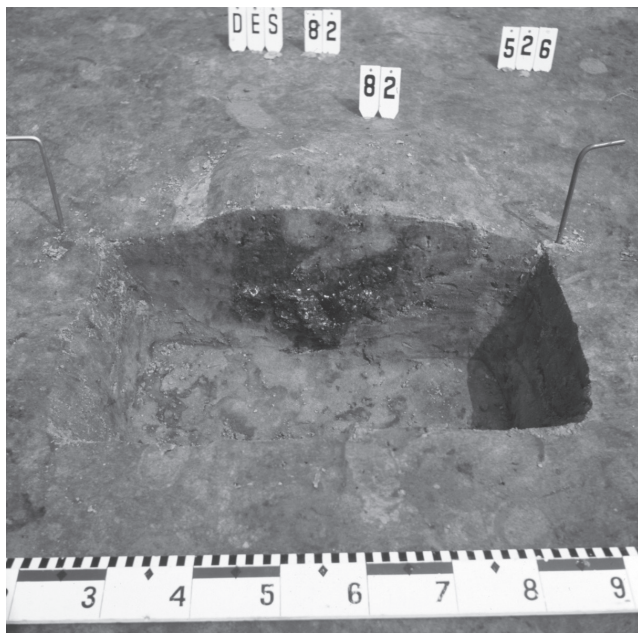


Fig. 2.9. Cremation grave type Destelbergen at the eponymous urnfield (© Department of Archaeology, Ghent University).

Urnfield research by De Laet and his department led to the creation of a typology of the different kind of cremation deposits recognised in the cemeteries of East Flanders (Fig. 2.9). This typology is based on the manner of deposition of the cremated remains from the pyre in the burial pit. This typological scheme is still used as a mainstay for identifying cremation burials. It has been enlarged to incorporate some newly ascertained ways of depositing cremated remains in the Scheldt valley. This scheme can also be used for the Late Iron Age. Radiocarbon dates are being used to support the chronological framework of this burial typology (Bourgeois *et al.* 1989; De Mulder 2011).

Conclusion

S. J. De Laet was, together with M. E. Mariën, one of the driving forces in the Bronze Age research in Belgium in the second half of the 20th century. His research was focused on two topics. First the Early and Middle Bronze Age barrows and the Hilversum culture together with his Dutch colleague W. Glasbergen. His second interest was in urnfields, especially in the province of East Flanders and their relation to the Central European urnfield culture.

Note

- 1 The biographical elements on De Laet's career have been extracted from De Laet (1974b). This document has also been used for several *In memoria* (Van Caenegem 1999; Van Looy 2000).

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