

Abstract

Ph.D. dissertation at Göteborg University, Sweden, 2007. **Title:** House urns. Study of a Late Bronze Age Trans-cultural Phenomenon. **Author:** Serena Sabatini. **Language:** English. **Department:** Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, Göteborg University, Box 200, SE-405 30 Göteborg.

The ceramic material commonly referred to as the northern European Late Bronze Age house urns is the main focus of this thesis. House urns are a distinctive and numerically limited class of funerary vessels characterised by more or less evident architectural features. Their unique shapes generated a large interest in their symbolism and in their possible relationship with the similar and partly contemporary phenomenon of the so called Villanovan hut urns from central Italy. However, after two centuries of debate there is still no consensus as to their interpretation.

This study aims, firstly, at providing a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon and its characteristics. To that end it is organised in different sections, each addressing a specific issue concerning the house urns. Additionally, it contains an updated catalogue of the 135 items known today with relevant information about each piece. The study takes up the challenge to depict not only the morphological, chronological and contextual characteristics of the material, but also its cultural and geographical background and the characteristics of some selected phenomena which, to different extents, are considered interlaced with the emergence and development of the house urns. The whole of the analysed data depict the house urns as characterised by a complex interplay between 'local' specific characteristics which have also been theoretically referred to as 'performances' and 'supra-local' correspondences which show a relevant abstract component (the 'house paradigm') and actually maintain the coherence of the phenomenon. The house urns were apparently used for a relatively limited number of people of diverse sex and age, dispersed over a large part of northern Europe mainly during the central phases of the Nordic Late Bronze Age.

This study proposes to distinguish a relationship between the Villanovan hut urns and the emergence of the house urns. It also proposes to discuss the contemporary phenomenon of the face urns which instead appear to interact with the development of the house urns, initiating a discussion on the value of both phenomena as markers of cultural identity. Finally, the house urns are defined as a northern European koine, in the sense that the dialectic between their local and supra-local components depicts a trans-cultural phenomenon which appears at the same time as a cultural space of specifically shared values.

Keywords: house urns, Late Bronze Age, Villanovan hut urns (*urne di capanna*), face urns, paradigm, (de)construction, local/supra-local, cultural identity, ritual, cremation, 'placing', graves, ship-shaped stone settings, diversity, trans-cultural phenomena, koine, northern Europe, the Baltic Sea, the Elbe River, communication, synecdoche, hybrid, World War II, heritage.