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The Lausitz Culture

BY

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THE LAUSITZ CULTURE



MODEL OF LOG-CABIN HOUSE AND TWO HUTS AT BUCH, NEAR BERLIN
(reconstruction by Dr A. Kiekebusch)

The Lausitz Culture

by V. GORDON CHILDE

ON the continent as in Britain the later phases of the Bronze Age are marked by the spread of large cremation cemeteries generally termed urnfields. One of the several groups of urnfield cultures in Central Europe occupies such a pre-eminent position that it may even claim to be the parent of all the rest. It is known as the Lausitz or Lusatian culture after the area where it is most richly and typically represented—a strip in eastern Saxony and western Silesia.

Here the bodies were cremated in *ustrina* close to the cemetery, and the ashes, carefully purified from cinders, were enclosed in clay ossuaries or cinerary urns. The ossuary was closed with an inverted dish, but in all early burials a hole was carefully bored in its walls. It is supposed that this aperture was intended to allow the ghost to escape, and hence it has been called a ghost-hole (*Seelenloch*). The urn, with its cover, was buried in the ground with many accessory vases, presumably containing provisions for the journey into the next world. A barrow might be raised over the tomb, but in all cases the graves form regular cemeteries.

The distinctive mark of the Lausitz culture everywhere is the bi-conical ossuary (fig. 1, 1013) but the accessory vases enable us to distinguish two successive phases in its evolution. In the earlier the pots are ornamented with large conical warts or *Buckeln*; in the later the warts disappear to make room for flutings or corrugations generally oblique but sometimes grouped in concentric semicircles. The older ware too is generally reddish while the later tends to be dark-faced.¹

¹ H. Seger, 'Lausitzer-Kultur' in Ebert's *Reallexikon*; cf. also Červinka 'Böhmen und Mähren' *ibid*; Buchtela in *Jahrbuch der k.k. Zentral-Kommission*, Vienna, 1904 and *Mannus*, xix, (1927) pp. 26 ff.

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The makers of this pottery must have lived in regular communities; the size of the cemeteries implies as much. At Buch, near Berlin, Dr Kiekebusch² discovered one such village. It consisted of wooden huts built of rough-hewn tree-trunks on the very same principle as the American log-cabin. (See plate).

The Lausitz folk were primarily farmers, for sickles and querns are found in the settlements and cemeteries. They possessed tame horses which they controlled by bits of which only the horn cheek pieces survive. But they were also metallurgists, since moulds are found even in the graves. Perhaps they invented the socketed celt. The nearest approach to a transitional form comes from Silesia; for, assuming with Sophus Müller that the socketed celt was developed out

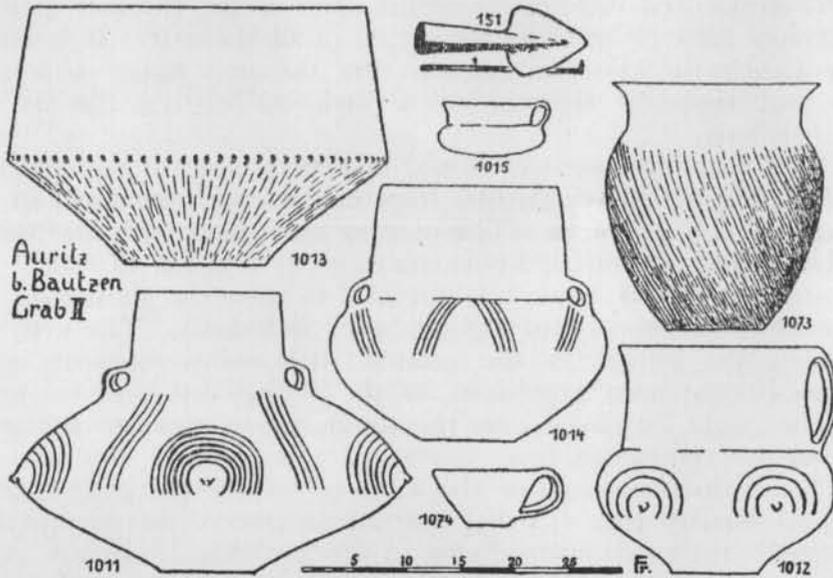


FIG. 1. VASES AND ARROW-HEAD FROM A LAUSITZ GRAVE (END OF PHASE A) NEAR BAUTZEN
(by permission of Dr W. Frenzel)

of a flanged celt held in place by a bronze sleeve that eventually came to be cast in one piece with the celt, the axe-head of fig. 2 approximates to the stage preceding the final disappearance of the saeptum. In any case it was the Lausitz folk who first diffused the use of the socketed

² A. Kiekebusch, *Die bronzezeitliches Dorf Buch bei Berlin.*

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celt throughout Central Europe. They seem to have been normally peaceable and democratic, but used bows and arrows, spears and bronze cut-and-thrust swords.

Economically and culturally the Lausitz people were the heirs of the Aunjetitz folk who had occupied the valleys and dominated the trade-routes of east Central Europe in the early Bronze Age. A whole series of intermediate forms connects the late Aunjetitz and early Lausitz pottery. Indeed the Lusatian cremators must have been the lineal descendants of the earlier inhumators.³ At the moment it is uncertain whether the transition took place simultaneously all over the eastern part of the Aunjetitz province—Silesia, Moravia and Lower Austria. More probably the specific Lausitz culture arose first in the Lausitz and Silesia and was spread thence, perhaps by conquerors, to the remaining regions. It is certain that early graves with wart ornamented pottery are commonest in Lausitz and the immediately adjoining tracts of Bohemia, Silesia and Poland. But such are not altogether wanting in Moravia and Lower Austria. Then in the next phase the Lausitz culture spread westward into Thuringia and northwards to the Spree; the whole of Moravia is covered with urnfields and there and in Lower Austria they contain two-membered fibulae such as were at home in central Germany. Even as far as central Slovakia pure Lausitz cemeteries occur, and north Hungary was overrun by invaders who introduced socketed celts to replace the superior shaft-hole axes previously used and fluted pottery of late Lausitz form. Even in Macedonia⁴ a similar pottery appears about 1100 B.C. in the late Mycenaean village of Vardaroftsa in a layer of ashes testifying to a hostile invasion. Reminiscences of Lausitz are even traceable in the proto-geometric pottery of north Greece where painted semi-circles reproduce the fluted semi-circles of Silesia. Evidently the Lausitz folk have advanced from their little corner in the north to colonize all east Central Europe and even make raids on the Aegean! Obviously too they have taken care to lay hands on the copper deposits of central Slovakia for the benefit of their industry.

East of the Elbe and north of the Ipoly the Lausitz peasants remained the basis of the population throughout the Iron Age; elements

³ von Richthofen in *Mannus*, Ergänzungsbande iv, pp. 140 ff.

⁴ Heurtley, *Antiquaries Journal*, 1927, pp. 44-59.

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of Hallstatt culture reached them first by peaceful penetration and then in the train of equestrian raiders from Illyria who inhumed their dead.

There are also traces of a Lausitz expansion westward, but here the record is much tangled. The hill country of western Bohemia, Bavaria and Wurtemberg⁵ was already occupied by virile pastoral tribes interring their dead under barrows. Beside these appear urnfields in the late Bronze Age, clustered principally in the lowlands but extending into the Tyrol and Switzerland. These urnfield folk, like the Lusatians, were traders and farmers, controlling the horse with horn-ended bits and living in log cabins. And they too were interested in deposits of metal, indeed they were apparently the first to mine copper and salt in the eastern Alps.

In some of the western cemeteries, notably near Munich and round Innsbruck,⁶ the biconical Lausitz ossuary occurs, but it is by no means characteristic; the north Alpine urnfield pottery is on the whole different from that in use east of the Elbe, as are the swords, pins and razors; the socketed celt is rare; the graves have a more martial aspect and are far more richly furnished with metal gifts than those of Silesia or Moravia. We are not here dealing with a mere extension of the Lausitz culture as there. None the less, whatever other elements were blended in this complex, they may well have been crystallized around nuclei of Lausitz antecedents. That group perhaps supplied leaders who could unite scattered bands and direct their varied industrial activities.

Now it was the north Alpine urnfield folk who synoicized the little hamlets strung out along the shores of the Alpine lakes into the flourishing industrial villages of the so-called 'bel âge du bronze'. Descendants of the same group must have eventually brought to England the bronze types and horn bits represented at Heathery Burn cave and in other deposits⁷. Another branch of the same stock descended the Rhine to Holland⁸ whence some at least reached Yorkshire⁹.

⁵ Naue, *Die Bronzezeit in Oberbayern*; Kraft, *Die Kultur der Bronzezeit in Süddeutschland*.

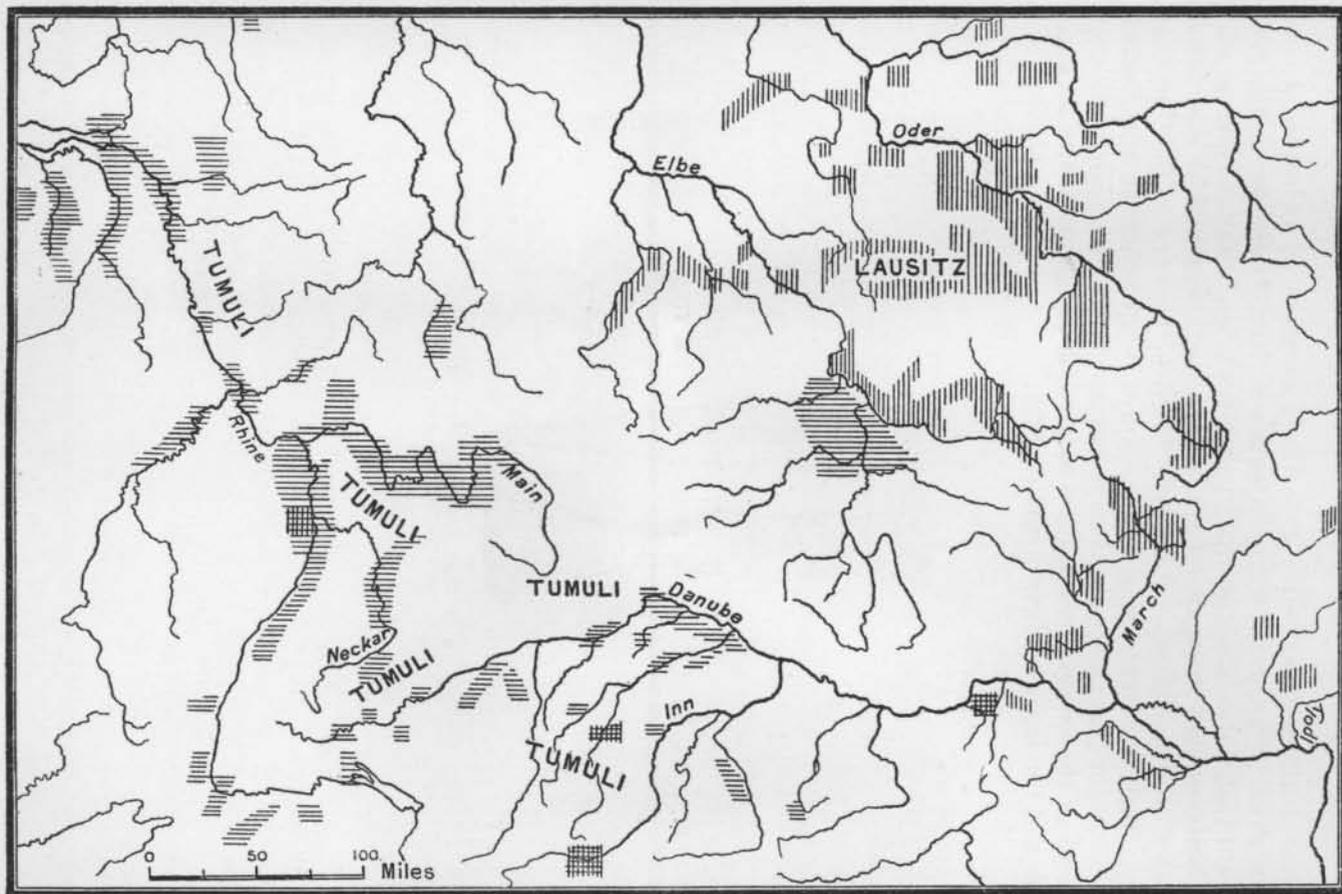
⁶ *Reallexikon*, sv Hötting.

⁷ Crawford, *Antiquaries Journal*, 1922, pp. 27 ff.

⁸ *Mannus*, Ergänzungsband v, pp. 50 ff.

⁹ Scarborough. But here there is clearly a cross-current from Central Germany as Kendrick (*Druids*, p. 39) points out.

MAP OF URNFIELD CULTURES



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Urnfields of true Lausitz type



North Alpine-Rhenish urnfields



Urnfields where Lausitz osuaries occur with North Alpine

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Most authors hold today that the Lausitz folk belonged to the Illyrian stock who have left place-names like Hallstatt, Halle and Halicz (in Galicia) containing the Illyrian root **hal* = salt. The present writer believes, however, that these names were left by the equestrian inhumators who diffused the later (eighth century B.C.) Hallstatt culture. But whatever racial name should be attached to the Lausitz folk it is certain that they played an important role in prehistoric Europe at the end of the second millennium B.C. The diffusion of the socketed celt was not the least of their achievements.

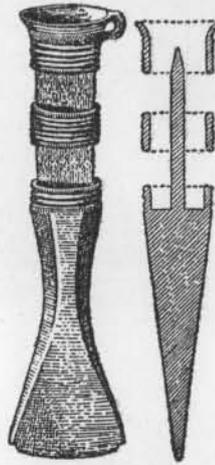


FIG 2. CELT FROM RATIBOR, SILESIA
(after *Altshlesien*, i, 1922)