

Germanische Gotteshäuser



Hermann Wille

Hermann Wille Germanic
places of worship

Germanic places of worship

between the Weser and Ems rivers

By

Hermann Wille





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The text was originally set in Fraktur.

Latin letters appear in italics (except in Old High German verses, titles and units of measurement).

Page concordant.

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You cannot please everyone with
your actions,
do **it** right for a few; pleasing
many is bad.

Schiller.

Previously!

The purpose of this book is to awaken and revive love for one's homeland and pride in Nordic culture.

The race from which we originate and its culture are our most precious possessions, the fertile ground in which we are rooted with our physical and spiritual being. The preservation of this heritage must be the most important task of the state and the foundation of all German national education. German prehistory and the history of our immediate homeland must therefore be placed at the centre of teaching and education, for this is where the roots of our strength lie. The history of German youth must not begin with Greek and Roman history and with myths and legends foreign to our people, but with the tribal history of our own people, our most valuable ethnic heritage.

Those who do not know where they come from do not know where they stand, let alone where they are going!

We must look back on the path our fathers have travelled from the primeval times of the Germanic peoples to the present day. We must try to delve into the innermost essence, into the soul of our race, into our innate Germanness. It is our duty to seriously and reverently immerse ourselves in the world of ideas of our ancestors, which

by the laws of life must necessarily also be our own.

This book draws particular attention to the unusually large number of monuments to Germanic prehistory in north-western Germany, the land of the former Chauci tribe. Almost unnoticed in their high value, they fall into the heath of oblivion. Through my research, I hope not only to serve my immediate homeland, but also to have made a modest contribution to Germanic antiquity research. For what I say and show is the result of years of solitary pioneering work and yet only part of an unfinished research project. I wish and hope that I may be granted the opportunity to continue my work in order to finally bring to light what originates from our own kind. The Oldenburg region should occupy first place in the specialist maps of prehistorians, so densely populated are the altars of the dead from Germanic prehistory here.

What particularly caught my attention in the Oldenburg region were the huge stone settings arranged in elongated rectangles, the so-called "Hünenbetten" (giants' beds), a special form of megalithic tombs that still pose a mystery to science today. The aim of this work is to explore their original purpose. I hope to have found a satisfactory solution based on architectural observation and thinking.

For it is only possible to explore the meaning and purpose of these Stone Age structures by attempting to place oneself in the time of their creation with sober, professional consideration, as if one had shared the simple, nature-bound life of the people and helped with the practical construction of these enormous megalithic structures. However, it is difficult to draw conclusions from a theoretical perspective, as it is too easy to overlook the simple, natural activities and work of Stone Age people.

Beyond solving a specific problem, this work aims to

but also provide some insights into Germanic antiquity. It aims to prove, particularly on the basis of prehistoric finds, that a people whose craftsmanship created such sophisticated weapons, tools and jewellery and who developed such distinctive, noble forms of culture could not possibly have been at the cultural level of "wild barbarians", as our own historiography would sometimes have us believe even today.

That is why this work is intended not only for specialist scholars, but for all German compatriots who are conscious of their ethnic origins, both in the narrower Oldenburg homeland and in the wider fatherland.

Knowledge of the Nordic culture of our ancestors is necessary for the moral renewal of the entire German-speaking people. It is the clear, inexhaustible spring from which a drink not only provides the last remnants of our ancestors and knowledge of the fate of the German people, but is also a source of strong national sentiment and eternally rejuvenating love for the fatherland.

*

Today is the child of yesterday; what we have is partly the legacy of pre-Germanic antiquity, what we are is entirely the work of those ancient Germans whom we like to refer to as 'barbarians'.

H. St. Chamberlain

Settling the score

While reading various historical works that I studied in the course of writing this book, I was astonished to discover what absurd historical falsifications are still being presented to young people. A thorough cleansing of school textbooks and a correction of the facts is urgently needed.

It is incomprehensible how various German historians report on our ancestors in an almost disparaging manner, probably because they still live under the spell of that deeply ingrained opinion that all light of culture came from the East. They lavish the highest praise on the Greeks and Romans as noble, cultivated peoples with a high, ideal cult of the gods, while the Germanic peoples appear crude and barbaric in their eyes, as wild heathens without any culture. Every encyclopaedia explains "pagans", Latin *pagani*, today in Christian usage as country dwellers or heathens who are not Christians, Jews or Mohammedans. So the word initially only means that they were people who lived in the heath. Under the influence of Christian missionaries, the word then underwent a change in meaning. "Pagan" was anyone who did not bow to Christian doctrine, who remained aloof. These may have been especially those clans living in the heath who lived too far away from the chapel, the monastery or the bishop's seat and knew how to escape the influence of the Christian missionaries. Today

we also use the word to mean people who still live in the crudest fetishistic beliefs, without any higher divine idea, without belief in a higher being. And in this contemptuous sense, those historians also use it to refer to our ancestors and their belief in God. Certainly, they did not yet know, as we do today since Herman Wirth's research, what a high, pure belief in light preceded the fantastically colourful world of gods in the Edda, but for this type of German antiquarian, the Germanic people only seem to have become noble and "capable of culture" when Christianity and its customs were forcibly imposed on them.

Historians and archaeologists are also educators and enlighteners of the people, or at least they should always be aware of this task. But they can never do justice to this task if they lack national consciousness and, above all, national pride. Such a portrayal of the world of our ancestors can have downright disastrous consequences if, as I have observed, it is incorporated into school textbooks by educational writers and then, unfortunately, instilled into the hearts of our youth, the future of our nation, by teachers. In his battle cry for the German soul, our Chancellor Adolf Hitler raises his voice as an educator of the people, warning and instructing:

"Only those who learn about the cultural, economic and, above all, political greatness of their own fatherland through education and school can and will gain that inner pride of being a member of such a people. And I can only fight for something I love, love only what I respect, and respect what I at least know."

A few examples of such a loveless and uncomprehending portrayal of German history may clarify what I am trying to point out here.

Prof. Dr. Oskar Jäger, director of the Royal Fried-

Wilhelm Gymnasium in Cologne, writes at one point in his "World History" about the Germanic peoples:

"The Romans called the peoples by a collective name

'Germans', whom they described as screamers or roarers because of their terrible battle cries."

Could it be that Director Dr. Jäger really knew so little about the various possible meanings of the name that he could only come up with this one explanation – which, incidentally, is highly improbable – and, moreover, mention it in such an offensive and disparaging manner?

Hans Hahne-Halle recently (1933) took a position on this name in his booklet

"Deutsche Vorzeit" (German Prehistory), he also takes a position on this name, which can be said to be conclusive. In his interpretation of the name, he follows the view of Tacitus, whose statements in "Germania" have, in his opinion, been confirmed by science almost in their entirety, since he draws on "all kinds of sources that are now lost, above all the works of Pliny the Elder, his friend, who was a cavalry colonel in Germania, and Caesar". If one compares his explanations of the name's meaning with those of Dr. Jäger, one can see – and one need only pay attention to the tone, to the "how" of the presentation – what constitutes affectionate and what constitutes unkind German historiography.

Hans Hahne writes:

"Tacitus attributes the collective name 'Germans' for the tribes of this country to the fact that the first Germans, who crossed the Rhine from the east at the turn of the millennium and drove the Gauls from its banks, were called Tungri at that time, and that this name then became common for the entire mother people to which that victorious tribe belonged. Thus, a tribal name with its awe-inspiring sound was transferred to the entire people, who naturally liked to use it because it evoked such glorious memories. This is a historical process that can be verified on several occasions. The French still call us Alemanni

, and the Turks call us Franks: after the first and most glorious tribes with whom they had contact."

And once again, Director Dr. Jäger:

"The wild people, possessed by a frenzied rage for destruction (!), intoxicated by battle and victory, then satiated themselves with all the horrors of savage revenge. In the clearings of the nearby woods, they sacrificed the prisoners to their gods and nailed the severed heads of the fallen to the trees. They tormented the survivors of their enemies. Stubborn pagans. The people are oath-breaking, 'unfaithful', like all barbarians."

I believe that any comment on this is superfluous. It is also a gross misjudgement of the tasks of national and indeed any objective historiography to accuse, for example, the Cheruscan leader Hermann, the liberator of the Germanic tribes from Roman servitude, in the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest, or Widukind, after the destruction of the Frankish army on Mount Süntel, of disloyalty because they did not accept the Roman rule.-maniens from Roman bondage in the Battle of Varus or Widukind after the destruction of the Frankish army at Mount Süntel, because they did not keep a promise they had made and fought the enemy with the methods that he himself considered appropriate at any time when it was to his advantage. In the struggle for the life and death of a people, the end justifies the means, and the righteous anger of Heinrich von Kleist against brutal enemies of the country – "Kill them, the Last Judgement will not ask you for reasons" – becomes a sacred national duty in such moments.

As for the accusation of "treachery" in the sense of "spinelessness," as these gentlemen historians probably mean it, it should be remembered that the Roman Caesars and emperors surrounded themselves with bodyguards made up of Germanic warriors because they could not rely on their own people. Caesar even used a Germanic cavalry as a weapon of war because it was of great use to him in his campaigns.

Prof. Dr. M. Hoernes, Vienna, writes in his "Prehistory

of Humanity", revised in 1926 by Prof. Dr. F. Behn, Mainz:

Our wild and bloodthirsty ancestors slaughtered their prisoners or mutilated them. Religion demanded human and animal sacrifices. Marriage took the form of abduction, and when a child was born, the father decided whether to raise it or abandon it. Artificial scars and tattoos marked the members of the same noble family. Superstition prevailed, and importance was attached to omens and the power of incantations. They remained at a low level of culture, while other peoples had already made enormous progress. Semitic tribes in Babylonia became the teachers of the Aryans who had invaded the Near East."

This "modern" account (1926!), which could be the subject of very malicious comments, is surpassed by the examples cited by Gustav Kossinna in his outstanding work:

"German Prehistory, an Outstanding National Science."

In 1806, J. Ch. Adelung wrote in his book "The Oldest History of the Germans": "The Germanic tribes are predators that sleep when they are not hunting or eating."

In an essay published in the *Preußische Jahrbücher* in April 1894, university professor Otto Seeck presents the following astonishing anthology of his research: "The Germanic tribes are 'wild barbarians', 'crude savages', 'savage hordes', but also 'thieves', 'robbers', 'murderers', 'drunks and brawlers of wild gluttony', and furthermore 'timid and venal cowards without any trace of strength of character' (!!! the author)."

Fortunately, however, there have been German men before him who have viewed the early history of our people with different eyes. In 1779, the State Chancellor

Frederick the Great, Count Ewald Friedrich von Hertzberg, expressed the view in his treatise on "The Reasons for the Superiority of the Germanic Peoples over the Romans" that "the rapid rise of the Prussian people under Frederick the Great was only made possible by the efficiency and malleability of the people themselves, which must have been the same for thousands of years."

As one of the first and most courageous heralds and advocates of an ancient Germanic cultural heritage that was every bit as great as that of other ancient peoples, Gustav Kossinna was always striving to restore the honour of our ancestors, which had been dragged through the mud by frivolous and foreign researchers, and to successfully represent it through the outstanding results of his research..

Willy Pastor's "Der Zug vom Norden" (The March from the North), 1906, is also a passionate defence against Gottfried Semper's infamous statement:

"The Germanic hordes, without national cohesion but united by a common language, were homeless outcasts from society."

Pastor replies:

"We, the sun wanderers (the Aryans coming from the north), have been portrayed as outcasts; what we heard from them was a criminal story, and we hear an epic full of pride and glory; let us free ourselves from the lies of the past."

If I again allow Tacitus to speak as a reliable key witness, his praise carries double weight when one remembers that he was a reporter in the enemy camp. In various places, one can read about the high standards of morality he had:

"Good manners are more effective there than good laws elsewhere."

"Their marital customs are strict and, in terms of their overall way of life, most praiseworthy."

"A people without malice or deceit, they reveal the secrets of their hearts in casual jokes; and they always do what is right: they deliberate when they are incapable of pretence, they decide when they cannot err."

"To turn anyone away from one's house is considered a sacrilege; everyone prepares a meal for the stranger according to their means. When his meal is finished, the host shows the guest the way to another hospitable person and escorts him there. Thus they enter the next house uninvited. There is nothing wrong with that; they are received with the same friendliness, whether known or unknown."

"It is rare for a slave to be punished."

"Lending money at interest and usury are unknown to them, and this ignorance protects them more than any prohibition."

"Prudence is very close to prudent courage."

"The Chauci are a people who are held in the highest esteem among the Germanic tribes and prefer to base their power on justice."

Tacitus, who knows them from his own observations, also correctly assesses the Gauls, while German historians like to portray them as "more highly cultivated" with a refined education. He writes in various places:

"I would not count among the Germanic peoples those who cultivate the tithe land: 'Gallic rabble, bold out of necessity.'"

"The Treveri and Nervii even assert their Germanic ancestry with jealous pride, as if such nobility of blood would cancel out any resemblance to the slackened Gauls."

This is how Tacitus characterises our ancestors.

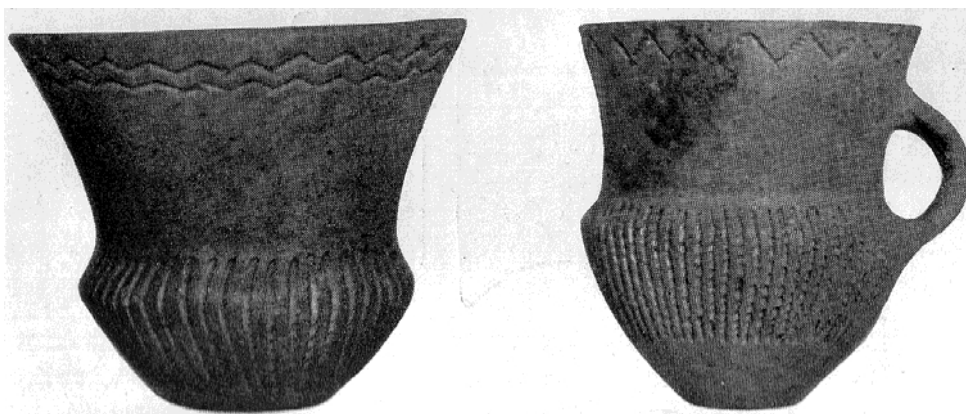
However, in contrast to Tacitus, some Roman writers also describe the cruelty of the Germanic people in war. These are probably biased reports by Roman soldiers. The warriors who escaped destruction in the Battle of Varus

and had happily returned to their homeland, portrayed their enemies as fearsome and cruel in order to excuse their defeat and boast of their heroism.

One must assume that the German historians who bring themselves to reinforce such distorted reports, embellishing them with childish imagination to make them even more bloodthirsty, lack the ability to think logically.

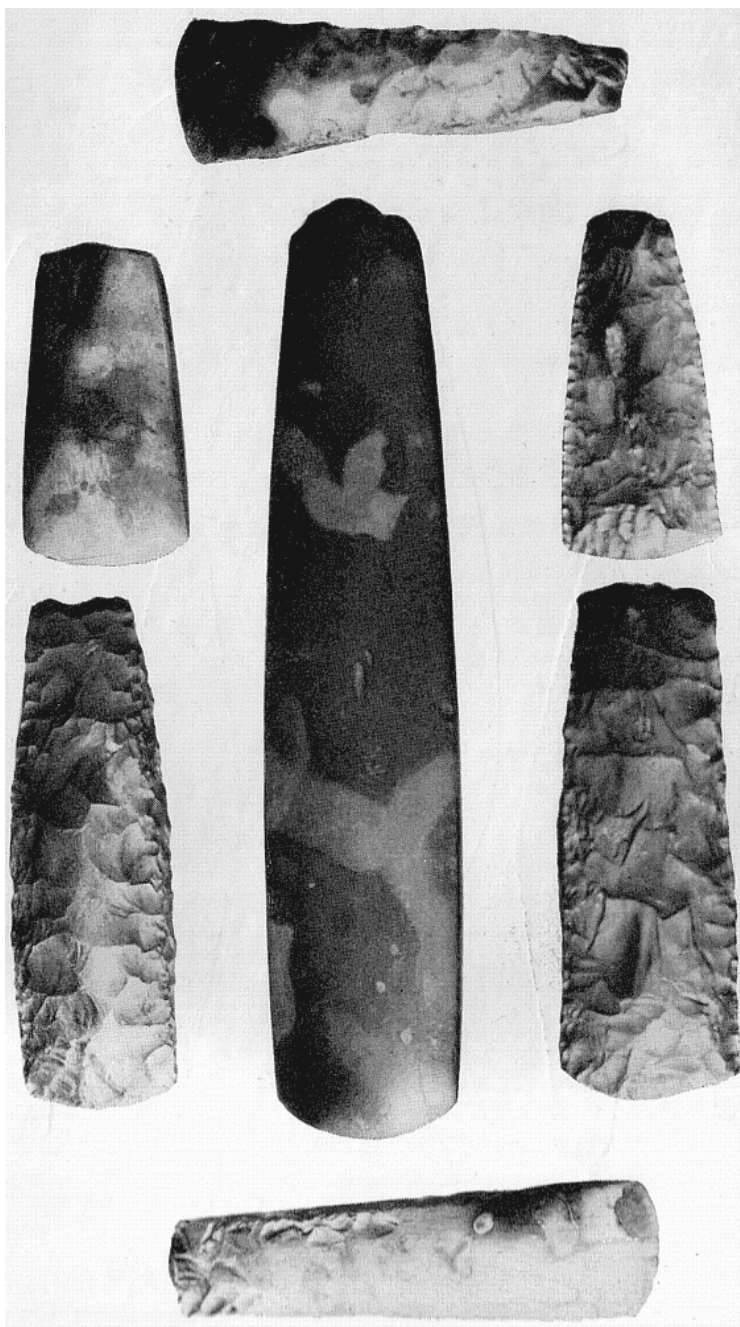
However, the worst part of the hateful songs about our ancestors arose as a result of Christianisation. Unfortunately, priests often resorted to any means necessary to tear the old beliefs from the hearts of the converted and to expose the reprehensible nature of the previous cult of gods. This may also have led to the creation and dissemination of those horrific tales of human sacrifice, which have not been proven to be credible in the slightest.

Lucie Varga recently conducted insightful research into the origins of such prejudices in her own work (*Das Schlagwort vom Finsteren Mittelalter* [The Slogan of the Dark Middle Ages]. Vienna-Leipzig 1932): "For the general assessment of the catchphrase 'Dark Ages', I consider it extremely important that, from its very beginnings, which we have traced in the preceding pages, this expression has never been based on an objective view of history: from the very outset, the breeding ground for this catchphrase has been bias, one-sidedness and contemporary polemics." And J. O. Plaßmann adds in a review of the book ("Germanien", issue 8, year 1933, p. 249): "If we say 'barbaric Germanic culture' instead of 'Middle Ages', we have the catchphrase we have to fight against; which played such a disastrous role in its historical development during the World War and which is now to be revived. The anti-Germanic tendency of the Romans dominates historiography to this day, and not only the supposedly 'objective science', but also



Vessels from the Neolithic period found in megalithic tombs in the Free State of Oldenburg, deep-engraved pottery from the oldest culture. The vessel at the top right shows a white filling of the decorative pattern.

Natural History Museum, Oldenburg



Struck and polished flint axes from the Neolithic period (Nordic). Found in north-western Germany and Sweden.
From the collection of the "Väterkunde Museum" in Bremen

... what is far worse, the subjective public sentiment, even here in our own country."

In any case, the reports of cruel human sacrifices at cult festivals are completely at odds with the character of our ancestors.

The reverence and awe of higher powers in nature and human life, which Caesar and Tacitus praised in our ancestors, have been preserved among the people to this day, even after the adoption of Christianity. Without them, Christianity would never have experienced the deepening and permeation of the ancient Norse spirit in northern Europe that is the hallmark of our "Christian" Middle Ages. The deepest and at the same time highest experience of our Christian calendar, our Christmas celebration, presents itself to us today as an ancient Nordic tradition, whose spiritual content we do not owe to the southern faith – rather, the southern faith owes us. It is precisely this realisation that imposes itself on us in connection with the precise research whose results are recorded in this book.

In his opening speech at the "First Nordic Thing" in Bremen in 1933, Ludwig Roselius said:

"Today I call upon the Thing so that we may read the history of our Nordic people from the stones, in order to face the struggle with pride and freedom.

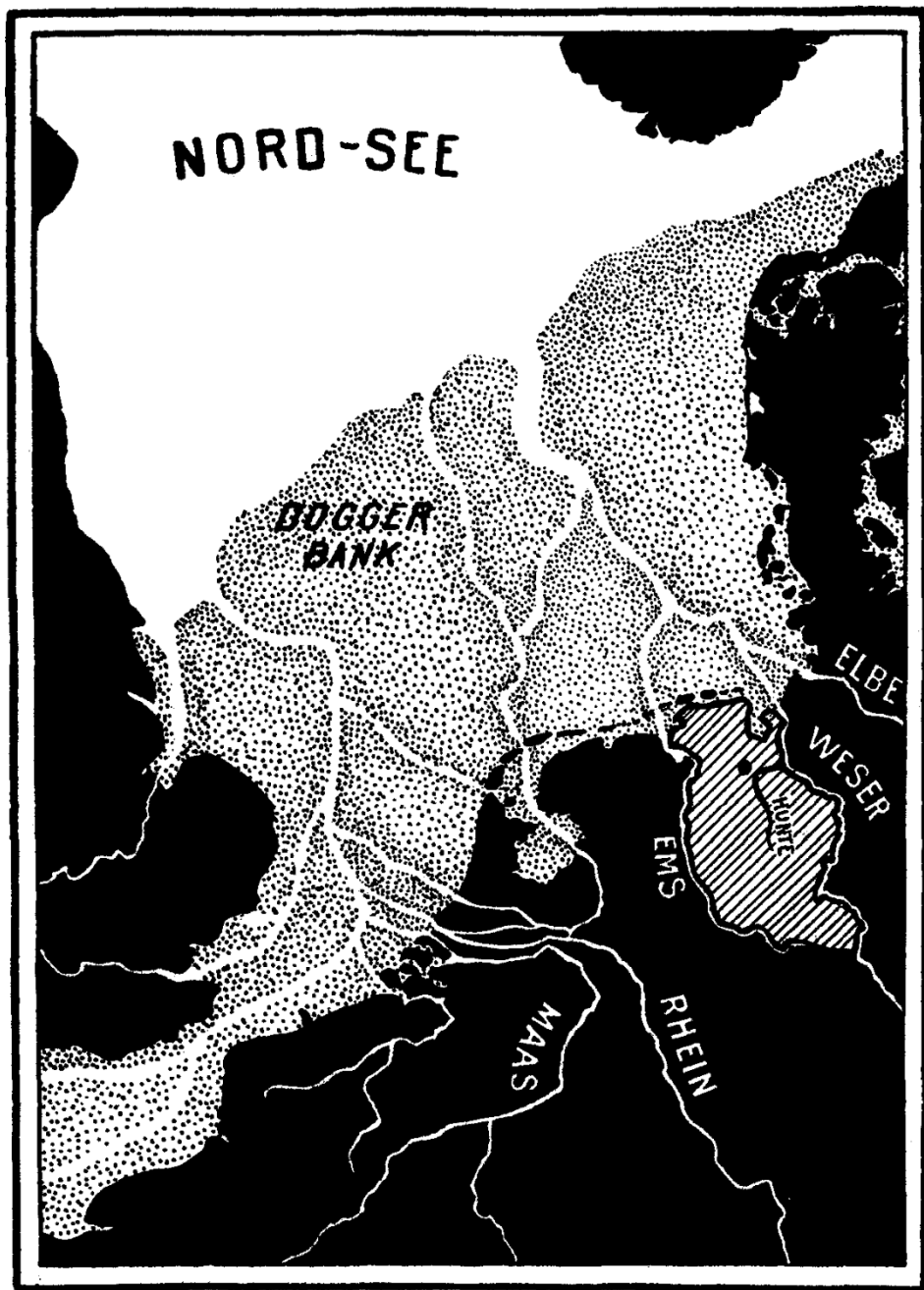
Let us finally put an end to the old wives' tale that 2000 years ago we were still barbarians and owe our culture to the southerners.

Who still speaks of the decline of the West?

We have awakened and are following in the footsteps of our strong ancestors.

Intellectually stimulating and heroically victorious, we Northerners have been opening up the lands of the sun for a thousand years. Purified, rounded off, and bursting with vitality, our ancient heritage returns to us in a new guise. That is the truth."

*



North Sea culture of the Neolithic period

Those who do not love their
homeland And do not
honour their homeland Are
scoundrels!

And unworthy of the happiness of their
homeland!

Hermann Almers

Land and People

between the Weser and Ems rivers

Carl Schuchhardt once expressed his conviction that Widukind's Saxons were the same people who built the megalithic tombs that still stand today as symbols of the ancient past of our Lower Saxony region.

The old master of German prehistoric research thus expressed an insight that is obvious to anyone who truly lives in the past of our Lower Saxony region and people and who therefore perceives this past as a living unity with the present of the region and its people. However, this insight appears to contradict the supposedly reliable findings of prehistoric research and early historical ethnology. A few words should therefore be said about these opinions – not so much from the point of view of the specialist scholar, who, in my opinion, often thinks too much in terms of the atoms of his research material, but rather from the point of view of the autodidact, who seeks to form a coherent picture of living reality from the individual research results.

Prehistoric research has become accustomed to inferring a change in cultures and thus in peoples from changing technical forms; and in historiography, too, the moment of

change and migration greater importance than that of persistence. However correct this way of looking at prehistory may be in individual cases, it nevertheless fails to take into account the facts that we can recognise from historical times and still in the living present as characteristic of the entire Low German people. People speak of great prehistoric migrations, which they believe they can deduce from the change, development and decline of technical forms, and they draw a parallel between these

"prehistoric migrations" are compared to the great historical migration of the Germanic peoples, which, of course, repeats an ancient process.

Overall, however, these things are viewed too much from the south, from the perspective of the Roman historian, who knew the Germanic tribes better as wanderers and conquerors than as settled farmers; and who was completely unfamiliar with the earthiness that still today gives Low German farmers all over the world their unique character. But we must also take this attachment to the land into account in those prehistoric times – or were the people who piled huge stone blocks into tombs and dug deep graves into the ground frivolous nomads who, driven by the vagaries of the economic situation or even by a thirst for adventure, abandoned their land like gypsies?

That is impossible, and so we must apply completely different standards to the apparent population shifts, at least as far as our Low German region is concerned. Since ancient times, the land between the Lower Elbe and Lower Rhine and Ems rivers has been the most settled land in Europe, perhaps even in the whole world. There may have been occasional incursions into this area from the north, incursions that have been repeated throughout history; such incursions may indeed be traceable in certain prehistoric changes in form – but there has been no fundamental and complete change in population.

since the Neolithic period, no one has ever been found in this area. We can therefore see that the great Celtic flood, which shook and transformed almost all of Europe during the Iron Age, washed over this block in the north; that during the time of Tacitus, the north-western German tribes fought certain battles and power shifts among themselves, but were never subjugated from outside – the Roman army got stuck in Westphalia, the great Slavic flood was halted in the east, just as for many centuries in the west the Frankish power could only spread by bypassing the Lower Saxony area. And even the subjugation of the old Germanic heartland by the international Frankish Empire was unable to permanently shift this natural centre of gravity: a hundred years later, the Saxon tribe was once again the power centre of Germany, with the other German tribes gathering around it; a German empire in the true sense of the word only became possible under the leadership of the Saxon tribe – and so the roots of the Prussian state also lie in these Lower Saxon tribal components of the new colonial land east of the Elbe.

A comparison with more recent and better known events allows us to view the entire question of "migration of peoples" in a different light than we have been accustomed to seeing it until now. We see that Lower Saxony was unaffected by the so-called migration of peoples, and so we must interpret the history of the tribes that we see appearing here one after the other in historical times differently than according to the previous view of entire peoples moving to new lands. We learn, for example, that a people known simply as "the Amsiwa-ren" were encountered in the Lower Rhine region in search of land, that they were rejected everywhere and finally disappeared from the stage of history – but about 100 years later, we find the same people back in their old seats in the Emsland region. If the entire tribe had emigrated with their wives and children,

their ancestral seats would certainly have been immediately taken over by other peoples. In reality, the Emsland farmer of that time was just as reluctant to leave his ancestral land with its ancient witnesses to his forefathers' era as he is today; but then, as now, they sent their young offspring, for whom there was no ancestral farm and no new settlement, to remote areas to seek land and a future there. Such an emigration wave is not very different from the waves of

"trekking" Boers in South Africa; this process was repeated on a large scale during the settlement of North America; a migration of peoples that Walther Darré rightly described as the actual great Germanic migration.

Thus, we should not automatically interpret the political upheavals that we recognise from the early tribal history of our homeland as the migration of entire peoples and their replacement by new ones. In Tacitus' time, we find the land between the Ems and Elbe rivers inhabited by the great tribe of the Chauci, the same land that we find a few centuries later as the heartland of the Saxon tribe. It is impossible that the small Saxon tribe in Holstein could have repopulated and settled the entire deserted land between the Elbe and Ems rivers – there was simply a change in the political leadership, and this may well have been due to the fact that the political and military leaders of the Chauken, enticed by greater goals, emigrated from their homeland and established new empires elsewhere. According to Rudolf Much's very probable assumption, we find these Chauken again as the core tribe of the Franks in the Netherlands. But the land-cultivating farmer, the Low German peasant, certainly did not abandon his land at that time to seek an uncertain new existence in France – he remained, and only the ruling or leading class changed; and this class was strong enough to give the country a strict political

unity and also a certain, on the whole uniform, linguistic status.

In the Weser region, we can still recognise the old Gaulish names, which probably date back to incursions by the Saxon conquerors. East Frisia, the ancient land of the Chauci, was probably occupied by a Frisian upper class during this period, which may explain why it was in this region in particular that Frisian finally gave way to the more tenacious Low Saxon dialect. We can still observe similar processes in more recent history, and they show us particularly clearly how little the political name, so to speak, proves an actual ethnic fact. Today, the name Saxony is associated with a region whose population consists mainly of Germanised Sorbs; it is Saxon colonial territory, but the name Saxony has, in a sense, retreated into this originally Slavic new territory in the face of the new power-political transformations.

These examples suffice to show that everything we teach in the following about ancient news concerning our north-western German ancestors must be seen in the light of these broader contexts. Only in this way can we recognise the permanence in change, the constant fundamental element in the eternal power struggle, in which our Low German folklore still forms the predominant persistent element today. And so we must always reconcile what ancient writers tell us about our ancestors with what our ancestors themselves have left us; and that is not only urns, shards, weapons and jewellery, it is infinitely more, namely living people – and we must also be able to trace back to those distant generations whose blood flows in our veins, while the products of their hands have for the most part long since fallen victim to time.

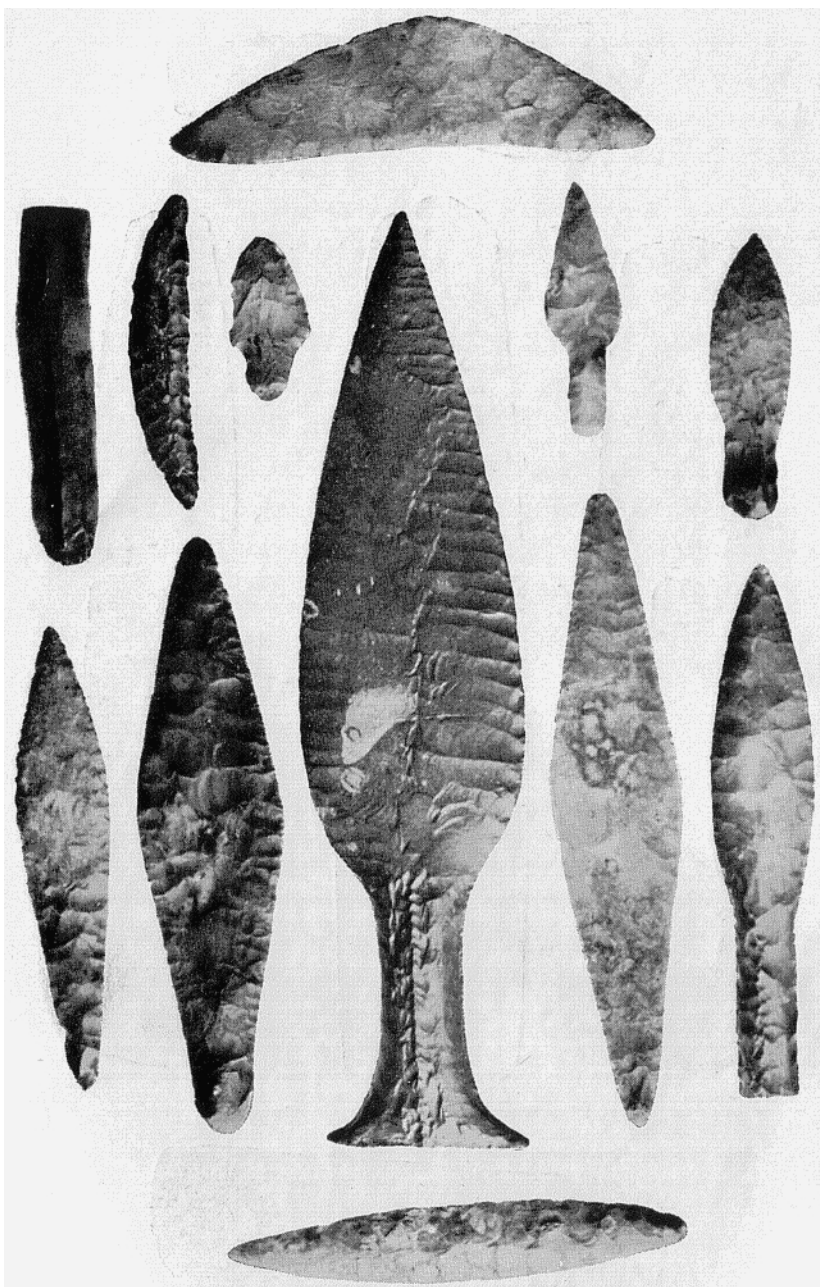
Very early on, dark news about the Nordic peoples seems to have reached the Mediterranean countries. We encounter

in the oldest literary monuments we have from southern Europe, in the Homeric poems, references to Nordic peoples who live in eternal twilight at the "entrance to the underworld", "at the end of the deep ocean".

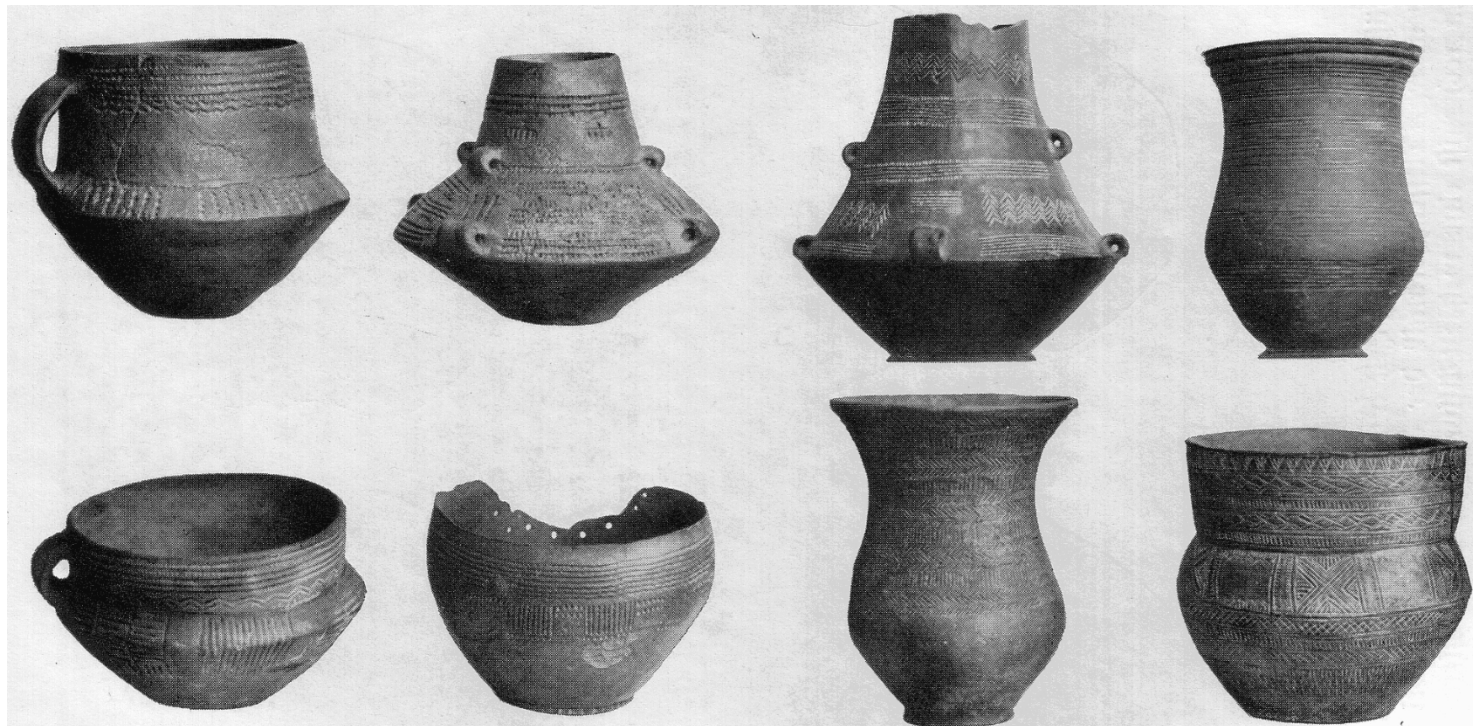
"completely shrouded in fog and darkness". Although Tacitus himself, in his *Germania*, only reports the tradition that Odysseus, on his eventful wanderings, is said to have drifted into the North Sea and set foot on the Germanic mainland as a conjecture, the latest research on the ancestral homeland and origins of the Aryan race, as conducted by Herman Wirth, has proven that such voyages were already being attempted in these early days of Germanic history.

The first Greek whose thirst for knowledge led him to *Germania* was Pytheas. He came from the Greek colony of Massilla, today's Marseille. Around 345 BC, he undertook a voyage of discovery in which he sailed around western Europe, pushed north to the island of Thule (Iceland?) and continued on to reach the German North Sea coast.

It would go beyond the scope of this work and far exceed its stated objective if I were to even list these first encounters between the Greeks and Romans and the West Germanic peoples, let alone describe them in detail, especially since there are specialised works on this subject. Suffice it to say here that we have no coherent reports that even remotely clearly reflect the conditions of the time regarding the land and people of the Germanic tribes between the Elbe, Ems and Rhine rivers until the publication of Tacitus' *Germania*. Unfortunately, the writings of Pytheas of Massilia have also been lost. They have fallen into oblivion and have only been passed on to later chroniclers through oral tradition. However, only fragmentary, often contradictory fragments and a few map drawings by the Greeks, which may summarise the cartographic results of these voyages of discovery, are available from later voyages of discovery.



Large ceremonial dagger, dagers, spearheads, arrowheads, knives and
saws made of flint (Nordic) from the Neolithic period.
Found in north-western Germany and Sweden.
From the collection of the "Väterkunde-Museum" in Bremen.



Vessels from the Neolithic period, 3000 to 2000 BC. Found in north-western Germany.
From the collection of the "Väterkunde-Museum" in Bremen

However, the first coherent and at the same time most valuable account of Germania is that of the Roman Tacitus from 98 AD. His Germania is the golden book of our people's prehistory, which reports on the inhabitants and their culture in a factual and concise manner, impartially and almost benevolently – even though they were enemies. His impartial account has since been further corroborated by extremely critical scientific examination and comparison, and the view that Tacitus, in writing his work, intended to show his effeminate, degenerate compatriots only the counterpart of a pure, unbroken folk culture in idealised transfiguration is increasingly fading. His work was written during the reign of Emperor Trajan (98–117 AD), when the Roman army set about expanding the fortifications on the Rhine and Danube, to annex Dacia to the empire as a new province, to secure the tithe land in the angle between the Rhine and the Danube with the palisade or limes, and to renew and complete the "peaceful penetration" of western Germany already initiated by Drusus' successor Tiberius (4 AD) through the outposts of Roman culture, the merchants. We know how close the Romans would have been to achieving this goal soon after the birth of Christ, had it not been for the Cheruscan Arminius (Hermann), a prince whom Tacitus praises highly in his Germania, who tore the net apart in the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest (9 AD).

"undisputed liberator of Germania," "who, unlike other kings and military leaders, did not fight the early Roman people, but rather the empire in its prime, not always successful in battle, but undefeated in war."

In writing his account, Tacitus will certainly have relied heavily on the reports of soldiers, officials and merchants who had travelled far and wide in Germania with the army. But it is equally obvious

that, as a man of comprehensive education, he would also have used the preliminary work of older writers, such as the Greeks Posidonius of Apamea and Strabo and the Romans Caesar, Sallust, Livy and Pliny, even though he only mentions Caesar by name as the "most reliable source".

For this reason, this book will primarily draw on German translations of Tacitus' *Germania* as the most informative source of evidence, as it presents the land and people of the Germanic tribes in the right light. The evidence is taken from the German edition by Paul Stefan, Insel-Verlag, Leipzig, which I consider to be the most beautiful in terms of language. His reporters had travelled with the Roman army down the Rhine to Friesland and then probably along the coast to the Ems, the Jade and the mouth of the Weser. Thus, the scouts probably only knew the strip of land along the undike coast, into whose lowlands the tide had unhindered access. Coming down the Rhine from the south, the Romans had only advanced as far as the Lippe, so that the armies had probably hardly explored the interior of the Chauci's territory at that time. Tacitus' later reports on the land and people of the Chauci, which are based on more detailed knowledge, also differ significantly from those of Pliny. Pliny's passage on the Chauci is famous because it particularly clearly illustrates the difference in the attitudes of the Romans and the Germanic peoples towards land and homeland: "But there are also such peoples in the north (who live in poverty), namely the Chauci, who are called the great and the small. There, in a powerful current, the ocean pours into the intervening spaces twice a day and night over a vast area, covering the alternating battlefield of the elements, which one may doubt whether it belongs to the land or is part of the sea. There, a miserable little people has high hills

They possess platforms built by human hands, corresponding to the highest tide line: huts are scattered across them. Their inhabitants resemble sailors when the floods cover the surrounding land, but shipwrecked sailors when the floods recede, and they hunt the fish fleeing with the sea from their huts. These people are not allowed to keep livestock ... And these people claim that if they were to be defeated by the Roman people today, they would become slaves! It is indeed true: fate spares many as their punishment." (According to the translation by W. Capelle in "Das Alte Germanien" [Ancient Germania], Jena 1929, p. 405 f.)

The situation of the Chauci cannot have been quite as miserable as Pliny describes it, as his account obviously refers only to the narrow coastal strip.

The "huts" that the poor people built on hills or on "hand-made mounds" according to the report were the farmsteads of the coastal inhabitants, which stood on so-called "wurten" in the lowlands, which had to be laboriously raised by diligent hands to protect the dwellings from the advancing tide of the sea.

However, this did not apply to the entire land of the Chauci, but only to the strip of low-lying coastal area and probably especially to the part of the country where the waters of the Jade Bay now flood. The indentation of the sea did not yet exist at the time of Pliny and Tacitus. It was only created by the onset of a storm surge in 1218. The coastline ran much further north, because around 850, the castle of Duke Wigbert, a son of Widukind, still stood where the Mellum lighthouse now stands in the sea. However, there is evidence that this very fertile area was heavily populated. This land belonged to the district of Rüstringen. The counts of this district had their residence near the North Sea on the Jade, in the area of today's Jade Bay. The first monastery and the first Christian church in the coastal area were located here in Jadelehe. This place was destroyed at the inlet of the Jade Bay. Long before the name of the castle on the Hunte, Oldenburg, was mentioned, the first Christian church in the coastal

monastery and the first Christian church in the coastal region were located in Jadelehe. This place was destroyed when the Jade Bay was indented. Long before the name of the castle on the Hunte, Oldenburg, was mentioned, the chieftains of Rüstringen lived in their residences on the North Sea coast.

The territory of the Chauci stretched along the North Sea coast from the Ems region to the Elbe. It was divided into two parts by the Weser. The *Chauci maiores*, or "greater Chauci," inhabited the area between the Weser and the Elbe, while *the Chauci minores*, or "lesser Chauci," inhabited the area between the Weser and the Ems. The Chauci minores also included the people who are now known as the Oldenburgers. The "Greater" and "Lesser" Chauci refer to the Chauci in a broader and narrower sense, similar to how we speak today of the province as Prussia in the narrower sense and of the country as Prussia in the broader sense.

According to Tacitus' report, the land of the Chauci must have been densely populated, well cultivated and economically exploited. However, he praises the Chauci themselves, their power, their sense of justice, their restrained strength and their bravery. Without doubt, they must have been the most important people in the wider region at that time, who were also held in the highest esteem by other Germanic peoples.

A poetic name from the early Middle Ages, Hugones, Anglo-Saxon Hugas, has been handed down, which can be equated with the name Chauci, ^{Germanic} Hauhoz, and interpreted as "the tall, high-spirited", not in a pejorative sense as haughty, "condescending", but in the truest sense of the word, the proud, those with high spirits!

Tacitus writes in chapter 35 of "Germania":

"This is how far west we know Germania to extend. To the north, it recedes in a tremendous arc. First of all, we find the Chauci people here; although they begin next to the Frisians and still occupy part of the coast, they extend

¹ Cf. the English haughty, proud, high-spirited.

itself in the flank of all the tribes described here and finally extends in an arc to the Chatti. And the Chauci not only possess this vast expanse of land, but also fill it; a people who are held in the highest esteem among the Germanic tribes and who prefer to base their power on justice. Without greed, without unbridled lust for power, they live quietly for themselves and do not provoke anyone to war, nor do they ravage, rob or plunder anyone's property. It is the highest testimony to their bravery and strength that they do not abuse their superior power. Yet they are quick to take up arms, and when necessity demands, they raise an army: horses and men in great numbers. Even when they remain peaceful, their reputation remains intact."

Parts of the north-western Chauci, the so-called Little Chauci, may have already been the Rüstingers and the people of Ambria, today's Ammerland, those from Lar- and Leri-gau and those from Hase- and Dersegau. The following can be regarded as a Saxon incursion "Wigmodi",

The "Kampfmutigen" (warriors), who were based in the Bremen area, and the

"Westfalhi" and "Ostfalhi", alongside the Angrivari or Engern, the main tribes of the great Saxon people. The dialect of the Saxons showed many echoes of Frisian and Anglo-Saxon; such scattered linguistic remnants indicate influences from later conquering classes. The High German sound shift stopped at the tribal border of the Saxons, who thus held on to their distinctive character more tenaciously than other German tribes.

Where did the original people of the great Indo-European family come from? Where did the settlement of the Weser-Ems region actually originate? Both questions are closely related. Did the Germanic people always live in our homeland?

If we consult written sources, we must

answer "yes". Even Tacitus can only report that the Germanic peoples were native to the land beyond the Rhine and Danube. Who else, he asks from the geographical perspective of a southerner, would have desired such an inhospitable region,

"sad to inhabit and look upon for all who do not call it home". Only those who were born there could love this land.

The Germanic tribes themselves also considered themselves to be indigenous. For if they had known otherwise, it would certainly have reached the ears of Roman historians. And so Tacitus can only report what is recounted in ancient Germanic songs, that they were created from the soil, the earth of the land, by the gods themselves, descended from the earth-born god Tuisto and his son Mannus. The ancient tradition still echoes in the popular legend of the creation of the first Westphalian from an oak tree.

Today, despite the lack of reports, historical science is no longer helpless in answering the question of the original homeland of the Germanic peoples. There has long been a specialised literature on this question, which is constantly expanding. The question that one scholar cannot answer is taken up by a researcher from a neighbouring field and leads to a solution. It is not uncommon for particularly important discoveries in this field, such as that of the Indo-European proto-people, which Franz Bopp established in 1816 through comparative linguistic research, to have been made by scholars outside the field of historical science.

This hand-in-hand work of all scientific fields, which commands our utmost reverence for the sharpness and boldness of the human mind, has also shed light on the deep darkness of humanity's origins. Here, we need only mention the research of Herman Wirth, who, with admirable linguistic

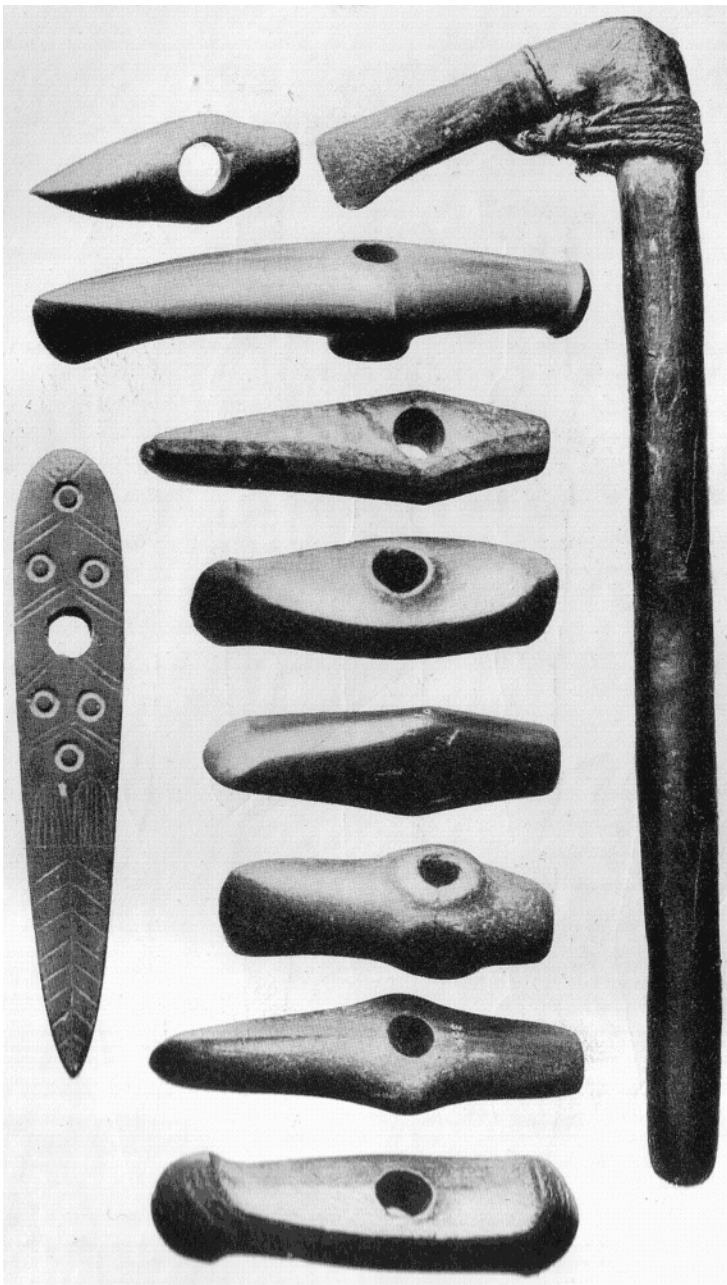
and expertise, has revealed the original script of humanity as a solar symbolic script, as an allegorical interpretation of cosmic events and the sun's path, and has attempted to determine the point of origin and migration routes of the Nordic race from the spread of these cult symbols.

Based on his research and the findings of racial studies, the previous view of the homeland of the Indo-Germanic proto-people, which was usually located in southern Russia, will probably be abandoned for good, and from now on the expanded northern sea region will be referred to as the original homeland of the Nordic race. Following the theory of continental drift between Europe and North America advocated by Köppen and Wegener, Wirth assumes the existence of a sunken Arctic continent which, due to the different position of the Earth's axis, originally had a warm climate throughout the year, but which gradually froze over as a result of its gradual shift, forcing the North Aryans to emigrate. The first stage of this migration southwards was the Atlantic island world to the southeast, known as Atlantis. This land has long been known to us from Plato's account, which, admittedly, has not yet been properly interpreted. When the tension between the continents caused by continental drift became too great, the earth's crust sank, cracked, and the islands sank into the floods. Only a few pillars remained in Greenland, Iceland, Spitsbergen and Franz Josef Land.

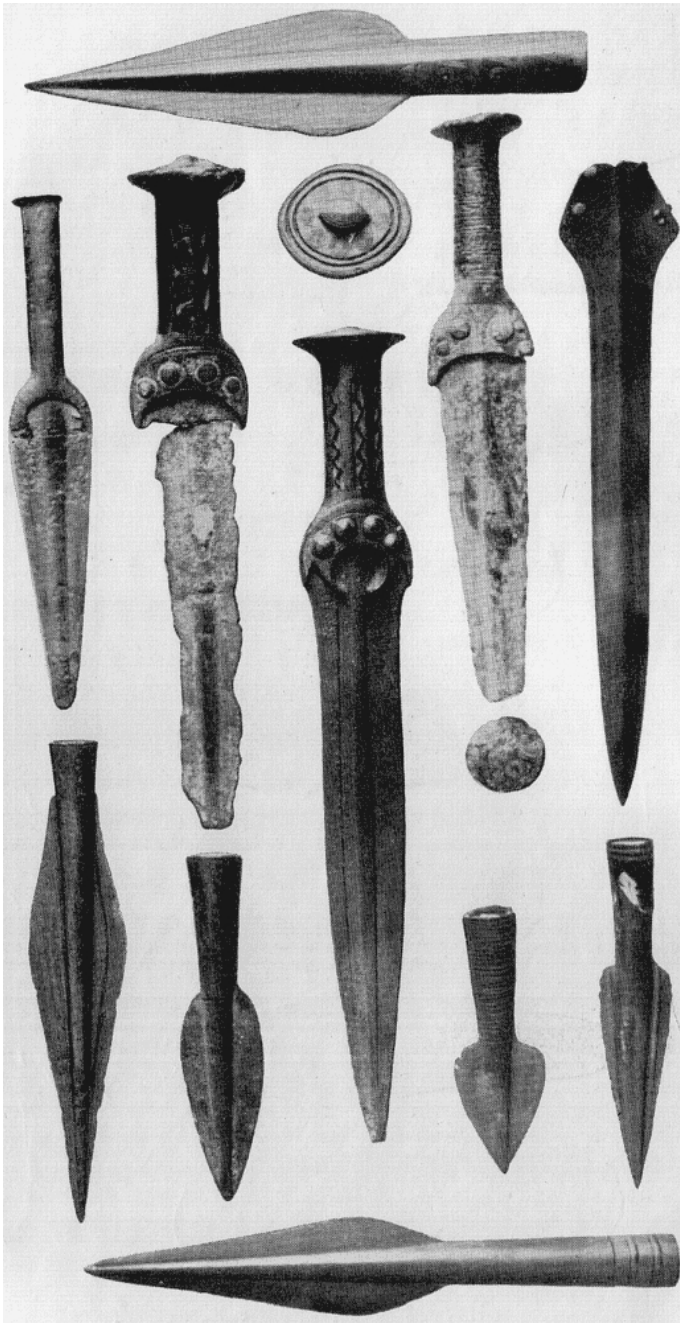
According to Herman Wirth, this Arctic continent, which disappeared beneath the waves, was the original homeland of the Germanic peoples and their related tribes. But even before the continent sank beneath the waves along with the Atlantean islands to the south – according to Plato, this occurred around 9000 BC, before our era – the first migrations of the North Aryans to the Germanic border areas may have taken place, which intensified as the glaciation of the Arctic continent progressed and the coming catastrophe in Atlantis

catastrophe in the form of earthquakes and seaquakes (Sintbrand and Sintflut). Only this assumption provides a plausible explanation for the fact that the legends and fairy tales of the great flood or the great world conflagration among the northern European peoples and the North American Indians have remained exactly the same for many thousands of years. The enduring tradition of our folk customs confirms Tacitus's account of the Germanic peoples' belief in the earth's growth.

It would be urgently necessary to address the whole question of the "Age of the Germanic peoples" to create a uniform expression, as there is constant disagreement on this issue. If Schuchhardt is correct in his repeatedly mentioned opinion, then we can readily refer to the builders of the large stone tombs as "Germanic peoples" without prejudging a more precise prehistoric classification. If we combine the results of racial research with those of prehistoric research, the following picture emerges – if we look at things in a lively way: the North Sea and Baltic Sea regions, filled with this ancient Nordic, ancient Indo-European humanity, flow over in ever-repeating periods; at certain intervals, it repeatedly sends new waves of Nordic people to other areas and cultures. The Indo-Iranians were among the first, the Italics and the Celts among the last of these periodically recurring waves; the Celts were the penultimate, the Germanic migrating tribes the last to leave their North Sea and Baltic Sea homeland. Only in this way can we correctly interpret the much-discussed relationship between the Celts and the Germanic peoples: the Celts are the emigrants, constantly on the move, while the "Germanic peoples" are simply the remnants of the great family of peoples who remained in their original homeland. Hence the important role that the North German, Lower Saxon bloc has repeatedly played in the history of the "emigrated" tribes – a land that the Anglo-Saxons aptly called "Old Saxons". It is the same relationship as that between



Battle axes and ceremonial axes from the Neolithic period, Corded Ware culture. Found in north-western Germany and Thuringia. Hatchet from the Late Bronze Age with original handle.
From the collection of the "Väterkunde Museum" in Bremen



Germanic daggers and spearheads from the earliest Bronze Age (Nordic).
Found in north-western Germany and Sweden.
From the collection of the "Väterkunde Museum" in Bremen

will inevitably develop between the "English" who remained in their homeland and the emigrated "Americans". The question of whether we can already refer to the inhabitants of Lower Saxony during the Stone and Bronze Ages as "Germans" is therefore actually a futile dispute over words; we could just as easily ask the equally futile question of whether we can "already" refer to the Brukteri and Angrivari at the time of Tacitus as Münsterlanders or Engern. In my opinion, there is no doubt whatsoever about the permanence (continuity) of all these peoples.

For the peripheral areas of the northern and western European coasts, including the Weser-Ems region and the former offshore Forsete region (Dogger Bank), which is now washed by the sea, direct migration from the Arctic continent cannot be ruled out given the proximity of the sunken continents. In any case, wherever there are remnants of megalithic culture – and this includes the enormous stone settings in the Oldenburg region – such assumptions can be made based on the grave goods that have been found.

What Tacitus says about the Germanic tribes in the second chapter of his *Germania* towards the end of the 1st century AD still applies in part today, especially to the land between the Weser and Ems rivers. It says:

"The Germanic people seem to me to be indigenous and completely untouched by contact with or assimilation of foreign tribes."

In chapter 4, Tacitus continues:

"I myself agree with those who consider the tribes of *Germania*, pure and untouched by any mixture of foreigners, to be a distinct, unadulterated people unlike any other. Therefore, despite their large numbers, they are all of the same type: light blue, defiant eyes, reddish-blond hair, powerful bodies, suited only for action and impetuous urges."

All accessible sources indicate that the peoples between the Weser and Ems rivers, in what is now Oldenburg, remained largely pure-bred for thousands of years, from the Stone Age to the Middle Ages and beyond, especially in the flat countryside.

According to Tacitus, the indigenous people of the Weser-Ems region were the Ingävoans. Wirth calls them the "Thuata", a name that has been preserved in Irish tradition and which, in his opinion, is the origin of the Germanic *thiod* ("people") and thus the name "German".

"Germans". On their migrations from the Arctic continent via Ireland and Scotland, these Thuata stopped on the then still continental territory of Dogger Bank and settled on the Forseteland off the coast of what are now the East and West Frisian Islands. Around 1500 BC, this area also seems to have disappeared beneath the waves due to gradual subsidence and the occurrence of storm surges and spring tides. The Stone Age people between the Weser and Ems rivers, including those on the high Geest, the builders of the megalithic tombs, must have belonged to this Thuata people, the Ingävoans, and among them to the Chauci tribe, who have been cultivating their fields here since prehistoric times, as their descendants still do today. As early as the Stone Age, around 4000 to 2000 BC, this people reached the peak of their indigenous culture, as is clearly demonstrated by the stone structures of the megalithic tombs and "Hünenbetten" (giant's beds) as well as the elegantly shaped utensils, tools and stone weapons that have come down to us.

Wherever the Nordic peoples settled, they formed the leading and ruling class and created a flourishing culture. However, through intermingling with the peoples they encountered in their new homelands, who were usually much more numerous, the pure race was lost over the course of centuries. The people, who had developed a high culture under the leadership of the Nordic upper class, disintegrated within a few centuries due to the corrosive mixing of blood, so that the cultural heyday in

these countries, in Greece as in Italy, lasted barely 1000 years.

However, the independence of Germanic culture and its development in relation to other cultures must be emphasised again and again. Here, one can wholeheartedly agree with Gustav Freytag's view in his "Pictures from Germany's Past":

The Germanic peoples are the first and, in many respects, the only master race on earth that was called to rule without first having been in close contact with the culture of foreign peoples for a thousand years. Before they displaced the Phoenician traders, the Hellenes had appropriated everything that had made the Phoenicians strong. The Romans had become half-Hellenes and discovered that they were close relatives of the Athenians and Asia Minor before they assumed rule over Greece and Asia. The Germanic tribes, however, when they began their armed colonisation expeditions against the great civilised state of the Mediterranean, were a foreign people and, as the Romans said, similar only to themselves. They too had not been entirely cut off from contact with the south, but in all essential respects their national life stood outside the culture of the Mediterranean."

This applies in particular to the peoples of the Ingävoni on the North Sea coast, especially the Chauci, as Tacitus expressly emphasises in his Germania.

It is sometimes assumed that some of the Aryan tribes, referred to as Indo-Europeans after their two poles, later returned to their original homeland, their point of departure, the North Sea region. In my opinion, there is no compelling reason for this assumption. If we accept it, we must assume with certainty that the Indo-Europeans encountered Stone Age people of their own race here who had never left their homeland. The builders of the megalithic tombs of north-western Germany, who are considered to be the original inhabitants

, did not participate in the migration of the Indo-Germans at all. This assumption is also confirmed by the finds that have been made in this area. Tools, weapons, jewellery and ceramic products can be traced almost seamlessly from the Neolithic period through the Bronze Age to the Iron Age, allowing us to draw conclusions about the long-standing roots of an uninterrupted succession of generations.

Even before the beginning of the third millennium BC, there must have been a lively community in the Geest region of the upper Huntetal valley, where the Ahlhorner Heide heathland extends.

Northwest Germany is particularly valuable for the prehistory of the Germanic peoples as a whole. According to the research findings of leading modern prehistorians, this region is the cradle of a distinct, advanced culture, as evidenced by the megalithic tombs found here. However, in terms of the number and size of megalithic tombs and other stone structures, southern Oldenburg can rightly be described as the classic land of Stone Age culture, the so-called megalithic tombs.

Herman Wirth says in his book "Was heißt Deutsch" (What does German mean?):

"From that time of a 'German' or 'ethnic' community in Northern Europe, which was based around the North Sea as its immediate homeland, a sublime monument to its intellectual culture still stands today. These are the large stone tombs, the so-called megalithic tombs, dolmens and burial mounds. At that time, this North Sea cultural circle encompassed Northern and Western Europe, i.e. Atlantic Europe, as a cultic, i.e. religious, ideological unity, with the other local subordinate cultural characteristics of the various countries. This Neolithic megalithic tomb culture, the forms of these stone burial chambers, and their cult symbolism form the basis of the later high religions there."

There is no doubt today that the forefathers of the "Germans" were the bearers of this magnificent monumental stone tomb culture.

. It also seems certain that these earliest Germanic builders had a keen sense of architecture and that the structures were erected by a people characterised by spiritual thinking and action and moral greatness.

The widespread distribution of these graves, which are generally divided into dolmens without passageways and passage graves, is particularly indicative of ancient tradition and cultural influence; all of these types are found in widespread distribution from the North Sea to Crete. The passage graves in particular show a close correspondence from England to Mycenae, although the roots of these forms undoubtedly lie in the north. Ancient seafaring must have been the basis for this cultural expansion, which is also evident in the grave vessels, their decorative art and their symbols. It was the amber peoples who carried this culture across vast lands and seas. The megalithic tombs, says O. Menghin in his *World History of the Stone Age*, are linked not only by technical and architectural peculiarities, but also by certain other details that prove that the form of the tomb and the beliefs associated with it were carried by a spiritual movement that transcended all cultural boundaries. The strength and form of their expansion can only be countered by the later world religions. In northern Germany, too, the ancient dolmen is still associated with ancient folk traditions.

These first and only witnesses of Stone Age man speak a powerful language to those who know how to listen. The stone structures prove, first of all, that their builders were not a poor and primitive people. On the contrary, their bold ideas and high level of technical skill suggest a spiritually advanced people. Furthermore, and this is important and significant, they must have been settled here for a long time, because only a long period of continuous culture justifies and explains such

magnificent structures. A nomadic people would never have undertaken and completed such a task.

What existed before the stone structures were built is unknown. However, it can be assumed that an ancient tribe had previously inhabited the same land. This is because it must have taken a long time to develop the level of culture required to construct these buildings. It is also unlikely that an immigrant people would have immediately begun constructing such enormous burial mounds after seizing foreign land. It can only have been an indigenous tribe that, based on ancient traditions and progressing steadily from its own original beginnings, created these mighty works.

This people also did not participate in the so-called migration of peoples later on. At the time of the Saxon Wars and their leader Widukind, the unadulterated descendants of Stone Age people still lived here, who, like the Frisians, have preserved their Nordic race more purely than any other tribe in Germany. Only the Scandinavians or Northmen, as tribes of the same Aryan race, were able to remain just as pure due to the geographical location of their settlements. The people of England today are also largely of Aryan-Germanic descent.

There was therefore a time when the ancestors of these Germanic tribes were not separated by any sharp boundaries in the modern sense, as they all spoke a uniform language and, although divided into numerous small peoples, together formed one people. This people as a whole can be described as the "Germans".

The Frisians split into West and East Frisians, and the name North Frisia came about later. These tribes have always been known for their love of freedom and sense of justice, and they stuck to their old homeland like no other Germanic tribe. There's no denying that the Germanic tribes later

repeatedly accepted foreign peoples among them. However, the extent of mixing is not the same everywhere in the Germanic territory. This is partly the basis for the tribal and linguistic differences within the nation as a whole.

Just as the various peoples slowly developed from the Indo-European proto-people through branching off and mixing, so too did the various languages gradually develop from the Indo-European proto-language, and within a language, different linguistic characteristics, styles of speech, dialects or vernaculars emerged, such as High and Low German in the German language and the dialects in the individual regions.

The history of the Germanic peoples between the Weser and Ems rivers must therefore begin for us at the time when the large stone tombs were built!

According to the prevailing opinion today, the age of these Stone Age structures is estimated to be between 4500 and 2000 BC. This is the period in which artistically polished stone axes were in use, which also required a high level of technical skill, taste and purposefulness. Perhaps 1000 years earlier, around 5000 BC, hammered stone axes appeared, which already corresponded in shape to the later polished axes.

In contrast, history books often state that "the ancient Germanic peoples led a nomadic lifestyle". One textbook even states: "They moved around in clans, led by the elders of the family, as we can still observe today among the gypsies, settling in suitable places, harvesting what nature offered them, and moving from place to place." In any case, this is as little true for the Ingavones as it is for the other Germanic peoples.

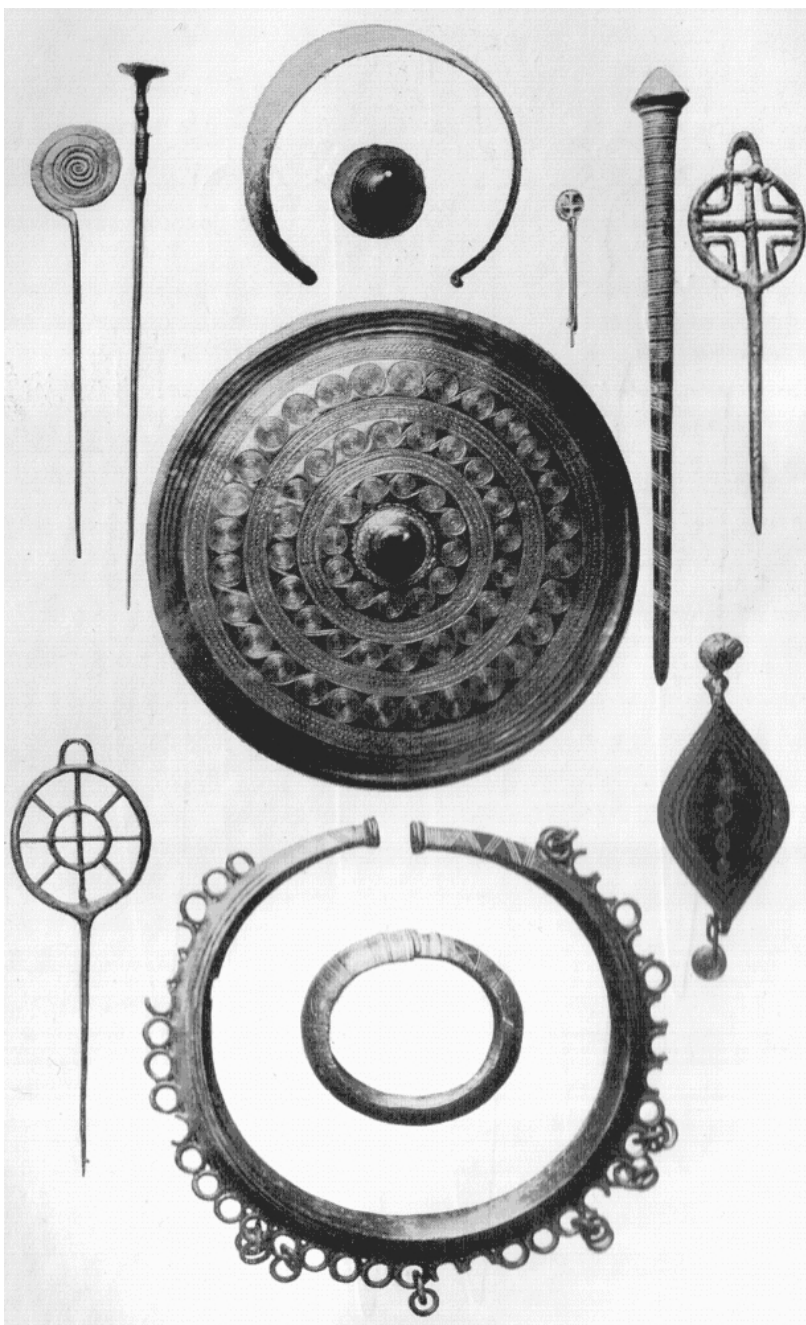
The physical constitution of the Stone Age population of Europe, as far as can be discerned from grave finds, shows no foreign traits compared to early historical times.

no foreign features prior to early historical times. The conditions of prehistoric times were also more favourable for the preservation of a people's purity. The type that prevails today in Germanic Northern Europe seems to have been originally the general Indo-European type. We encounter it everywhere where the Aryans were originally the ruling and culturally dominant upper class, such as e.g. among the Greeks at the time of their rise and heyday, even though in the later development of the people the Nordic character disappeared more and more through intermingling, which ultimately led to decline.

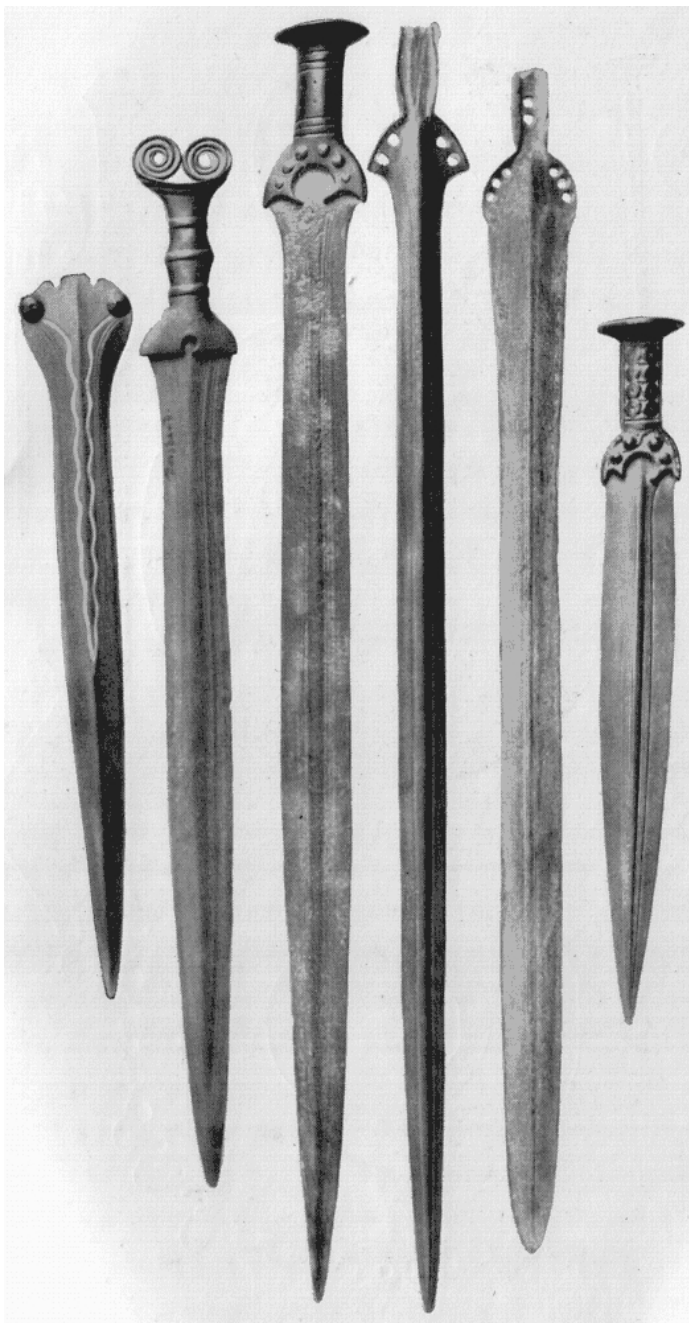
Grave finds from the Late Stone Age and Bronze Age have shown that this was a tall people with long skulls and blond hair. The number of finds already suggests a large population for this period, which could not have been destroyed by a new wave of immigration.

The systematically arranged settlements of the stone-building groups of the Ahlhorn and Glane Heath also suggest that our ancestors must have lived together in stable clans and tribal associations as early as the Neolithic period, i.e. around 4000 to 2000 BC. The large graves, each of which will have belonged to a clan, are often located in larger groups, making it easy to see that the clans were united in a larger community. As the buildings prove, the united clan associations were led by a chieftain, for in the middle of the stone building groups lies, as will be explained in more detail below, the elongated cult room with the tomb of the leader under the altar. Around the cult room, the graves of the large clans are grouped together in the cemetery, comparable to today's churchyard. The dwellings of the people, which have completely disappeared, must have been located in the immediate vicinity.

The fertile, lush Huntetal valley with its many small tributaries would have served as pasture and farmland, and the



Germanic bronze jewellery, Early Bronze Age (Nordic).
Found in north-western Germany and Denmark.
From the collection of the "Väterkunde Museum" in Bremen



Germanic long swords and short swords from the Early Bronze Age (Nordic). Found in north-western Germany and Sweden.
From the collection of the "Väterkunde Museum" in Bremen

Extensive forests provided abundant wood for building houses and fuel. The rivers were rich in fish, and the forests and fields offered game for a rich hunt for moose, bears, wolves and deer.

In the subsequent Bronze Age, the community expanded more and more. From Roman reports, we can clearly see how German farmers lived at that time. Some of the Low Germans did not live in closed villages, but in individual farmsteads, as we still see preserved today in the Oldenburg region. Here, the independence of the individual farm owner had to develop more quickly. He was more firmly rooted in the land he overlooked from his isolated farm. It was not in the village community that overcrowding was first felt, but in the family. The old families remained firmly rooted in their fathers' land as the core of the clans. The families joined together in clans, and these in turn joined together in larger mark and gauge cooperatives. The land was communal property. Everyone cultivated the field closest to their dwelling. They received as much as they needed for their family. Arable land was allocated according to the size of the clan that wanted to cultivate it. The wide open spaces of the land made such division easy. *E s c h* (Gothic atisk) was the ancient name, still preserved today in Oldenburg and Westphalia, for the common land used for farming by the In addition, "Kamp" was the enclosed field of an individual farmer, surrounded by hedgerows. Since fertilisation of the fields was hardly practised, the cultivated area changed from year to year, with large parts still lying fallow.

The desire to cultivate the land did not grow in line with its fertility and extent. Agricultural operations focused only on ensuring sufficient pasture for livestock in the river valleys and fields for growing grain. Cattle and sheep were kept as domestic animals. Horse breeding was particularly important, as horses were needed for farming and warfare

. The cultivation of fruit and root vegetables was added later.

The assumption that the Germanic tribes were not loyal to their homeland and lacked the love for the land that is characteristic of all farming peoples is unfounded. The Germanic tribesmen took pride in their weapons, lived in sturdy houses, slept on beds or benches, wore linen and woollen clothing in addition to furs, owned herds and fields, and engaged in hunting and fishing more for their own enjoyment than for their livelihood. A number of village communities formed the district, and the district members elected their district leader. His power was based on personal competence and on the fact that he was the chairman of the people's court. Often, the chieftain or leader of a large clan was also the duke or king of a larger confederation. The Germanic people held noble origins in high esteem. They were pious people, and they considered the old families, whose ancestors could be traced back to divine origins, to be the noble families of their people.

The community determined the laws governing legal matters. Nothing was as sacred to the Germanic peoples as the unshakeable existence of their laws and customs, which regulated and secured the daily life of the community. The elders of the clans deliberated in joint assemblies, and the people decided. At certain times, the men capable of bearing arms met for consultations at specific locations. The thing sites or places of judgement were still laid out in the tradition of the Feme under a protective giant oak, ash or lime tree. It was the community square, the village green. Before a lawsuit was brought, the judge commanded silence. His prestige was based on the weight of his counsel and the fairness of his judgement. If the motion was displeasing, it was rejected by the community with murmurs; if it was pleasing, the spears were struck together as a sign of approval. Noble, experienced men from among the people stood by their

leader as advisors. The penance, which had to be paid either to the prince, the community or the relatives, usually consisted of livestock.

It was also customary for the members of the community to voluntarily contribute crops or livestock to their leaders, each according to his means. These contributions were used to maintain the places of worship or were offerings at the annual festivals.

The king or duke was the supreme leader of the army, to which all men fit for military service belonged. After reaching the age of majority and passing an examination, young men were declared fit for military service by the people's assembly and received a shield and lance from their leader or father. This "sword ceremony" was the most honourable day in a young man's life.

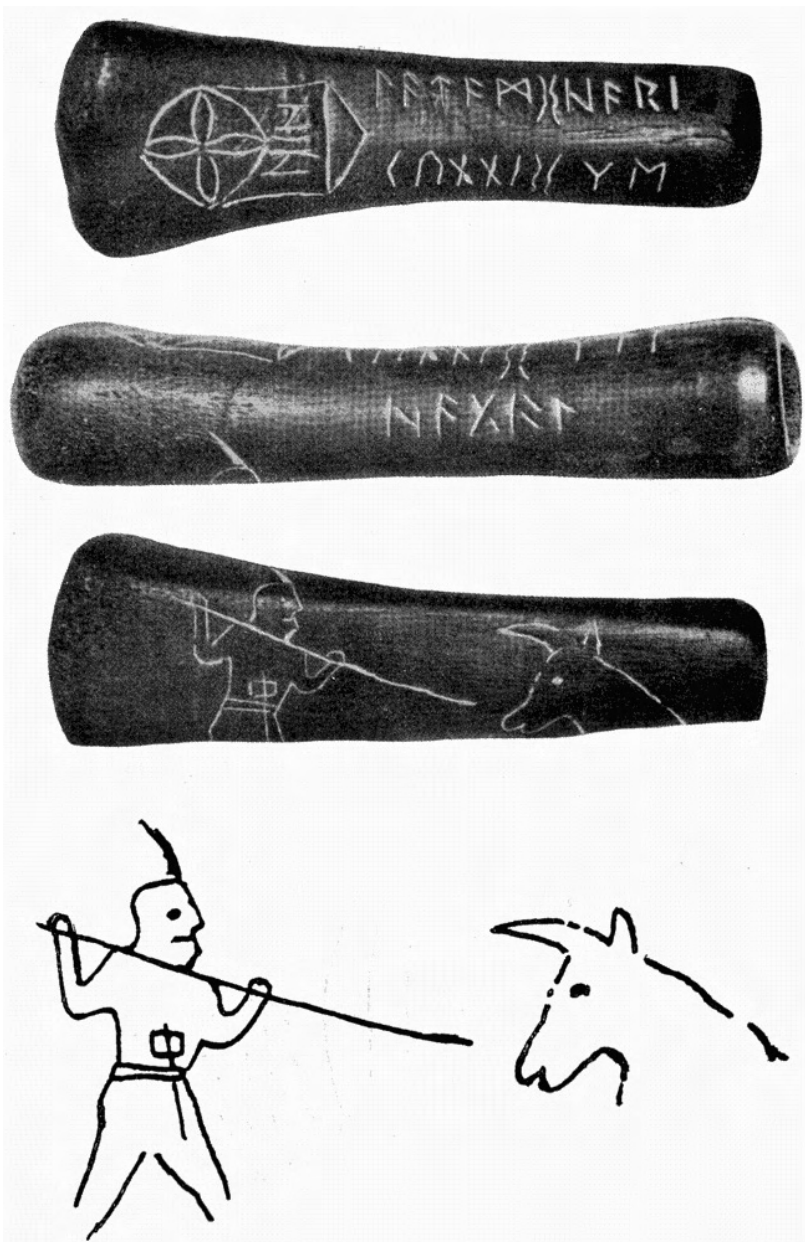
Several clans joined together to form a hundred-strong group. It comprised between one hundred and one hundred and twenty men fit for military service. This hundred-strong group formed a legal and military community. They lived in close proximity, held joint consultations and had their own court under a tribal leader. In war, they fought shoulder to shoulder under an elected leader. The hundreds joined together to form thousands, which again felt like a single unit and lived together in a district. A district was a military district for a thousand men under the leadership of a prince, who also presided over the district court. Several districts formed a community, in peacetime as an administrative, judicial and religious community, but in the event of war as an army community for the defence of home and land and property.

The warriors' main weapons were the spear, called a fram, and a short sword made of bronze, later iron. A large wooden shield covered with leather served as protection. At the head of the army was the leader, around whom the young warriors gathered. After the attack by the young men, the main force was deployed. Skilled cavalry was led here and there in battle as an offensive weapon to unsettle the enemy.

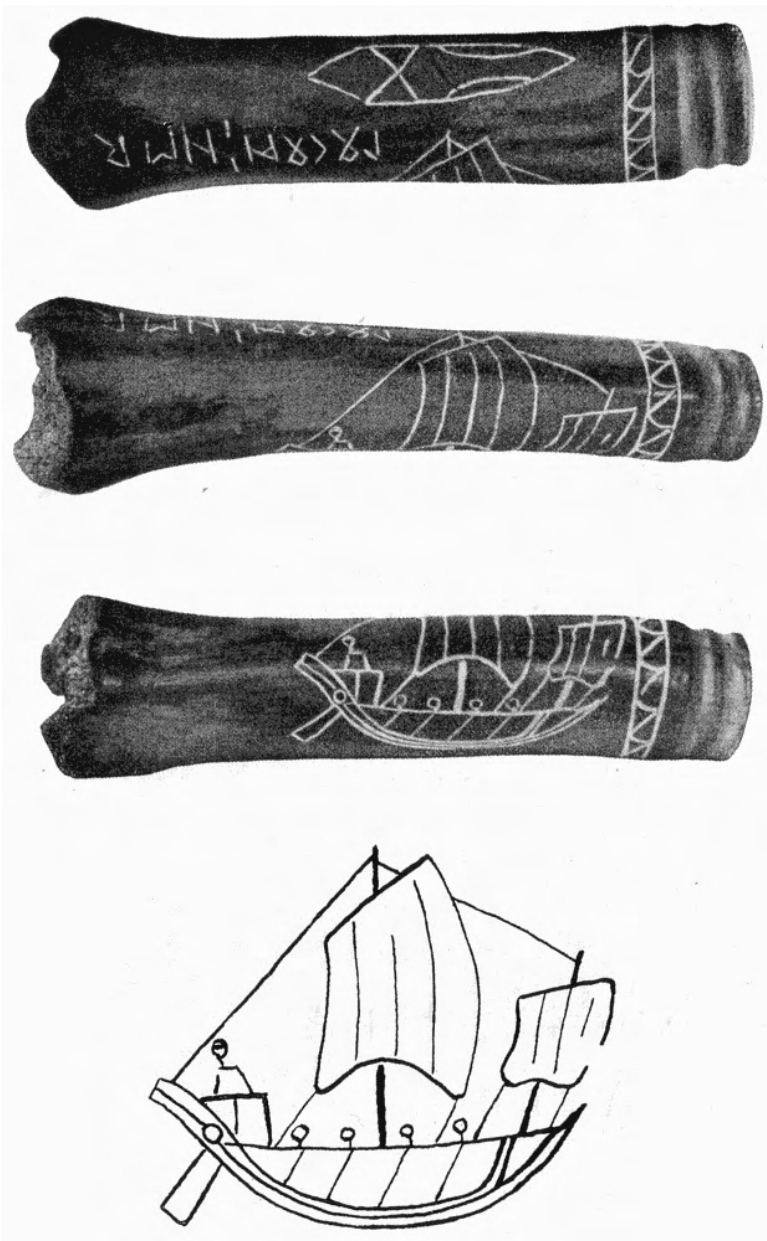
. The strength of the army lay in the foot soldiers, who were arranged in a wedge formation. Wounded soldiers were brought to safety during the battle and bandaged by women, sisters and mothers. Lamenting was considered cowardice, and anyone who retreated in battle was dishonoured and was not allowed to participate in assemblies or sacrifices.

The personal leadership of the army by the prince, who fought at the forefront in full view of all, spurred the warriors on to exert their utmost strength. They knew that what was at stake was their very existence, their families, their homeland. No mercenary army was capable of such bravery and could muster such resistance.

The people believed in a divine power, an invisible god who revealed himself in the light of the sun throughout the course of the year. Only later did a number of other gods appear alongside the light- and life-giving All-Father. To his imagination, the destructive and constructive forces of nature appeared as higher powers and divine beings. The devastating storm surges, lightning and thunder, storms and fog, the destructive power of fire, water and frost: all these forces of nature became terrible monsters to him, impetuous giants that threatened his life and possessions. How grateful and reverent he was, on the other hand, for the blessings that the sun and earth bestowed upon him. How joyfully it rejoiced at the awakening of nature, at the arrival of spring! How painfully its heart contracted at the dying of the plant world in winter. How it listened again and again to this growth and becoming, this withering and passing away, this "die and become" as a new miracle! These peaceful, blessing powers, the conquerors of evil beings, elevated it to its "gods," to whom it made sacrifices at sacred sites. However, it was more the will of the deity than that of the individual gods whose will was always recognised. Thus, worship was part of daily life. Numerous altars under the sacred trees surrounded the dwellings. The clan association



Bone dagger handle with runic inscriptions and pictorial representation.
 Probably 400 to 600 AD. Excavated from the lower Weser River in
 1927/28. Described by H. v. Buttell-Reepen in "Funde von Runen mit
 bildlichen Darstellungen" (Finds of Runes with Pictorial
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Bone dagger handle with runic inscriptions and pictorial representation.
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Described by H. v. Buttell-Reepen "Finds of runes with pictorial
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performed his communal rituals in sacred groves, which in later times were consecrated to various gods. Here, the festivals took place mainly in the warmer season, in summer. For the winter festivals, they had built large halls on stone foundation walls with a huge, thatched roof that reached almost to the ground, as will be proven and explained later. The leader's deep grave lay in this sacred hall. The capstones of his tomb also formed the altar for the cult rituals. After the sacrificial feasts, people remained gathered here for extended banquets.

We can already see the unusual state-forming power that emanated from the Lower Saxon tribe in historical times taking shape in that period. We can already see it in the organisation of the people into families, clans, hundreds and thousands, into market and district cooperatives and cult associations, but especially in their solidarity in the *Volksding*, which made all economic, legal and political decisions, forms of community that bound all free and able-bodied men, like the citizens of a state, to the welfare and woes of the whole through rights and duties.

This bond between clans and relatives was already evident in the smallest but most important cell of community life, the family.

The head and master of the family is the man (Old High German *fro* = master). His rights are unlimited. He rules over the fate and sometimes even the lives of his relatives. But here, unlike in Slavic countries and the Orient, the woman is not the slave of the man. On the contrary, she stands by his side as his mistress (*frouwa* = mistress); she is in charge of the entire household. As the bearer of future life, she is herself a sanctuary; in later Germanic customs, pregnant women are still granted the right to seek food from other people's gardens according to their cravings. As the bearer

bearer of future life, she is also the bearer of knowledge of the future – hence the "holy and prescient" qualities that, according to Tacitus, the Germanic peoples attributed to their women. In times of war, however, she is his most loyal companion in times of need and death. Woe betide anyone who offends her honour, pride and love!

Tacitus praises Germanic women highly. He says: "Their marital customs are strict and most praiseworthy in their entire way of life. Thus, the women live, protected by their chastity, uncorrupted by the temptations of spectacle or the attractions of feasting, and neither husband nor wife knows of secret correspondence. Good morals are more powerful there than good laws elsewhere. The wife is a companion in hardship and danger, destined to endure and risk with her husband in peace as in war. The husband brings his wife a wedding gift, not women's trinkets, but cattle, a bridled horse, a shield, a spear and a sword. The woman brings the man a piece of armour; this is considered the strongest bond between them, the secret consecration of their union. What they receive, they shall pass on untainted and honoured to their sons, so that their daughters-in-law may take it over and their grandchildren inherit it. The woman takes care of the household, the man goes hunting and fishing and provides for the family. The cultivation of the fields was left to subordinates or slaves, who were not considered slaves, but members of the family. They lived with their wives and children in a special house on the estate, but had no rights whatsoever. They had to deliver part of their crops and livestock to their master.

Male and female youth grew up together. The girls were equal to the boys, just as hardened and steeled. Blood ties were considered sacred and binding. Hospitality and hospitality also applied to strangers. To turn anyone away from the door, no matter who they were, was considered sacrilege

sacrilege; depending on their means, everyone offered the stranger a meal. No distinctions were made in the right of hospitality.

Ancestor worship and the cult of the dead were particularly important; people believed in life after death. This veneration of the dead was already common in the Stone Age and was practised throughout the ages. In the Neolithic period, enormous monuments were erected for the dead in the form of stone burial chambers, which have survived to this day. In north-western Germany, the dead were buried stretched out in burial chambers. The grave goods consisted of weapons and jewellery and clay jugs containing food and drink. In the Bronze Age, around 1800 BC, other customs arose in the cult of the dead. The dead were cremated and the bone remains were buried in urns above ground and covered with small mounds of earth. Each family had its own mound in the cemetery. Countless urn mounds from the long period of three to four thousand years ago have been preserved in many cases in unchanged form in the heath; in some places, there was still a folk tradition of buried kings with gold treasures at these sites, which excavations have proven to be surprisingly accurate and ancient. The chapter "Ancestor Worship" describes the manner of burial in more detail.

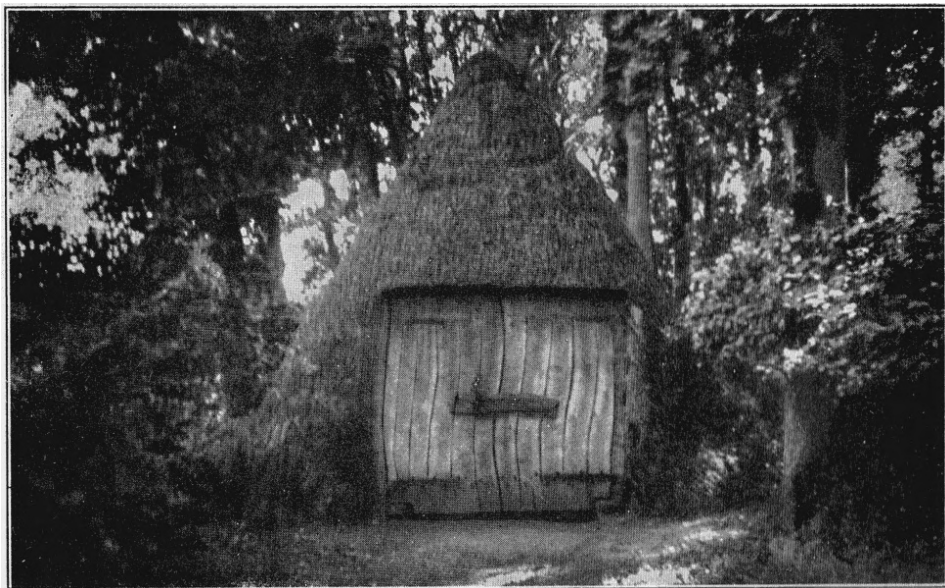
The discovery of metal and its processing possibilities brought about many changes in everyday life. Craftsmanship quickly developed into a high level of skill, so that even in the early Bronze Age, people were able to manufacture everyday objects and weapons from this new metal. This led to greater demands on people. Increasing prosperity and growing craftsmanship soon led to a remarkable indigenous culture. The bronze finds from this period—necklaces, bracelets, rings, vessels, beautifully shaped swords and axes—reveal a refined sense of form combined with astonishing technical skill and exquisite workmanship. Unfortunately, only objects made of more durable materials have survived.

. However, it can easily be assumed that, with such a high level of craftsmanship, these people produced all their everyday utensils, especially those made of wood, with the same taste. Their entire way of life must have corresponded to this high level of culture.

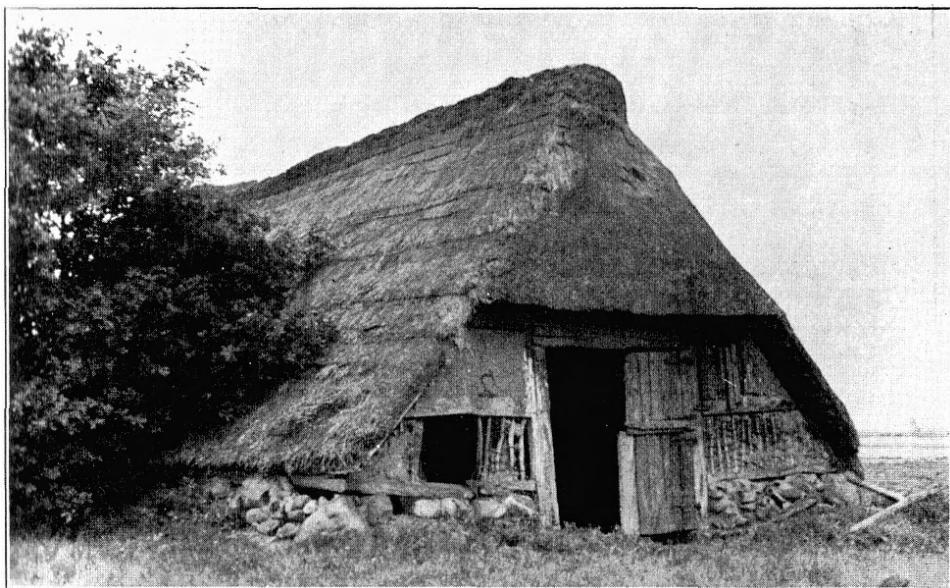
Before the beginning of the Bronze Age, pure copper was used, which was obtained in barter trade, e.g. with furs, but mainly with amber from the North Sea coast from southern countries. Soon, people learned to mix this copper with a small amount of tin imported from England, and hard bronze was created.

Recent research has shown that the artistically crafted bronze objects were not, as previously assumed, made in the south and imported from there. Neither in Greece nor in Italy have works from such an early period and in such forms ever been found as those that have been recovered in large numbers in north-western Europe. Artistic craftsmanship did not emerge among the Greek and Italian peoples until much later. The moulds found, which were made for casting bronze, bronze bars and scrap metal show that the objects were indeed manufactured in north-western Germany.

The art of pottery had developed to the highest technical level long before the art of metalworking. We can safely assume that everyday objects and decorative items made from more perishable materials, such as wood, were of equally high quality. The wood, which is easy to work with, must have been used to create particularly beautiful pieces, as the enduring tradition of our folk art, which is still alive today, shows. It was accessible to anyone who wanted to use it. The discovery of the "Oseberg ship" from the late Viking Age represents the most magnificent example of wood carving that has been preserved. Particularly the carvings of a



Roof placed on the ground



Roof on a boulder wall (Lower Saxony-Oldenburg)

The development of the house



Lower Saxony farmhouse, half-timbered with clay



Lower Saxony farmhouse, half-timbered with clinker (Oldenburg)

The development of the

Schlittenkopf are so perfectly beautiful in form and so masterfully crafted that they have hardly been surpassed even in later times.

When looking at a bronze neck ring or a beautifully shaped sword, one must assume that people's clothing must have been in keeping with their jewellery. As finds of this kind prove, Bronze Age clothing did not differ greatly from the beautiful costumes of more recent times. Since there have always been people of varying degrees of wealth, it goes without saying that the clothing of the people of this period would also have been very different in style and design.

Around 800 BC, perhaps even earlier, people in the North Sea countries and southern Germania became familiar with iron. As the raw material could be obtained from local soil, this metal inevitably became established. It was much easier to work with than bronze. Initially, iron was not very popular because it was not yet possible to produce it in a pure form. Furthermore, the process of hardening was not yet known, so weapons and tools were too soft. Objects were quickly attacked by rust and did not have the beautiful colour and shine of light yellow bronze. Despite the widespread use of iron as the main material, bronze remained a popular metal until the early Middle Ages. The rapid decomposition of iron has meant that so few well-preserved weapons, tools and implements from this period have survived. Such archaeological finds have almost all rusted away and are often damaged beyond recognition. These flourishing Nordic farming cultures have their own laws; they change within certain limits according to the new materials and newly available trade goods, but metal itself, as O. Menghin also states, does not give any significant impetus to the cultural development of Northern Europe. Metal cultures are, in essence and essentially,

continuations of Stone Age cultures, enriched only by technological advances, while the folklore itself remains unaffected.

From the finds of the Bronze and Iron Ages, we can also draw conclusions about how our ancestors lived. Those who adorned themselves with beautiful bronze rings and needles and owned a bronze sword did not live in a poor hut, but would have known how to make their homes beautiful. The dwellings were made of wood, as no other building material was available and this was abundant everywhere. Our ancestors certainly possessed good building techniques, which can also be seen in the independent, enduring tradition of German timber construction. In most cases, the original form of the house will have been lost because the stone material from the foundation walls was reused in renovations.

In north-western Germany, this original form was a roof placed on the ground. A low earth wall was erected in a rectangular shape to protect against rainwater and covered with turf slabs. On this base, rafters made of unworked round logs were placed as the framework for the roof, which reached down to the ground. Heather, straw, reeds and turf covered the roof and protected the interior well against cold and rain. The gable walls were constructed from upright posts, the compartments filled with spokes and coarse wattle, and the framework filled with clay and smoothed over. The house had no windows. One of the gable walls had a large opening as an entrance and a hole ("Uhlenloch") under the ridge, which provided the room with sparse, semi-dark light and also allowed the smoke from the hearth fire to escape. The house consisted of only one room, with the sleeping quarters arranged on low benches around the fire at the back wall. Wherever boulders were found, they were used as foundation walls. The larger meeting houses,

The royal halls and temples were built on such boulder walls. The larger stones were arranged in straight rows, with the gaps filled with smaller stones and clay. These foundation walls supported the roof. Sacred symbols were probably displayed at the top of the ridge of these royal halls; horse heads among the Saxons, swan decorations among the Frisians; deer antlers were also attached to them, as in the royal hall of Beowulf, which was named "Heorot" (deer) after them, or in the halls of the Saxon nobles, which are called "*hōha* hornseli", high horn halls, in the Heliand.

The elongated shape of the house has been preserved for thousands of years. The North German thatched farmhouse, which unmistakably refers to the buildings of the earliest times, can still be found today in the heathland in southern Oldenburg. The longitudinal outer walls, often only man-high, were built later, with the extension of the half-timbered structure made of wood and clay. It is only in recent times that bricks have replaced the half-timbering. I have examined many of the so-called sheep pens that lie isolated in the heath and have repeatedly found that these buildings, which required so much labour and material to construct, were certainly not originally intended as night quarters for animals. Sheep were not so valuable that such work would have been expended on their accommodation. Even transporting the boulders weighing many hundredweight for the foundation walls and erecting these heavy stones was unusually difficult and required a large workforce. Heavy oak foot beams lie on the foundation walls of these single-room houses, supporting the hardwood roof truss. The gable walls are constructed from strong, upright beams. The compartments are filled with spokes and wattlework made of twigs and smoothed with clay in the manner of plaster. In most cases, these original single-room houses are used as barns. Today, both gable walls have a large gate to allow livestock to enter.

However, it is often apparent that the door on the rear gable wall was added later, as the old entrance door usually has a strongly accentuated roof projection. This old entrance is carefully crafted from good oak wood, often as a four-part double door, i.e. with two upper and two lower wings. Even when the lower doors were closed, the upper wings could be opened to let in air and light, as is still the case in many farmhouses today. The rear doors clearly show that they were only installed in more recent times, after the single-room house was abandoned by its owner to be used as a stable. This is because these doors are in almost all cases roughly assembled from ordinary, cheap fir slats; this new entrance served as a more convenient exit for the carts stored underneath.

Mr Harms from Glane, an elderly farmer and owner of a particularly beautiful sheepfold, told me that he had known the fold to be used only for this purpose since childhood. When I pointed out the good construction and expressed my doubts that this building could have been built solely for the protection of sheep, he became thoughtful. He said that he had also wondered about this expense, because today a very simple room would be built for such a purpose. His ancestors, as he can prove, have lived on this site for five hundred years. Surely, centuries earlier, his ancestors had built the house known today as the "sheepfold" for themselves and only later moved into the larger stone house where he was born.

The well-preserved single-room house on the Ahlhorn Heath shows the original form of Germanic dwellings in north-western Germany in the earliest times. Hardly any of these old houses still have their original roofs. They have either been repaired repeatedly or replaced with new ones. In many cases, the remains of the foundation walls of such buildings can be found standing alone on the

grounds, overgrown with heath, the remains of the foundation walls of such buildings. The roof truss must have fallen victim to a fire long ago, and the smaller stones have been taken away to be used elsewhere. Only the large, heavy blocks were left behind. The floor plans of these remains are very significant. Almost all of them have the same dimensions and in many cases resemble the low, rectangular ramparts in the forest near Moorbek and Glane in the Huntetal valley, which belong to the settlements of the Bronze and Iron Ages. The similarity to the stone settings of the "Visbeker Braut" type, which are almost the same width but much longer, is also striking.

The large heathlands in southern Oldenburg, which contain many remains of dwellings, seem to have been untouched by the passage of centuries. The tough heathland has covered the dry, sterile sand with a seemingly imperishable, solid blanket, so that hardly any changes to the soil have occurred as a result of vegetation growth or sand drifts. This land has also long been located away from major transport routes and former military roads. Attentive observers can therefore go on discovery tours here. But even chance, which usually brings greater joy, can lead to old sites.

I visited Moorbek near Glane to examine the stone circles on the heath and the megalithic tombs near Wildeshausen and Ahlhorn. I stayed with Mr Stolle on his ancient estate. The large, stately farmhouse, surrounded by farm buildings and stables, is located on the old mill pond, which is fed by the Bullerbäke stream. This small lake became the starting point for further discoveries for me. Right next to the old manor house, in the beautiful garden by the lake, lies a

"Berg", a hill that has been used to create a bowling alley. This hill is covered with huge old oak trees. At first glance, it is clear that it is not just a natural feature, but that human hands must have helped to shape it

long before the old oak trees stood here. At the edge of the lake, about 20 metres away from the hill, separated by a low-lying area, lies a second hill, popularly known as

It is called "Stinkbarg". It is lower than the first one, but larger in size, about 80 metres long and about 50 metres wide. This rectangular space also shows signs of human intervention at its outer edges, transforming what nature had provided. In various places, an old wall-like enclosure of this elevated flat space is clearly visible. The shape and location of the two hills in relation to each other and to the lake is striking. None of this seemed coincidental or purposeless to me.

The lake, through which the Bullerbäke flows, has clear, fresh water with a constant inflow and outflow. There was no reason for the name "Stinkberg" (stinking hill); there would never have been a manure storage site here. I therefore consider it possible that the form "Stinkberg" is nothing more than a corrupted form of the no longer understood "Dingberg" and that this mountain originally meant the Dinghügel. Comparable examples would be "Denghoog" on Sylt, on the one hand, and the names "Tenckhof" and "Stenkhoff" reported to me from Westphalia, on the other, which very likely originally meant the same thing. In several places in Oldenburg, the names "Dingstede", "Dingshagen" and "Dingsfelde" occur in several places in Oldenburg.

Once the place of sacrifice or judgement had been found, the smaller but slightly higher mound would be aligned with the platform of the altar mound. The entire complex is typical of a hill sanctuary by a lake, as altars and thing sites were usually located close to each other. Tacitus also mentions altars that stood by lakes, rivers or springs, by "holy water".

Thus, all the features at this lake suggest that it was a place of worship and judgement in a prehistoric settlement. The leader of the clan, who was also

supervisor of the altar hill and judge, would have had his residence.

I made a new discovery in the immediate vicinity, on the grounds of the Moorbek estate. As we walked through the almost untouched forest, we suddenly found ourselves standing at the almost steeply sloping edge of the Huntetal valley in front of a low, sharply defined enclosure. It is about 1 metre high and 2 metres thick at the base and forms a rectangle with a diameter of about 30 metres. The entrance is clearly visible. This enclosure, which is now covered with moss, plants and shrubs, may have once been a fence. This enclosure would have been a protective wall for a dwelling against wild animals. The dwelling hut stood in the middle of the space. At the entrance to the outer protective wall, there is still a visible round elevation, which may have been the fireplace or the rubbish heap. A short distance away is another enclosure of the same type. The landowner Stolle knew nothing about this place. He considered it far too small to be used as an enclosure for livestock and also inconceivable in this location. Based on all the findings, there seems to be no doubt that this was the site of dwellings that belonged to the cult sites and the thingstead by the lake and to the extensive burial ground.

Tacitus already knew of isolated farms and scattered villages in his work *Germania*. He writes: "The Germanic tribes live separately and apart from each other, wherever a spring, a field or a grove particularly appeals to them." He goes on to say: "They build villages, but not in the Roman style with connected and adjoining buildings; instead, each leaves a free space around his house, perhaps to protect against the risk of fire, perhaps also out of inexperience in building." However, the otherwise sharp-eyed Roman overlooked the real reason for the free location of the houses. The Germanic farmer wanted to be independent!

To the west of the forest, separated by a new country road, lie the heath and a young pine forest. This heath contains a large number of burial mounds. Here lies the extensive burial ground that completed the settlement. The urns depicted in the chapter "Ancestor Worship" on page 109 come from this "Moorbek" burial ground.

This is a rare case of a prehistoric settlement with many details in almost complete form, located in close proximity to the Stone Age settlements of Glane and Steinloge with the megalithic tombs and the "Hünenbetten" (megalithic tombs).

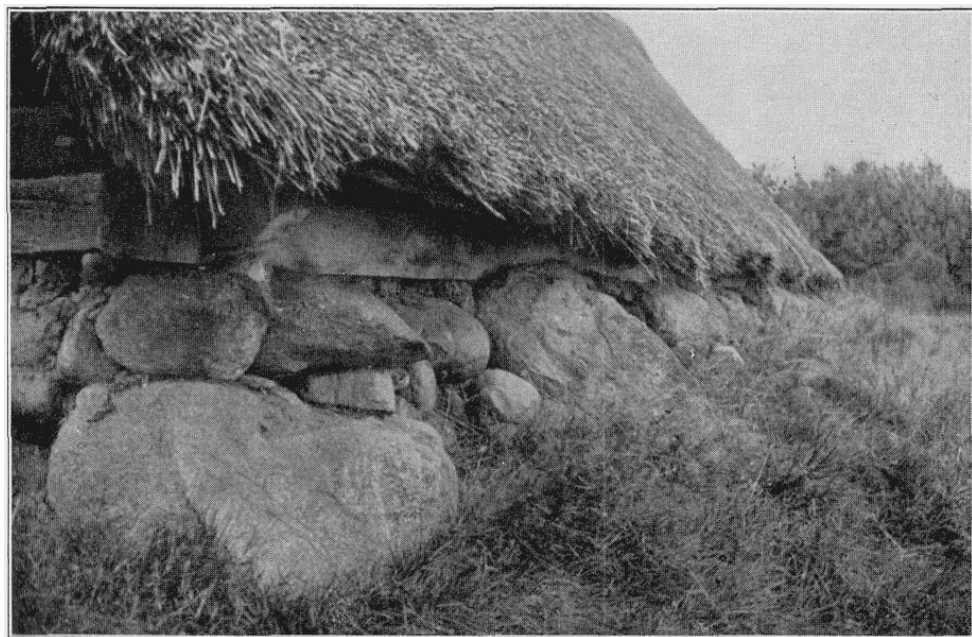
Thus, in the Old Germanic settlement near Moorbek, one thing led to another: where there are so many graves, a large number of people must naturally have lived there, for only some of the graves will have survived to the present day. Where a large number of people lived, there must have been a community, and where there was such a community, it had a head, a leader. It had its altar, its thingstead and its sacred grove. Based on this assumption, I tried to discover remains or traces of dwellings near the Moorbek burial ground, and my assumption was surprisingly confirmed. I found the dwellings on the high banks of the Hunte, the altar mound by the sacred water, the thing site and, in the urn mounds, the settlement's cemetery. Since there must have been similar settlements in this area, especially at the Hespenbusch, Aunuchle and Pestrup burial grounds and other places, it should also be possible to identify thing sites and cult sites here.

Previously overlooked, but of great historical value, is the so-called "rose garden" of the Pestruper Heath near Wildeshausen. Roses, which one might expect to find here based on the name, probably never existed so far away in the heath. The name is thought to refer to an original horse garden...



Single-room house Ahlhorner Heath

This area of large stone structures and urn mounds is a rich source of prehistoric tools, weapons and ceramics from the Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages.



Single-room house Ahlhorner Heath

Top: corner of the gable. Bottom: long side of the base wall made of boulders with stone struts in front to prevent the foot beam of the roof from slipping

; Ludwig Uhland already recognised the famous Wormser Rosengarten as a "horse garden", an enclosure for combat on horseback, as described in the famous poem about the Wormser Rosengarten. Here, too, it is not exclusively a horse enclosure, as there is no surrounding wall or other features that would justify the name. It is more likely that a horse enclosure located in the immediate vicinity by the river gave this place its name. There is hardly another site in Germany that is as well preserved. A track several metres wide surrounds the large, oval, levelled area measuring 140 metres by 100 metres. Combat games would have been performed in the central square during cult festivals. Spear throwing, wrestling, fencing and stone throwing, as well as the cultic weapon dances of young men between erected swords and spears mentioned by Tacitus, must have taken place at this site. In times of peace, the hundreds of neighbouring districts would have held their competitions here.

Tacitus reports in chapter 24 of Germania:

"There is only one kind of spectacle, and it is the same at every festival: naked young men, who do it for pleasure, swing themselves into a dance between swords and threatening spears. Practice has made them agile, agility graceful; but they seek neither gain nor reward; the prize for their daring game is the joy of the spectators."

The outer track surrounding the battlefield was used for races and horse races. All around, a naturally occurring, amphitheatre-like embankment provided space for thousands of people. The area was laid out in such a way that at midday, the spectators had the sun at their backs on the rising oval side, comparable to the "main grandstand".

This combat playground is adjacent to the largest prehistoric cemetery in north-western Germany, the "Pestruper Gräberfeld". Countless burial mounds stretch as far as the eye can see across the heath. It is the burial ground of the same people who celebrated cult festivals in honour of the deity and the dead on the nearby battle playground. The size of this significant field alone does not reveal how numerous this tribe must have been; the surrounding area also contains smaller scattered cemeteries in the extensive heath and forest. The dwellings, fields and pastures of this people must have been located in the immediate vicinity. Even though their traces have disappeared, they can still be recognised in the terrain. It is extremely significant that such clan associations with their dwellings, cult sites and burial grounds can still be found today in the Weser-Ems region.

At the end of this chapter, we should not fail to mention the signal points, which were important to our ancestors in many ways. These were small hills, mostly natural elevations, but many of which had to be prepared by human hands for their intended purposes. In ancient times, they probably supported wooden scaffolding, the platform of which was covered with earth. In times of war, the pyres erected on them sent out the glow of fire as light signals. In times of peace, bonfires burned here in honour of the deity. At Easter, the spring fires blazed, and at the solstice, the flames celebrated the high sun of summer. Even today, the Easter fire is still burned on the Osterberg between Moorbek and Großenkneten and in many other places. As in the past, spring fires still shine from one hill to another throughout the whole country in many areas of north-western Germany. The Osterberg mentioned here borders directly on the Hespenbusch burial ground and certainly had a close cultural relationship with it. I assume that this hill also

in ancient times carried an altar and was consecrated as a hill sanctuary to a deity; the urn cemetery is located in the immediate vicinity of this hill. Cult ceremonies for cremations would also have taken place on this elevation before the bone remains were buried in the urn mounds. The well-preserved burial grounds of Moorbek and Hespenbusch, which are barely 3 km apart, must have belonged to two separate clans, as a strip of marshy moorland separates the two burial grounds and the settlements. In addition to their burial grounds, each community clan certainly had a special altar mound, one at the hill sanctuary by the lake in Moorbek, the other at Osterberg near the burial ground.

In many cases, the names already indicate the special significance of such hills, as in southern Oldenburg: Wachtberg, Hohelied, Hosüne, Kiekup, Osterberg, Hilligenberg, Hohelucht, Elmeloh, and in northern Oldenburg: Elmendorf, Leuchtenburg, Hohelucht. The list could be extended to include many other places.

These hills were also landmarks for our ancestors. They marked the "sacred lines" named by Teudt in his book "Germanische Heiligtümer" (Germanic Sanctuaries).

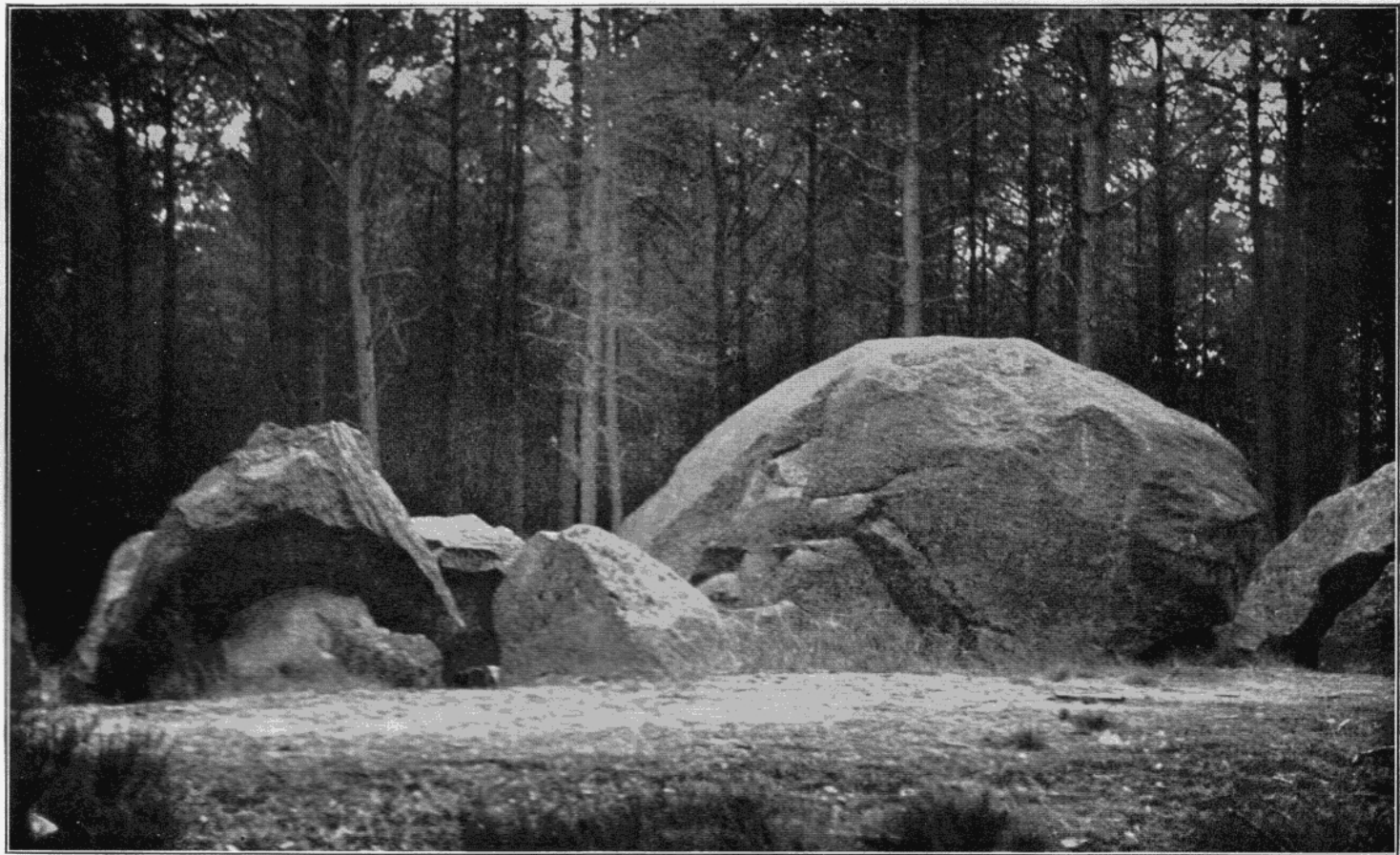
Teudt asserts that "in large parts of Germania, the custom of orienting sacred buildings and other public sites to the north and east based on astronomical observations was practised in relation to each other". Connecting these cult sites results in a system of sacred lines. He explains and justifies this orientation of the cult sites by saying that the flames, which were visible from afar on days of sacrifice and celebration, naturally presented themselves to the leaders of the people as a useful means of communicating with those living far away. Thus, an effective signalling system would soon have developed. The straight lines also indicated the shortest routes to the country's borders.

Inspired by Teudt, Dr Herbert Röhrig investigated the locations in the North Sea coastal region and reports surprising findings in his book *Heilige Linien durch Ostfriesland* (Sacred Lines through East Frisia). Röhrig writes that during the Megalithic period, the east-west direction was almost without exception, but by the end of the Megalithic period, the almost always prevailing east-west direction had changed, so that in the early Bronze Age, the southeast-northwest direction became predominant, and finally the south-north direction. This corresponds to the change in the north direction that occurred over time; it remains to be seen whether a change in religious beliefs played a role in this. According to the theory put forward by Röhrig, the change from an east-west to a south-north orientation was caused by the immigration of northern peoples, which, according to archaeological evidence, must have taken place between 2000 and 1800 BC. All the typical burial mounds of these northern immigrants are oriented along the north-south line.

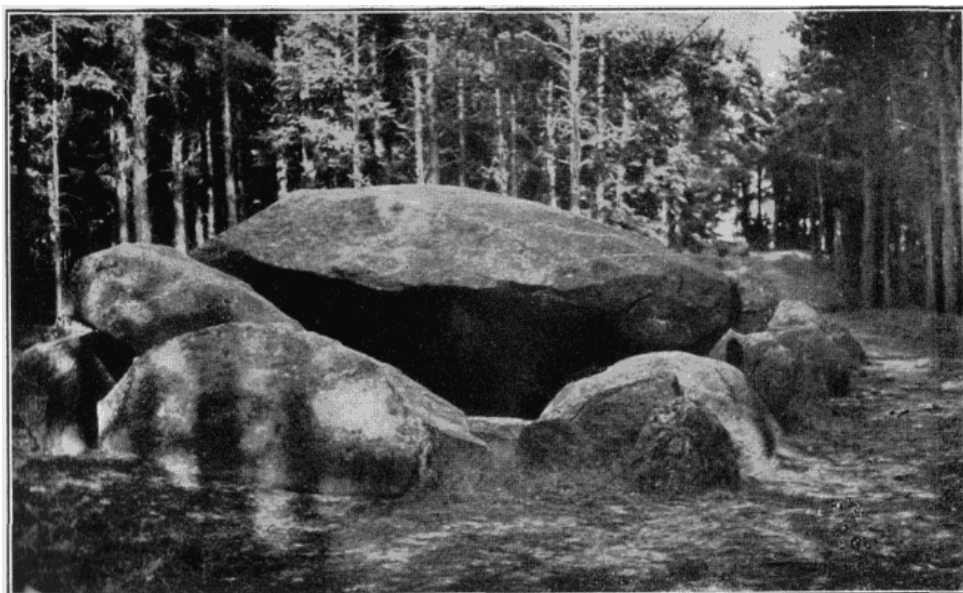
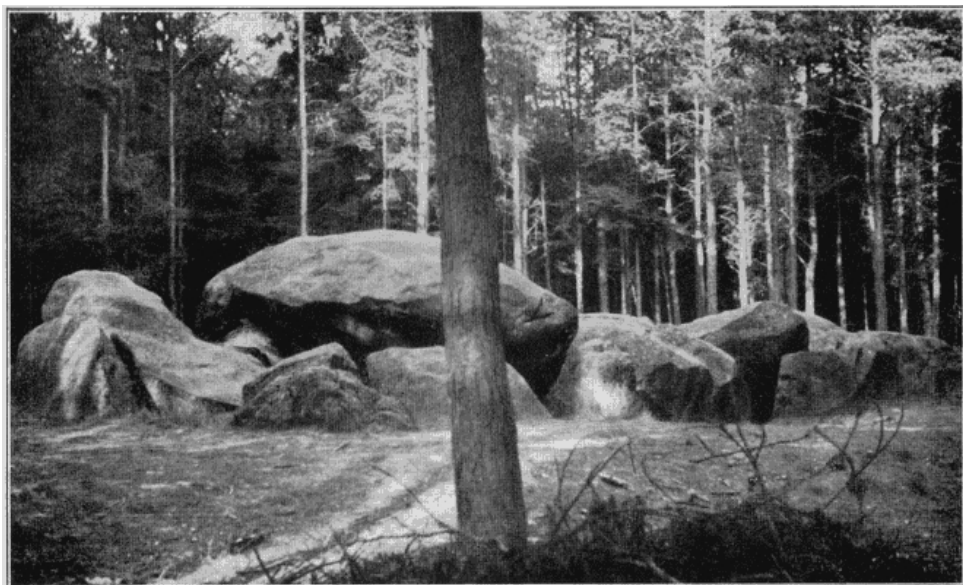
The existence of these astronomical structures presupposes a high level of knowledge on the part of their builders. Our ancestors used astronomy to organise their calendar and applied their observations to agriculture and navigation. In the East Frisian national shrine "Upstalsboom" near Aurich, the centre of a line system has been identified. This place, where a "Irminsul" once stood, was used as a meeting place until well into the Middle Ages.

According to Röhrig, there are many such locations in East Frisia. These include the Pythenberg near Leer, the Rabbesberg near Dunum and the Utparp hill. Also striking in this context are ancient roads that certainly belong to the system of sacred lines, but whose designation cannot be explained with certainty.

The method that Teudt uses in the area he has thoroughly researched, the Lipperland, can also be applied to north-western Germany, especially Oldenburg and East Frisia.



Megalithic tomb "Ahlhorner Heide" Kellersteine group



Megalithic tomb "Ahlhorner Heide" Kellersteine group

land. The results are so astonishing that Teudt's views become even more credible thanks to the similar findings. In the Lar and Leri Gau region, Teudt lists the following sacred lines: Wachtberg – Dötlingen Church – Court – Aschenstedt – Wunderberg (ring walls) Seelte – Barrien. Other related locations are: Godenstedt Church, Osterhorn, Hünenburg (ring forts) Horst, Klotzeburg. These names alone suggest, for the most part, ancient cultic significance. Such sacred lines can also be found in Ammerland.

Finally, a word about bridge building, which often goes hand in hand with road construction and is further proof of the Germanic peoples' skill in woodworking.

Road and bridge construction is usually attributed to the Romans, and the Germanic tribes are denied both the need for such structures and the ability to build them. This is particularly true of the bridges over the moors, the so-called plank roads, which consist of tree trunks strung together and have been found and uncovered at various locations in the Oldenburg Moor. These simple log dams differ from the bog bridges in the deeper parts of the peat in that they are more artistically constructed. Plank roads have also been found in countries and areas where the Romans never set foot. It is therefore very likely that the Romans learned the art of building such bridges from the Germans and then developed it further.

In addition to these remnants of a wooden culture, which are unfortunately sparse due to their transience, there is still masonry in some places from the early days of Germanic culture, which owes its creation to the skill, diligence and unique building methods of our ancestors, but which is usually attributed to the work of foreigners, either the Franks or the Romans, due to thoughtlessness and ignorance.

The remains of the stone buildings indicate excellent technical workmanship in the large erratic granite blocks. Particular mention should be made here of the burial chambers built into the ground, whose side walls are smoothly split. The split surfaces reveal that the separation must have been made suddenly, with a single blow. There are no drill holes for wooden wedges. The large blocks could only be split if they had been wedged into the longitudinal stratification of the rock. For this purpose, a series of wedge gaps were worked out with a hard hammer in accordance with the stratification, into which well-dried willow wedges were then driven, firmly grafted and doused with water. The swelling of the willow wood caused the stone to split.

Perhaps one might also consider splitting the stone with fire: a groove was chiselled into the stone to be split, heated by a fire, and then water was suddenly poured into the groove. The sudden, localised cooling then caused the stone to split apart.

It would be worthwhile to investigate the splitting technique used here in more detail, because the smooth, unworked split surface visible on the edge stones of the deep grave is significant, as knowledge of this process would allow further conclusions of great importance to be drawn.

The little that has been gathered in this chapter about a distinct, indigenous culture of our early Germanic period is sufficient to dispel the old misconception, perpetuated from generation to generation and from history book to history book, that our ancestors were barbarians in the sense of "lowly African Negro tribes". Archaeological finds provide increasingly clear and explicit evidence of the high level and uniqueness of Germanic culture and the depth of its religious and moral worldview and outlook on life at the time when the Greeks and Romans first encountered it.

It was not until much later that the same malicious attitude

, from which, in these days of German reflection on our identity, our irreconcilable enemies spread horror stories about us, they maliciously applied the derogatory term "barbarians" to the Germanic peoples, whom they basically admired and envied, just as they tried to belittle German efficiency and self-assertion in the eyes of the world during the World War by calling them "Huns". Finally, in times of weakness, we ourselves probably thought little of our ancestors and agreed with the view that claimed that all the light of civilisation had come to us from the Orient, from the East.

In contrast to the Romanesque, i.e. post-Roman, view described above, there is the view of those ancient Romans who felt superior to the culture of the Germanic peoples, but who, as the depictions of their artists and writers prove, treated their enemies fairly and in many ways recognised and admired them as role models.

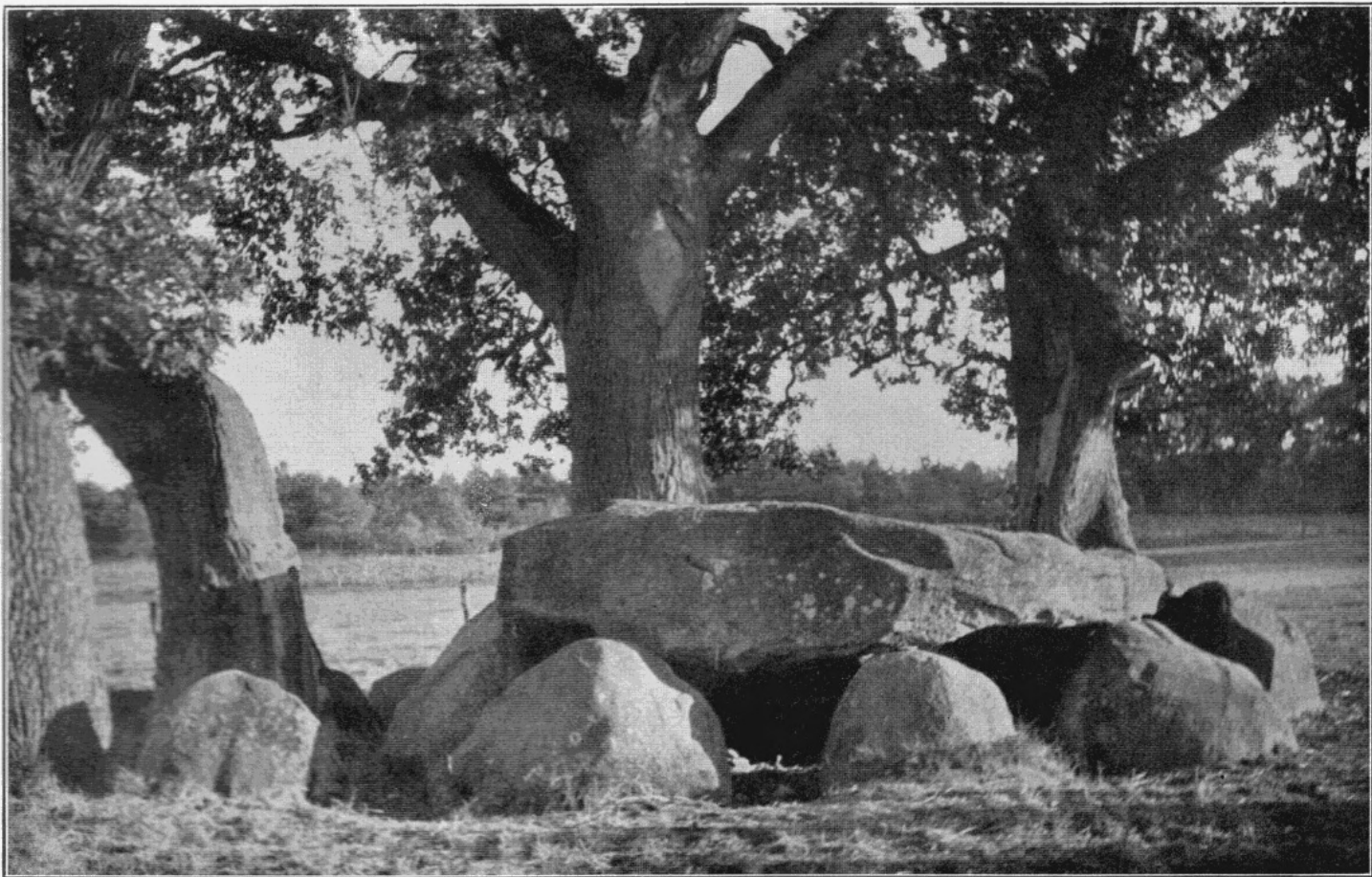
We ourselves, however, have the task, described a hundred years ago by Baron vom Stein as a "German duty", of never tiring in our efforts to shed light on Germanic and medieval prehistory in order to constantly deepen and expand our knowledge of it. The following chapters may also make a small contribution to this.

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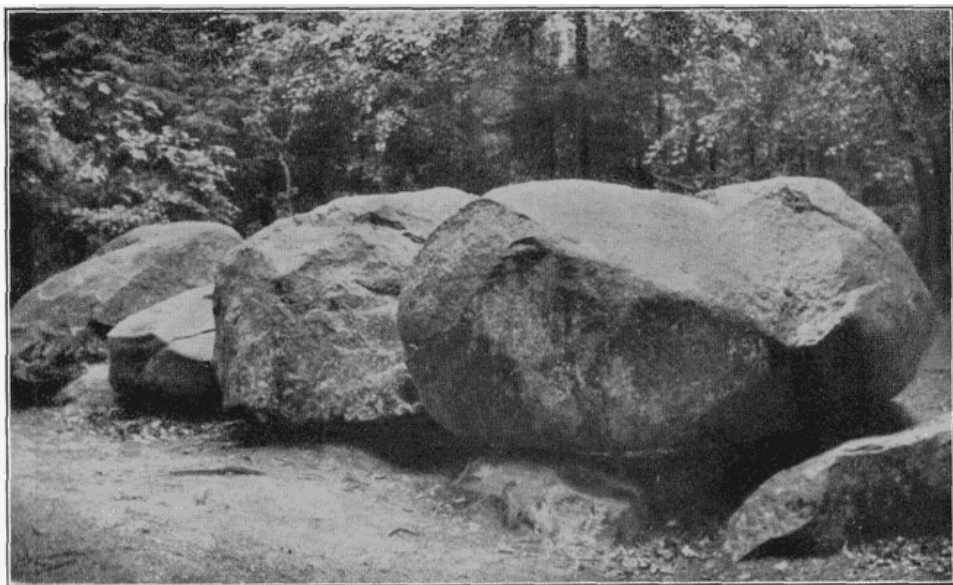
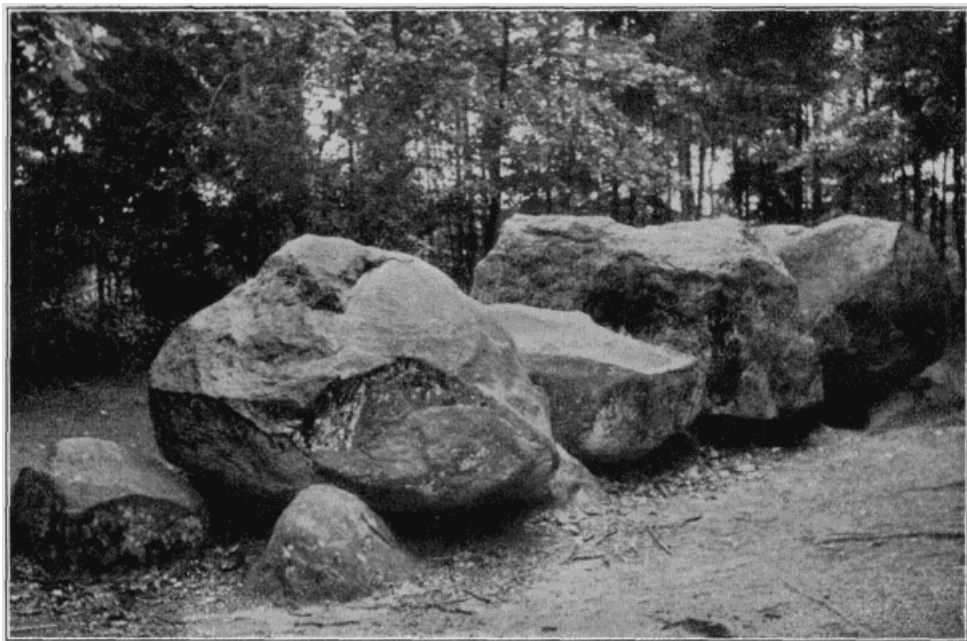
Megalithic tombs

Strange, to walk among
graves from distant
prehistory, Standing silently
and gazing in wonder
Standing before the mighty stones,
Which a pagan race,
Who still hunted bears With
stone axes, Once laid their
heroes to rest! Strange to
think: three thousand years and
more
Spring and autumn changed, The North
Sea roared.
Peoples came and went; storms
swept across the land – But the oak-
crowned
Graves endured. Their size
is staggering,
makes us feel humble and small –
Light on the scales of eternity
Weighing our present existence: A
thousand years later,
Ah, perhaps only a hundred,
We are gone and forgotten, Without a
trace or mark!

Heinrich Anacker.



Megalithic tomb "Ahlhorner Heide" (formerly Heidenopfertisch)



Megalithic tomb "Ahlhorner Heide"
Belonging to the place of worship at Engelmanns Beke

What comes from the earth must return to
the earth; But every species that springs
from its fields strives for the gates of
heaven.

Marcus
Aurelius

Ancestor worship

Megalithic tombs, cremation graves and urn graves

In Germanic prehistory, graves are almost the only witnesses and sources of early human culture. If the burial of the dead is in itself the first sign of a spiritual interpretation of the world, then the manner of burial, the layout of the graves and the grave goods faithfully reflect the beliefs, customs and traditions of our ancestors.

The veneration of the dead and ancestor worship among the Stone Age people of north-western Europe also testify to their capacity for higher thought and action.

We know virtually nothing about the cult life of the ancient Germanic peoples, the "Ingävoנים", as Tacitus calls them, or the "Thuata" according to Herman Wirth, based on archaeological finds.

It is only from the Neolithic period (4500–2000 BC) that we have valuable evidence of the culture of the inhabitants of what later became Chaukenland, which is the subject of my particular research.

It is the megalithic tombs, the so-called ^{megalithic graves}, that are the sublime, impressive monuments to the high intellectual culture of that ethnic community that settled around the North Sea and found its final and highest development here.

In southern Oldenburg, in the Ahlhorn and Glane heaths, there are a vast number of enormous stone monuments. Despite their

¹ From the Greek *megas* = large and *lithos* = stone.

size, their remarkable number, their good condition and their extraordinary significance for prehistory, there is as yet no comprehensive work that deals with these monuments in depth. Extensive works have been written about prehistoric cult monuments outside Germany, but the ones closest to us have not been given the same care and attention due to the German obsession with the foreign.

When discussing the veneration of the dead and the cult of the dead, one must start from the fundamental attitude of the people towards their deity; this shows how strongly the belief in life after death is ingrained in a people. It is characteristic of our own mindset, as it has developed under the millennia-old influence of foreign spiritual currents, foreign points of view and ideas, that we are most prejudiced against the thinking of our own ancestors. Influences that the credulous do not even notice have been at work for more than a thousand years, clouding our view in this regard. After all, it is entirely foreign, predominantly Oriental religious ideas that have determined our attitude towards the world since our youth, and for more than a thousand years now. No wonder, then, that our religious scholars in particular no longer have the ability, let alone the will, to approach the spiritual attitude of our ancestors with the same impartiality that they accord to every exotic people in this regard. Professor Dalman, for example, wrote in the 1908 Palestine Yearbook that nothing tangible could be learned about the religious customs of ancient times in connection with Nordic archaeology because research had not yielded any truly reliable sacred sites. It is astonishing how the religion of that distant period has left so few indisputable monuments. It is certain that the care of the dead and the cult of spirits (!), which need to be examined more closely, represent the place of religion and as a

thick blanket has long concealed God's true nature (!). Certainly, the "deliverance from the power of darkness" (Col. 1:13) proclaimed by Christianity is an event whose significance can only be appreciated by those who understand what this darkness means.

One wonders which darkness is greater: the darkness of "dead worship and spirit cult" that supposedly prevailed among our ancestors, or the darkness in which leading scholars are still caught up when it comes to matters concerning their own ancestors. It is a perpetual circular argument: if one once and for all establishes the religious customs of a relatively late Oriental culture as authoritative for every religious view, and if these criteria are then lacking elsewhere, one must naturally conclude that there is no higher religion. Just imagine if, in five thousand years, someone wanted to draw conclusions about our religious thinking solely from our graves – what a pattern of dullness, tastelessness and inconsistency would emerge; where would we find evidence of truly "higher religious feeling"?

What was the true state of our ancestors' faith in this regard?

Although much has been lost forever as a result of Christianisation and the systematic eradication of Germanic beliefs and all previously prevailing cult practices, recent prehistoric research has shed light on some aspects of this.

The Germanic gods, as they appear to us from later Nordic tradition, were not abstract beings. There was no gap between man and God. For the Germanic peoples, the dead did not go to an unimaginable realm where they attained some kind of salvation whose nature was philosophically sophisticated. There was no uncertainty, no guessing as to where the soul would go after death, to light or darkness. Gera-

This is the fundamental difference between the Germanic and Christian religions. The Germanic people were warriors, always ready to fight and die. How alien, then, must a religion have seemed to them that sought to instil fear of the afterlife and made fear a prerequisite for salvation. Our ancestors, as fighters, warriors and heroes, worshipped only gods for whom they could fight after death and with whom they felt connected on earth.

Our ancestors knew two types of burial: burial in the ground and cremation. In the Neolithic period, above-ground burials with stone packing and burials in stone chambers were already common. The subsequent Bronze Age brought cremation. It was customary to bury the bone remains under flat mounds. The cremation of the dead instead of burial is a development that may have had several causes. First of all, we can assume for practical reasons that the Ice Age stone deposits had become increasingly rare and no longer allowed the construction of so many large stone structures. However, we can also assume that there were religious reasons: perhaps the idea that the dead were freed much more quickly from the "burden of earthly remains" if one did not wait for the body to decompose naturally. Finally, one reason why cremation is sometimes preferred today may have already been valid at that time: the fear of burying someone who was only apparently dead. Of course, the intention to protect the corpse from desecration by wild animals also played a role.

In this chapter, I would like to discuss the stages of development and construction of the tombs in the individual periods, as I found them in Oldenburg.

It is assumed that the stone monuments of Oldenburg all served the same purpose, namely that they were created as

burial chambers for the leaders of the people and their clans. It is clear that we are dealing with two different groups that must have served different purposes. We will examine their differences in detail in the next chapter.

One type of stone structure, the "Visbek bride and groom" and the "Glaner stones", are long, rectangular stone settings with a completely empty interior except for the deep grave built into the upper quarter of the structure. The burial chamber is not above ground, but underground, and ends with the upper edge at ground level, so that only the capstones rest flat on the grave above the ground. However, the megalithic tombs scattered across the heath and also built around these elongated stone settings in a systematic manner have a different structure to the long, rectangular rows of stones known as "Hünenbetten" (giant's beds). We will first discuss the "megalithic tombs" as the earliest burial sites known to us, while the elongated stone structures will be dealt with in the chapter on "places of worship".

These large stone tombs in the Oldenburg region, also known as megalithic tombs and commonly referred to as Hünengräber, are often found in groups and reveal a certain degree of planning in their layout and construction. The enormous stone structures, erected in honour of the dead, bear witness to the high culture and strong sense of community of a large people who must have been led by a chieftain. These clans must also have been a large, strong people in terms of their numbers, who, if one may use the expression for that time, must have been prosperous, even rich. A small, poor people could never have created such structures.

The decisive factor in the construction of such burial chambers, one might call them

practical reasons may also have played a role.

According to the latest research findings, the development of grave types in the Neolithic period can be summarised as follows: the oldest type of grave in our region is probably the megalithic tomb "underground", as revealed by the latest excavations by Dr. Stieren-Münster. Such burial sites were relatively simple to construct. The megalithic tombs of the Stone Age heyday required a large supply of stone material. Of course, as already mentioned, the supply of giant stones gradually came to an end; and so from around 2500 BC onwards we find two different types of tombs: the most recent stage of stone tombs themselves are the so-called stone cists (around 2500–1800 BC), but alongside them there are also wooden roofs over the burial chamber; Finally, there were the stone packings, in which the body of the deceased was protected from wild animals and the effects of the weather by stones packed on top and a layer of earth. In areas where stone was scarce, protective wooden roofs would have been used predominantly. Short round logs were arranged diagonally over the dead in the form of a roof and covered with a mound of earth. These burial sites have naturally collapsed over time due to the perishability of wood. They are very difficult to recognise in the earth, and in most cases nothing remains of the remains of the bodies. The existence of such graves can then only be determined by finding grave goods that were given to the deceased; however, the trained eye can sometimes find individual traces of decayed wooden coverings.

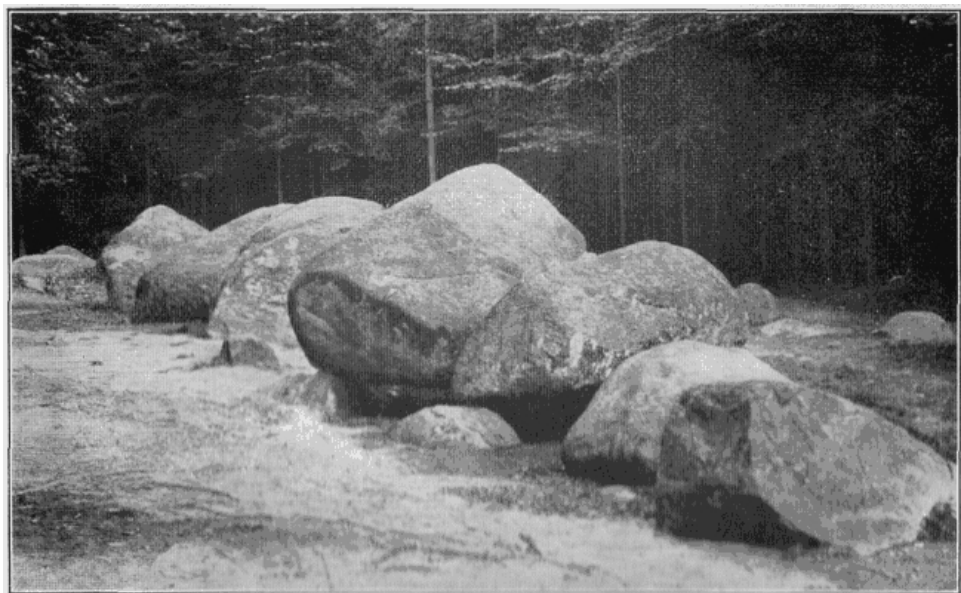
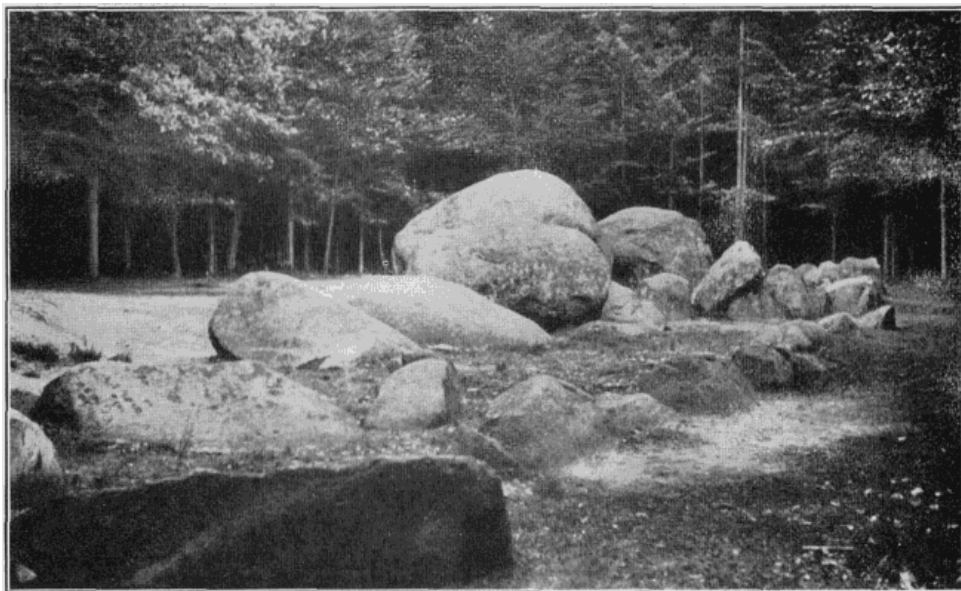
The grave goods, which consisted of food and drink, weapons and tools, should by no means be interpreted in a crude, materialistic way as evidence of a belief in the physical survival of the dead

Just as in our culture, the grave goods would have had primarily symbolic meaning; they were signs of piety, of the loving care that was bestowed upon the deceased in this symbolic form when it was no longer possible to care for them in reality. Or would one conclude from our custom of placing flowers or lights on the grave of the deceased that the dead should enjoy the scent of the flowers or the glow of the lights? The selection and form of the grave goods suggest a race that was both fond of form and fond of weapons, for whom beauty meant the perfection of practicality in form – as evidenced by every stone hammer and every piece of jewellery.

We can no longer determine what existed before the megalithic tombs of the Neolithic period. They suddenly appeared, and they too are, in a sense, a result of the Ice Age, as were most likely the Nordic people themselves. Boulders of Swedish granite, which had been driven from the north on glaciers and ice floes during the Ice Age, lay scattered across the landscape. Where the ice floes with their stone load piled up on the first slight elevations in the ground, the megalithic tombs made of huge blocks now stand. If you take a map of north-western Germany, on which the differences in altitude are easily recognisable, you can see that the stone tombs are located precisely where the slight elevations begin, on the *geest*. In the flat, lower-lying land north of Oldenburg, in the marsh, they are almost completely absent because the ice floes passed over them. Larger boulders are rare here. But even further into central Germany, there are few stone graves of this size. The fact that so many monuments have been preserved in the Lüneburg and Oldenburg heaths and in the Hümmling is largely due to the fact that these areas were sparsely populated in later times. But where fertile soil became

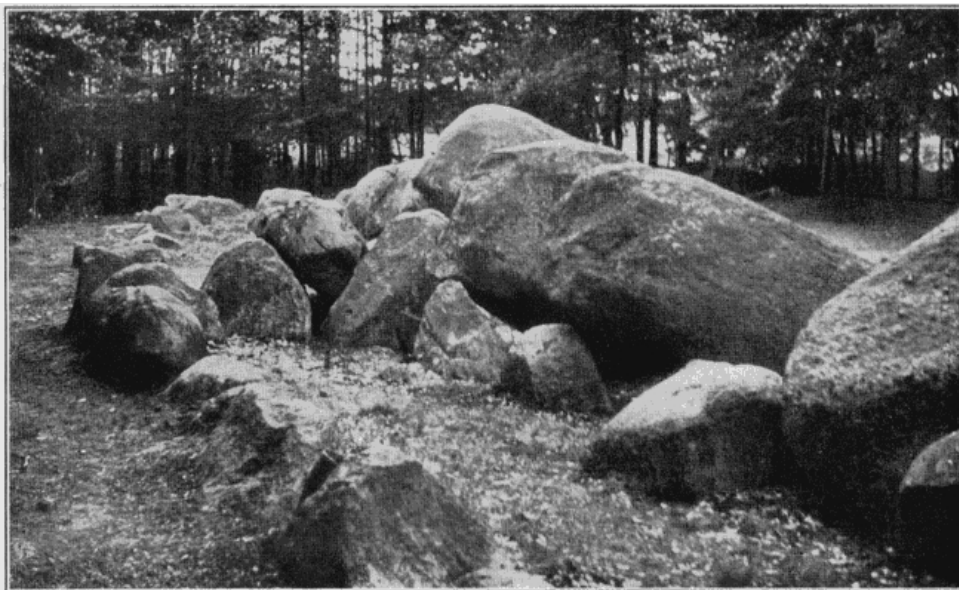
After denser settlement had taken place, the available stones were used over time for building houses and roads. The dwellings would have been located in the immediate vicinity of the large graves. It can be assumed that the clans did not bury their dead far from their homes. However, burials did not take place directly behind the houses, but in special cemeteries. The burial grounds are usually located west of the place of residence. In the next chapter, we will see how the clan community soon progressed to shared cult sites that were hardly inferior to our own.

In winter, the blocks were brought in on sledges to build the tombs. First, stones of almost equal size were placed upright in a narrow rectangle with an internal width of about 1.50 m on a low mound of earth. The capstones were laid on top of these supporting stones, which formed the inner walls of the burial chamber. The lengths of the stone settings I examined varied greatly, ranging from about 6 to 30 m. Stones weighing several tonnes are not uncommon. In order to place the huge capstones on the supporting stones, a mound of earth of the same height was piled up against the stone wall. The resulting inclined plane was covered with wood, and the large stone blocks were rolled up on round logs. The capstones were hoisted onto the supporting stones using tree trunks as levers. The walls of the burial chamber thus consist of rows of supporting stones at the bottom, with the large stone blocks resting on top as a ceiling. The gaps between the supporting stones were filled with smaller boulders embedded in moss, earth and probably also clay in order to close the burial chamber more completely. The spaces between the supporting stones below the outer floor level of the burial chamber were tightly filled with rubble and small pieces of stone. The complete closure of the



Megalithic tomb "Ahlhorner Heide"

Passage grave belonging to the place of worship at Engelmann Beke. – Top: south side, bottom: north side p. 85



Megalithic tomb "Ahlhorner Heide"

Passage grave belonging to the place of worship at Engelmann Beke. – Top: south side with kerbstones and entrance; bottom: entrance.

Filling the gaps between the supporting stones and the capstones was a necessary measure to prevent even small animals from entering the tomb. Over the centuries, the smaller stones were used for other purposes and have therefore almost completely disappeared. Those that were too heavy to transport remained. The floor of the tomb was paved with flat stones.

At one point along the long side, one of the supporting stones was smaller and lower than the others, so that it did not bear any load. This was the capstone that closed the entrance to the chamber. It was rolled away from the opening during subsequent burials, so that the burial chamber could be opened and closed relatively easily. Three days after Christ's death, Mary, on her way to the tomb to wrap the body in cloths, says:

"Who will roll away the stone from the tomb?" Here, too, there is mention of a movable capstone that sealed the burial chamber.

At a short distance, 1–1½ metres around the elongated burial chamber, kerbstones were erected in a closed line to form an enclosure. At both ends, the kerbstones were placed in an arc, so that the whole resembled an elongated oval. Opinions differ widely as to the purpose of these kerbstones. A simple, natural explanation can be found for this as well. The burial chamber needed to be protected and was given a low surrounding wall. As with the graves, the gaps in the stone settings were filled with smaller stones, similar to the old cemetery walls made of boulders that still enclose many village cemeteries today.

Experts generally say that the graves were all covered with a mound of earth. However, this is not true for all megalithic tombs. The large burial mounds that cover a stone chamber with earth probably belong mostly to the subsequent Bronze Age.

Bronze Age. These burial mounds, which were often also used as altars or sacrificial mounds, have a different structure. In areas where large stones were scarce, a mound of earth would have surrounded the smaller stone tomb. The largest earth mounds are the "Three Mountains" near Elmendorf on the Zwischenahner Meer and those near Godensholt. The royal tomb near Seddin in the Mark Brandenburg shows that the burial chamber itself was built on a relatively small scale (approximately 1.7×2.00 m) and therefore required the protective mound of earth.

In his book "Totenehre im alten Norden" (Honouring the Dead in the Ancient North), Hans Hahne writes about megalithic tombs, among other things:

"The large capstone of the tomb in Langen in Hanover (not far from the Ahlhorner Heide) is, like many other stone block tombs, covered with artificial cup marks. On Danish and German gravestones, the oldest form of the symbol of the year, the wheel, is also carved several times. In more recent graves in Western Europe, which are closely related to those in the north, even the oldest Northern European script appears in the form of sacred symbols."

Here it is clearly stated that large stone block tombs from the same period in a nearby area, built by the same tribe, are decorated with cult symbols and inscriptions. These tombs could not possibly have been covered by mounds of earth, as the symbols could only have had meaning if they were visible and exposed.

Herman Wirth's view that the capstone was used as a sacrificial table argues against covering these stone settings with earth. He writes:

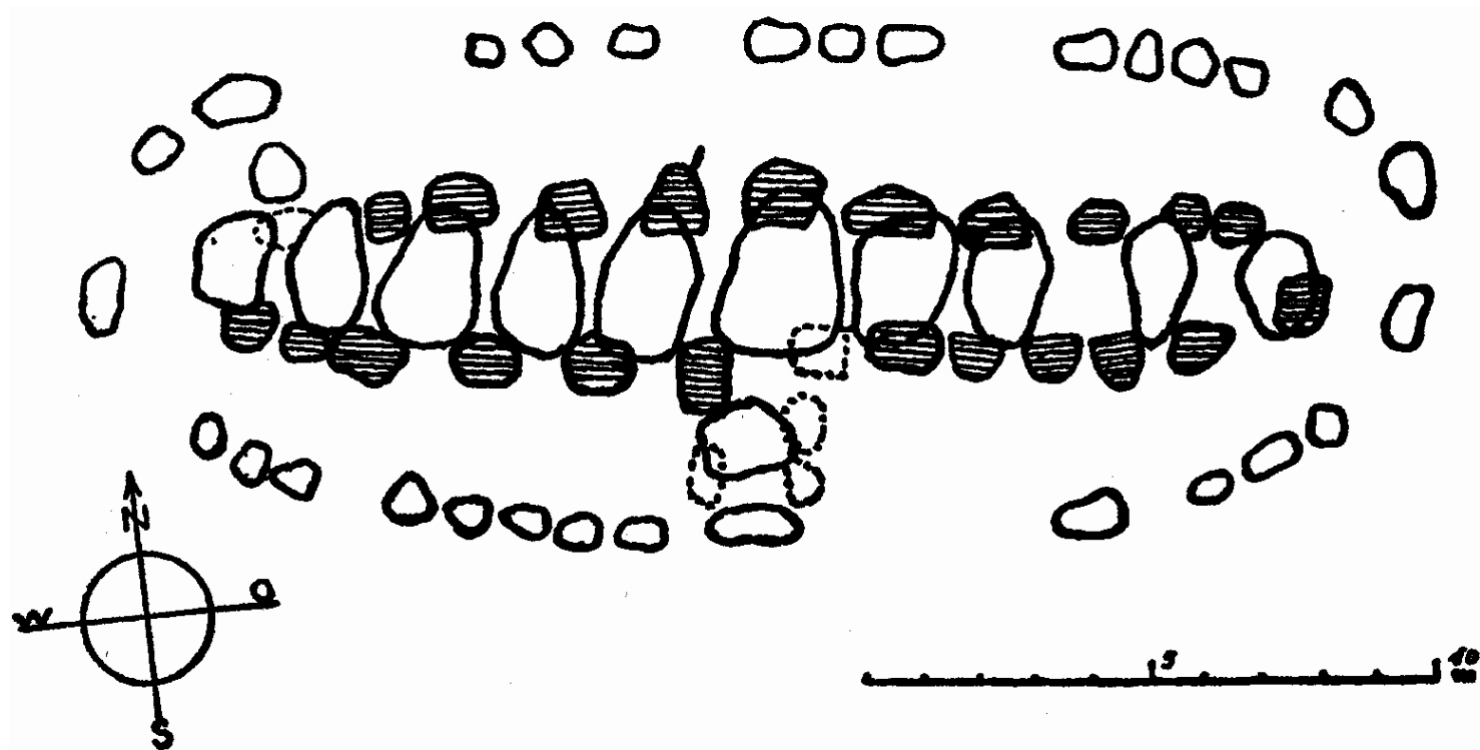
"The North Atlantic dolmen, the megalithic tomb, was in fact an altar as a family tomb, and its 'capstone' was the 'sacrificial table' on which the sacred fire was lit."

This opinion is confirmed by numerous ancient legends in which the "megalithic tombs" are referred to as pagan sacrificial tables

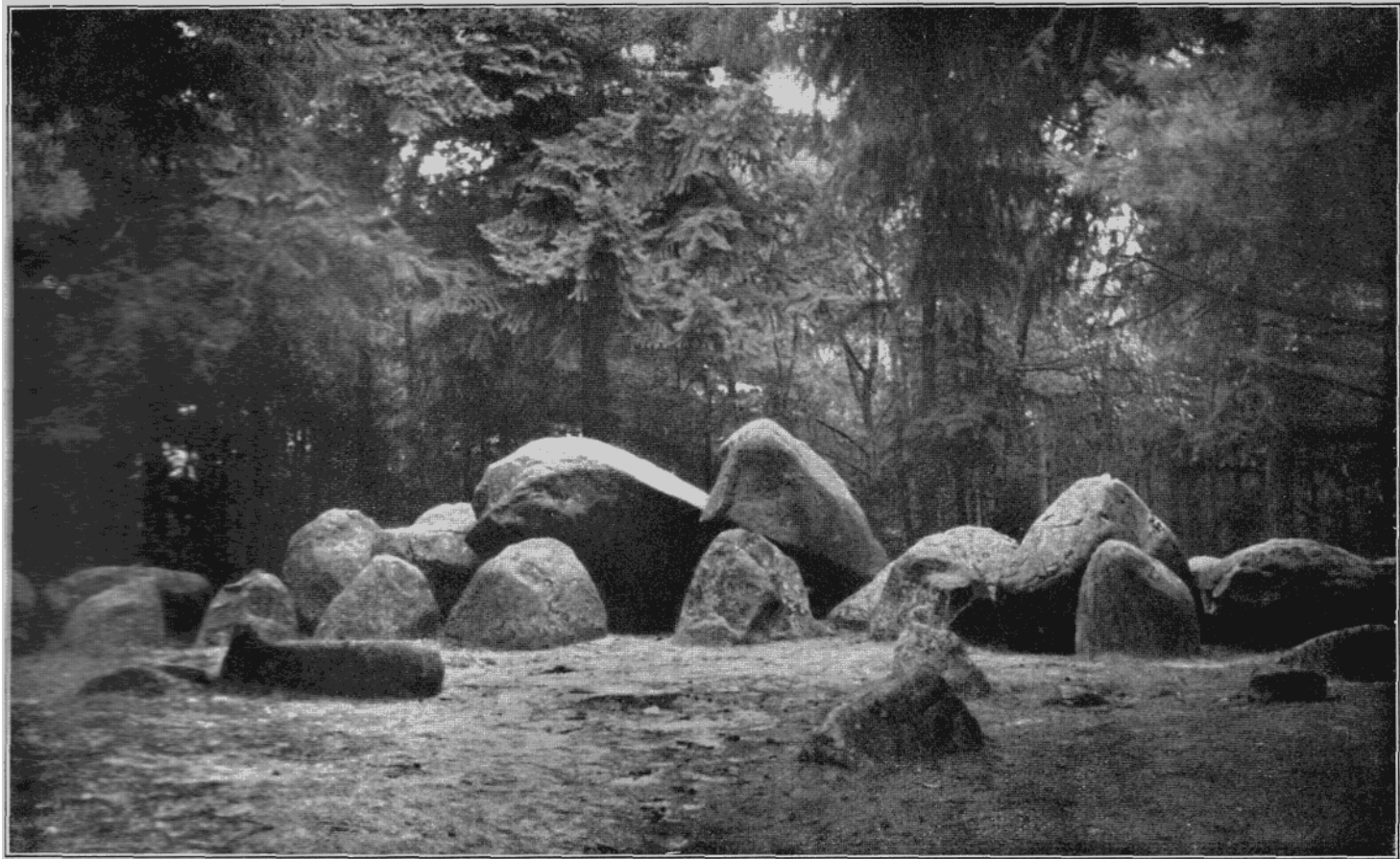
; for example, in the particularly significant legend of the Karlsteine stones at Haster Egge near Osnabrück.

It would have been pointless to conceal these mighty structures from view with earth, and there was no technical or practical reason to do so. The earth of a mound of such size cannot disappear completely through wind and rain. If the earth had been washed away by the weather, it would have been noticeable in the immediate vicinity. The evidence suggests otherwise. The urn mounds in the countless burial grounds nearby were once made of loose sand, yet they have remained unchanged. Like these, which were covered with rooted turf, the much larger mounds of the stone graves should have been preserved even more.

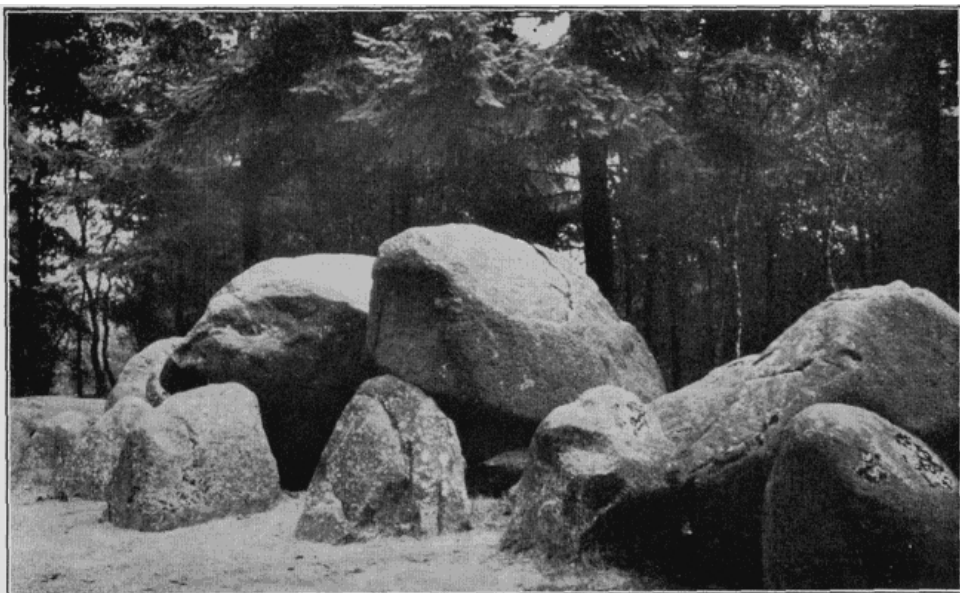
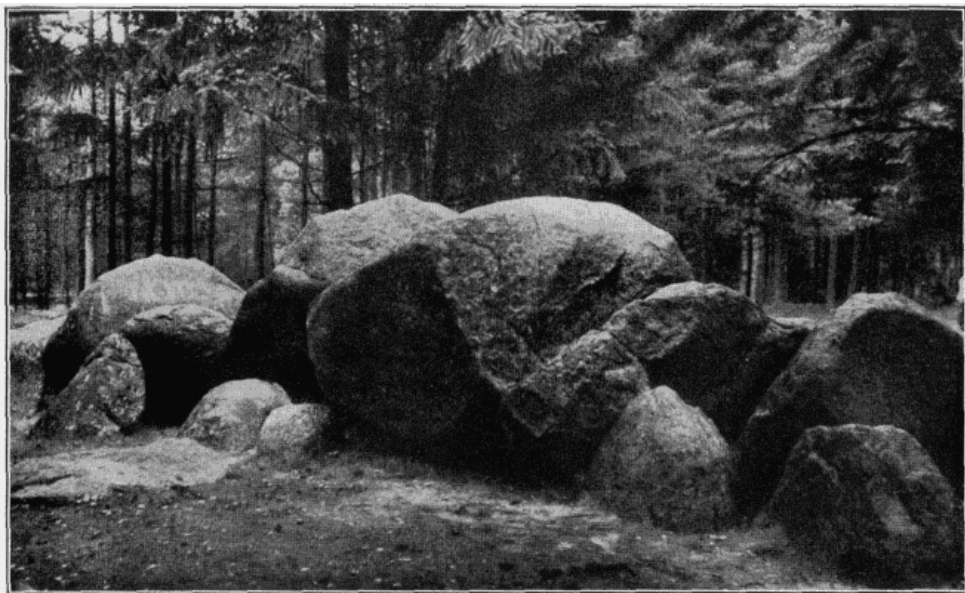
Apart from minor variations, the structure of megalithic tombs is almost always the same. Smaller tombs often lack the kerbstones of the surrounding wall. Some burial chambers have a side entrance made of supporting and capstones, which leads from the kerbstones to the burial chamber. One such tomb is located in the Ahlhorner Heide burial group near the "Visbeker Bräutigam". The entrance is clearly visible in the photograph. The so-called "Hohen Steine" (high stones) in southern Oldenburg on the road between Wileshausen and Ahlhorn are also a huge megalithic tomb. This most beautiful and largest stone tomb has a length of 23 m and a width of 10 m with the kerbstones of the surrounding wall. Several of the kerbstones are missing; about 30 are still in place. Some of the large supporting stones of the burial chamber itself are still in their original position. The burial chamber has an internal length of 19 metres, an internal width of 1.50 metres and a depth of 1 to 1.20 metres. All ten of the large capstones, some of which are exceptionally large (the largest measuring approximately 2.50×2.00×1.50 m), are still in place. However, the stones are no longer in their original position. Some of them have been removed from the supporting stones.



Megalithic tomb "Hohe Steine"



"Hohesteine" megalithic tomb
Ahlhorner Heide, on the Wildeshausen-Ahlhorn road, north side



Hohesteine megalithic tomb
Ahlhorner Heath, on the Wildeshausen road Top: south
side, bottom: north side

This megalithic tomb is the best example of the typical structure among all the sites on the heath. It is probably a clan tomb and will have been used for reburials for an infinitely long time.

Just a few kilometres away are two larger groups of two megalithic tombs each, known as "Kellersteine". The first group is located in Steinhorst, a large forest not far from the "Visbeker Braut", the second and larger group is on the way to the "Bräutigam" about 2 km away. The tombs are well preserved, and here too the structure of supporting and capstones is the same as in the other megalithic tombs.

In the second group, the first grave forms an elongated oval approximately 15 metres long; a striking feature is an enormous capstone of unusual size. The second tomb is located 60 metres away and differs from the previous one in its external shape. The supporting stones form a regular rectangle 6 metres long and 1.50 metres wide on the inside, creating an almost smooth-walled burial chamber with flat capstones forming an angular cellar, which is probably the reason for the name "cellar stones". Unfortunately, one of the supporting stones has been deliberately blown up.

An almost untouched cellar grave is located in Stüwenmühle near Endel in the Ahlhorn Heath, close to the "Visbek Bridegroom". The tomb is located in the front garden of a house and has a chamber measuring 3 by 1½ metres with an internal height of 1.20 metres. The spaces between the supporting stones are filled with smaller stones, which are stacked in the manner of a dry stone wall. The gaps between the capstones are also filled with stones. The floor is paved. The only thing missing from this tomb is the capstone that closed it, so that one can enter the interior of the chamber through this low opening. Here, then, in a completely preserved stone tomb, the structure can be clearly observed from the inside. The tomb is covered with an almost

covered by a round mound of earth, which is only open at the entrance to the tomb. Here, the protective mound of earth covering the small burial chamber has been preserved completely in its original form. This tomb dates back to the early Bronze Age; I was unable to determine the nature and whereabouts of the finds.

High above the Hunte River on the right bank near the village of Rekkum, opposite the Pestrup burial ground with the "Rosengarten", lie two enormous megalithic tombs about 150 paces apart. Their structure and size resemble the most beautiful of all megalithic tombs, the "Hohensteine" near Wildeshausen. The western tomb, located next to the river, has an external length of 22 m and a width of 4 m. The interior of the elongated burial chamber measures 19 m by 2.00 m. Twenty-four of the supporting stones and eleven of the enormous capstones have been preserved. The second tomb is well preserved in its structure. The very wide, rectangular burial chamber with its large and high supporting stones, about 1.40 metres above the ground, is striking. All 17 of these stones appear to have been preserved. The capstones, enormous blocks measuring $3 \times 2.50 \times 2$ m, some of which still rest in their original position, are all 7 preserved. No kerbstones can be found at either of the graves.

Near Dötlingen on the road to Ostrittrum, belonging to a farm with the curious name "Egyp-ten", lies a very well-preserved megalithic tomb, which is particularly instructive in showing the structure of the tombs, as this tomb was only uncovered in our time and is therefore well preserved in parts. The burial chamber lies in a mound of earth, with the capstones of one part missing, but the supporting stones are all preserved, as are the capstones of the remaining part, which still cover a section of the chamber in their original position. The inner rectangle of the chamber measures approximately 5.50 m in length and 1.50 m in width; the space is 1.20 m high from the well-preserved paving to the lower edge of the capstones. The supporting stones stand with the

smooth split surface facing inwards, so that the chamber is angular and has straight walls. The filling stones between the supporting stones, which are laid in the manner of a dry chamber and completely close the joints, reveal the original, careful construction of the tomb. This tomb is one of the few tombs whose upper capstones still show their original position. In the transverse joint between the capstones pushed together, the old stone packing still lies in its original position, filling and levelling the gaps and thus completely closing the tomb from above between the capstones. See picture on p. 85.

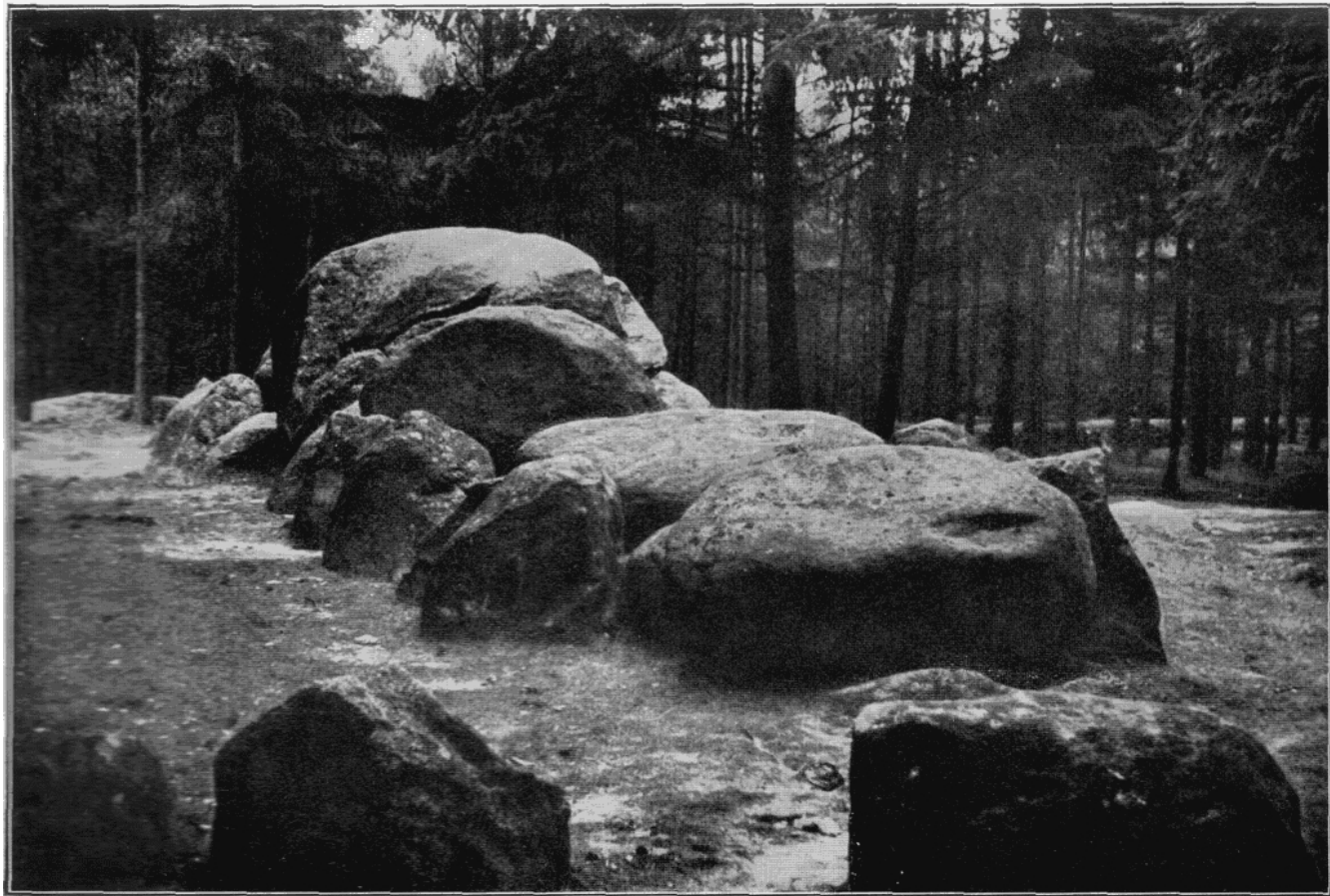
This grave and the one at Stüwenmühle best illustrate the original technique of grave construction; they are probably the only ones in the Oldenburg region that show the structure so clearly. The kerbstones and the mound of earth piled up in an oval around the grave also show the original form.

While wandering around the vast heathland as a loner, I was able to observe many previously unrecognised graves that still lie completely untouched under the protective blanket of heather. The megalithic tombs, such as the "Hohen Steine" (high stones), are probably the oldest form. Individual untouched burial mounds on the heath, located near megalithic tombs from the Neolithic period and near the burial grounds of the later Bronze Age and early Iron Age; some graves, including individual ones located on the heath, reveal small stone chambers from the early Bronze Age, which would certainly yield surprising insights into this period if opened. Graves and finds from the early Bronze Age following the Neolithic period in this landscape have been little researched. The megalithic tombs of the Late Stone Age, which have long since been destroyed, are well known, but very little material from these tombs has found its way into museums, as they were plundered and improperly opened at an early stage. Countless burial mounds, the cremation graves of the Iron Age, have been destroyed by ploughing, but many have also been investigated and many still exist, so that there is clarity about the finds from these graves.

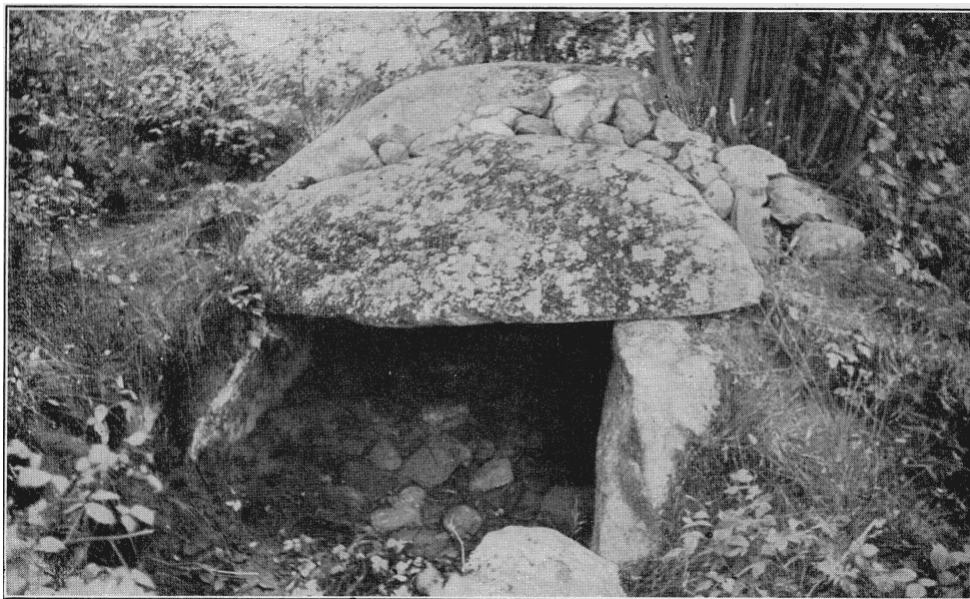
However, the intermediate stage, the graves of the early Bronze Age, are less well understood; and since some are known to be untouched and partly unrecognised under the heath cover, these graves may perhaps fill some gaps in the chronology.

Near the village of Neerstedt in the Dötlingen area lies a huge erratic boulder which, although it does not cover a burial chamber, is nevertheless of great value for prehistory, as it is probably the only remaining stone in this area that served cultic purposes. It is the so-called "Hexenstein" (witch stone), a stone block measuring 5.50 m in length, 3.50 m in width and 1.50 m in height above the ground, but which probably still stands 2 m deep in the earth, so that only the upper flat part of the huge stone block protrudes. On this stone there are cup-like depressions 7 cm in diameter, which were carved into the stone by human hands in a triangular pattern. Such stones, which probably served cultic purposes, are called cup stones or bowl stones. In some places, butter was sacrificed in these cups. An old farmer from the neighbouring farm told me what his grandmother had told him about the "witch stone" when he was a child: the three indentations in the stone come from the three legs of a spinning wheel on which the witches spin during the 12 nights. This refers to the 12 holy nights from Christmas Eve to

6 January, the Feast of the Epiphany. That was the time of the Yule festival, the winter solstice. The old man went on to say that even in his childhood, no wheel was allowed to turn in the vicinity during these 12 days, "so as not to scare away the witches". No cart was allowed to be driven within a radius of the stone, no wheel was allowed to turn in the yard, the wheelbarrow was not used, and litter was carried into the stables on people's arms. This "superstition" expresses the ancient symbolic connection between the wheel of the year, which stands still at the winter solstice, and its earthly counterpart. Quite similar stories are also in



Megalithic tomb "Hohesteine"
Ahlhorner Heath near Wildeshausen, from east to west



Megalithic tomb near Dötlingen

The grave is still partially covered by the mound, and the old stone packing between the capstones has been preserved in its original position. p. 82

Sweden and Norway are known for their cup-marked stones.

Many megalithic tombs are still scattered across the vast heathland and pine forests of this area, which have no special names, and traces of prehistoric settlements can also be found in many places. There are further remains of megalithic tombs in Dötlingen and Aschenbeck. In Kleinenkneten, on the edge of the Pestrup burial ground, there are two megalithic tombs with supporting, covering and edge stones next to an elongated, rectangular stone setting with an internal length of 48 m and an internal width of 6 m, with a deep grave in the upper part of the complex. As with the "Visbeker Bräutigam" and the "Glaner Steine", the entire complex appears to have been planned; here, too, there is a grave in the upper part of the rectangular stone setting and two megalithic tombs in the immediate vicinity.

Of particular significance are the megalithic tombs in the overall complex of the "Visbek Bridegroom", an elongated stone setting with an internal length of 105 metres and an internal width of 7 metres, at the western end of which a deep grave has been built. Here, four graves lie around the stone setting of a place of worship, like a cemetery around a church. The planned layout is clearly recognisable. These burial vaults would have been the burial sites of larger clans. Between the large stone graves, there would also have been many smaller ones in the cemetery, which have disappeared over time; however, graves covered by a layer of humus may still lie hidden in the ground. The largest grave in this complex is located about 60 metres northwest of the place of worship. The kerbstones form an elongated oval 30 metres long and 6 metres wide. The narrow burial chamber almost fills the length of the oval. The interior of the elongated chamber is clearly visible, but here too, some of the heavy capstones have slipped off the supporting stones, and some are missing altogether. In this tomb, the entrance to the burial chamber is particularly striking

: a passageway made of supporting and capstones, which is still clearly visible, leads from the kerbstones to the chamber.

30 metres from the southern end of the cult site lies a second large, particularly well-preserved grave. The four very large and heavy capstones still rest in their original position on the supporting stones that form the burial chamber. This grave must be almost untouched; one of the capstones, with a volume of about 3 cubic metres, would weigh about 8,500 kg. There does not appear to have been an enclosure of kerbstones here originally. In the immediate vicinity, northwest of the large stone setting, there is a smaller, untouched tomb, which is still partially buried in the mound, and to the south, the fourth cellar tomb, 6 metres long, which is missing its capstones.

About 200 metres away from this complex, south of the small stream, lies another megalithic tomb, which can probably be described as one of the most beautiful. It is situated in a very picturesque location under a group of old oak trees and has been given the name

"Heidenopfertisch" (pagan sacrificial table). A very large, flat stone, 1 m thick and measuring 5×3.50 m, lies 1 m above the ground on the supporting stones. The entire complex must have been about 10 m long. Unfortunately, the capstone on one half is missing. This tomb is notable for its large, flat, almost level capstone, which is probably why this megalithic tomb was given the name "Heidenopfertisch" (pagan sacrificial table). However, it is not an altar, but a tomb. Here, too, as with all megalithic tombs, the spaces between the supporting stones were originally filled with small stones, completely sealing the interior of the chamber from the outside.

Stone altars are often mentioned in ancient records, for example by Tacitus, in the Edda and in Icelandic sagas. At the time of Christianisation, the altars were destroyed by monks. No altar stones have survived that can be conclusively proven to have been used for ritual purposes in pre-Christian times. The "converts" did a very thorough job here. Of course, they did not dare to destroy the megalithic tombs, as the people would not have allowed the desecration of their ancestors' graves.

, as the people would not have allowed the desecration of their ancestors' graves. However, the altars in the open air, in sacred groves and under trees, were completely destroyed.

Although this chapter has primarily dealt with the megalithic tombs and stone alignments of the Neolithic period in the area between the Weser and Ems rivers, we may also draw comparisons with the enormous prehistoric megalithic structures in the neighbouring area of the Lüneburg Heath, which display the same characteristics. Near Fallingbostel, the famous megalithic tombs, the "Seven Stone Houses", are located off the road in a nature reserve in the vast, beautiful heathland. These megalithic tombs are built from the same material and in the same style as the megalithic tombs in southern Oldenburg. The builders probably belonged to the same race as the people who assembled the huge boulders of the Ahlhorn Heath. Of these original seven stone houses of the Lüneburg Heath, five still exist, lying in a row running from north-west to south-east on an elongated ridge. Two of the megalithic tombs are exceptionally well preserved; the rectangular chambers are still completely closed except for the entrance, and none of the supporting and capstones are missing. In one of the tombs, the large chamber is completely covered by a single enormous capstone, which is about 4 m wide and 5 m long, with a thickness of only about 60 cm. The internal dimensions of the chamber are 4.60 m long and 2.90 m wide, with a height of 1.40 m. Some upright kerbstones surrounding the tomb are still preserved in their original position. Particular care has been taken with the entrance to this tomb, which is also located on the south side.

The technical structure corresponds to that of the graves in southern Oldenburg, but it can be assumed that the two groups did not originate at exactly the same time. The "Hohen Steine" in Ahlhorn

Heath, Oldenburg, are probably the oldest, dating from around 4000 BC, perhaps even earlier. The graves in southern Oldenburg are all built from huge erratic blocks piled on top of each other. The capstones are mostly rounded natural blocks without split surfaces; some of the supporting stones have been worked and their split surfaces face the interior of the chamber.

The supporting stones of the burial chambers at Fallingbostel show more extensive processing; large flat stones are joined together to form smooth walls, and even the huge capstone is very flat in relation to its size and has clearly been split. Based on the type of construction and processing, it can be assumed that these megalithic tombs were built several centuries later than those in southern Oldenburg.

Around 2000–1800 BC, at the beginning of the Bronze Age, a change in burial practices began. The dead were now cremated and the ashes and bone remains were buried in urns under low mounds. It was no longer necessary to store and protect the dead in huge stone houses.

The probable cause of this change in burial practices has already been suggested. The large stones in the landscape had been used up. The ancient burial sites from the previous Neolithic period, which contained the ancestors of the people, were sacred and inviolable to their descendants. Digging deep graves was still difficult even now with the inadequate tools available. The danger of wild animals digging up the dead was the same as before. The manufacture of clay pots had been known since ancient times. Clay was available in sufficient quantities along the river courses. The material used for urns had improved in that fine grit from crushed stones was added to the clay, making the walls of the pots more sturdy. The shaping of the jugs, drying them in the sun and firing them in the fire may also have undergone some improvements. Among the aforementioned

Under the circumstances, it was customary to cremate the dead and bury the remains in urns in shallow mounds. Each family created a low mound for themselves, similar to a stone burial chamber in the Stone Age, in which they buried the urns from one death to the next, so that a number of urns were often buried one after the other in a single mound. A burial mound usually contains urns of various sizes and shapes, some simple, some richly decorated. Perhaps they were decorated according to the position of the deceased within the family. At times, there seems to have been a shortage of clay jugs. In isolated cases, the bones were placed in baskets woven from shrubs, wrapped in skins or even buried in the mound completely uncovered, without any covering.

The burial of an urn took place in the presence of family members, and the custom of throwing sand into the grave three times, as is still common today, may have originated here when the mound of earth was piled over the urn. Shards are often found scattered in the burial mound; there are also graves in which only shards and bones are found – "shards bring good luck" is an ancient belief that apparently goes back to this prehistoric symbolism of luck and salvation. Like the burial chamber itself, the throwing of sand, flowers, wreaths and funeral music are also tributes to the dead. Much of the veneration of the dead in our prehistoric times has survived to this day. If these customs had been foreign and adopted from other peoples, they would not have survived this long. But the religious thinking and actions of a people are firmly rooted in its innermost core.

The urn fields, which are now overgrown with heather, must have looked very different in the past. We can assume with certainty that the graves were marked on the outside with a sign or decorative object in the earliest times, as it would have been impossible to find one's own clan's grave among all the burial mounds during subsequent burials.

decorative elements, as it would have been impossible to find one's own clan's burial mound among all the others during subsequent burials. Out of necessity, some kind of markings or other distinctive features were attached to the graves, which could be considered the precursors of our modern grave crosses and structures. The oldest grave markers of this kind are probably wooden grave posts (grave steles), which, as guardians of the ancestral grave, absorbed the higher power (Germanic *megin*) within themselves. Such wooden grave posts were only replaced by gravestones in the Christian era and the Viking era in Northern Europe; but in Holland and the Harz Mountains, we still find such wooden grave slabs, whose symbolism, as Herman Wirth has clearly demonstrated, is many thousands of years old.

The finds unearthed from these graves are particularly valuable to prehistorians and archaeologists. Pottery, weapons, tools and implements made of stone and bronze are almost the only things that have survived from Germanic prehistory thanks to the protective soil. All implements made of perishable materials, primarily wood, which could have provided further insights into the culture of our ancestors, have fallen victim to the ravages of time. Thus, ceramic finds are often the only clues available to researchers and are therefore of extraordinary importance.

Scholars who have devoted themselves exclusively to researching prehistoric ceramics use the shapes to determine the migration of the clans once buried here. They then classify the cultures and clan associations, referring to deep-cut, corded and ribbon ceramics cultures, bell and spherical beaker peoples, and others. Unfortunately, these are the only clues we have at our disposal, as we do not know the names of the tribes and peoples. Broadly speaking, the classification based on pottery paints the following picture: in certain areas, only

the deep-cut pottery, which is roughly equivalent to the Megalithic period in terms of time and technique. Towards the end of the Megalithic period, around 2500, part of this population moved to the Elbe; under the influence of the decorative style prevailing there, the Nordic deep-cut pottery in the Magdeburg area changed to the so-called "Elbe pottery". South of this, the so-called "band ceramics" predominated; isolated band ceramic settlements are scattered in the north, and we find them as islands near Hanover and in the Braunschweig region. The "corded ware" people, who appeared in Thuringia from 2500 to 2200, played a very special role. From here, they spread to previously unknown areas: to Bohemia, Brandenburg, Pomerania, Mecklenburg, westwards to the Weser and even as far as Holland. Certain developments can now be traced in the pottery: from its embryonic beginnings, a rise in form, then a decline and decay, and finally an extinction, which we can observe very closely in the numerous finds.

Prehistoric science has taught us to follow these developments using a method that has been perfected to a high degree of mastery. The question is whether we can really conclude from the emergence, development and decline of technical and artistic forms that there has been a corresponding rise, development and decline of entire communities. With all due respect for the method, it seems to me that there is a danger of confusing the methodological with the substantive. Here, too, a comparison with more recent and more easily overlooked developments will help us to see things more clearly. Can we conclude from the emergence, development and decline of the "Romanesque" style, Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque that entire peoples migrated? These styles also tend to begin in a specific, more closely defined area, spread from there, experience periods of prosperity that often vary in different regions, and then decline again. But

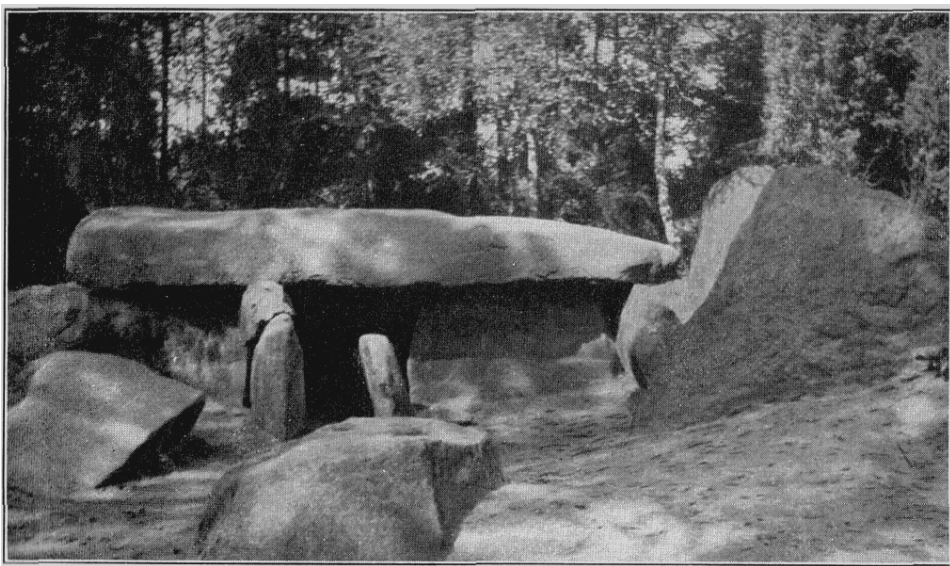
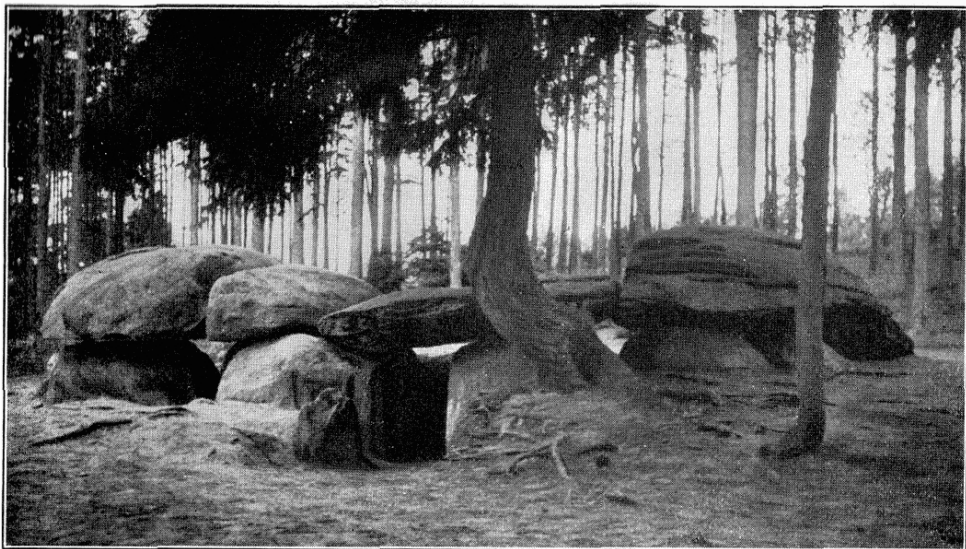
would anyone conclude from the fact that the Baroque style originated in Austria and spread from there that the Austrians conquered the whole of Central Europe and a considerable part of the rest of Europe during this period? Recent research has shown us that there is a certain connection between art and race, but here too the change is not based on the change of races per se, but on the varying degrees of prominence of the individual racial components at different times.

These reservations should always be borne in mind when classifying decorative motifs, so as not to apply a lifeless scheme to living processes. They will always be an important tool for researchers wishing to study the cultural conditions of a people. But the impoverishment of urn decoration in the Bronze Age shows how much one must beware of generalisations: this impoverishment was based neither on a change in population nor on a decline in culture, but precisely on a significant refinement of technical culture through the invention of bronze and bronze vessels, which pushed the inconspicuous old material of clay vessels into the background.

In detail, the various types of decoration can be characterised as follows: Deep-cut pottery features decorations created by regularly repeating indentations in the surface of the urn with a chisel. They show a continuous connection over long periods of time and, as already mentioned, are characteristic of megalithic culture in general. Corded pottery is decorated by pressing a hemp cord into the soft clay, while in band pottery the decorations run in bands around the vessel. Pots and urns in which decorations alternate with smooth areas are grouped together as a special zone pottery. So-called "Geometric ornaments" appear in line and zigzag forms, in



One of the megalithic tombs "Seven Stone Houses"
in Südbostel, Lüneburg Heath



Megalithic tombs of the "Seven Stone Houses"
in Südbostel, Lüneburg Heath

spiral and meander patterns. Herman Wirth was the first to interpret the symbolic meaning of many of these motifs based on the epigraphic tradition.

Just as the decorations changed over time, so too did the shapes of the urns, the clay used and the manufacturing process develop to ever greater perfection. The earliest vessels are simply shaped by hand; sometimes they show well-preserved female finger impressions, revealing carefully manicured hands. The potter's wheel, which many would like to attribute to a great age, first appeared in the Germanic Iron Age, around 600 BC, and even then only in southern Germany; in northern Germany, it appeared only very rarely before the introduction of Christianity.

As with the decorations, the vessels are also classified into different styles and periods with corresponding tribal affiliations according to their shape. We are familiar with spherical amphorae, bell beakers, collar bottles and humpback urns – a wealth of names that reflect the diversity of shapes. The spherical shape of the cups, for example, gives rise to the term "spherical cup people"; local characteristics also influence the names: we speak of the Rößener, Großgartacher, Hinkelstein, Walter-nienburg styles, etc.

In many cases, clay pots have three, four or even more small eyelets arranged in a circle on the belly. Strings were pulled through these to hang the pots from the rafters of houses, protecting their contents from rodents and other predators. In the Late Bronze Age, so-called "house urns" were also used to hold the ashes and bone remains after a corpse had been cremated. These urns were modelled on the shape of a house with a high, steep roof.

The clay vessels that have come down to us have been found almost exclusively in graves, so they served the cult of the dead.

The earliest vessels from the megalithic tomb period, when cremation was not yet known, were intended to hold food and drink, as both were usually placed in the stone houses of the dead. When cremation became common in the subsequent Bronze Age, the bone remains were placed in urns and buried in a protective mound. This usually protected them until the spade of the researcher lifted them, examined them and secured them in museums.

For those who wish to learn more about the different types of prehistoric pottery, we recommend the specialist works of Carl Schuchhardt and Gustav Kossinna.

Judging by the finds, many of the large burial grounds in the Weser-Ems region must have been used for centuries, even millennia, as weapons and tools from the Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages have been found as grave goods in these prehistoric cemeteries. The extent of the burial grounds is still significant today. Burial mounds of various sizes are lined up in rows.

The largest prehistoric cemetery in north-western Germany, which has remained almost unchanged since the Late Bronze Age and the transition to the Iron Age, is the Pestrup burial ground near Wildeshausen, which covers an area of 36 hectares and still has 350 mounds today. Among the many easily recognisable mounds, there are also flatter, smaller graves that are not easy to spot. The most extensive ones are referred to as royal graves and probably belonged to the larger clans. In general, such a cemetery probably presented a very uniform appearance, as social differences in the honouring of the dead, as seen in the tomb structures in the Orient, never became very apparent in the north. The terrain is a vast heathland. The heather crust has retained the shape of the burial mounds almost unchanged since their creation, which sounds unlikely at first, but is confirmed by simple investigation. The urns are located at a shallow depth, often only

20–30 centimetres below the heathland. If the height of the hills had changed over the millennia, the vessels would either have to be deeper below the heathland or barely covered, if at all. The character of the heath is still the same today as it was in the past: unspoilt, untouched by civilisation and unchanging. Here, everything has remained as it was in the time of our venerable ancestors. It is this unspoilt nature that still holds such appeal for us today, with its beauty and romance.

I was greatly impressed by the discovery of an ancient Germanic battle arena, located near the Pestrup burial ground, separated from the urn mounds only by a country road. It is the so-called "Rosengarten" (= horse enclosure, cf. above

p. 60 f., the original meaning of this name has been lost). The very well-preserved festival site, which may date back to the Bronze Age, is beautifully situated above the river in the Hunte valley and has the shape of an ancient oval amphitheatre approximately 140 metres long and 100 metres wide. The oval is surrounded by a race track approximately 6 metres wide and the ascending seating areas for spectators. The traces I found clearly highlight the character of such a site, so that there can be little doubt about it.

Such a finding inevitably reveals a connection between burial rites and honouring the dead, for the cult of the dead included not only sacrificial offerings but also combat games. At Stonehenge (southern England), an elongated racecourse has been preserved, and combat games and chariot races in honour of the deceased are also mentioned in Homer's *Iliad*, which has preserved so much of the Indo-European culture. The Greek racecourse, the stadium, also had its roots in this ancient cult of the dead.

The combat games were also organised very differently among the Germanic peoples, depending on the rank and prestige of the deceased.

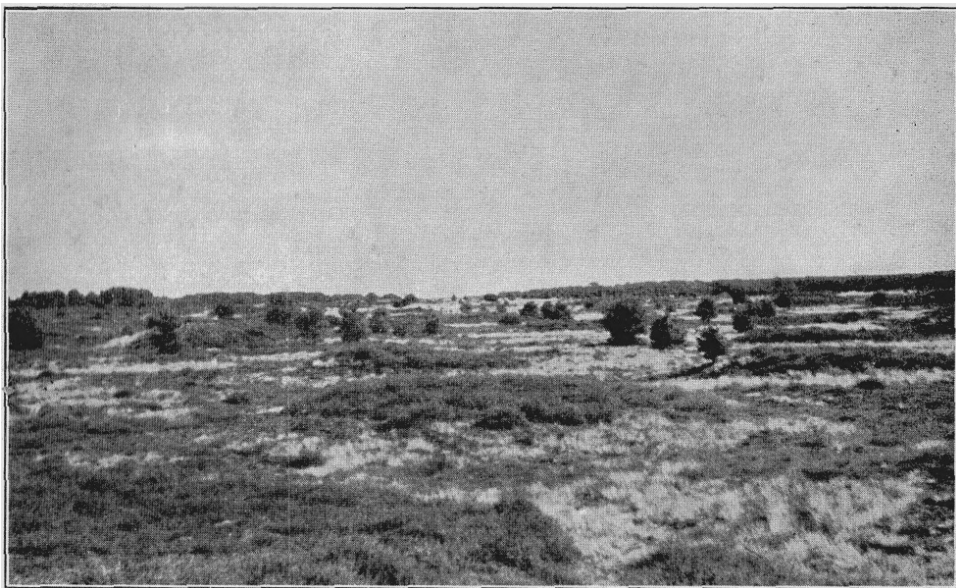
In his treatise "Über das kultische Reiten in Germanien" (Germanien, 1933. B. 1), Gustav Neckel links ritual processions on horseback with funeral rites.

In addition to the Pestrup field, there are large burial grounds at Hespenbusch near Großenkneten, Spascher Sand near Au-mühle, Moorbek, on the Moorbek estate, Dötlinger Heide on the Hunte and Ahlhorner Heide. There are also individual urn mounds scattered throughout the same area. The area around Dötlingen, Wildeshausen, Ahlhorn and Cloppenburg has a wealth of features from prehistoric times. Most of the mounds lie unrecognised in the heathland, in forests and in reforested pine fields. Many place names, such as Helle, Kummerkamp, Totengrund, Liekenfeld and others, indicate burial sites.

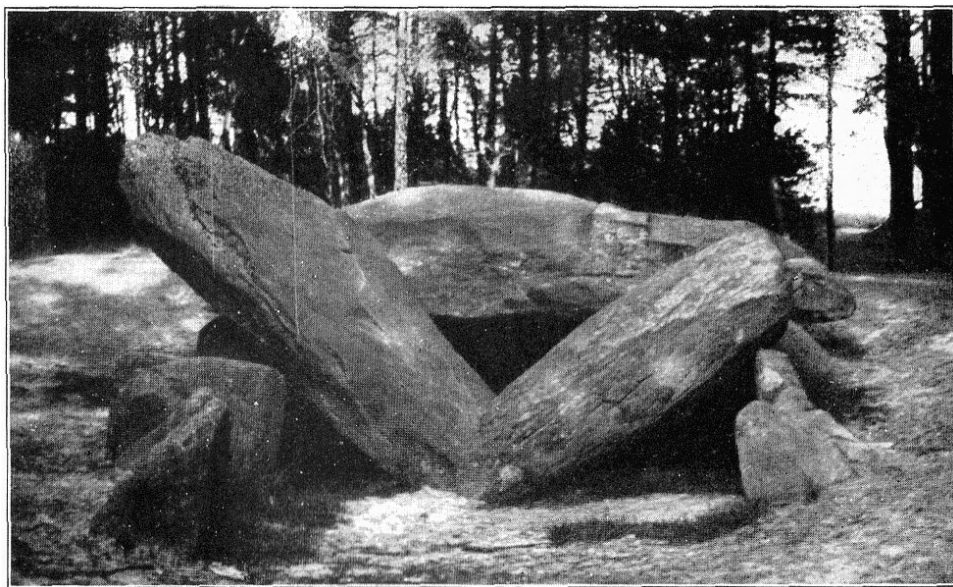
The prehistoric hills known as the "Three Mountains" at Zwischenahner Meer in Ammerland, 18 kilometres north-west of Oldenburg, are also associated with ancestor worship and honouring the dead.

On the northern side of the lake near Elmendorf, surrounded by water, three almost circular mounds lie in a triangle. The mounds were created by human hands, as the land here is flat, without any noticeable elevations. These three mounds, each with a diameter of about 45 metres and a height of 8 metres, are covered with huge old oak trees, so it is impossible that they could have been created in the last few centuries. If these elevations were sand drifts or dunes, they could only have an elongated shape, rising slowly on the windward side and sloping down more steeply on the other side.

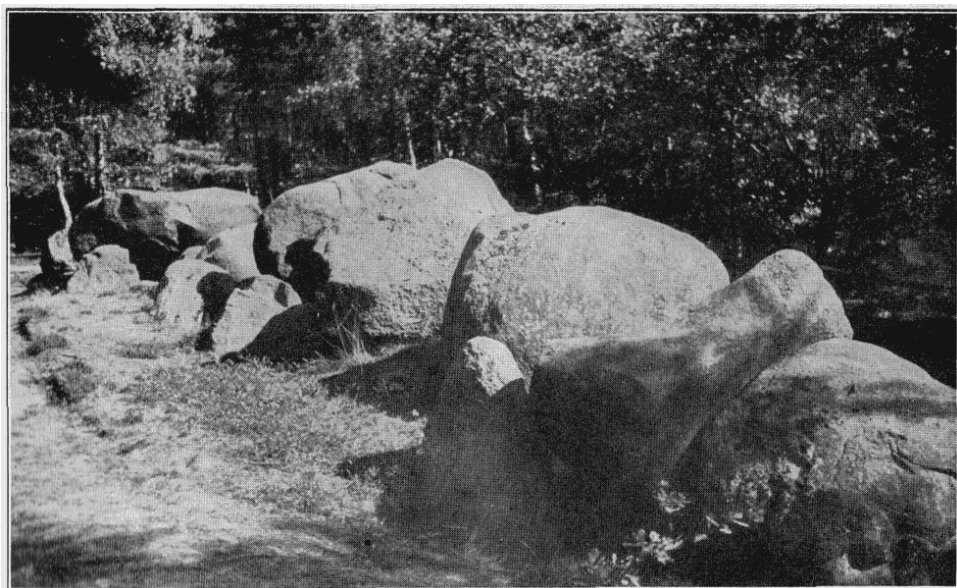
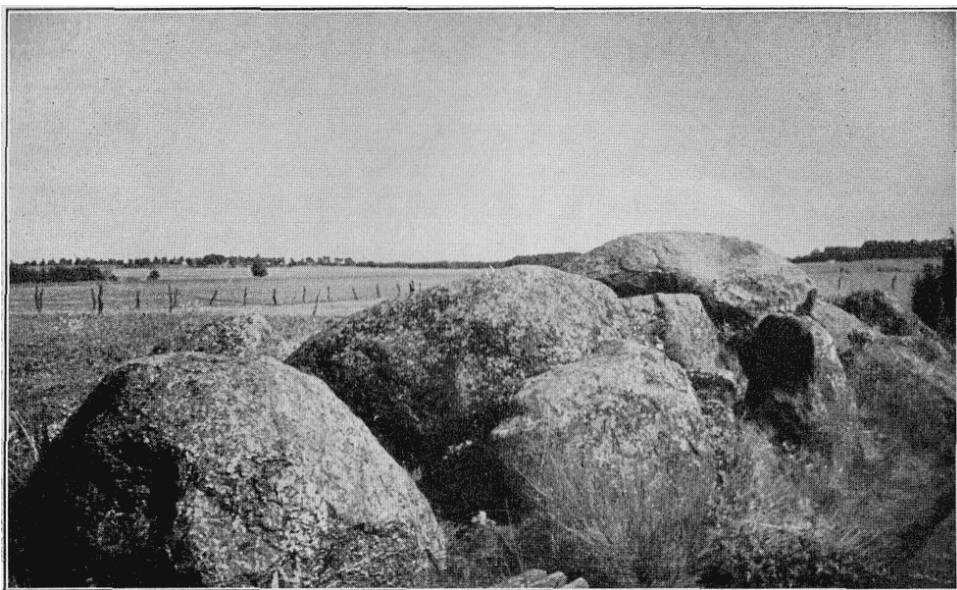
But they rise almost circularly and steeply. The summit, which offers a wide panoramic view of the sea, reveals a platform about 20 metres in diameter, on which the altars and pyres may have stood. The enormous task of constructing these largest prehistoric mounds in north-western Germany can be dated to the Bronze Age. They may be graves



Pestrup burial ground near Wildeshausen
Around 350 burial mounds can still be seen



Megalithic tomb group "Kellersteine"
Ahlhorner Heath



Megalithic tombs near Reckum on the Hunte (Wildeshausen)

the leaders of the people, on which altars were erected for sacrificial ceremonies in honour of the dead. Ancestor worship and religious worship are closely linked in ancient peoples. According to Germanic legend, heroes, dukes and kings lived in the sacred mountains after their death. There is ample evidence that cult and altar mounds contain graves.

Legends, which often have a mythical core, also tell of sacred mountains where heroes and kings live on; the folk legend places Frederick Barbarossa in the Kyffhäuser. Valhalla, the realm of the dead where Odin lived, was also conceived as a sacred mountain, a tomb for heroes. For three thousand years, the legend of the

"King Hinz" (Heinz, Heinrich), who was said to be buried in the Hinzerberg in a triple coffin, one made of copper, one of silver and one of gold. When this mountain was excavated as a quarry in 1899, the workers came across a burial chamber measuring approximately 2½ by 2½ metres; in addition to numerous grave goods, they found a clay urn enclosing a bronze urn containing the king's ashes. The legend of the king's triple coffin had been passed down by word of mouth for thousands of years. Although the coffins were not made of copper, silver and gold, but of stone, clay and bronze, the tradition had basically been correct.

The striking external shape of the three hills of Elmendorf, their enormous size and their selected, wonderful location close to the sea, washed by the waters, suggest the construction of a place of worship of the highest importance. Details would have to be revealed by careful excavation. Due to the overzealousness of the messengers of the new doctrine, almost all ancient Germanic cultural monuments were destroyed during Christianisation. It is thanks to a benevolent fate that something beautiful and grand has been preserved here.

The enormous memorials erected by faithful followers in tireless labour for their leaders on the coast near Elmendorf around 3000 years ago are probably the most significant hilltop sanctuary from Germanic prehistory in north-western Germany.

These altar mountains should become for Germany what the hills of Old Uppsala are for Sweden – a national sanctuary!

The place where the Three Hills Sanctuary is located is called "Elmendorf". Elm is a wooded ridge, and Elmsfeuer means beams of light on high places, including towers, ship masts, beacons on high points, and signal fires. The sacred fires burned on the holy hills by the sea during cult festivals. The flames of the solstice fires shone far across the sea to the sacred groves.

Sacrificial and festival sites and the burial places of ancestors stood in the light of the flames. In times of war, pyres were probably erected on these sacrificial mountains as fire signals, which were visible from one fire watchtower to another in the districts and passed on messages.

It is conceivable that Elmendorf, the place of the sacred hills, was named after St. Elm (Erasmus) by missionaries after the introduction of Christianity in order to distract from the old beliefs without prohibiting the folk custom of burning fires on these hills. Therefore, we can trace the name of the place Elmendorf back to the hill or Elms fire of the Germanic cult.

Adjacent to the village of Elmendorf with the "Dreibergen" lies the village of "Helle" with its prehistoric burial ground, which is thought to have been closely connected to the hill sanctuary.

The Zwischenahner Meer was not only geographically at the centre of the old Ammerland region; it was also a focal point in the spiritual life of its inhabitants, a place of gathering

and gathering place for the entire population. Even today, the ancient, sacred ground of our ancestors bears witness to their ancient way of life, which was determined by lofty goals. Even today, place names reveal ancient beliefs in God. The place name Helle (near Elmendorf) is a fine example of how language confirms prehistoric facts in ancient traditions. Helle, our "hell", originally meant nothing more than a burial ground, a "realm of the dead", as it then appears in the mythical reinterpretation as the realm of "Hel". This burial site, now a levelled field in Helle, still bears the name "Kummerkamp", which literally means a field of burial mounds.

The Gothic *halja*, Old Saxon *hellia* (our "hell"), originally probably referred to the burial ground itself, which was then mythically interpreted as the realm of the dead; if it is related to the verb *helan* (to hide) or *helian* (to envelop) (Latin *celare*, to hide), then it originally simply meant the realm of the

"hidden" or "sheltered" realm. Perhaps the stone burial chamber can be regarded as the most original "hellia"; perhaps the Latin *cella* (chamber, cell) also has the same relationship to "celare" and originally also meant the stone burial chamber, which is probably the original form of all "cellars". The name Kummerkamp can also be explained as "burial mound field": Kummer corresponds to the Anglo-Saxon *kum-bal* or *kumbor* (Old Saxon *kumbal*), which originally meant the burial mound as a tomb or grave marker, then the stake or grave stele, and finally the banner or banner pole, which was originally nothing more than the sacred grave stake. Kummerkamp is therefore a (fenced-in) field of burial mounds. The meaning of Kummer as "soul pain" seems to have originally been derived from the burial mound as the most visible expression of

"grief" for the deceased; it can also mean the funeral songs, the lamentation for the dead, which was held on the burial mound itself.

The Kummerkamp, which is partly enclosed by an old, strong hedge (wall) that is still visible today, still contains many valuable witnesses to prehistoric culture.

In the Oldenburg Yearbook of the Association for Archaeology and Regional History, 1926–27, Professor Dr von Buttel-Reepen describes the research findings from the burial ground in Helle, whose artefacts are housed in the Natural History Museum in Oldenburg. As already mentioned, these consist of flint weapons and tools, flint scrapers and blades, as well as bronze finds from various periods. Bronze brooches (= garment clasps), urns and bronze vessels were found, as well as an iron shield boss, swords and spears. The most valuable objects are an exceptionally beautiful antique glass vessel of moss green colour and a bone dice with engraved dots and rings (sun symbols).

On the Kummerkamp, the remains of skeleton graves were also discovered in the form of wooden boards that had rotted away in the earth. Although no bone remains were found in them, some of the above-mentioned grave goods were still present. From all this, it can be concluded that the first burials date from the end of the Neolithic period, others from the early to late Bronze Age, and others from the Iron Age.

Heppeke Renners tor Helle, mentioned in a document from 1441, is the direct ancestor of the current owner, Karl Reiners, Helle. Seven children: three boys and four girls, delightful, healthy, light-blond, blue-eyed creatures, are the offspring who will preserve the family line. For 500 years, the Reiners family has demonstrably lived on their own land without interruption. A document dating back to 1190 provides evidence of an even earlier period. Since that time, the Hedemann family has lived on their farm in Helle without changing ownership, for 750 years.



Urn mounds of the Moorbek burial ground



Urn mound

Burial ground, Moorbek estate. – The burial mound, 5 metres in diameter and 0.8 metres high, contained 10 urns dating from around 600 BC.

It can therefore be assumed that the same clan had lived on the same land for hundreds of years. The burial ground, the Kummerkamp, will also have taken in the ancestors, the forefathers of this pure-bred Germanic clan. There are also a strikingly large number of families here who can trace their roots back a long way.

On the eastern side of the Zwischenahner Meer lies the village of "Aschhausen", whose name may be related to the process of cremating corpses, the cremation graves and the ashes of the deceased. Certain customs were probably observed during the cremation. It is unlikely that the dead were simply burned behind the house on a pyre or funeral pyre by members of the clan. I have not been able to find any further information on this subject. However, it can be safely assumed that established ceremonies were followed in accordance with the highly developed tradition of honouring the dead. The cremation certainly took place only at certain locations, probably on the "Hilligenstohlsbarg" belonging to Aschhausen for this district. It can perhaps be assumed that a stone cremation altar, as described in detail elsewhere, stood here on the low hill. Such names must have had a specific meaning in ancient times; they cannot have been plucked out of thin air. Like the hill sanctuary of Elmendorf, the Hilligenstohlsbarg must have had special significance in the cult life of the clans living here. Urns have also been found at this site. Further investigations should provide more detailed information. We can perhaps imagine the course of such a funeral ceremony as follows:

The body was carried in solemn procession past temples or sacred groves to the stone altar. Perhaps in reference to these ancient customs and traditions, it then became customary in the early Christian church to carry the coffin of the deceased

around the church or past it before burial. After the ceremonial cremation, the remains of the body were probably carried in urns, led by the clan, to the "Helle" to be buried in the cemetery, the God's Acre. Even today, the names of such places still refer to their original purpose. The location of Aschhausen, not far from the hill sanctuary and the burial ground, suggests this assumption. Other places with a similar purpose are Aschenstedt near Dötlingen and Aschwege near Edewecht. They are common in north-western Germany, mostly in areas where prehistoric burial sites have been found , cremation sites, "ash sites".

Documents from 1449 mention an "Alarde to ^{Aschehusen}"¹. According to my explanation, the component "Asche" or "Asch" in Aschhausen etc. has a completely natural meaning, as it is derived from ash. Contrary to popular belief, ash in this context is not related to the ash tree, although the ash tree often appears as a sacred tree in the cult of the gods. Ash is called ase in Germanic, and the spear made of ash wood is also called this.

Names such as "Aschwege" (ash paths) may, as W. Teudt assumes in his book "Germanische Heiligtümer" (Germanic Sanctuaries), originate from the fact that the dead and their ashes were carried along these paths to places of worship and cremation sites. Compare also what has been said above about the paths of the dead.

Looking at the survey map, the following is striking: the path from the old Edewecht (formerly Adewacht), from Wester-scheps, Holttange, Dänikhorst goes via Aschwege, then via Specken (Low German Speken = spokes = wood, a log dam over low, swampy moorland)², past the Zwi-

¹ Baasen, C., The Oldenburg Ammerland. 1927

² Ramsauer, W., Local History of the Duchy of Oldenburg. 1.

schenahner Meer to Aschhausen, where the cremation may have taken place, to the three holy mountains and the Helle. A solemn ceremony may have been performed at the Dreihügelheiligtum, after which the ashes were buried in the Helle. Horn players led the procession. The weapons were carried at the front, followed by the war horse. Comrades-in-arms sang the dirge. This is how the free men of "Ambria" may have honoured their dead.

A counterpart to this route to Aschhausen is the old road that led from Aschenstedt via Aschenbeck past the court (Dingstätte) to Dötlingen to Petersberg (Petersberge are old Donarberge) and to the large sanctuary near Glane on the Hunte. Other interpretations of the name Aschhausen are unsatisfactory; the one assumed here is the most obvious and, in connection with the other cult sites, also the most natural.

This place also includes a "Düvelshop", or "Devil's Mound", a hill that certainly had some religious significance. In later times, this site, which was viewed with suspicion by missionaries, was "satanised" and renamed Devil's Mound.

Northwest of the Zwischenahner Meer lies Mansholt, and north of it "Dingsfelde". Mansholt is the name of the village and the old estate. The adjacent forest is the Mansholter Holz. This is how it is recorded on the cadastral maps. We also have shrines and thing sites here, which are always located close to each other. Part of this forest, directly adjacent to the old Mansholt estate, is marked on the cadastral map as "Dingshagen". This is where the enclosed thingstead is to be found.

*

It is strange that in the many treatises on early Germanic urns, there is no mention of their original use as vessels for cremated remains and the actual purpose of the corpses.

cremation is mentioned so little. It is generally accepted that urn fields and cremation graves developed in the late Bronze Age and spread from south to north, mixing with burial mounds. What is peculiar here is the persistence of burial mounds from the Stone Age to the Iron Age; stone coffins also occur occasionally. The reasons I have already given for cremation are perhaps too simple and too logical to be convincing. The origin of cremation is generally interpreted as follows: according to Germanic beliefs, cremation allowed the soul to detach itself from the mortal shell more easily after death and thus float away more quickly to the realm of the afterlife. Jacob Grimm also regarded cremation as a sacrifice to the deity. Many experts even say that the Indo-Europeans brought the custom of cremation with them when they migrated north from the south, i.e. that it was adopted from India and retained by the Germanic peoples in northern Germany during the Bronze Age. Today, we know that the custom of cremation migrated from north to south, as the forefathers of the Germanic and Greek peoples belonged to the same ancient people, the same Aryan race. The custom of cremation was therefore similar among the Greeks and the Germanic peoples. Homer sings of the cremation of Greek heroes in the Iliad. Similar descriptions can be found in the Germanic Beowulf song, which almost corresponds to those in the Iliad.

When you think about the many cremations that took place at the huge burial mound near Pestrup, you can't help but wonder how this was done. We don't have a clear picture of this. Reports only mention pyres. Tacitus also mentions cremation with selected woods.

During the excavation of an urn mound on the grounds of Gu-

Moorbek near Glane and carefully examining its contents, I was able to determine the following:

Part of the heathland at the edge of an ancient dry ditch, which must have been a tributary of the Hunte river in the past, is a large burial ground. In this piece of heathland, there are many low, outwardly inconspicuous urn mounds lying irregularly next to each other, unnoticed and unrecognised. Part of this heathland has been ploughed up for farmland. In the process, urn shards and entire urns were ploughed up and carelessly thrown aside. While examining urn shards and bone remains lying in a rabbit hole, I noticed the wall of an urn at the edge of this hole under the heath, which I carefully uncovered. However, it had been destroyed by the roots of the heath. Near this spot lay a small, inconspicuous mound 4–5 metres in diameter and about 80 cm high, which, like the whole field with its undulating slight elevations, was covered with thick flowering heather.

First, some heather sods were lifted flat from the root system and the light, sandy and moist soil was examined. At a depth of barely 20 cm below the heather scrub, I noticed the edge of an urn, which I very carefully uncovered without touching it. Right next to it was a second urn and, after the soil around it had been removed, a third. These three urns stood in a row next to each other. A short distance of 60 cm away, there were two more, and in another group, five urns stood together. So this very small, inconspicuous mound had covered 10 urns. Two of the pots had been crushed by roots and frost, but the shards were complete, as the grave had remained completely untouched since the burial. The illustrations clearly show the shallow depth of the soil layer, the arrangement of the urns and the variety of shapes. None of the ten urns is alike; their shapes and sizes vary greatly. The material is coarse-slip clay mixed with grit.

finely crushed granite stones, feldspar, quartz and mica, and has a dark grey-brown colour.

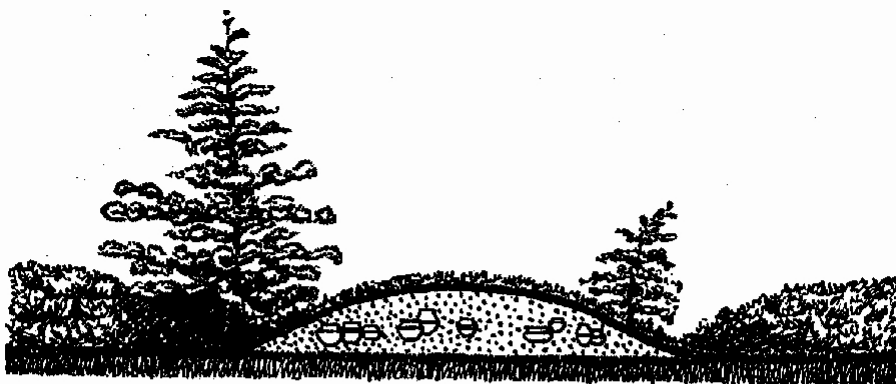
After all the urns had been carefully uncovered and the soil had been meticulously examined for any grave goods, which were not present, all the urns were left to dry in the open air until the next morning. The pots had become very brittle due to the damp soil. However, drying in the open air made them more stable, so that they could be removed from their place with great care. The urns were then cleaned of soil with a soft brush and their contents examined. Some of the urns were filled up to three-quarters with bone fragments, covered with a layer of fine sand from the mound. A little sand had also trickled between the bone fragments. The bone fragments were solid and very light in colour, grey-white. It was striking that neither ashes nor small charcoal particles were found in the urns. Some of the bone remains showed traces of melted bronze. A few small balls of melted bronze were also found in the urns. They probably came from bronze belt buckles or fibulae (= garment clasps). In urn no. 1, the bone remains were covered with an upturned flat, smaller bowl, as can be clearly seen in the photograph. In urns 3 and 8, the bones were covered with shards. In one urn, there was a very small bowl on top, 7.5 cm in diameter and only 3.5 cm high. It was shaped like a flat cup with a handle. This vessel, into which sand had trickled, may be considered a so-called libation vessel. Two of the urns, nos. 4 and 5, are very neatly crafted, beautifully shaped and decorated with incised line ornaments. The various urns, which I sketched on graph paper with millimetre precision, are elegant and beautiful in design; one could almost say modern. Our ancestors had a refined sense of form; there is no sign of barbaric ignorance here. The

I have recorded the progress of the excavation in photographs. The sizes of the urns can be seen in the scale drawings. Director Müller-Brauel of the prehistoric collection at the Väterkunde Museum in Bremen's Böttcherstraße confirmed to me that the urns described and illustrated here date from the Late Bronze Age and must be attributed to Period VI. However, they also extend into the subsequent La Tène period, the Germanic Iron Age, specifically into stage A. Since the time span is not exactly small, it follows that this grave was used by a clan for reburials over a long period of time.

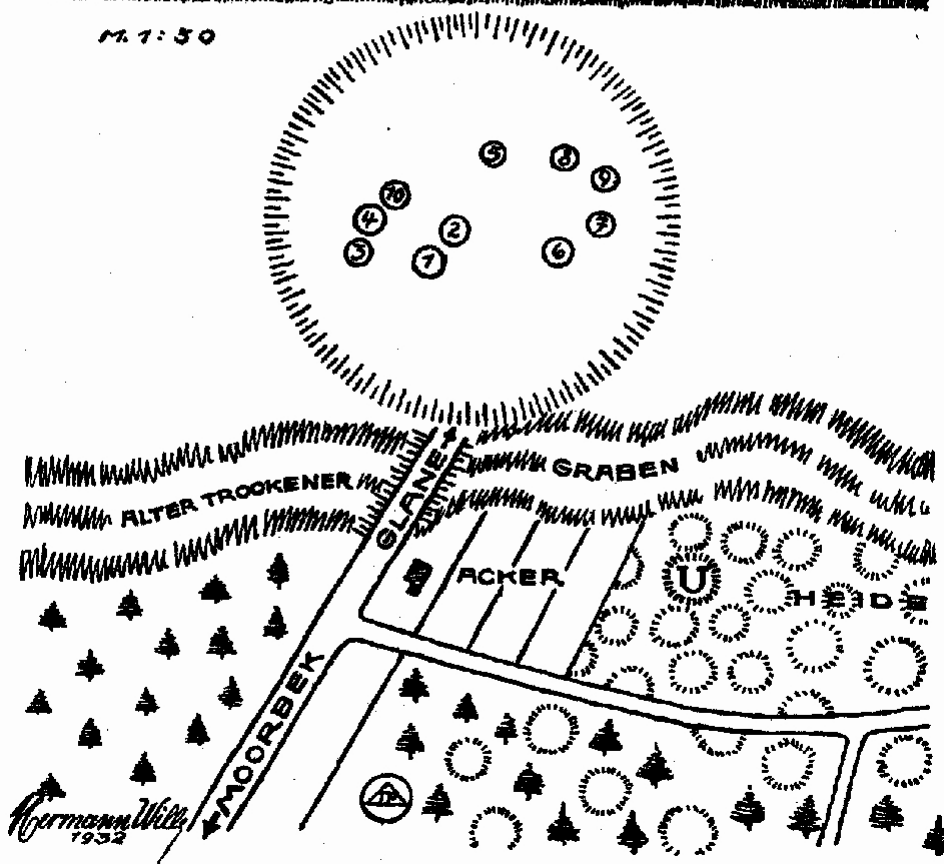
The most striking thing about the examination of the contents of the various urns was that not the slightest particles of charcoal and only very little ash residue were found. This gives pause for thought. Naturally, a large fire is necessary for cremation. However, it would have been impossible to pick out all the bone fragments, even the tiniest splinters and the often pea-sized, melted bronze balls found in the urns, from the charcoal and ash remains of a large pyre if the cremation had taken place on a woodpile. Furthermore, how would it have been possible to collect the small bone remains and bronze balls from the ash heap without mixing in even a single particle of charcoal? However, I have been able to ascertain from various fire pits and hearths in the ground that charcoal remains and ash from this period have otherwise been preserved.

The ceremonial cremation of the dead could therefore not have taken place on a pyre or a woodpile. Special facilities must have been available for this recurring act.

Special cremation sites would have been set up near the large burial grounds, the cemeteries, where the cremation took place. On the capstone of such altars, the deceased may have been placed in their ceremonial armour for cremation.



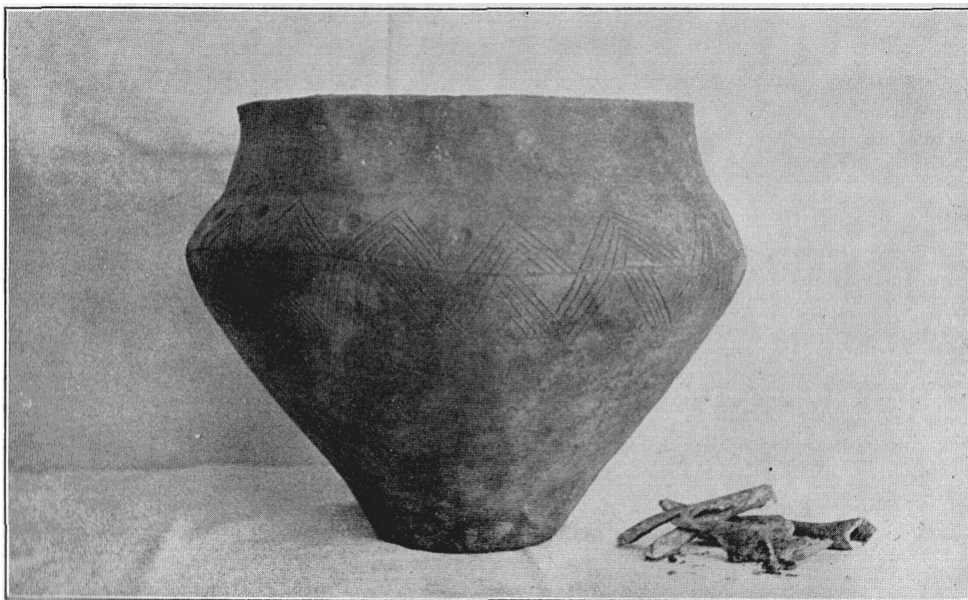
M. 1:50



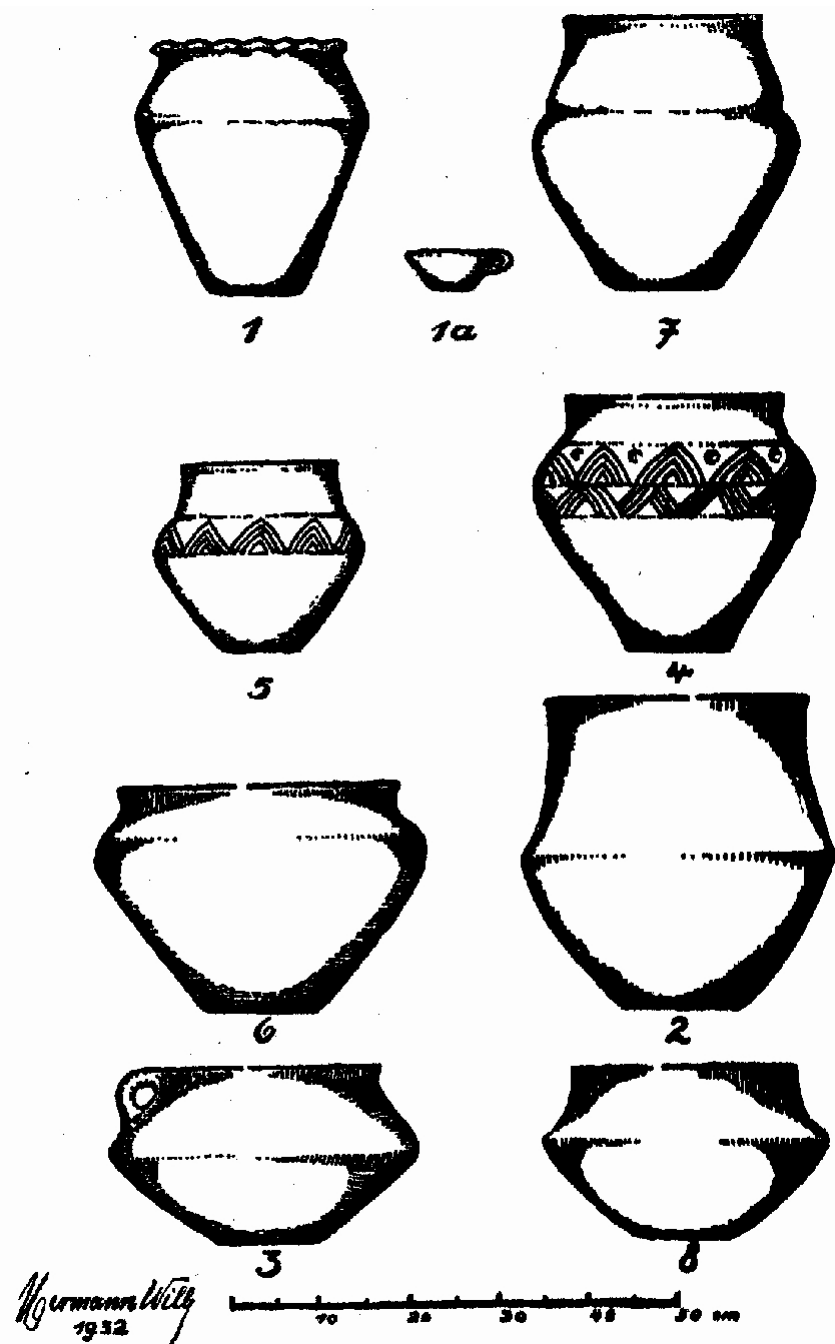
Urn mound in the Moorbek burial ground



Urn mound, Moorbek estate
Group of urns in their original arrangement



Urn mound, Moorbek estate
Decorated urns from around 600 BC



Eight urns from a burial mound in the Moorbek burial ground dating from around 600 BC.

The wood piles were erected around this altar and set alight. The body was consumed in the embers of the fire. The bone remains and the remains of the melted jewellery and weapons remained on the stone, from where they could be collected after cooling and placed in the urn.

As if to confirm my assumption, Hans Müller-Brauel, who has many years of practical experience in this field and is a keen expert on prehistoric details, told me during a conversation on this subject that he had repeatedly excavated fire pits in the area between the Weser and Elbe rivers, which he had studied in particular, that must have been used for cremating corpses. These were rectangular stone structures made of small boulders, covered with a thick layer of clay on top. Remains of burnt material, etc., were also found. After the dead person had been cremated, the ashes and charcoal remains could be easily blown away by waving a cloth, leaving only the bone remains. This explains quite convincingly the fact that the urns contain only bone remains without any ashes or charcoal.

The cremation was accompanied by a solemn ceremony. The members of the clan would have carried the dead to the place of worship. It was not mourners, as with the Greeks and Romans, who accompanied the procession with their eerie cries, but the solemn, familiar war songs of the comrades-in-arms. The dead man did not need to be mourned because of his death; he was the chosen one who came to Valhalla to continue fighting as a hero. This was the attitude of the mourners towards the dead man; it corresponded to a heroic worldview that had existed since ancient times. In the famous epic "Beowulf", which describes Nordic conditions around 600 AD in Anglo-Saxon language, the burial of the hero is described at the end (verse 3138 ff.):

Himƿ —gegiredan Géata léode ad
on eordan un-wâclícne,
helmun behongen, hilde-bordum,
beorhtum byrnum, swâ he bêna waes;
âlegdonƿ â tô-middes maerneƿ éoden,
haeled hiôfende, hlâford léofne.
Ongunnonƿ â on beorge bael-fyra maest wîgend
weccan: wudu-rêc âstâh
sweart ofer swiodole, swôgende lêg, wôpe
bewunden (wind-blond gelaeg) odƿ aet he
pâ bânhus gebrocen haefde. hât on hredre
...

"The Geats prepared for him
the fire on the earth, the inevitable one, hung with
helmets, with battle shields,
With shining armour, as he had requested They laid the
glorious ruler in the middle, The bright hero, the dear
lord.
Then the greatest funeral fires began on the mountain,
Awakening the warriors, the wood smoke rose Black above
the smouldering embers, the crackling flames,
Accompanied by cries of lamentation – the wind died down –
Until it had broken the ossuary (the body), Hot in the chest
..."

"They laid him there in the middle" does not necessarily mean
"In the middle of the wood" can also mean "in the middle of the wood".
One could therefore imagine that the corpse was actually placed on a
stone pyre and that the wood was piled around it. The embers in the
middle would then have consumed the corpse without it coming into
contact with the wood itself. Dr. J. O. Plaßmann pointed out to me that
this view actually corresponds to the

corresponds to the idea preserved in the legend of Brynhild sleeping on the stone in the middle of the "wobbling fire":

"On the stone sleeps the battle-hardened warrior,
surrounded by the blazing enemy (fire)."

We know that this mythical idea is nothing more than a mythical reinterpretation of the pyre, that the sleeper is in fact the dead woman who has been plunged into Odin's magical sleep (death) and is ready to journey to the underworld. This so-called "cult myth" would therefore also reflect an ancient cultic practice.

With the rising smoke of the flames, the soul, separated from the body, ascended into the universe to the gods. In "Sämund's Edda of the Wise", translated by

J. L. Studach in 1829, there is a note that reads: "Wasn't Odin's body burned? Didn't he ascend gloriously to heaven in smoke and flames? And: There he rose up, where he will return. In the fire of sacrifice? In the burning of the corpse? In the smoke, the soul of the dead rose up to the gods."

The places where the cremations were probably carried out still refer to their original purpose today through their names, such as Aschenstedt near Dötlingen and Aschhausen on the Zwischenahner Meer. This becomes more likely when we consider the numerous "Aschenwege" or "Aschwege" (ash paths) that exist in Lower Germany, which sometimes coincide with the corpse paths, which in turn may usually only be used for the purpose of burials and often lead across completely foreign land, even through the middle of foreign farms. If one could research the age of such corpse paths, one might perhaps go back to the gravest prehistoric times.

The Iron Age, which followed the Bronze Age (beginning around 700 BC), brought about the discovery of iron in the local area.

Iron ore was found in the ground, a major transformation. However, it took effect very slowly. The old material, bronze, was more beautiful and harder, because people did not yet understand how to temper iron, and so expensive bronze remained alongside cheap iron. Until then, bronze had hardly been used for ordinary tools, except for jewellery, swords, axes and other objects. There were no digging tools or other rough tools made from precious bronze. Domestic iron was easier to work with, it could be cast and forged, and above all, it was easier to obtain. The use of this new metal brought about many changes in the economy and technology, which then also had an impact on the lives of the peoples. Trade and commerce expanded further, connections with foreign peoples, journeys to the south, foreign merchants and the trade in amber brought new, bustling life. Farm settlements developed into villages and towns.

Different customs also emerged in the burial of the dead, and so first in the south and much later also in the north of Germania, people switched from cremation to burial. In our homeland, burial had already reappeared in pre-Christian times, alongside cremation.

After subjugating the Saxons, Charles the Frankish prohibited had fought for 30 years under Wittekind against foreign rule with tenacious perseverance for traditional customs and beliefs, under penalty of death. With Christianisation, he thus finally introduced burial in graves.

The dead were no longer cremated and their remains were no longer placed in urns under a flat mound, but in tree coffins, wooden coffins, and, for the more affluent, in stone coffins in a cemetery.

In the burial grounds from the transition period, in addition to the earlier urn graves, one also finds those of earth burials.

. The remains of the bodies buried in the earth have mostly disappeared completely. These graves can be identified by the remains of the decayed wooden boards that lined the side walls of the crypt. The location of the grave goods, which are often very well preserved, also helps to identify the former burial site.

In some of these graves on the Kummerkamp in Helle, the remains of wooden grave linings and grave goods were found in a layer of ash several centimetres thick, which is believed to have come from sacrificial fires in honour of the dead and was scattered in the grave. This ash filling in the grave is interpreted as follows: the dead were laid to rest on ashes in order to provide them with warmth in the realm of the dead from the sacrificial fire through the ashes, just as weapons and food were given to the dead in vessels based on the same belief. However, one should not attach too much importance to these supposedly "primitive" beliefs, as there was also a practical purpose here: the damp earth was home to many worms; ashes are sterile and dead, so they kept the worms away. This was a way of protecting the dead.

When Germanic beliefs about gods met with Christian teachings, the new customs also had an effect on the veneration of the dead. The ban on cremation in the 8th century AD led to the emergence of other customs among the Saxons in north-western Germany. The Christian Church issued its orders. Burials were carried out according to Christian rites, but many of the traditional customs were retained.

The deceased were now laid to rest in a stretched-out position in tree coffins, split, hollowed-out tree trunks or wooden box coffins. Nobles and the wealthy were laid to rest in stone box coffins. In the Oldenburg Castle Museum, next to a tree coffin, there are several stone coffins with beautiful decorations from the early Christian period, which were found in the coastal area of the North Sea and the Jade Bay.

Even now, the dead were buried in the churchyard around the church, just as in the Stone Age, when the deceased were buried in huge stone houses in cemeteries located around places of worship. Thus, graves often point to places where sanctuaries once stood in ancient times.

Looking back, we can safely say that our ancestors honoured the dead at least as much as the "praised" civilised peoples of antiquity, who ultimately only developed forms that had their origins in the Nordic character and Germanic spirit. Let us rejoice that so many visible traces of this ancestor cult have been preserved, completing the picture of our ancestors' spiritual culture in such a desirable way. For such a cemetery field tells us vividly how settled peasant labour developed the land; it also tells us that long before Christianisation, the Germanic peoples had a high level of cultural life and pure and deep beliefs, and that the ideas of the "savage paganism of the barbarians" belong to the realm of fable and legend.

Everything attacks with a consuming
tooth the voracious time,
Everything displaces it from its place,
does not allow it to remain long.
Everything demands death.
Dying is the law, not punishment,
And of the world you see,
it will one day be said: it was!
Seneca

Houses of God

in the Lar and Leri districts.¹

Oldenburg is the classic land of megalithic monuments from Germanic prehistory. There is hardly any other area in Germany where such a large number of well-preserved stone settings and other structures from prehistoric times have been preserved. These monuments of the ancestors, which are so immensely valuable to the German people, are German cultural assets of the highest value, for they are sublime testimonies to the high spiritual culture of that ethnic community that lived around the North Sea.

Three to two thousand years before the birth of Christ, a people created these enormous structures and places of worship, which were astonishing for their time and tools, and whose remains have survived to the present day.

In southern Oldenburg, these enormous stone monuments are clustered together in large groups within a limited area. The land is largely heath and fallow. Only in later times was part of it taken into cultivation as farmland. Today, it is criss-crossed by a few roads. Settlement is sparse. It is thanks to these circumstances that

¹ The Lar-Gau was the district between the Hunte and Weser rivers, including Dötlingen, Kirchhatten, Hude and Delmenhorst; the Leri-Gau was the tribal community on the left bank of the Hunte, including Hundlosen, Wildeshausen, Visbek and Ahlhorn.

that the mighty witnesses of prehistoric times have been preserved. At the time these stone monuments were erected, the population must have been much denser, for only a large, strong race of highly cultured people could have had the ability to construct such buildings. But even in the Bronze Age, which followed the Neolithic period, there must have been a lively community here; the wide heaths of this area appear to be literally dotted with megalithic tombs and burial mounds.

The enormous stone structures, which are located close together in large complexes, clearly show – as already mentioned in the previous chapter in a different context – two types of stone settings that are fundamentally different in their construction. The differences are so striking that it is obvious even without special knowledge that the two complexes were once built for completely different purposes.

One group consists of massive, imposing megalithic tombs constructed from supporting stones and capstones. The other group comprises the "Hünenbetten" (giants' beds), which have been erected in long rectangles. In the upper quarter of the interior of these, there is a burial chamber constructed from large stone blocks, a deep grave whose interior is level with the top edge of the ground. These are the long stone structures to the left of the Hunte river in the heath near Glane and the so-called "Visbeker Braut und Bräutigam" (Visbek bride and groom) in the Ahlhorn heath.

These two different types of stone structures are generally regarded as equivalent structures that served one purpose, namely the burial of clan leaders and entire families. The elongated rectangular stone settings with the deep graves at the a end referred to as "Hünenbetten" – an arbitrary term that says nothing about their actual purpose. However, since both types reveal a completely different basic idea and even show clearly recognisable differences, there is no logical explanation or deeper justification for equating them.

The crux of the as yet unresolved question is therefore this:

Are the boulders arranged in elongated rectangles on the Ahlhorn and Glane Heath burial grounds the graves of leaders and subordinates, as is the prevailing opinion, or are they, as I have discovered in my thorough investigations, something else entirely, namely the foundation walls of a former covered place of worship?

The opinion that the stone settings are the remains of places of worship is dismissed as fantasy, without the slightest evidence being provided for the inaccuracy of this view or the correctness of any other. However, no flawless logical justification has yet been provided for the claim that they were large-scale burial sites. To my knowledge, this is the first time that this bold assertion has been ventured, put down in writing and illustrated with photographs and drawings. Attacks from experts are inevitable. It must be difficult to break with a cherished misconception!

The fact that prehistorians and archaeologists have not yet recognised the enormous remains of Germanic temples as such is no proof that there were no temples. Despite archaeological knowledge, the simplest evidence has been overlooked. With sober, calm consideration and logical thinking, combined with a sense and feeling for the practically simple, the craftsmanship and technical vision, one comes to different conclusions.

It is claimed that there were never any Germanic temples because no tangible evidence has been found for them, because there are said to be no remains from which temples could be reconstructed. And yet there is clear, unambiguous evidence of striking clarity and convincing power, which has simply not been recognised as such until now.

However, before I present the actual evidence of the existence

Germanic temples in the earliest times through technical reconstructions, I would like to briefly summarise what historical source research has to say about Germanic temples.

At the beginning of almost every chapter on the religious customs of the Germanic peoples, and in all books on Germanic prehistory, one finds the view, based on Tacitus, that the Germanic peoples did not know any covered temple buildings and performed their cult rituals only on altars in the open air, in sacred groves. By referring to a passage in Chapter 9 of *Germania*, it is believed that any assumption of temples can be dismissed once and for all as absurd and unreasonable. Tacitus writes:

"Moreover, it is contrary to their (the Germanic peoples') conception of the greatness of the heavenly powers to confine the gods within walls and to represent them with human features. They consecrate forests and groves to them and invoke by the names of gods that secret power which they behold only in rapt contemplation."

This speaks of a deep religious view.

In his "Prehistory of Germany," Carl Schuchhardt writes under "Worship of the Gods," referring to the passage quoted from Tacitus: "There were never any images of gods among the Germanic peoples and, as a result (!? author's note), no temples either." This is concise, but by no means proof. Schuchhardt makes two things dependent on each other here that are by no means mutually dependent.

Tacitus was probably only partially informed about the temple buildings of the Germanic tribes by his sources and, due to his lack of knowledge, expressed himself incorrectly at this point. The Romans imagined temples to be only monumental buildings made of precious materials. They therefore did not consider the elongated, simple buildings covered with heather, which Tacitus probably knew as meeting houses, to be temples because they did not appear worthy enough for gods according to their standards.

Tacitus correctly reports that the Germanic tribes did not depict their gods with human features. No finds have ever been made in Germanic territory that could be identified as images of gods.

However, it is at least very risky to deny that the Germanic peoples built temples based solely on this source.

Firstly, it should be noted that the Roman legions only fought the Germanic tribes in summer, while they took up winter quarters during the cold seasons. Similarly, travelling merchants would not have transported their goods overland in winter, so they would have been familiar with the cult festivals of summer, but less so with those of winter. Perhaps this explains the error or ignorance in Tacitus' reports.

On the other hand, Roman historians, including Tacitus, also report that Germanicus in the autumn of 14

AD, during his campaigns of revenge following the crushing defeat and destruction of the Roman legions in 9 AD by Arminius (Hermann), the liberator of Germania, attacked the Marsi tribe on the upper Lippe during a religious festival and razed the sanctuary of Tanfana¹ to the ground. However, such a sanctuary can only have been a temple or a closed cult room. This Tanfana, which Tacitus describes as the centre of a cult association, would have been a place of worship with a cult hall for the Marsi tribe, as this is clearly what it was. Of course, we can only use the term "temple" with the greatest reservation; it should not be taken to mean that it was something equivalent to a southern temple. Basically, Tacitus is correct in his assertion that the

¹ It is not possible to distinguish with certainty whether this "Tanfana(e)" is the name of a deity or the sanctuary itself. The name has been interpreted in countless ways; it is not worth repeating these interpretations here.

The Germanic peoples did not lock their gods away in temples, that is correct; these Germanic cultic spaces were not intended as dwellings for gods, as rationalistic southern European thinking interpreted them: they were merely spaces for the community to gather for cultic purposes.

If we now turn to Old Norse sagas and Edda poems, we often come across very detailed accounts of "temples", the existence of which has been confirmed by excavations in Iceland and Gotland. According to these accounts, the temple was an elongated building with two rooms; the larger one, which took up about three quarters of the long rectangle, was used for cult rituals and sacrificial meals; the smaller quarter was the actual sanctuary, the "Afhus", which was reserved for priests only. The temple treasure and cult objects were also kept there.

The foundations of royal halls (temples?) have been found on the island of Gotland, while the remains of sun temples have been discovered in Ireland, England, Norway and Sweden. In the 8th century, the island of Fosetesland (Helgoland) had a temple, which was destroyed by the monk Ludgerus in 785. According to a report by the Archbishop of Bremen, the old church in Osterholz-Scharmbeck also stands on the site of an ancient pagan sanctuary. In the 11th century, a large temple still stood in all its glory near Uppsala, with its evergreen tree and sacrificial springs.

A letter from Pope Gregory I (590–604) to Abbot Melittus of Canterbury clearly attests that the Saxons who emigrated to England must have understood the art of building solid temples. It states:¹

"Tell Augustine (the convert of the Saxons in England) what conclusion I have reached after long consideration of the conversion of the English: namely, that one should not destroy the pagan temples of the people, but only the images of the gods within them; then one should

¹ Germania, 1932, 4th series, vol. 1.

temples with holy water, erect altars and place relics there. For if these temples are well built, they can very well be transformed from places of demons into houses of the true God, so that when the people themselves do not see their temples destroyed, they will renounce their error from their hearts, recognise and worship the true God, and gather at the usual place according to the old custom."

Opinions may differ about the alleged "images of gods" mentioned here; in general, Christian sources use the term "idolum" to refer to any sacred object of the pagans. Such objects (posts, pillars?) would have been found in these enclosed cult rooms.

Gregory I's writings suggest that the Germanic peoples worshipped their deities not only in sacred groves, but also in rooms.

And this is entirely understandable to me for another reason, which was rooted in the nature of the country. Some of the cult festivals in honour of the deity took place during the warmer season, in summer. The festivals were held in the open air, in sacred groves, at altars, under sacred trees, oaks, lime trees and ash trees, of course. Even today, church consecration festivals are still celebrated under the village lime tree.

But what about winter, the time of the largest and most sacred of the festivals, the festival of the winter solstice, the Yule festival, the time of the

"wîhen nachten", the sacred twelve nights?

It seems implausible to me that this most important annual festival of the Germanic peoples in the cold north would have been celebrated in bare, leafless sacred groves, amid high snowdrifts and bitter cold. What about the sacrificial meals and drinking that were part of the high festival and are attested as such? In winter, in bitter cold, such festivals would hardly have been possible in the sacred groves; the elongated "temples" were built for this purpose.

It is hardly credible and difficult to imagine that the Germanic peoples, with their advanced culture, who erected huge stone monuments to their dead and lived in log cabins, would have celebrated their extensive cult festivals outdoors in snowstorms.

Such considerations alone support the no longer bold assertion that the Germanic peoples must have had covered places of worship, i.e. temples.

However, since no reliable records from the time of their presumed origin have come down to us, we must attempt to resolve the questions raised in another way, namely through technical reconstruction.

This should be attempted at the large so-called "megalithic tombs" to the left of the Hunte, in the Glaner and Ahlhorner Heide, which I do not consider to be "giant's beds", but rather the remains, the foundations of places of worship, of sacred halls, of temples. The three stone settings mentioned are constructed in long rectangles of regular shape, with lengths of approximately 60, 80 and 105 metres and an internal width of approximately 5 and 7 metres. The stones of the side walls are aligned in a straight row. In the upper part of the structure, about 15 metres from the head end, there is a deep grave. The rest of the elongated space is completely empty. The three structures are completely identical and, as the comparison in the picture shows to any impartial observer, differ significantly from the surrounding real megalithic tombs.

In his "Prehistory of Germany", Carl Schuchhardt comments on these stone structures in the Ahlhorn Heath under "Megalithic Culture" as follows:

"Earlier claims about these graves, that their stone structures were exposed, located on a flat hill surrounded by a circle of stones, and that they were heroes', princes' or even mass graves after a battle, have been refuted by modern research. They were carefully constructed architectural structures, prepared

of a larger community, with a preferred burial site for the ruling class and simpler ones for the many subordinates. As usual, the mound that once covered them is missing. Despite some still doubting it, this mound was originally always there. The most beautiful megalithic tombs are near Wildeshausen in Oldenburg, where the 'Visbek bride and groom' reach lengths of 80 and 110 metres on the Ahlhorn Heath."

Let us first assume that the long stone settings with the deep grave in the upper quarter of the total length were indeed structures with preferred burial sites for the ruling family and simpler ones for the many subordinates. How can we practically imagine the creation of such a giant grave, especially since, according to Schuchhardt's opinion, a mound arched over the entire complex? How can we imagine the filling of the huge space within the outer stone setting? Were the dead buried one after the other next to the deep grave for the "ruling dynasty" and covered with earth? When was the long row of stones enclosing the site erected? Was it built at the same time as the deep grave was constructed, or was it extended over time as more dead were buried? And if, as I firmly believe with Schuchhardt, the large deep grave was undoubtedly a crypt for several dead, for the ruling dynasty, for the district prince and his close relatives, how could subsequent burials have taken place in the deep grave given the presence of a mound? For this grave has no passageway from the kerbstones to the chamber like the passage graves, that much is certain. Furthermore, why is it that in the three large stone structures of the same type in the Ahlhorn and Glane heaths, and indeed in other similar stone settings that I have seen in pictures, the leader's grave is not in the middle, surrounded by his people, but always in the first quarter of the total length? This upper part, in which the grave is located, is always marked by a special

Large stones are emphasised as a space, and in three out of five cases, this stone setting is semicircular like the apse of a church. If, like Schuchhardt, one believes that these stone settings are "carefully constructed architectural structures", would it not have been illogical to cover them completely with earth and thus hide them from view? Even the finds of bone remains and pottery shards made in the elongated interior are by no means compelling evidence that the structures should be regarded as mass graves.

In countless churches of the early Middle Ages, the graves of princes and clergy often fill a large part of the floor beneath the stone paving of the nave.

However, if these elongated stone settings were not burial sites for long-term burials, nor mass graves after a battle, then they were unique structures created from an idea, built according to a specific plan during a construction period, and thus truly "careful architectural structures", albeit in a different sense than Carl Schuchhardt means.

The striking difference in the structure of the megalithic tombs and these elongated stone settings alone should prompt any attentive observer to think about the different purposes of these stone ruins.

The only logical answer to all these open questions seems to me to be the following:

The rows of stones arranged in a long rectangle on the Ahlhorn and Glane Heaths in a regular, straight alignment are an architectural structure, namely the remains of the low base walls of temples with a deep grave. During his lifetime, the leader or prince built this cult hall with his people in honour of the deity. The crypt, whose capstones formed the altar, was intended for the leader and his clan.

The idea that the capstones of the deep grave may have been used as an altar is one that is quite familiar to modern prehistoric research. Herman Wirth writes in his "Aufgang der Menschheit" (The Rise of Humanity): "The North Atlantic dolmens, the megalithic tombs, the house of God as a family tomb was in fact an altar and its capstone the 'sacrificial table' on which the sacred fire was lit."

Only in this interpretation, according to which the capstones of the deep grave were both the altar and sacrificial table of a temple, does its location in the first quarter of the total length of the complex make sense and take on meaning; for now the division of the apse and nave into two parts in appropriate proportions becomes self-evident.

Thus, in the semi-darkness of the royal hall, the temple, in the deep tomb – the crypt – in solemn silence beneath the altar of the covered place of worship, and around him, in the immediate and wider vicinity, lay the faithful of his people in their stone houses in the bosom of their beloved homeland. Thus, the place of worship was at the same time a symbol of the unity of the clans, and the altar of the temple was the sacred centre of the clan associations living in the surrounding districts. The thoughts that occupied his mind will be best understood by those who have read Herman Wirth's prehistoric review "What does it mean to be German?", written "for self-reflection and self-determination". It states in various places:

Here, sacrifices were made to pray for offspring and for the reincarnation of beloved ancestors who had passed away. Here, the 'die and become' took place, the eternal return, which is the revelation of God in time and space. And this revelation is passed on from generation to generation as a moral world order. That is the meaning of the clan and inheritance: the high responsibility towards ancestors and descendants as a link in a chain. Death is not an end, not a

punishment: it is transformation, renewal, reversal. The tomb is therefore the symbol of human life, where 'die and become' is fulfilled, accomplished. It is the place of rebirth, which guarantees the eternal return of life in one's lineage, in one's physical and spiritual heritage. This is why the high mass of the year, the Yule celebration, the festival of the dead and the living, was celebrated here and prayers were said for the reincarnation of the departed."

The fact that the ancient megalithic tombs were sacred sites and were regarded as such for thousands of years is proven by the many Iron Age and even Saxon urn cemeteries that were laid out around such tombs: e.g. the Saxon cemeteries at Loxstedt, Westerwanna, Ottendorf district, Issendorf, Kr. Stade, all of which begin in the earthen mantle of the megalithic tombs! The old pastor Mushardt, who excavated Issendorf around 1770, reports that the most beautiful and best urns were found in the earthen cover of the stone tomb – a place of honour for the noble families. (Communication from Hans Müller-Brauel.)

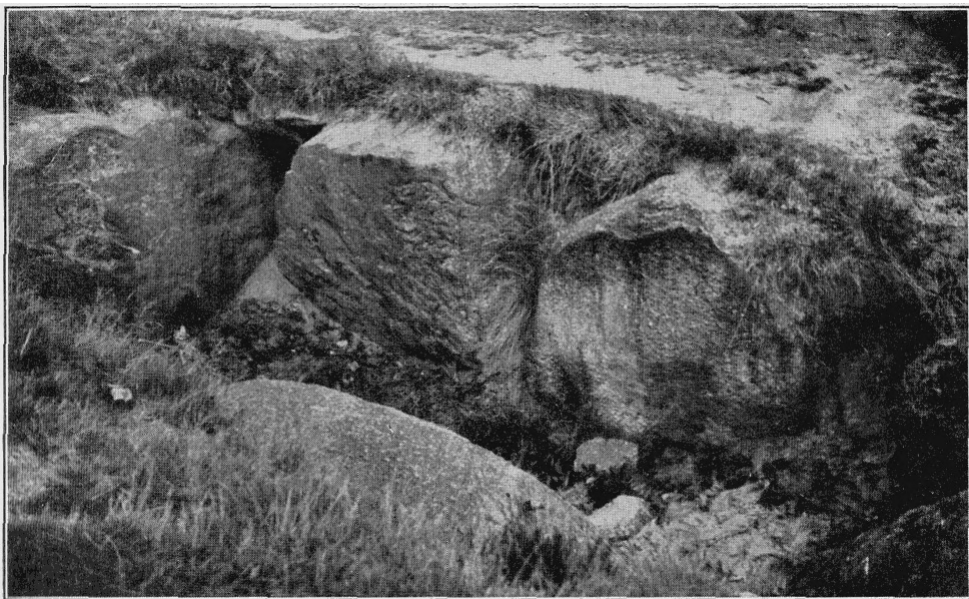
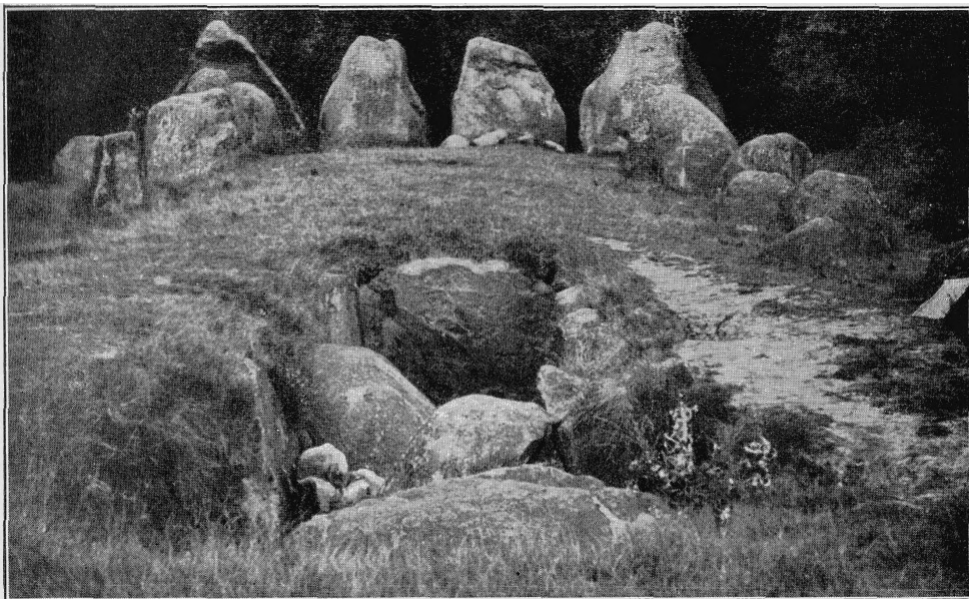
It was valuable for me to note that G. Schwantes, in his book "Aus Deutschlands Urgeschichte" (From Germany's Prehistory), also gives room to the assumption that the area enclosed by stone settings was perhaps revered as a sacred place, and that he thus also seeks to explain the presence of graves from later times, which therefore originate from later reburials, in the assumed flat hill. He writes:

Very often, the surrounding flat hill is surrounded by a circular or rectangular setting of tall stones. This stone setting can hardly have had any practical significance. It was probably just a decoration, closing off the inner space with the grave, which may have been revered as a sacred place, from the surrounding area. With a few exceptions, this inner bed was not used for burials in the Stone Age, only the chambers. However, it is not uncommon to find graves from later periods in the flat mound.



stone setting "Visbeker Braut"

Alhorner Heath. Exterior 82×8 m, deep grave 14 m, from the south-west gable side



Stone setting "Visbeker Braut"

Top: space behind the deep grave

Bottom: interior of the burial
chamber

, proof that the Hünenbetten were also revered religiously in more recent periods of prehistory."

G. Schwantes comes much closer to the view that these stone settings were places of worship. However, I must disagree with him in his opinion that they "had no practical significance". On the contrary, they were of immense practical importance: as already stated above, they were the foundation walls that supported the roof of a temple; the interior space was the meeting place for a community, the nave in which cultic celebrations were held. Schwantes subscribes to the view generally held among prehistorians that no distinction should be made between the two types of stone structures described above, even though a mere glance reveals that the stone settings, which I describe as the remains of the foundations or base walls of the places of worship, the temples, are completely different in structure from the stones of the actual megalithic tombs.

Furthermore, if both were the same, there would have to be connecting pieces, transitions from the stone graves, which consist of supporting and covering stones and do not exceed a certain size, to those elongated stone structures of enormous dimensions. However, there are no intermediate stages between the two that show that both are the same, only different in size.

I also have to doubt the view that the huge interior of these elongated, rectangular stone structures was filled with a mound of earth that completely covered the kerbstones. Where would these thousands of cubic metres of earth have come from? The earth would have disappeared no more than the small mounds of loosely piled cremation and urn graves, either by itself or by wind and weather. The low urn mounds would have been covered with grass or heather sods to prevent them from being blown away. These heather sods took root in the piled earth and thus formed a

solid cover over the mound, which has preserved the graves in their ancient, unaltered form through the storms of time to this day. If the space between these rows of stones had also been covered with earth, the builders would certainly have proceeded in the same way as with the smaller burial mounds. Here, too, the earth would have been preserved by rooting and would not have disappeared without a trace. The massive, heavy stones, which stand almost closed in a straight line and in some cases rise up to 2 m above the ground, would have held the earth between them as if with powerful clamps instead of releasing it. Hardly anyone would have taken the trouble to remove these mountains of earth. There would also be no apparent reason to do so, as there is sand in abundance there; and even if the earth had been removed to expose the stones, it would have to be visible as mounds in the immediate vicinity. If the earth had been washed away by wind and rain, this would still be evident today in the vicinity of the stone rows.

The boulders of the foundation walls do not stand on flat ground, but on a natural, flat hill. The edge stones stand almost closed in an aligned row. Christian churches are also often built on low hills. In the systematic connection between the Germanic temple complex and the tombs of the leading clans in the immediate and wider vicinity of the temple, I see the precursor to the later churches with their cemeteries.

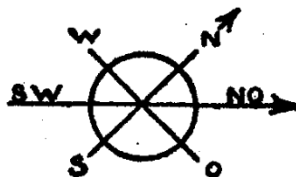
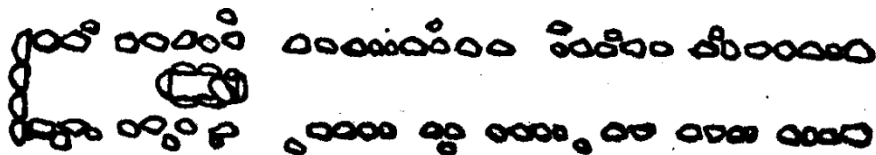
The temple or cult hall was an elongated, simple building with a high, thatched roof that reached almost to the ground. The roof rested on a low base wall made of boulders. The temple was intended for sacrificial festivals, sacrificial meals and gatherings. A covered hall was a natural necessity for the extensive cult rituals in winter when it was very cold and the weather did not allow sacrificial festivals to be held in sacred groves or at altars in the open air.

What is to be said against these structures having been temples? Should we deny the "barbarians of the north" the ability to construct such buildings, but readily grant it to the peoples of the south? The Germanic tribes possessed the skill to construct such buildings, as the temple ruins themselves clearly demonstrate. The builders even knew how to split these enormous stones smoothly, prepare them and use them appropriately, as a single glance into the deep grave of the Steinloge (Visbeker Braut) site clearly proves.

Every people, even the most primitive, has sought to make everything it has built with its own hands beautiful according to its own conception. This enormous task of moving and erecting stones on such a scale and to such an extent would have been meaningless and contrary to reason if its sole purpose had been to form border or decorative stones for a burial site.

Nor can I imagine that it would have been enough for the people to set up the stones bare and naked in long rows and consider the work finished. If the purpose of setting the stones had been to erect an imposing, large stone monument, then these stones would probably have been set in a huge square or a massive circle. Nothing, neither the location, the stone material nor the shape of a grave, would have necessitated the elongated, striking shape if certain practical and technical considerations had not given rise to it. But let us first continue with the detailed description of these temple ruins.

The remains of the foundation walls of the "Steinloge" (Visbek Bride) temple stand on a pine-covered site, aligned almost exactly in a south-west to north-east direction. It is 82 metres long and 5½ metres wide inside. The entrance, or portal, is formed by two 1.80-metre-high stones on the north-eastern gable wall. The opposite narrow side is closed off by four large upright granite blocks.



Cult site "Steinloge" (Visbeker Braut)

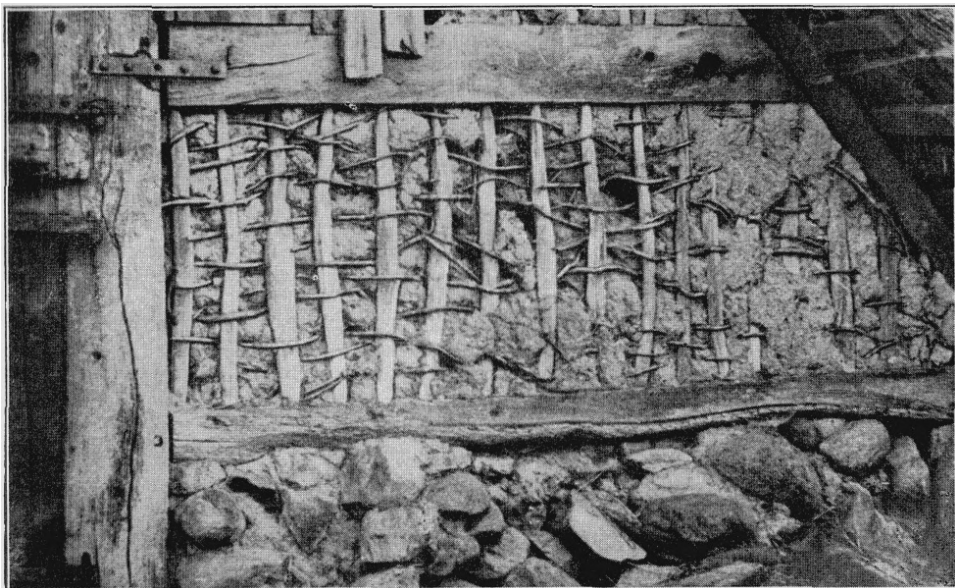
This type of stone setting made of boulders is only found in the same technical construction and similar layout in the foundation walls of the old single-room houses in the heath, which are now used as sheep pens. The stones of the temple foundation walls are only stronger and larger than the foundation walls of the much smaller single-room houses. Some of the large stones of the long walls are about 1.50–2 m high and about 1 m thick and stand on the natural ground with their lower part in raised earth and a layer of humus. Particularly large stones up to 2½ m high are erected on the narrow or gable sides. The fill inside the stone setting, about ½ to ¾ m high, formed the floor of the hall.

Fourteen metres from the closed south-western gable wall, in the upper quarter, lies the deep grave, which ends at ground level, so that the capstones lie above the ground. This rectangular tomb, 1.40 metres deep, is 7 metres long and 1.50 metres wide inside. The long walls are each made of four very large stones, and the short sides are each made of one very large stone.

The burial chamber built into the ground has been constructed with great technical precision. The huge blocks of the side walls are smoothly split. The split surfaces reveal that the separation



"Sheepfold", single-room house, Glaner Heath



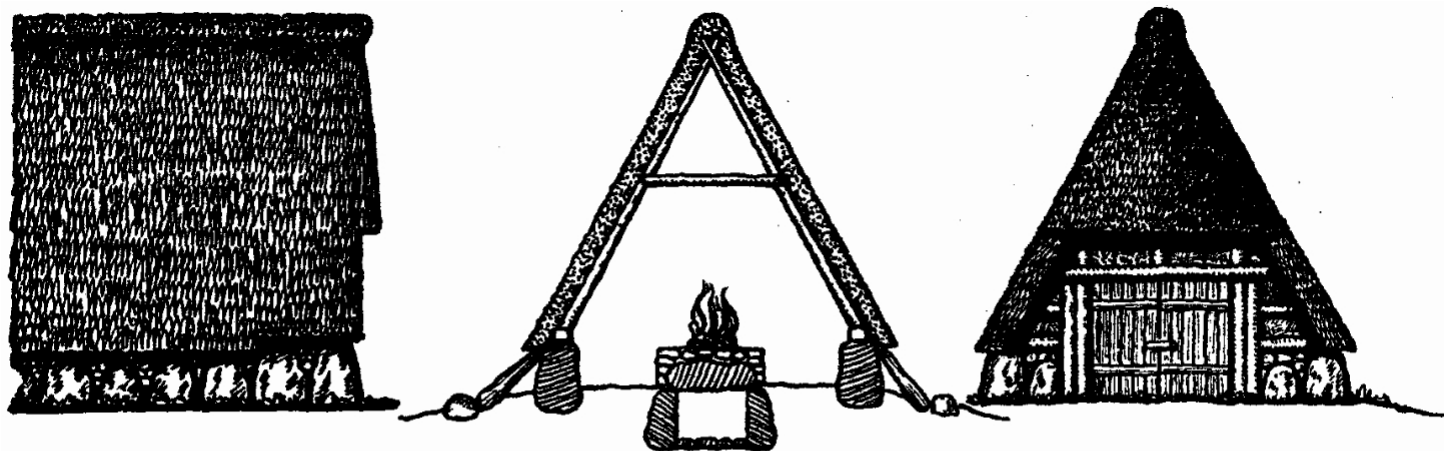
"Sheepfold" Glaner Heath
Top: Half-timbered gable wall. – Bottom: Boulder base wall

with a single blast or blow. There are no drill holes for wooden wedges. This clearly visible splitting is not given enough attention and appreciation, as it requires a high level of technical skill. Another striking feature of the construction of the deep grave is the clean, craftsmanship-like processing of the stone material, which was brought to its current location at least four thousand years ago. The stones are positioned so that the walls form a smooth surface with the split surfaces facing inwards. The gaps were filled with smaller layers of stone, and the floor was paved with flat stones. The careful workmanship is still visible today. It bears witness to the great skill of the builders who, judging by this, were certainly also capable of constructing a roof resting on the base wall above the burial chamber of their leaders' family.

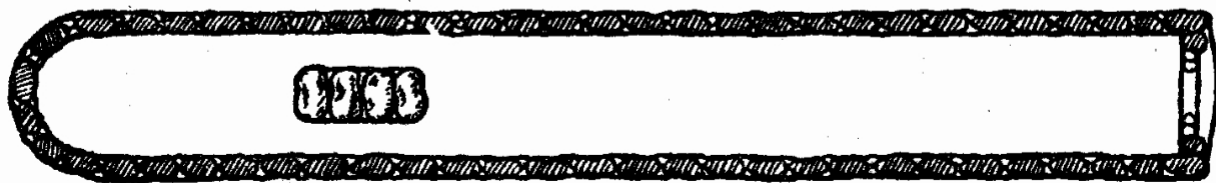
The very narrow longitudinal shape of the temple's foundation walls indicates a high, steep gable roof sloping down the long sides, which reached almost to the ground, as can still be seen today on the thatched farmhouses in that area.

The stone ruins located southeast of Ahlhorn, known as the "Visbeker Bräutigam"¹, which is unique in terms of its length, number of stones and impeccable condition, deserves its reputation as one of the most magnificent monuments from that period. The stones, arranged in an elongated rectangle and surrounded by a group of megalithic tombs, reveal a coherent overall structure and are located on the Engelmansbeke near the Engelmann farm, which can trace its ownership back 500 years in a direct line. The creators of these enormous structures

¹ The names "Visbeker Bräutigam" (Visbek groom) for the stone setting in the Ahlhorn Heath and "Visbeker Braut" (Visbek bride) for the one near Steinloge go back to a very recent legend, according to which the stones represent a petrified wedding procession; a nearby megalithic tomb is even referred to as the "bridal carriage". These rather unfortunate names have also been applied to the stone settings at Glane. It would be desirable to agree on a better name in the near future.



M. 1=100



M. 1=250

16.6.32

Germanic cult hall, reconstructed structure on the boulders of a "giant's bed".

The builders tried to adhere to certain cardinal directions in their constructions. This temple is laid out in a precise west-east direction. The interior of the complex is 7 m wide and 102 m long and consists of 120 heavy granite blocks.

The deep grave in the upper part of the "stone avenue" at the western end is 10 metres long. It is formed by five capstones, the largest of which measures approximately 2½ by 3 metres. They rest on supporting stones lying in the ground, the number of which cannot be determined precisely because they are covered by the blocks lying on top of them.

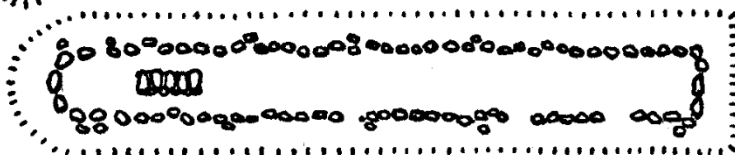
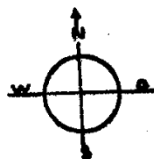
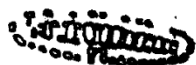
Access to the burial chamber must have been as follows: the huge capstones that covered the grave for eternity were no longer moved. However, one of the stones on the side walls is a good half metre lower than the others. Here, access was provided by a stone that was easier to move and which closed the gap between the supporting stones. It was removed during subsequent burials. The capstones of the burial chamber, which also formed the altar, were filled with smaller stones, as were the spaces between the side walls. The small stones embedded in clay thus formed a smooth platform on the upper surface, which could be used as an altar.

Bone fragments and urn shards found in the earthen chamber of the nave are likely to be remains that were removed from time to time from the single large deep grave to make room for subsequent burials. Out of reverence, they were buried inside the long temple. I have already pointed out elsewhere that numerous graves of clergy and leaders have been found under the stone slabs of the nave in countless churches dating back to the early Middle Ages. These graves often fill the entire floor of the church.

If it is now claimed that the site was a mass grave, and that this was marked by the outer rows of stones in the gan-

If the extension had been covered with earth, the question arises as to how it would have been possible to access the interior of the deep grave during subsequent investigations. Not only would it have been necessary to remove stones from the solid outer walls, but also the mound of earth in order to reach the grave. None of these structures has an entrance leading from outside the kerbstones into the interior of the grave, as is the case with the megalithic tombs and passage graves in the immediate vicinity. Just as a covered entrance was provided for these, such a passage would also have been particularly well constructed in the largest structure, which formed the centre, if the covering with a mound had really made this necessary. However, the deep grave lies exposed in the large space without access from the outer kerbstones; it has never been covered with earth.

The cemetery, which extends around the cult site (Visbeker Bräutigam), contains four megalithic tombs, two of which are exceptional



Cult site "Ahlhorner Heide" (Visbeker Bräutigam) with four megalithic tombs from the cemetery.

They are unusually large and well preserved. Northwest of the western end of the temple lies the "Great Passage Tomb", south of the eastern end lies the second, the so-called "Bride's Carriage", with particularly large, heavy capstones. In the immediate vicinity of the temple there are two more stone tombs, one untouched in the mound, the other partially destroyed. The cemetery grounds around the temple hall are clearly visible. In addition to these four burial sites, approximately 300 metres south of the temple, beyond the beacon, lies the most beautiful stone tomb, the "Heathen Sacrificial Table", which no longer belongs to the cemetery.

There is absolutely no evidence to suggest that the Germanic peoples of the Neolithic period, who built the megalithic tombs, did not have covered temples. These people, who are arbitrarily classified as "primitive", are simply denied the ability to construct such buildings without any justification. However, a people who understood how to build the dwelling places of the dead from huge, heavy stones for eternity would certainly have strived to build more beautiful and larger houses for their deities. A people who mastered the technology to produce finely crafted stone tools and axes of such high, sophisticated forms certainly also accomplished other technical feats, which unfortunately remain unknown to us due to the transience of the material. A people who were finally able to move, split and flatten the enormous stone blocks over long distances, who knew how to erect and stack the stone colossi, they were certainly also able to carry out the construction of a roof according to a well-considered plan, one larger and more beautiful than the one they built to protect their own dwellings. The highest thought of humanity has always been the idea of God and the belief in immortality. Houses of God and tombs have therefore always been the highest and foremost tasks of architecture. The temple, which has always been the greatest architectural achievement of peoples, has its archetype in the house of man.

In the same way that our ancestors built their own dwellings out of wood, they erected larger, more beautiful houses for their deities, elongated "sacred halls" in which there was room for the priests and clans, where sacrifices were made at the altar, where the priest drank the mead of the deity, where the congregation sat around a long fire and, after the sacred rites, paid homage to the clan leader, the duke, and enjoyed the sacred sacrificial meal and drink. These sacred halls were not only houses of worship and temples, but also meeting places for the clans. The princes also received neighbouring leaders here.

The work required for the construction of the temple was as follows: a strong, thick stone wall made of huge boulders scattered across the landscape was erected as an outer wall. This strong stone wall, the remains of which still stand today, formed the foundation, base and perimeter wall of the temple. The stones were positioned and aligned so that the largest ones were initially in a straight line and at as equal a height as possible. With their enormous weight, the large stones formed the core and support of the masonry, which resisted the load of the roof and also the wind pressure of the huge roof surfaces. The heavy stones thus replaced today's binding agents, such as mortar and others, with their weight. A wall made of smaller stones, laid in a dry stone wall pattern, would not be able to withstand the weight of the roof. Where one of the large stones is lower than the others, a suitable stone was placed under the foot beams of the roof truss to compensate, so that the base wall was of uniform height. The gaps between the irregular boulders were filled with smaller stones and the joints were filled with earth, moss and probably clay. Where two of the large stone blocks of the wall meet, there are often a number of smaller stones on the outside in the humus, which are overgrown by it.

Stones that later fell out of the gaps. In various places, filling stones can still be found wedged in the spaces between the large stone blocks. The same type of masonry was also used in the supporting walls of the megalithic tombs; I was able to confirm this in the chamber of a tomb that was still completely preserved in its original condition. Once the lower substructure had been completed as a wall, the frame made of rough logs was placed on top of it, and the roof trusses and rafters were placed on top of that. The extensive forests provided large quantities of wood. However, working with it was extremely difficult, as only very simple stone tools were available at that time. Metal was still completely absent. The trees were felled with flint axes and stone wedges were used to split the trunks. Medium-thickness, peeled but otherwise unprocessed round timbers, known as poles, were used as rafters for the roof truss. These logs were straight, but only available in lengths of 7–8 metres at most, as only hardwood could be used; there were no softwoods here at that time. The later carpentry technique of joining pieces of wood together was not yet known.

This limited length of the rafters is the sole reason why the three stone settings described in the Ahlhorn Heath, near Steinloge and Glane, have been erected in long, narrow rectangles, 60, 82 and 105 metres long, but only 5½ and 7 metres wide inside.

Herein lies the key to solving the question: graves
or places of worship?

And the answer can only be: places of worship, halls, houses of God!

The length of the wood available for the rafters determined the span, the width of the house.

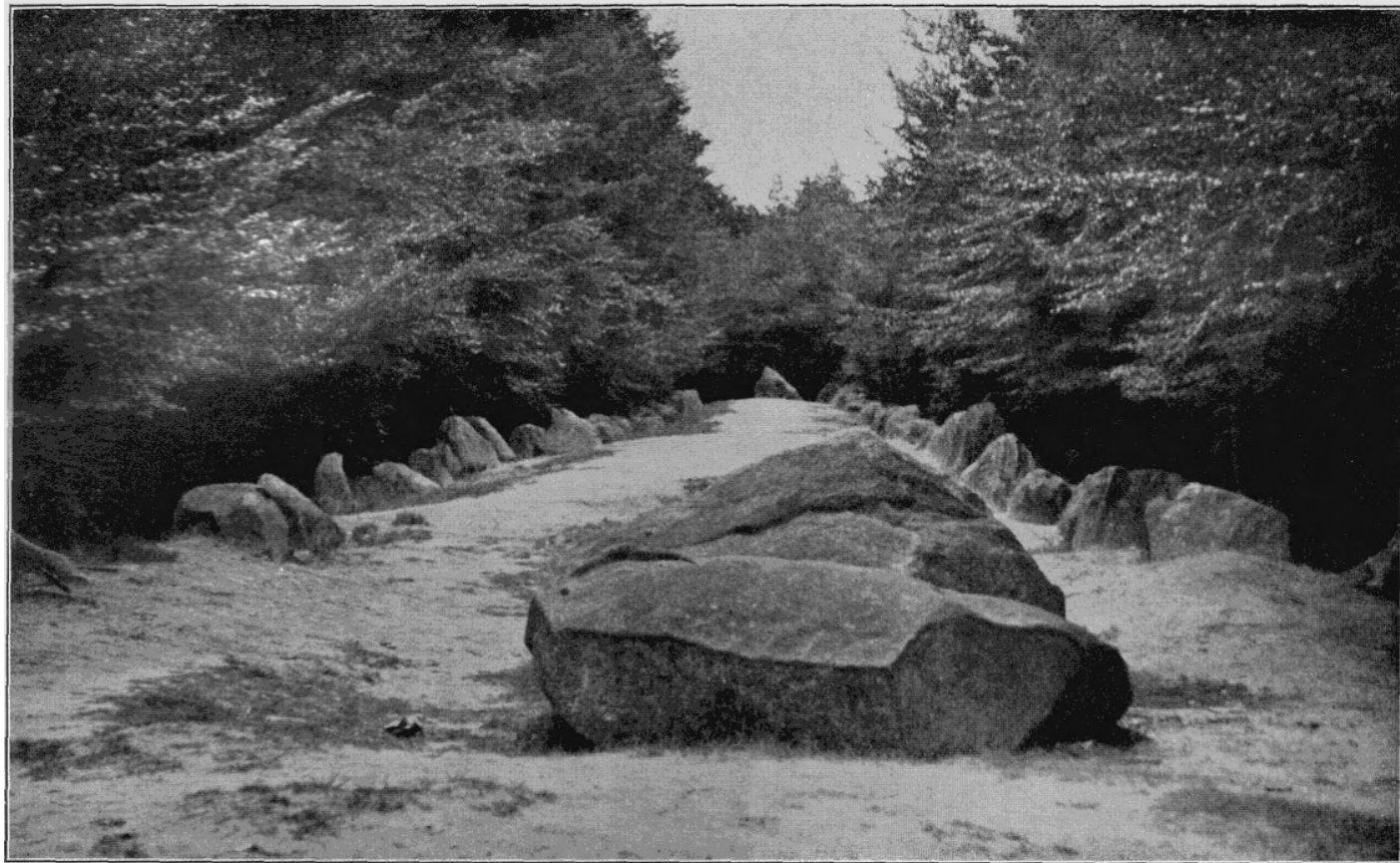
The distance between the lower longitudinal outer walls, i.e.

The spacing between the stones that are still standing today was therefore determined by the length of the rafters used for the roof truss. This explains the narrow width of the room. In terms of length, however, the roof truss and thus the house could be extended as desired, whether by 60, 82 or 105 metres. In order to create space for a large congregation, the length had to be extended accordingly given the narrow width. If these foundation walls had not supported a roof, there would have been no valid reason for their narrow spacing; the rows of stones could have been moved further apart or closer together as desired. However, the three temple remains preserved in the Ahlhorn and Glaner Heath and in the Kleckerwald near Harburg, which are discussed here, are almost the same width. This also proves and underlines that this arrangement was not accidental. It was dictated by technical considerations, because the foundation walls supported a roof structure whose dimensions were not at the discretion of the builders, but were fixed and determined by the nature of the building material, the length of the rafters.

Anyone who looks at the structures impartially, without prejudice, will find it difficult to come to any other conclusion.

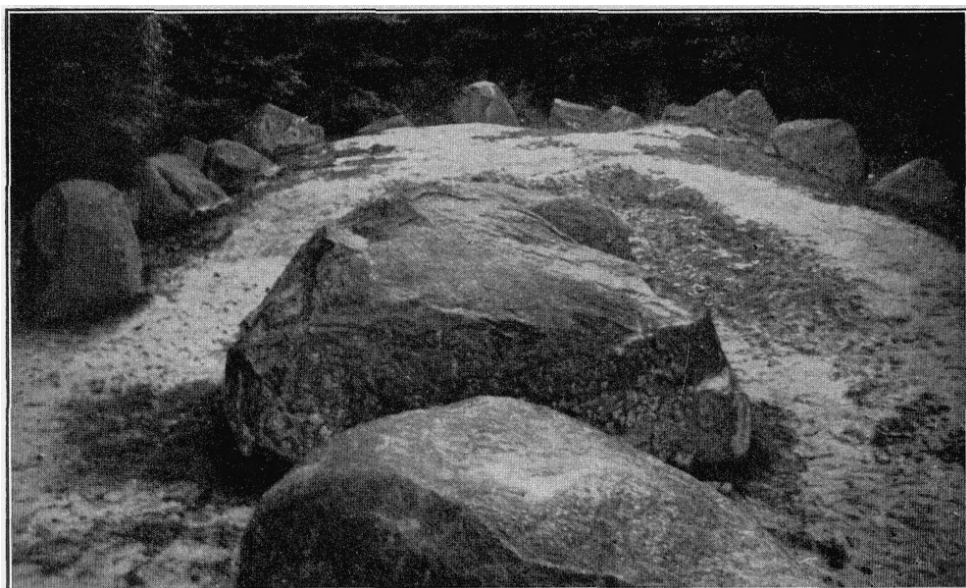
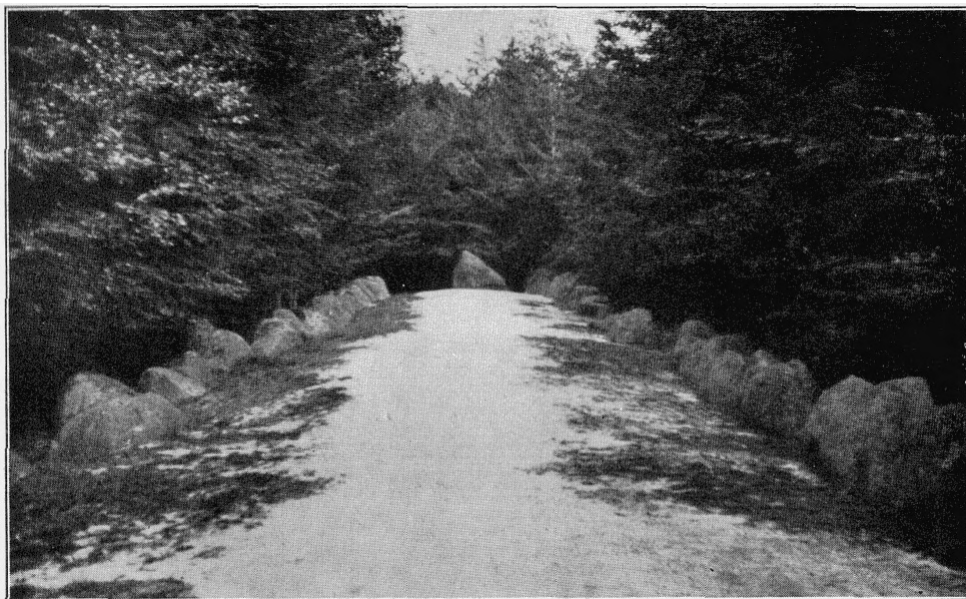
The buildings of the ancient Germanic peoples were initially purely functional and remained so for a long time. Unfortunately, virtually all of the original wooden structures from that period, even fragments, have been lost due to the perishable nature of this material. And yet we have evidence that this lost style of construction was more significant than we realise today. The depictions of Germanic dwellings on Roman victory monuments, such as Trajan's Column, confirm this.

This is how I imagine the structure of the sacred halls in Ahlhorn, Glaner Heide and Kleckerwald:



Stone setting "Visbek Bridegroom"

Ahlhorner Heath. Exterior dimensions: 105 m $\times$ 10 m. – In the foreground,
capstones of the burial chamber, longhouse viewed from the east



Visbeker Bräutigam stone setting
Ahlhorner Heath, above: nave facing east, below: tomb and apse facing west.

Low outer walls made of large granite blocks supported a high, steep roof without an inner ceiling. The floor was flat earth with a compacted clay screed. The gable walls consisted of strong logs erected at short intervals. The fields of the half-timbered structure were filled with straw-mixed clay on both sides and smoothed.

Tacitus writes about this in chapter 16 of "Germania":

"Everywhere they use rough timber, unconcerned with appearance or prestige. However, they carefully coat individual areas (the fields of the half-timbered structure) with a type of earth so pure and shiny that it looks like paint and coloured drawings."

The roof was covered with heather, reeds, straw, peat or turf. Pliny says in his *"Historia naturalis"*: "They cover their houses with reeds, and the high, steep roof lasts a long time." The building had no windows. The interior was in semi-darkness, as is still the case today in the large hallways of farmhouses. The entrance gable had a large, open door frame with an air or smoke hole above it. In addition, there were several openings in the roof which, like the gaps in the gable wall, allowed the smoke from the sacrificial altar and the elongated fireplaces, which will be discussed later, to escape and at the same time provided some light. This method of log cabin construction, with a high roof resting on rough boulders and extending almost to the ground at the sides, has been preserved for a long time. The older wooden churches in England and Scandinavia are built in the same way. The Lower Saxon farmhouse is a further development of the old Germanic dwelling house, or hall, and the Christian longhouse church of the north also has its origins here. In any case, half-timbered construction and upright log construction with upright joints are the oldest forms of Germanic timber construction and have also been used here. However, it is wrong to declare one form to be the only original one, here as elsewhere.

If we look back at the development of architecture in general, we must admit that technology and external style underwent a much longer period of development among the peoples of the south as well as those of the north than we generally tend to assume. The great ancient temples of Greece, the theatres and thermal baths of Rome are the magnificent end products of earlier, simpler beginnings, just as everything that grows must have had a seed from which it emerged. If we examine the architecture of antiquity, from which we have countless masterpieces, e.g. the Acropolis, the Pergamon Altar, the Market Gate of Miletus, the Roman theatres and thermal baths and much more, we must admit that in the 2500 years that have passed since then, we have added little, if anything, that is new. The vast majority of our great buildings of the last few centuries are merely poor copies of the architectural styles of ancient times. Even though technical skills have improved over the centuries, this progress is very modest when measured against the passage of time. The construction of the pyramids and *the Roman Forum* would be considered extraordinary achievements today and would require the greatest skill.

Considering that purely artistic ideas and design have developed very little over a period of around 2,500 years, despite the best examples, it is reasonable to assume that the architects of the ancient world, who did not have such good examples as we have today, must have made slow progress. It must have taken a long time from the first beginnings to such perfection. The ancient buildings that have come down to us are not the beginnings, but for the most part the flowering of their era. It is a great mistake to assume that the art and technology of the Egyptians, Greeks and Romans arose from nothing in a short period of time. No, there must have been many preliminary stages, as was the case, for example, with

Schliemann's excavations in Troy and other finds confirm this.

We must also assume such stages of development in the buildings of the Germanic peoples. The imperial palaces, the early basilicas on north-western German soil, also had their precursors. Even if stone construction, i.e. high stone construction, is said to have been introduced to Germania only by the Romans, large wooden buildings on stone bases, as befits the densely wooded German countryside, certainly existed thousands of years earlier.

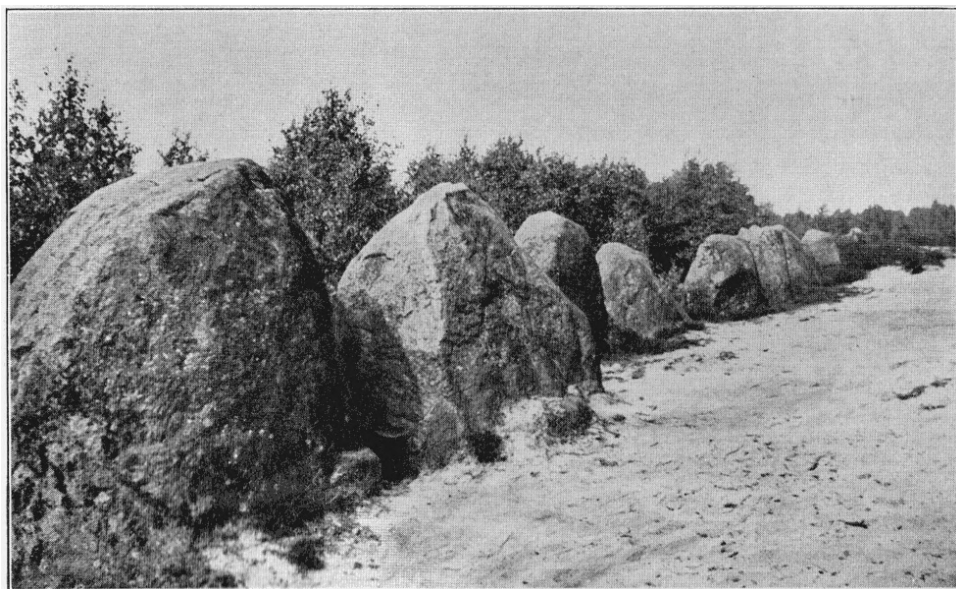
Stone Age people did not live in primitive caves. As required by the harsh climate of the north, they had a protective roof, strong and solidly covered, that withstood all storms, rain and cold. Like all peoples throughout history, they celebrated festivals in sheltered rooms that should not be imagined as primitive. In the early Bronze Age and the subsequent Iron Age, wood carving must have already reached a very high level of sophistication, as evidenced much later by the wonderful carvings on the Oseberg ship, which in terms of technical and artistic execution have hardly been surpassed to this day. One must imagine the design of the inner temple room to be equivalent and in keeping with the high-quality jewellery and weapons of the time. Indeed, these sacred halls were certainly decorated with even greater care and beauty as houses of God.

The elongated hall was divided into two parts. Three-quarters of the building, next to the entrance gate, was the assembly room where cult and sacrificial ceremonies took place. The last quarter was used by the priests and housed the cult implements and the temple treasure. In front of the priest's room stood the sacrificial altar. Beneath it, in a deep grave, lay the bones of the leaders, the dukes of the clan. On the side walls were the high seats of the priests, the judges and the princes

. In the middle of the hall, fire pits were laid out lengthwise on the ground. On both sides, the assembled people camped here in long rows and found welcome protection from the cold of winter by the fire.

The entrance to the temple is not always in the same place in each building. The temples in the Ahlhorn and Glane heaths had their entrance gates on the narrow or gable side opposite the altar. In the case of the "Vis-beker Bräutigam" temple, however, this gable wall is completely closed off by massive stone blocks in a straight line. The entrance here was probably on the lower right-hand side, measured from the altar. The Glaner temple measures 56 m in length, the Steinloge temple 82 m; the not too great size of both buildings would therefore make the entrance through the gable wall still seem appropriate. The "Vis-beker Bräutigam" temple, on the other hand, is 105 m long. Due to its great length, it was certainly necessary to place the entrance on the long side, as is often found later in ancient basilicas (Sta. Maria de Naranco) and royal halls (Theodoric's Palace in Ravenna), which are built in a similar elongated rectangular shape.

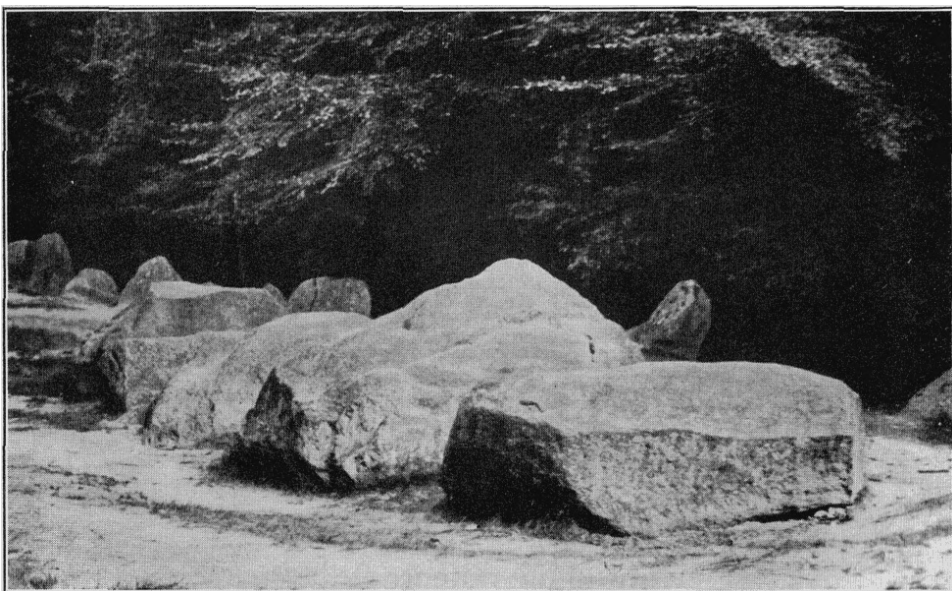
So-called house urns, which are modelled on a residential building with a high, steep roof, also have the entrance on the long side. The entrance to the interior of the cult hall was probably, as the door opening in the house urns suggests, higher than the outer floor, so that a few steps led up to the threshold. This was probably the case with the temple ruins known as the "Visbeker Bräutigam" (Visbek Bridegroom), as the interior floor of the room is also $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ m higher than the ground outside the temple. In almost all Christian churches, steps lead up to the raised interior. So if an entrance cannot be conclusively proven at the temple complex located here, the possibility that it led over the foundation wall , is certainly acceptable. At a location of the



stone setting "Glaner Heide"
Top: entrance, bottom: left side wall



Gable wall "Visbeker Braut"



Capping stones of the burial chamber "Visbeker Bräutigam"

Part of the base wall is missing on the southern long side, so that, unless the missing stones were removed for some purpose, this could have been the entrance. Given the extraordinary length of the building, it is likely that the entrance to the house of worship was located in the long wall so that the distribution of people when filling and emptying the sacred hall could take place more conveniently and easily.

The cult festivals in these sacred halls were probably not devotional ceremonies in the modern sense, but rather annual festivals, celebrations of joy and feasts. Some of the feasts may have been held together around the long fire in the hall.



In later times, the altar held the sacrificial cauldron, a vessel containing the blood of the sacrificial animal, which the priest sprinkled during the sacred ceremonies. The well-known

The "Eidring", which is also found as a grave offering, was probably placed on the altar. The customs surrounding the sacrifice and the subsequent celebrations varied depending on the deity being worshipped. Once the sacrifice had been performed and the sacrificial blood had been used for divination, the priest would open the meal by blessing the cup or drinking horn and the sacrificial food. Then he drank the love of the gods in order to achieve victory and to pray for fertility and peace. This was followed by the communal sacrificial feast and the drinking. The hero's horn was passed around and solemn vows were made, which were to be fulfilled within a year.

The sacrificial meal consisted of the meat of the sacrificed animals (cattle, sheep, game), but also crops and curdled milk. An intoxicating drink, mead, made from fermented grain and sweetened with honey, was served.

Tacitus reports on the festivals in chapters 22 and 23 of "Germania" as follows:

Then they often go to feasts. Drinking day and night brings no shame. Often, when they are drunk, there are quarrels, and these rarely remain mere words, but quite often end in wounds and manslaughter. But even reconciliation between enemies, new alliances, connections to princes, and even war and peace are usually discussed during drinking binges, as if at no other time would the mind be more open to unbiased consideration or more easily inflamed with grand ideas. A people without malice or deceit, they reveal the secrets of their hearts in informal banter. Once everyone has expressed their opinion without reservation, it is reviewed again the next day, and justice is always done: they deliberate when they are incapable of pretence, and decide when they cannot err.

Their drink is a juice made from barley or wheat, fermented into a kind of wine. They also trade wine on the banks of the Rhine. Their food is simple: wild fruits, fresh game, curdled milk. Without effort or seasoning, they simply satisfy their hunger. They do not show the same moderation when it comes to quenching their thirst."

This description by Tacitus also applies to the feasts after the sacrificial festivals in those halls, which he did not consider to be temples.

The name for the house of the gods was Gothic *alhs*, Anglo-Saxon *ealh*, Old Saxon *alah*. Not only the temple, but also the temple district was referred to as *alah*. *Alah* (pronounced alach) also means "enclosed place". Place names such as Ahlden,

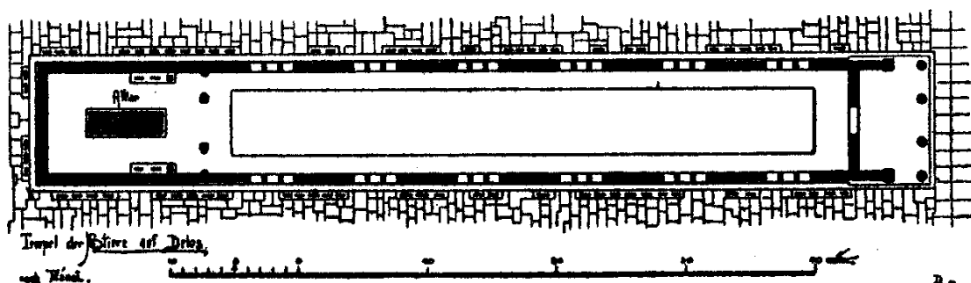
Ahlstedt, Ahlsdorf, and Ahlshausen may be traced back to prehistoric places of worship. This is certainly the case with the Westphalian place names Alstedde and Alst, both of which can be traced back to *the* Old Saxon *ala-stedi* (sacred place). The Ahlhorn Heath, where the aforementioned giant temples, the sacred halls, stood, and the town of Ahlhorn may also have received their names as consecrated, sacred sites during this period.

The settlements of the Germanic tribes were not as primitive as is generally assumed. The Germanic tribes lived on farms in wooden log cabins with high roofs that almost reached the ground. The farmstead was enclosed by a fence or surrounded by a low rampart, which was often topped with an upright fence made of poles and interwoven with shrubs. Often there was also a protective ditch. The enclosure was designed not only to protect against enemies, but also against wild animals.

The Edda poems and the Norse sagas mention royal halls built of wood on stone foundations, in front of which the thingstead was located. Widukind hid his treasure in a wooden treasure house from the Franks. Countless historical reports confirm the dominance of wooden construction from the earliest times until the introduction of Christianity and beyond.

In his book *Die Baukunst der Germanen* (The Architecture of the Germanic Peoples), Albrecht Haupt argues that the Germanic temples of the north (presumably those described in the Edda) originated from early Christian churches. It must certainly have been the other way around. The royal halls, and thus the temples of the Germanic peoples, formed the archetypes of Christian churches on Low German soil. Greek temples also developed from the ancient Norse longhouse (Greek: *megaron*). Their builders came from the same Nordic race that, as the upper class of the Greek people, was the creator and bearer of its culture.

The "Temple of the Bulls on Delos" (an island in the Aegean Sea) from the third century BC (Handbuch der Architektur, vol. 1, T. 2) has almost the same elongated floor plan as the stone setting "Steinloge" (Visbeker Braut). The Greek temple is 67 metres long and 8.50 metres wide. The stone remains of the base walls of the cult hall at Steinloge show a ratio of 8×28 metres measured from the outside. There are also similarities in the other arrangements, especially in the location of the altars of the two cult halls. The name "Temple of the Bulls" can be traced back to the capitals of the columns in front of the altar, which are decorated with bulls.



Temple on Delos

The Oldenburg cult sites were built about two thousand years earlier than the temple on Delos, which also had a wooden roof.

The same people who built the huge cult halls and megalithic tombs in the neighbouring Lar and Leri districts, the Ahlhorn Heath, are likely to have lived in the area that is now Bremen. The monk Wilhado, who had preached Christianity in Friesland for two years, became Bishop of Bremen in 787 under Charlemagne. He consecrated the first Christian church there, a wooden structure probably on the same site where a sanctuary of the Germanic gods had been destroyed and where St. Peter's Cathedral now stands, which was begun in its present form in 1003.

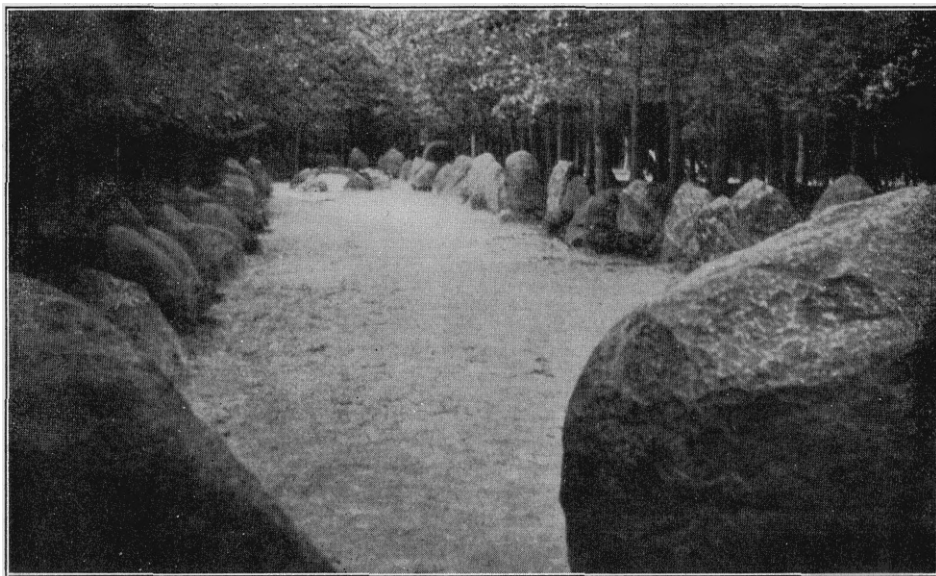
In the immediate vicinity of the cathedral stands the smaller Liebfrauen



stone setting in the "Kleckerwald"
Lüneburg Heath, south of Harburg. Interior 46 m $\times$ 5 m. North-south.



Old church in "Bispingen", built from boulders



Stone setting in the "Kleckerwald"

Centre of the nave, right side 2.20 m wide entrance, emphasised by tall stones, in the background the deep grave

A church from the 12th century, meaning two places of worship from earlier times in close proximity to each other, like a cathedral and a chapel, with the town hall in between, which in ancient times would have been the site of the thing place, whose symbol was Roland, the ancient symbol of justice of the Germanic peoples.

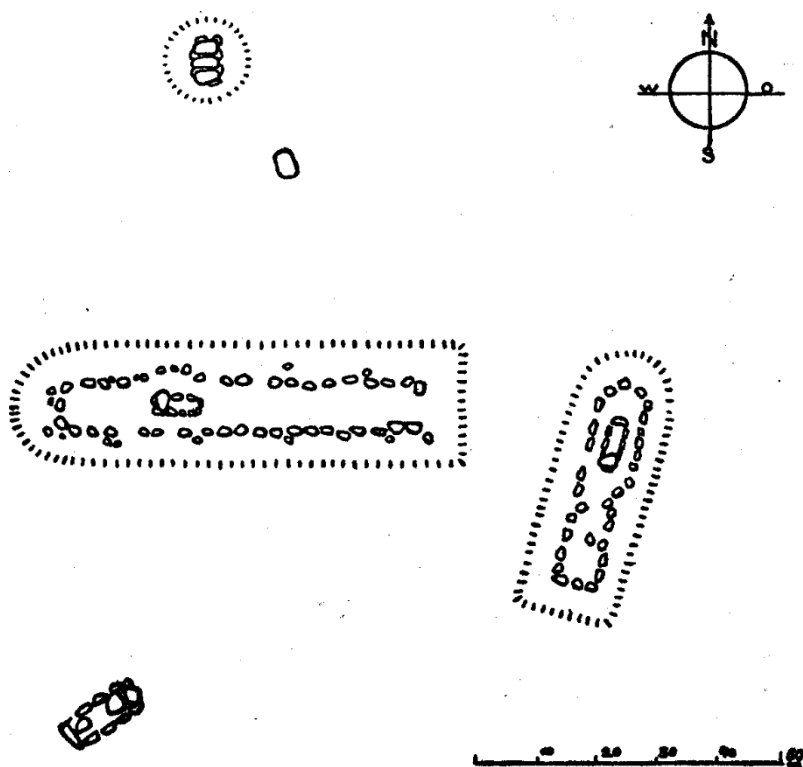
The wooden cathedral in Reims is widely praised. Where Strasbourg Cathedral stands today, there was previously a wooden church and, before that, a "pagan" sanctuary. In Trier, too, where Germans rather than Gauls lived before the arrival of the Romans, recent excavations beneath the ruins of Roman temples have uncovered ancient Germanic temple complexes.

The hall buildings of the Ahlhorn and Glaner Heide were not alone. Simple smaller buildings used as accommodation would have been grouped around the large cemetery, as the cult festivals often lasted several days. The elders of the clans who came to the festivals had to be accommodated and entertained. Thus, the entire Glaner cult site presents itself as a planned complex, in which much of what must have belonged to the large-scale sacred district of a Germanic community is still recognisable today.

The Glaner stones clearly show the hall as the centrepiece of the complex; it is surrounded by a cemetery with three preserved megalithic tombs belonging to the leading clans. About 30 metres north of the hall is a cellar grave, another 10 metres away is a second one; to the south is a third grave, whose rectangular chamber measures 6 metres across. Near the large cult hall, 40 metres from the entrance, the remains of a smaller hall stand on a hill, similar to a chapel near a cathedral in later times.

The large place of worship, as we may now call it, is located on a hill about 1½ metres high in an east-west direction above the cemetery south of the left bank of the Hunte; it displays the same characteristic features in its layout as the "Visbek Bride".

and the "Visbek Bridegroom". The floor plan forms a long rectangle measuring 56 metres in length and 5 metres in internal width between the foundation walls. The entrance on the eastern gable, flanked by very large stones, resembles a portal. At the western end is the deep grave, 6 m long, which ends with its upper edge at the floor level; here too, it is located in the upper quarter of the complex, 18 m from the western wall.



Cult site "Glaner Heide"

In contrast to the "Visbeker Braut", the outer wall at the rear of the halls in the Glaner and Ahlhorner Heide forms a semicircle behind the deep grave. According to the descriptions in the Edda and the Icelandic sagas, the so-called "Afhús", the rear temple room where the "Al-tar" (*stallr*) was located, has the same shape.

The semicircular end of the hall at its western end can perhaps be regarded as a precursor to the "apse" in early Christian churches; the deep grave beneath the altar perhaps as a model for the "crypt". Such a comparison is obvious when one compares the floor plans of the two structures and considers that we cannot say anything with certainty about the origins of Christian church forms. Particularly striking is the similarity between the deep grave and the crypt in the early Christian churches of Germania. Originally, the deep grave was an ancestral tomb; similarly, the altar in Catholic churches is an "ancestral tomb" – the relics of the saints, which must be contained in every altar, have, in a sense, taken the place of the deified ancestors. This is also indicated by the name "ossuary" given to these old crypts in some regions. In the old church of Obermarsberg, formerly Eresburg, the crypt is still called "das Heidenloch" (the pagan hole). Could this be a reminder of a pre-Christian place of worship?

Opposite the entrance to the large hall, on a second, higher hill, lies the smaller hall mentioned above, oriented in a south-west to north-east direction. It is considerably smaller than the large hall, measuring 30×4 metres inside. However, this stone setting also displays the same significant features as the three large hall complexes mentioned above. Here, too, the deep grave is located in the first quarter of the complex, which is rounded off towards the apse, at the northeast end. As already mentioned, this complex could have been a smaller sanctuary or a burial chapel, which relates to the large hall like a chapel to a cathedral. It is not a megalithic tomb such as the "Hohen Steine" or the "Kellersteine", as it, like the other "Hünenbetten", differs completely from the megalithic tombs in its overall structure. Most of the stones of the outer wall have been tilted inwards. If they could be returned to their original position, the same picture would emerge as with the other cult sites.

These foundation walls must also have originally supported a roof.

Near the village of Kleinenkneten, in the immediate vicinity of the Pestrup burial ground and adjacent to it, lies the fifth place of worship that I found in southern Oldenburg. Here, too, the overall layout of the hall surrounded by the cemetery can be recognised. The remains of the foundation walls stand on a low elevation; the north-south orientation is precisely maintained. The inner length of the space between the rows of stones is 48 m, the inner width 6.50 m. The deep grave is located 16 m from the northern gable wall; this space formed the "holy of holies". The "crypt" is 5 m long and 2 m wide. A huge capstone, which formed the foundation of the altar, measures 3.50×2.50 metres. The floor of the complex has been heavily disturbed, resulting in depressions and adjacent elevations, so that the surface of the nave is not as level as other complexes of the same type. Several stones from the base wall are missing, which were probably used in the construction of the surrounding farms. Part of the capstone of the deep grave has been blasted off; five drill holes indicate that more was to be blasted off.

In the immediate vicinity of this site, and apparently belonging to it, there are two megalithic tombs on another hill, whose burial chambers have been partially destroyed; some capstones reveal the size of the tombs, which were surrounded by kerbstones.

The layout of the cult hall and the burial chambers here, as with the "Visbek Bridegroom" and the "Glaner Stones" sites, reveals the systematic arrangement of a "house of God" and a "field of God". The immediate proximity of the extensive Pestrup burial ground with its many hundreds of burial mounds from the Bronze and Iron Ages shows that this area was settled by a native people in an unbroken succession from the Stone Age to historical times.

The large stone setting near Emmern, in the province of Drenthe (Holland), which was examined by J. H. Holwerda (*Prähistorische Zeitschrift*, 1914, vol. VL), exhibits the same characteristics as the stone monuments in the Oldenburg Heath. However, it is considerably smaller in size. The structure of the outer stone setting and the construction of the deep graves – there are two in this complex – bear an unmistakable resemblance to those described here. These stone ruins would also have been covered by a roof.

One could describe this structure as a "mausoleum" or compare it to later burial chapels.

*

In addition to these five elongated stone settings in southern Oldenburg described above, which I described as the core stones of the base walls of cult halls, I also examined the stone setting in the "Kleckerwald" forest, 12 km south of Harburg, Klecken station, which shows the same peculiarity in its entire structure. This architecturally appealing structure in the Lüneburg Heath also differs completely from the form of the megalithic tombs near Fallingbommel; the only thing the structures have in common is the stone material. The difference between the megalithic tomb and the base wall of a hall building is particularly striking here, so that it is impossible to imagine that the two stone structures served the same purpose. The stone structures at Fallingbommel clearly and unambiguously reveal themselves to be a mortuary, a burial place for large clans. In the long rectangular stone setting in Kleckerwalde, laid out in straight lines with a deep grave at the end, the idea of a long, covered hall is particularly striking. It is actually hard to understand why it was not recognised earlier that these rows of stones must have supported a roof. For here, too, the question arises: why are the rows of stones so narrow and so long, erected in straight lines, why is the complex not laid out in a different way?

Shaped roughly square, round or oval, why is the deep grave not located in the centre, but emphasised at one end of the structure? The answer can only be the same as for stone monuments of the same type in the Oldenburg region:

the length of the rafters determined the width of the room!

The rows of stones in Kleckerwalde clearly show the floor plan of a hall, and in the best possible condition. The room, laid out in a north-south direction, measures 45.70 m in length and 5 m in width. The deep grave, whose capstones probably formed the foundation of the altar here as well, is located 9 m from the northern gable; the burial chamber is 6 m long and 1.80 m wide, while the nave, the nave of the hall, measures 30 m in length. The entrance is located in the middle of the east side of the hall wall, as seen from the altar. The space for the cult objects, the priest's room, the "holy of holies" or the "apse" is strongly emphasised, as is the layout of the "crypt" and the large room for the congregation. Almost all of the large core stones that formed the support for the base wall through their own weight have been preserved. 72 large stones remain in their original position. The large capstones of the deep grave, which were highly sought after for later buildings, have unfortunately disappeared except for one.

At both ends of the left side of the complex, there is a very large stone, arbitrarily referred to as a "guard stone". These two stones are not part of the original structure of the complex; they were erected here in more recent times, as can still be clearly seen. All the stones of the actual base wall are embedded in the ground at the bottom, while the two "guard stones" are placed upright on the ground; to keep them upright, bucket-sized boulders have been placed underneath them. The shape of the stones, which have a split surface on one side, also indicates that they originally served other purposes. They may have been the

capstones of megalithic tombs that belonged to the cemetery, the churchyard of the place of worship, and were perhaps removed during the construction of the road that passes a short distance away and erected here. These two stones, erected here, would have to be removed as they disturb the image and lead to false judgements.

Originally, there are said to have been eight stone structures here, most of which were removed in earlier centuries to be used for paving roads and building houses. These too are likely to have been megalithic tombs belonging to the cemetery of the cult hall.

The rows of stones in the "Kleckerwalde" are the remains of a sanctuary of extraordinary importance for the prehistory and early history of the North-West Germanic peoples; they fully confirm my assumptions about the hall buildings in the Oldenburg region.

What is surprising is the similarity to one of the earliest churches in the Lüneburg Heath. About 18 km from Soltau, towards Lüneburg, lies one of the oldest villages in the heath, the village of Bispingen, with an ancient church built of field stones. The rectangular shape without a tower, with its rounded apse and mighty buttresses, which are also built of boulders, suggest that this church was built on the site and from the materials of a Germanic place of worship. A mighty old lime tree shades the church and cemetery.

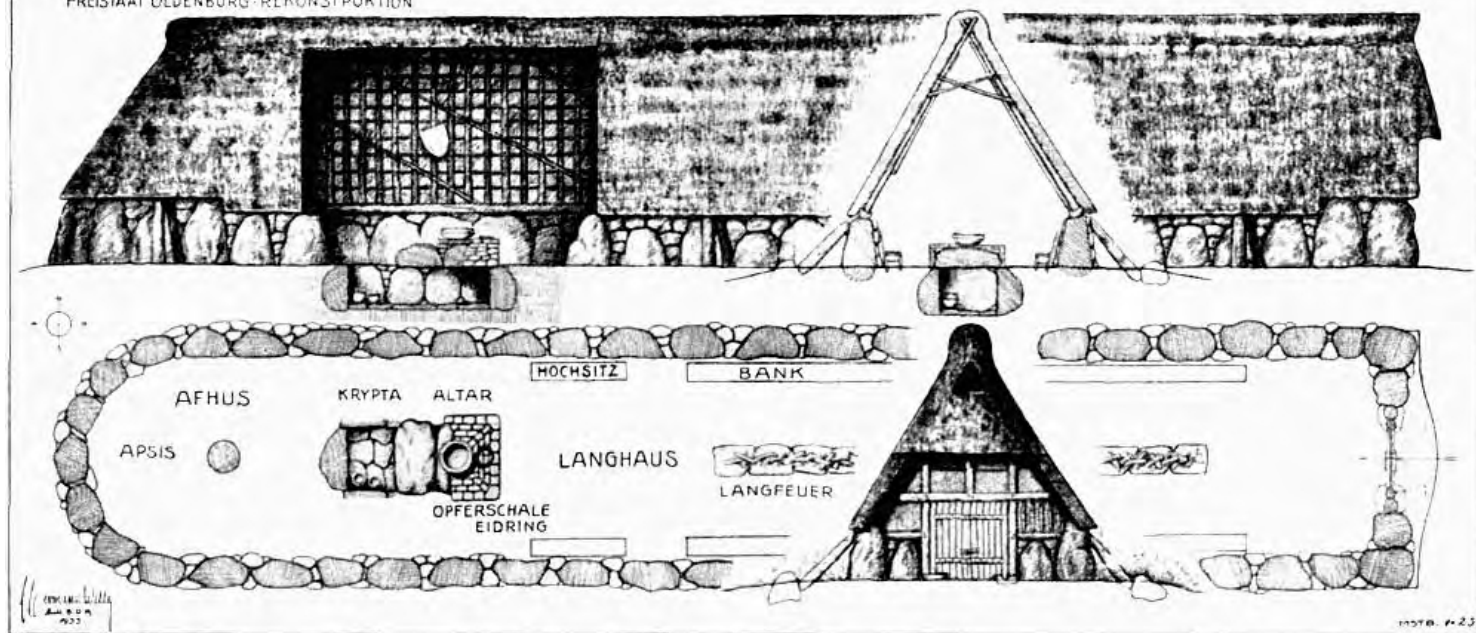
The so-called "Heidenkapelle" (pagan chapel) on the Tönniesberg near Oerlingshausen, not far from Detmold, is also thought to have served cultic purposes in pre-Christian times. This building, constructed from boulders, is mortared with lime paste; the interior is divided into two parts, the upper third has a "recess" in which an iron axe from the early Iron Age was found. The smaller partitioned room of the rectangular building faces east. A partially preserved half-height partition wall separated the rooms, and there are also traces of a former roof. This still

unexplained, heavily dilapidated stone building also has the characteristic shape of an ancient Germanic cult hall. It is also reported that the Wittekind Chapel on the Weser Gorge was built by Christian monks on the site of an ancient Germanic place of worship.

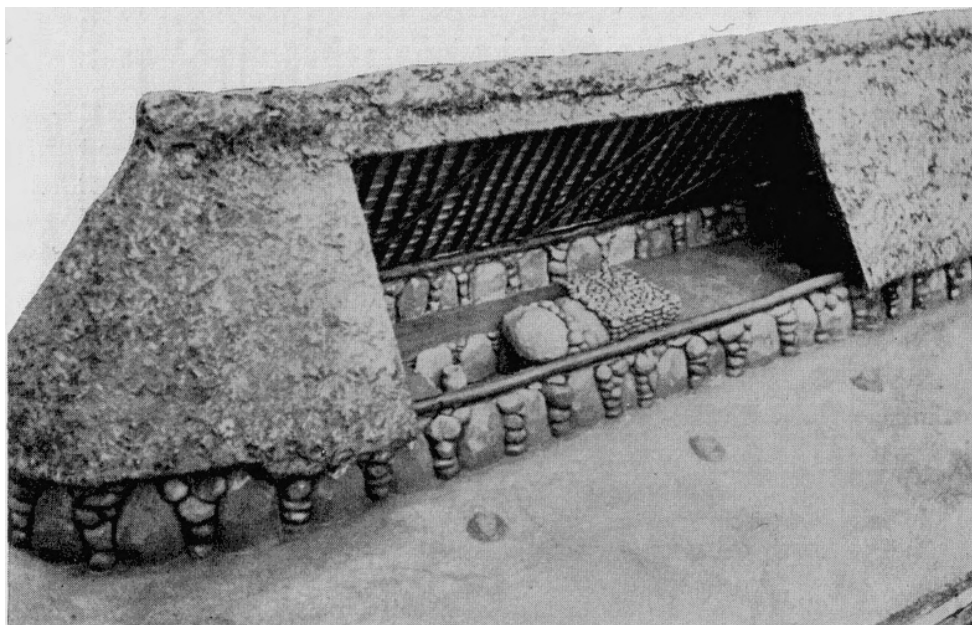
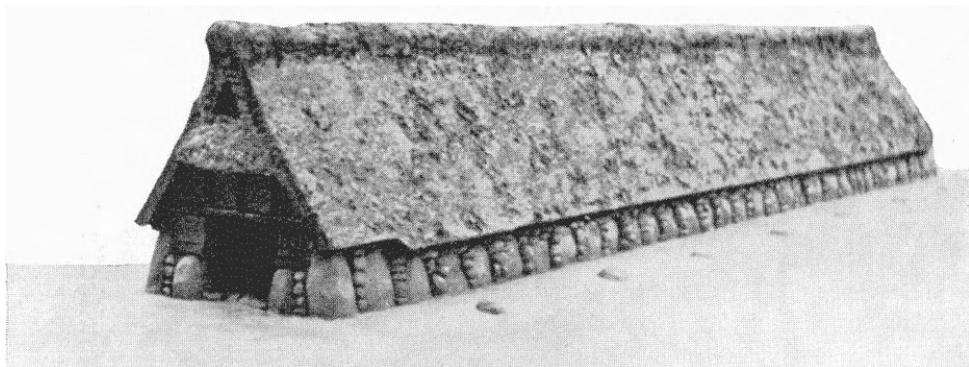
We therefore find, as we can characterise the result of this latest investigation, a seamless transition from the pre-Christian places of worship of the Low German tribes to the earliest Christian places of worship; there was by no means a sudden break with the old and the advent of the new form, but rather the new gradually replaced the old. And this transition, as confirmed by friends, is also clearly reflected in linguistic developments. The Heliand, the Old Saxon Gospel harmony, whose purpose was to bring the new faith closer to the hearts of the forcibly converted Saxons, has handed down to us a wealth of ideas and expressions that paint a vivid picture of Old Saxon life around the year 800. Here we find the conditions and events in Palestine around the time of Christ depicted in the characters and colours of ancient Germanic life; and even where foreign circumstances prevail, there is rarely a lack of Old Saxon words that readily transport these things to the homeland. From these expressions and their application to the biblical subjects known to us, we can deduce what related and corresponding subjects must have existed in ancient Germany.

It is particularly noteworthy in this context that the Heliand poet had access to familiar concepts and words when describing the temple in Jerusalem, which must have been quite familiar to both the poet and the listener; for it is not the case that the poet invented these words for the purpose of describing a foreign building. Furthermore, these are terms that in their

GERMANISCHE KULTHALLE
FREISTAAT OLDENBURG - REKONSTRUKTION



A cult hall reconstructed from a megalithic tomb



Model of a reconstructed cult hall

Below: detail with tomb and altar
Produced by the
author for the "Väterkunde-Museum"

Indo-European prehistory, and must therefore have reflected common institutions and concepts of the Nordic peoples at least as early as the Bronze Age.

The temple in Jerusalem generally appears in the Heliand under the name "Alah" (pronounced alach). The word means in Gothic "alhs", Anglo-Saxon "ealh", means a place of worship, a sanctuary. The Latin word "arx", castle, which sounds exactly the same, reveals the age and original meaning of the word: it originally referred to a space enclosed by stones. The same original form can be deduced from another name for a place of worship: Old High German "haruc" or "harag" also means sanctuary or place of worship, the form of which can still be recognised in the Norse "hörgr", meaning "temple" or longhouse. *Harg*, *hörgr*, however, corresponds exactly to the Latin "carcer", meaning a closed space formed by stones. Perhaps we can even see in this "carcer" the original deep grave, the archetype of the "cella" or cellar.

We have now described above how, in the Icelandic temple, the nave, the assembly room of the people, occupies the larger space of the entire building, while the *Afhus* forms the space around the altar, the "holy of holies", so to speak, at one end, where the deep grave lies in the stone "giant's beds". The same idea clearly underlies the terms used in the Heliand: the *Alah* is the large assembly room of the people, while the "holy of holies" of the temple, the *Afhus* of Iceland, is referred to as "Wih". *Wih* means sanctuary, as an adjective "holy" (*wihe nacht* = holy night; *Weihenstephan* = holy Stephen); it corresponds to the Latin "vicus", which in turn means a demarcated space. This division can now be clearly seen in various passages of the Heliand. Thus it says of Zacharias (verse 103 ff.):

endi gêng im the gihêrôdo man
an thana wîh innan, that werod ôdar bêd umbi
thana alah ûtan.

"And the man went
to the Holy of Holies (*wîh*) inside, while the rest of the people
waited around outside in the temple room (*alah*)."

And later it says of Simeon in the temple (463 ff.): Thar

fundun sea ênna gôdan man,
alan at them alaha, adal-boranan;
the habda at them wîha sô filu wintrô endi sumarô gilibd an
them liotha.

"There they found a good man,
an old man in the temple, a nobleman;
who had lived with the "Wîh" for so many winters and
summers in the light."

It is also reported of the teachings of Christ (4248):

the he thâr an themu alahe gisprak, waldand an themu wîhe –

"which he proclaimed there in the temple (*alah*), the ruler of sanctity"
(*wîh*); apparently, the teaching Christ sits here with the
"Wîh", and the listening people are gathered in *the* "Alah".

The description of such a Germanic place of worship still resonates in the
verses (4277 ff.):

quâdun that ni wâri gôdlîkora alah
obar erdu thurh erlo hand,
thorough man's work with mighty power,
rakud arihtid.

"They said that there was no more magnificent house
of God on earth than this, built by the noble hand, by
man's work with mighty power,
a building erected."

We have already mentioned above that the treasury or chamber containing the temple treasures was located in *the Afhus*, the sanctuary of the church. This view also lives on in the Heliand (3765):

Thô quam thâr ôk ên widows tô,
idis arm-skapan endi te themu alaha gêng, endi
siu an that tresur-hûs twêne legda êrine
skattôs.

"Now a widow also came,
a poor woman who went to the house of God, and she
put two
bronze coins into the treasury."

The parable of the widow's mite is thus transferred here entirely into Old Germanic circumstances, as we find them again later in Icelandic churches.¹

The "Alah", the church, with the "Wih", the deep grave, the altar inside, is thus an ancient Germanic and Aryan tradition, and it remained a living reality until the time of violent conversion.

Later, we find the same ideas in the reports about the settlement of Iceland; it was believed that these

Since they are first mentioned around the year 1000 AD, these "temples" were already modelled on Christian churches. A comparison with what the Heliand tells us, and above all with the findings of the "Hünenbetten" (giant's beds), shows us that even in Iceland, only a very old tradition lives on in hall construction. The story of Thorolf Mostrarskegg, one of the first to travel to Iceland, tells us that he demolished the temple in his Norwegian homeland, using the wood and earth from the mound on which Thor's image stood to build a new church.

¹ According to information provided by J. O. Plaßmann, Münster.

took with him to his new home. This sacred earth would correspond to the earth around the deep grave, which was also filled with special "earth power" (Norse: *iardar-megin*) as the land of the ancestors. The high seat pillars, thrown into the sea, then show him the place where, according to divine will, he lands in Iceland. "He built a large farmstead there on Hofswag (Hofs Bay), which he called Hofstadir (Hofstead); there he had a temple built, and it was a large building. There was a door on the long side near one end; inside stood the high seat pillars, and there were nails in them, which were called gods' nails. Inside was a large sanctuary. Further inside the temple was a room, similar to a choir in churches today. There was a stage in the middle of the floor, like an altar, and on it lay a ring that did not close, weighing twenty oeren (1 oer = 26.72 g), and on this all oaths were to be sworn.¹ The temple priest was to wear this ring on his arm at all gatherings. On the stage there was also to be a sacrificial basin with a sprinkler in it, and this was to be used to sprinkle the blood from the basin, which was called sacrificial blood: this was the blood that was obtained when animals were slaughtered. Around the stage, a side altar was set up for the gods" (Thorolf Mostrarskegg. Hanseatische Verlags-anstalt, Hamburg).

The "space, similar to a choir in churches today" is quite obviously the "Wih" of the Heliand, while the "stage in the middle of the floor, like an altar" has replaced the old deep stone tomb, which of course disappeared in a newly settled area; but the earth brought from the ancestral grave in the local church still takes its place. We can therefore equate this temple very closely with the prehistoric "house of God". But the dimensions of such a hall – in this case, of course, a residential building – are also described to us in the legend of

¹ The "oath ring" is often mistakenly referred to as a neck ring.

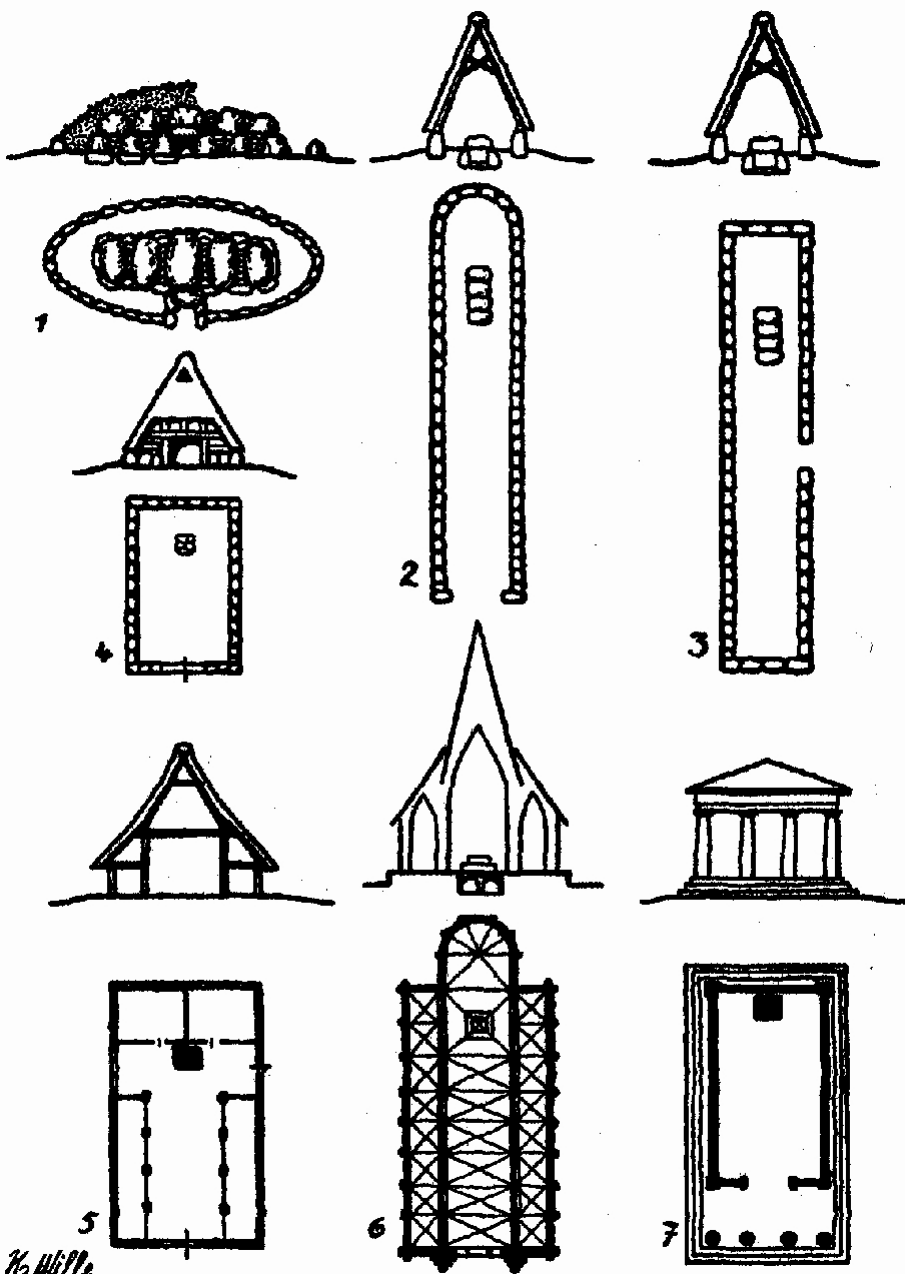
Gisli the outlawed (Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt; p. 47): "The residential building was 100 fathoms long and 10 fathoms wide; but outside, on the south side, the women's quarters were slightly lower."

The ratio of 1:10 between the front wall and side wall, measured from the outside, corresponds almost exactly to that of the "Visbeker Bräutigam" (approximately 105:10), the "Visbeker Braut" (approximately 82:8), Glaner stone setting (approx. 60: 6) and the base wall in Kleckerwald (approx. 60:6).

In addition to the sanctuaries described, there will of course have been a number of temples in these districts, for example in Wildeshausen, Dötlingen, Hundlosen, Großenkneten, Visbek, Delmenhorst, Wardenburg, Kirchhatten and everywhere else where churches from the earliest times stood and still stand.

The places of worship were destroyed by the monks who proclaimed the new doctrine. Well-preserved sacred halls were converted into Christian churches after the devil and all evil spirits (which, according to the monks, were the gods) had been driven out, the interior sprinkled with holy water, and the sacred space consecrated as a Christian church. In the places where sanctuaries were destroyed, Christian churches were built with the remains of the material, the large granite blocks, in order to proclaim the new doctrine to the people in Christian consecrated places of worship in their familiar surroundings. This explains why no cult halls in their original form have come down to us and why there are no chronicles reporting on them.

The cult halls in the Ahlhorn Heath, near Steinloge, and the Glaner sanctuary were destroyed but not rebuilt. Perhaps Charlemagne intervened here too, burning the temples and driving away many farmers, so that the dense population declined and the remaining people moved to the more fertile farmland of the Weser Valley. The area was deserted, the elevation of the Kir-



1. Megalithic tomb, 2. and 3. Places of worship from the Neolithic period, 4. Single-room house, 5. Lower Saxon farmhouse, 6. Three-nave church, 7. Greek temple

It can be assumed that these places of worship were in use until the introduction of Christianity, because belief in God was so deeply connected to daily life, and the cult of ancestors and veneration of the dead were so deeply rooted. It can be assumed that these places of worship were in use until the introduction of Christianity, because belief in God was so deeply connected with daily life, and ancestor worship and veneration of the dead were so strongly pronounced that these early places of worship would have been used and maintained as long as people believed in the old deities.

As already mentioned, the temples, the sacred halls, were primarily intended for the cold season, winter. The festivals at the time of the sacred nights, Christmas Eve, Yule, the winter solstice, were celebrated in them, just as today Christmas Eve and Christmas are celebrated in Christian churches. The sacrificial festivals of spring and summer, on the other hand, were celebrated in the forest cathedral, in the sacred groves covered by the blue sky.

Fortune has preserved these places of worship, at least in their foundations, in the remote heathlands of Oldenburg and the neighbouring areas so well that we can still recognise their original purpose today.

There is probably no other region in Germany where megalithic tombs, urn fields, dwellings and festival sites from prehistoric times are located in such completeness in a closed area as in southern Oldenburg. This land can therefore rightly be described as the classic land of prehistoric monuments.

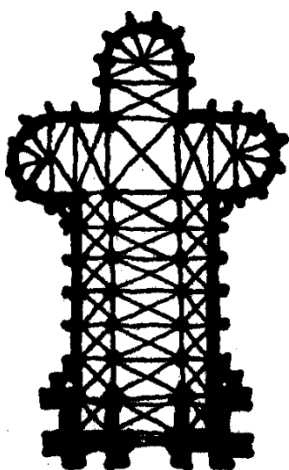
In view of the "Hünenbetten" (giant's beds), the question arose: were the enormous stone structures in the Ahlhorn Heath, in Steinloge and in the Glaner Heath burial sites – were they mass graves or were they places of worship, places of worship for our distant ancestors?

With this attempt to interpret the meaning of those enormous stone structures, which have been given the rather meaningless name "Hünenbetten" (giant's beds), I hope not only to have done a service to science – I also hope

also to have emphatically pointed out the tremendous significance of these monuments of our ancestors for understanding the deep sources of our folk culture.

For that should be the ultimate and highest goal of all prehistoric science: to fathom eternal life from dead matter, which, as the heritage of our blood and our race, has been constantly renewed since the days of the Stone Age to the present day.

*





Nativity scene from a 12th-century Greek Gospel book. According to Greek tradition, the stable is depicted as a cave and the manger as a brick altar.



Nativity scene from the *Menologium graecum vaticanum*. End of the 10th century.

The "manger" is built of stone, in the style of an altar.

Illustration by Max Schmid, *Die Darstellung der Geburt Christi in der bildenden Kunst* (The Depiction of the Birth of Christ in the Visual Arts). Stuttgart 1890. pp. 17 and 23.



Nativity scene from the ivory chair of Maximian of Ravenna, 6th century. The brick "manger" has an entrance in the style of a crypt. According to Max Schmid, op. cit. p. 23.

What does not
comes from your heart,
Does not penetrate the heart, The
light,
That shines in your eyes,
It shines brightly
And ignites more
Than a hundred thousand candles.
The German Rembrandt.

Christmas

Winter solstice

In the previous chapter, it is mainly architectural and factual reasons that lead to the large "giant beds" being depicted as covered cult rooms, even as houses of worship in the true sense of the word. This factual finding is also supported by a few, albeit sparse, literary traditions that have been preserved for us in our Old Saxon Heliand and in the Nordic sagas as the last echoes of the ancient Germanic spirit. However, I believe that the ancient tradition we have gleaned from the megalithic structures of our distant past was even more tenacious, and it continues to influence us without our being aware of it.

What is added below in this section as a supplement to my remarks is thanks to the communications and exchange of ideas with Dr. I. O. Pläßmann, who gave me many valuable pointers for this book.

We know from very old reports that the winter solstice festival was a major celebration for our ancestors, indeed the most important festival of the year; we also know that this festival must date back to Indo-European prehistory, because we also find the festival of the reborn sun, the winter solstice festival, among the Romans as a major celebration, originally probably also the

highest annual festival, and it was here that it played an important role in the adoption of Christianity. It is well known that in the earliest Christian church, the birth of the Lord was not celebrated at all; rather, the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan on 6 January was celebrated and, in the Gnostic sense, was regarded as the actual day of Christ's appearance in the world. On 25 December 354, the day of the Lord's birth was celebrated for the first time in Rome; but this day was the "day of the undefeated sun" in the old Roman calendar, that is, the day when the sun, at the winter solstice, after the end of the descending half of the year, invincibly begins its upward course again, towards the ascending half of the year. In fact, however, the day was still generally regarded as the day of the birth of the sun – a tradition which, according to Herman Wirth, can only be traced back to a homeland high in the north – which is why Augustine still emphasised in the 5th century that Christians did not celebrate 25 December as the day of the birth of the sun, as the unbelievers did, but because of the birth of the one who created the sun. There may have been an influence from the cult of Mithras here, but this was not decisive, as the "day of the undefeated sun" was an ancient Roman and Indo-European tradition.

We can see from many examples that Christianity was only able to establish and assert itself by adopting important cultic customs from pre-Christian times and thus gradually replacing the old, whereby the transition may often have gone unnoticed by the general population. This was the case with the Christmas festival in Rome, and it was no different with the Nordic Christmas festival, which long before the adoption of Christianity had been a major, if not the most important, annual festival, celebrating the return of the undefeated sun and thus, in the most original religious sense, the return of the god who revealed himself in the course of the year, "who created the sun," as it is still said in the

Icelandic sagas. This high annual festival was a continuous period of celebration – "*ze wíhen* nechten", the holy nights, as the festival was still called in the Middle Ages, or "Mothers' Night", the "*môdranith*" as the ancient Anglo-Saxons called it. It is the night of the year when the three mothers, the three Norns or Holdens, cherish the child at the foot of the tree of life. As is so often the case, the original "pagan" meaning has fallen apart into two parts: "Christmas" has been adopted by Christianity, but the twelve holy nights between Christmas and Epiphany have become a time for all kinds of hauntings, in which the "satanised" deities of ancient times live on.

We have no direct evidence of how our ancestors celebrated this "*wíhen* nechte", the holy festival of the winter solstice, the Yule season. We can only guess at it from the Christmas customs that live on today: it is the evergreen tree of life, the fir or mistletoe, which appears here as a symbol of the ever-renewing year and life; and almost everywhere at the foot of this evergreen tree can be found the manger with the newborn child of God, "created by the sun". The fir tree as a Christmas tree is first mentioned in literature in Strasbourg in 1605; but that proves nothing, for it is an ancient custom that was revived throughout Germany from Alsace at that time, while it has been preserved on some remote Baltic islands in uninterrupted tradition until the present day. We know of other Christmas customs, such as

"Tunscheren" and the light stands, which have preserved the ancient symbolism of the year much more clearly and must therefore have been important festive symbols of our ancestors in ancient times.

Where was this important annual festival celebrated in ancient times? If our ancestors had a shared religious life, a shared cult life, then this must have been

The high annual festival also had a communal character, as evidenced by reports of the winter solstice festival of the Thulites from very early times. In fact, even in historical times, the Yule festival was celebrated with a great feast, at which the Yule boar was eaten and the "minne" of the gods, heroes and the dead of the clan was drunk. The festival was originally a festival of the dead, but at the same time also of new life – l i k e the "undefeated sun", which with its

"Death" in the winter night at the same time as her new life begins, a symbol of both, a symbol of passing and ever-renewing life. Nordic traditions, which are completely independent of Christianity, also tell us about the child born on that night; and 28 December, to which the Church has moved the Feast of the Holy Innocents, was originally a day dedicated to children in general, which the Church has appropriated for itself through reinterpretation. It is a time when the deceased ancestors and children are remembered at the same time – and that is why, since time immemorial, it has been a day for the whole clan, in which one generation follows another, just as one annual ring follows another in the great world year.

We know that these Yule celebrations were held in the great royal halls of the north; they must have been celebrated in the same way in prehistoric times in the halls, which originally belonged not to a king but to the clan or the clan elder. It is easy to understand why we still hear about the great Yule feast that followed, but not about the actual religious celebration that must have preceded it, as evidenced by the deeply religious, original character of *the "wiþen nechte"*. This is not surprising, for it was precisely the religious component that was completely absorbed by the Church, which gave it a somewhat different interpretation.

but which in reality incorporated the deepest spiritual content, as it still lives on in us today, into its church festival. No wonder that even today, Christmas without children is inconceivable for us. But just as today the "secular" festive feast follows the actual religious celebration, so too in the past the act of consecration must have preceded it. Much of the original consecration offerings still live on in our Christmas baking, such as the Juleber, which is still baked today as "Julgalt" in Sweden; it is cut into pieces and mixed with the seed. In Germany, too, a cake pig, as it is called, is still slaughtered in many places. All these customs, of which many more survive than can be seen in a single region, took place either in the prehistoric dwelling or in the house of God, which was, after all, only a dwelling transferred to a larger scale; the floor plan of these halls, as I imagine them, corresponds to that of the Low German farmhouse. In the most primitive conditions, the ancestral grave was probably also located in the house itself, near the hearth or even under it; that is, roughly where the deep grave, the stone chamber of the ancestral grave, is located in the cult hall, the "Hünenbette". And here lies the tangible connection between the departed ancestors and the "new life" of the children! We know from some regions, especially those with very ancient traditions, that there is still a custom of bringing newborns or very young children into contact with the dolmen, the stone chamber tomb. In some areas of Brittany, newborns or very young children are actually placed on the capstone of the dolmen. Elsewhere, the stone is called "To the Newborns". A related custom, also widespread in Germany, is to pull newborns through openings in the dolmen, which is supposed to bring them luck and health; this custom is especially practised with weak children. Originally, it was probably a sensual rebirth, which in its connection with the Ah-

clearly demonstrates its connection to the meaning of Christmas. That is why we find this custom elsewhere in connection with the so-called "beating with the rod of life", which is practised here on the Day of the Holy Innocents: The girls are "tickled" or "peppered" with the rod of the juniper ("Kwickbaum" = tree of life), as they are the bearers of the "new life" of future offspring. It is obviously the same idea when mothers in Brittany first roll their weak children on the capstone of the dolmen and then beat them with a broom made of broom, which they then use to sweep the dolmen. Such stones have often been inscribed with the names of saints, who here too have simply replaced an older religious tradition. Dying children were even rolled on such stones in the hope of keeping them alive, which is why they are also called "*Pierres de l'Enfant*" or "*Roches aux enfants*". In some places, the Mother of God is also transferred with the cradle to the "children's stone": the original source here is by no means the biblical story, but the ancient connection between the stone tomb, the ancestral grave, and the new life of the clan, the offspring, and thus the newborn child at the winter solstice. Here, the connection with our Christmas celebrations and nativity scenes is obvious. The oldest depictions of the "nativity scene" with ox and donkey in the form familiar to us can be found in the 4th century in the catacombs of Rome, and strangely enough, or rather significantly, almost exclusively on sarcophagi. Here, too, the connection between the "undefeated sun" and the idea of "new life" is tangibly evident: this depiction did not actually correspond to the intentions of the church leadership, which had to reluctantly elevate the old winter solstice festival to the feast of the birth of the Lord. We can also observe that in the south, as in the north,

Pre-Christian ideas have been closely associated with this depiction: the oldest Greek nativity scenes almost without exception show a cave as the place of birth, which does not correspond to the biblical account, but clearly echoes the ancient Greek and Aryan myths of the birth of Zeus or Dionysus in a rock cave.

One might assume that nativity scenes gradually spread from the south to the north and were then adopted as something completely new when Christianity was introduced. However, this is contradicted by the ancient Germanic character of our Christmas celebrations in general; only today do we still find nativity scenes based entirely on local ideas; in the past, it was usually a stable (a one-room house), the archetype of which can still be seen everywhere in the North German heath. Some elements, such as the sheep, are not mentioned at all in the biblical tradition. Incidentally, they are also completely absent from most early Christian depictions. The origin of the ox and the donkey (often depicted as a horse) is also completely unclear; yet it is precisely these animals that complete the picture of a Nordic farmhouse, with horses and cattle standing to the right and left of the hallway. Now, however, the word

The word "crib" itself is of Germanic origin (Old Saxon *kribbia*); strangely enough, it is precisely this word that has been adopted from Germanic into Provençal, Italian and French (French: *la crèche*, the crib, also *le crèchet*). In Cominges there is a dolmen called *Pierre de crèchet*, meaning "manger stone"; and it is said that it was brought to its current location by St. Bertrand's mule. So here we have a connection between the donkey and the manger that is clearly pre-Christian and has nothing to do with the biblical Christmas story, because otherwise St. Bertrand would undoubtedly have been associated with the donkey instead of St. Joseph. Here, then, the "manger" with

the name borrowed from Germanic is undoubtedly a dolmen, a stone chamber tomb, in a conceptual connection that is obviously pre-Christian.

Perhaps these ancient traditions do give us an insight into what the Nordic Christmas festival was once like in ancient times. Since the festival could not be celebrated in snow and ice, a place of worship was needed, a closed cult hall, the remains of which we have recognised in our "megalithic tombs". But if we imagine this hall, with the deep grave as an "altar", as the scene of the ancient Norse Christmas celebration, our imagination may paint the following picture: the child, perhaps the youngest of the clan, was placed on the capstone of the deep grave, which we can perhaps imagine as an altar-like structure made of small boulders grouted into clay on top of the capstones of the grave; this was the archetype of the "*Pierre de crèchet*", the

"Krippensteines", or the "*Pierre de l'enfant*", the "Kindli-stein", as it is still known today in the original Breton tradition. And it would explain how the "manger" became the central experience of *the* "holy nights" and thus of the entire annual cycle among the northern peoples; a significance that it would never have acquired from the southern church; and why the "holy nights" are still the great mystery of the year for us, whose ineradicable, ancient spiritual content will cause any "godless movement" to fail, but only because the roots of our faith lie much deeper than in the 1100 years of Christian rule.

What has been said above may give soulful content to what I have deduced from the outside as the framework of the deep religious customs of our ancestors, thus rounding off the section on the old Germanic places of worship.



Kneeling Germanic man
(bronze statuette, Paris)

Not with his gaze lowered and his head bowed; with his head raised,
the Germanic man gave thanks to his god



Swastika bronze,
circa 400 AD
Weimar Museum

True faith does not grow from teaching, It
is born only from the depths of one's being.
From a burning homesickness, it struggles into
the light, only when one has renounced all that is
foreign.

Friedrich Karl Otto

End of the Gods

The End of Freedom

When Charlemagne, or "the Great" as German historians still habitually call him, set about realising his vision of a unified state with the help of the Roman Church, namely to establish a Roman-Christian empire in Europe, and now began to force even the last remaining German tribes east of the Rhine into this state and to imbue them with Christian doctrine and Roman Catholic culture, in other words to Romanise them, the hour of destiny struck for this magnificent old Chauci land, as it did for all Saxon and Frisian tribes, the end of their gods and with it the end of their freedom dawned.

With political acumen, Charlemagne recognised that the Saxons on the north-eastern border of the empire could pose a threat to his overall concept of the state; for they were a people capable of absorbing parts of the Frankish Empire and establishing a Saxon empire of their own, whose political lines of force, in the event of expansion to the west and southwest, would target the heartland and backbone of his empire, the lower Rhine valley.

And so it came to pass that, as the Saxons did not want to be deprived of their freedom and their gods, there ensued a thirty-year struggle between this most glorious and proudest of all Germanic tribes, whose

I am indebted to Otto Wille, Steglitz, for valuable references to recent historical research, which I have used in this work.

The Widukind coat of arms, which depicts a noble white Saxon horse rearing up, symbolises the selfish Frankish conquerors; a battle that was unparalleled in its bitterness and ferocity, if one recalls the fighting style of the Frankish Charlemagne, who did not shy away from massacres and deportations; a battle, however, that is characterised by admirable determination and tragic grandeur, if one thinks of the tenacious resistance of the Saxons and the bitter end.

Certainly, the Saxons, who were so closely attached to their homeland, were hit even harder by the uprooting from their culture and the displacement to foreign lands than by the inhuman massacres, which in some places amounted to extermination.

Charles skilfully knew how to turn the planned war of conquest into a national war of defence against the hated "predatory" neighbours, as his French heirs later did as a matter of course. And so it would be the irrefutable national duty of German nationalist historiography to finally distribute light and shadow correctly in this struggle, allowing the shining figure of the leader who had almost become a myth among his people, the Saxon Duke Widukind, to stand out radiantly from the dark and glistening image of the West Frankish Charlemagne.

This Charlemagne, who ruthlessly and selfishly took up the fight against everything that the world still describes and perceives as "German" today, must never be regarded as a German emperor and prince. There is really no reason to call him the Great and celebrate him as a national hero in German historiography – this realisation is becoming increasingly widespread today. We Germans are happy to leave him to the West Franks and their present-day heirs, who honour him with great pride and regard him as one of their own.

¹ For those who wish to view Charlemagne in the light of a German conception of history, I refer you in particular to the final chapters of Teudt's *Germanische Heiligtümer* (Germanic Sanctuaries), Eugen Diederichs, Jena 1931.

It was only natural that this violent man, equipped with an absolute will to power, would soon come into conflict with people who had never tolerated a lord above them and from whom he and his helpers, the district counts and bishops he had appointed, brutally collected tithes.

This is the only explanation for the fact that the deeds of donation of his successors repeatedly mention the "tithe" as a privilege granted, which was often collected from entire regions and given away to "superiors" outside the country, as if the goods of the people, earned and acquired through sweat and toil, were worthless.

This is what a document from the year 819 says:

"Emperor Louis I grants Abbot Castus of Visbek immunity (exemption from taxes) for the church of Visbek and its associated churches in Lerigau, for the tithe in the Ammeri and Ponteburg forests (now Bodenburg near Oldenburg) and the other churches in Hesigau and Fenkigaul."

Thus, at the time of Charles the Tenth, all churches and landscapes in the Chaukenland may have been burdened, and the common good of the clans may have been transformed by arbitrariness and brute force into blatant self-interest in favour of those who were compliant with the emperor for their own benefit.

The defiant freeman, who stubbornly defended his ancestral rights, independence and freedom, had to bow to the superiority of the foreign conquerors, and he may have bowed his neck only grudgingly, if he did not prefer to suffer death for freedom rather than live in servitude.

However, the new faith served as both a pretext and a means to justify and accomplish the subjugation and extermination of one of the best Germanic peoples, for the conquest of Saxony took place under the sign of the cross, i.e. in the service of the Pope and the Church, whose priests accompanied Charlemagne's army.

¹ Rüttnig, Oldenburg Document Book.

ten; supported by Charlemagne's army, the Church was rewarded with an expansion of its sphere of influence. Thus, political and clerical imperialism found common ground, for both sought power and self-interest.

The proud courts of the Saxons were reduced to rubble and ashes in this terrible religious war. They, who had previously sat proudly, richly and freely on their estates and looked up to no one but their deity, now had to hide from the murderous and greedy Franks. Through fire and sword, in the most unchristian manner, the belief in their old gods was torn from their hearts. Even today, the memory of the bloodbath at Verden an der Aller lives on unabated in the consciousness of the people of Lower Saxony, and hatred for this terrible deed burns hot in German hearts.

Charles quenched his thirst for revenge for his defeat at Süntel on 4,500 noble Saxons, civilian prisoners, as Wilhelm Teudt suspects, who had been captured since the Paderborn disenfranchisement as representatives and followers of the old faith and gradually brought together in the permanent prison camp at Verden. This brutal Saxon slayer had ruthlessly carried out the decision he had made in 775 at Kiersy not to rest until the Saxons were converted or completely exterminated. After the bloodbath at Verden (782), the fighting continued on both sides with the utmost ferocity. The embittered people even engaged in open battle twice in this second phase of the war (782–92), at Detmold and on the Hase (783), but suffered two crushing defeats. In repeated campaigns, West and Eastphalia were subjugated, partly by the king himself and partly by his son. Neither winter nor flooding deterred them from their work of destruction. When Widukind realised that Charlemagne, with his inhuman cruelty, was capable of anything, he abandoned the struggle for freedom in 785 and voluntarily submitted in order to save his people from complete annihilation. At Charlemagne's behest

This event, which was so important for his politics, was celebrated in Rome with a thanksgiving feast; for a pardon from Charlemagne could only be bought by accepting Christianity. Widukind may have found both submission and baptism bitterly difficult; for this also sealed the fate of his people, who were now leaderless. Nevertheless, it took another twelve years of struggle (792–804) to completely subjugate and enslave this proud people. In almost annual campaigns, Charlemagne brutally crushed the new uprisings of the Saxons, who had allied themselves with the Frisians and Abotrites (in Mecklenburg). In particular, he again resorted to mass resettlements. "Soon," according to careful sources in Gebhardt's Handbook of German History, which I follow in this brief account of the Saxon Wars, "7,000 men alone, soon a third of the total population, men, women and children, and finally about 10,000 people from both banks of the Elbe were taken away and their land given to the Abotrites (i.e. to the neighbouring Slavs! The author), to Frankish settlers or to ecclesiastical foundations."

Since then, we have encountered traces of these transplants in many Saxon place names and buildings in central and southern Germany and, conversely, in many Franconian place names and buildings in northern Germany.

Once the Saxons' resistance had been broken, Charlemagne established bishoprics: Bremen, Münster, Paderborn, Osnabrück, Verden and Minden were built at that time. The ownership of brands and wastelands, which the Germanic tribes had left unused, was confiscated for his own use. He took some of this for himself, then for his Frankish compatriots, whom he appointed as lords to maintain his rule. The Church also received large areas of land. This is entirely consistent with Wilhelm Teudt's characterisation of Charlemagne as someone who was capable of any dishonourable act as long as it brought him personal advantage

, when he bought the subjugated leaders of the robbed people with this people's land, granting them possessions in order to make them compliant and separate them from the people.

Thus, the new political power deeply interfered with the previous freedom and economic life of the Saxons. Charlemagne appointed officials as administrators in the conquered land. He gave the divided land as fiefs to the appointed counts, who had to pay him a tithe. He then covered the land with a network of monasteries, which he endowed with huge estates. The people had to pay heavy taxes. The emperor's self-interest went to extremes. People were expected to renounce their own possessions for the benefit and welfare of the church and for the spread of the "theocracy," although he certainly retained a great deal for himself.

Karl's will, which is kept in manuscript form in the Imperial Library in Vienna, provides a deep and true insight into his character and his goals in life. A glance at this will, at the composition and utilisation of his enormous movable property in gold, silver and precious stones, shows all too clearly that he was never concerned with preserving the welfare and rights of the German people. Einhard, Charlemagne's pupil, friend and minister, who wrote his biography immediately after the emperor's death, tells us how he spent years before his death organising and distributing his treasures. He writes: "He undertook to make testamentary dispositions by which he also wanted to appoint his daughters and illegitimate children as his heirs with certain shares." Einhard speaks without reproach of nine wives and concubines of this "Christian" Frankish king! Most of the possessions in the treasury then passed into the ownership of the Franks. On the other hand, he did not remember in the slightest the country and the people from whom these enormous treasures originated. It had been robbed and plundered. In his will, he thought only of his personal salvation.

On 28 January 814, the man whose tools of the trade were the sword and the cross died.

At this point, I would like to mention that overseas trade at that time was in the hands of the Jews, who enjoyed a tolerance under Charlemagne's sceptre that they had never experienced before and never experienced again. A Jew named Isaac was employed at Charlemagne's court for important business matters, namely as an interpreter.

The professional clergy who emerged with the introduction of Christianity had every interest in obscuring, erasing and, if possible, completely eradicating everything connected with the old faith.

The Roman Church and its priests at that time were willing to use any justification as long as it served to justify the ruthless expansion of their power. They did not shy away from invoking the Old Testament in defence of their "Christian" methods of conversion, especially Deuteronomy 12:2-3:

"Destroy all the places where the heathen have served their gods, whether on high mountains, on hills or under trees; and tear down their altars, break their pillars, burn their groves and the images of their gods with fire, and wipe out and destroy their names from that place."

Given the zeal for conversion of the monks and priests, it is actually surprising that so many connections to the Germanic past have nevertheless been preserved to this day in customs and traditions, in idioms, and in field and place names.

This systematic persecution and destruction of all indigenous Germanic culture by the missionaries and agents of Charlemagne explains why so few reliable sources of Germanic prehistory have come down to us. In its intention and effect, this elimination and paralysis of all expressions of the Germanic national spirit

comparable to the intellectual movement, hidden and openly led by foreign masters, which we know only too well, and which deliberately suppressed and distorted the German spirit in the years after the World War until the breakthrough of the National Socialist revolution. This almost clairvoyant hatred of our opponents towards Aryan-Germanic art and worldview ultimately robbed us of our fathers' heritage. The intellectual and cultural heritage of that time must have been very high indeed, because it was deemed worthy of being fought against by all the dark forces.

The Germanic soul has, in truth, never sought God anywhere else but within itself. Since German prehistory is our first and most unique heritage, it must therefore also be placed at the beginning of teaching and education. Only when I have thoroughly assimilated what is close to my blood and my own can I advantageously absorb foreign worldviews and assess their value. What good does it do us to introduce our youth to Greco-Roman culture and history, which Germanic prehistory first established, before teaching them about Germanic prehistory?

The destruction of Germanic places of worship in northern Germany between the Ems and Weser rivers was carried out on the orders of Bishop Gregory around 750 by the missionary Boniface and his successor, the monk Anskar from Corven Abbey. It must be assumed that where chapels and churches stand today, there were once consecrated places of worship. The annual festivals were transformed into church festivals in honour of the saints, and so the old festivals continued to exist in many cases, only in a different form.

The Benedictine monk Winfried, known as Bishop Boniface, tore down the pagan altars and cut down the sacred trees with his own hands, including the sacred oak tree of Donar near Geismar in Hesse. In his old age, he returned to the Frisians, among whom he had begun his work of conversion.

Boniface, who in his old age resumed his youthful plan of converting the Frisians and destroyed altars and churches in the east of the Zuiderzee, was killed in 754 at Dokkum by embittered Frisians in righteous anger.

No one can deny that "the historical course of events during the introduction of Christianity in Germania was reprehensible, and that the discord thus created in the spiritual state of the German people has not yet been eliminated in the course of subsequent times in a manner that corresponds to our insights from both a religious and a national point of view." This is how Wilhelm Teudt critically summarises his assessment of the consequences of the Christianisation of Saxony under Charlemagne.

In a sense, there is a direct line from Charles' destruction of the Saxons' ancestral beliefs to the massacre of 5,000 Stedinger under the rule of Frederick II (1215–50), the most un-German of all German emperors. In order to prove himself orthodox to the Pope – he himself was suspected of heresy due to his fondness for scientific studies – he ordered a persecution of heretics in Germany. The "persecutor of heretics, crusader and spiritual advisor" at the Thuringian court, Magister Conrad von Marburg, developed an almost uncanny efficiency in this regard, supported by the "dogs of the Pope", the Dominicans. He was most severe in Hesse and Thuringia, where the old faith had long been preserved in customs and traditions. There he was also killed by the people in 1233. But the movement continued and spread to the Weser-Ems region, led by Bishop Conrad of Hildesheim.

According to tradition, free Dutchmen and Frisians settled in the Weser marshes at the call of the Archbishop of Bremen. They were called Stedinger, meaning "people of the shore." In order to seize their territory, the lords of Oldenburg and the Archbishop of Bremen accused the inhabitants of "paganism"

and mocking Christianity. An army of knights, made up of their neighbours who were eager for plunder, destroyed them after a brave fight in the Battle of Altenesch (Oldenesche) on 27 May 1234.

Perhaps among these Stedingers were descendants of Widukind's Saxons from the Leri-Gau, who had moved from the Geest to the fertile north and into the wide Weser Valley, the Stedingerland. In any case, long-established families whose names are attested in southern Oldenburg moved to the northern region in later times. The people had been worn down and exhausted by the Saxon Wars under the heroic leadership of Widukind. It may no longer have been worthwhile to convert the Germanic temples into Christian churches. Thus, the remains of the places of worship that were destroyed by force have been preserved to this day in the long rows of boulders with deep graves.

Parts of this ancient Saxon people may have merged with the immigrant Frisians and Flemings to form the Stedinger people. The old defiant spirit and tenacious will to create their own property transformed the previously almost uninhabited Weser Valley, the landscapes of Stedingen and Rüstringen, into a flourishing, fertile landscape. The wide area of the Weser was cultivated, ditches were dug so that the water could flow into the streams. Earthen dykes had to be built to protect against flooding along the rivers. But even this hard work of dyke building was probably gladly done by the farmers, for here they were free.

It certainly took many centuries before the people of Stedingen could call the green meadows and yellow cornfields their own. The number of farmers spread across the entire Weser valley to the coast along the dykes. The fertile land and numerous livestock made the Stedinger people rich and proud. The feeling of having created a new home on the banks of the Weser united them all, and this was particularly evident in their sense of freedom.

But here, too, a new enemy lurked: the bishops of Bremen had only encouraged this immigration in order to subjugate the people for the sake of church tithes, and so here, too, a life-and-death struggle ensued between the Old Germanic peasant families' desire for freedom and the bishops' and dukes' lust for power.

When the Archbishop of Bremen recognised the growth of their power, he initially worsened the conditions for the Stedinger people who were under his rule. In many places, he appointed clergy, had wooden churches built and erected a fortified house for the monks who were responsible for collecting church tithes. The Counts of Oldenburg also appointed bailiffs, and soon they built fortified castles with earthen ramparts and wooden palisades. One such fortified castle was built on the Lichtenberg hill on the Hunte River to monitor Niederstedingen near Huntebrück; another was located near Linen. When the Oldenburg bailiffs who lived in the castles harmed the peasants through their violent acts, the Nordstedtingers gathered at Brokdeich, not far from Iprump, to resist in 1204. They set fire to the fortresses and, to protect themselves against intervention from Bremen, built a strong bridge with a solid gate and a long moat with a stone wall at the Deichhauser Ochtmfurt. The Stedinger Weg, which led from Berne to Wildeshausen, was also fortified. But the struggle between the archbishopric and the Stedinger continued. The peasants fought for their independence and refused to pay tithes and taxes to the ecclesiastical and secular powers. The new archbishop, Gerhard II, then resorted to force. His brother Hermann von der Lippe controlled the border and dared to make raids into the interior.

In 1229, the Stedinger confronted the knights, who were defeated in battle. Since then, the people had a particularly difficult time under the rule of Gerhard II. Anathema was imposed on the country, allegedly because the inhabitants were still practising all kinds of

pagan customs. But the people did not understand why it should be heretical to adhere to the customs of their forefathers. Betrayed by the emperor and declared outlaws, surrounded by their predatory neighbours like a pack of dogs, the Stedinger finally succumbed to their superior enemies. An entire people was exterminated because the Christian church preached this war. The clergyman who wrote the Saxon Chronicle thought it was perfectly right that the "Stedinge had been destroyed, for they had committed great violence and injustice for more than thirty years, so our Lord God struck them down with his power".

Time and again, Low German peasants, Saxons and Stedingers took up arms to defend their homeland and the faith of their forefathers in a fight to the death; for "it is not without provocation that the peasant takes up iron and oak clubs".

It may seem surprising to some that this freedom-loving people, with such a tenacious will to assert themselves, so quickly accepted the "Christ" as their "Saviour", as

"Duke of Bliss" and then remained loyal to him. When we think of the original religion of mankind, as revealed to us by Herman Wirth, this should come as no surprise; for the new doctrine came from the Orient with a symbolism that, being similar in every detail, could simply be substituted for that of our own ancestral beliefs.

"Her" became "Heliand," the wheel cross became the high cross, and the bull became the lamb; the old sanctuaries became Christian temples. Certainly, where we find sanctuaries in early Christian times, there were Germanic halls in pre-Christian times. The Church Father Augustine was once able to testify, remembering that the new doctrine was the revival of an ancient one and that Christ had taken the place of the victorious and dying "Son of God," the sun hero: "What is now called the Christian religion already existed among the ancients and was not lacking in the beginnings of the human race – until Christ appeared in the flesh. From then on, the true religion,

which already existed before, received the name of the Christian religion."

But there was another factor that facilitated and accelerated this change of belief during the reign of Charlemagne, the relentless conqueror of the Saxons at the turning point of Germanic culture.

The Neolithic megalithic tomb culture of the North Sea region around 2000 BC forms, as Herman Wirth aims to prove in his forthcoming work "Urglaube der Menschheit; ein Abriß der Denkmälerkunde atlantischer Kultsymbolik" (Primordial Beliefs of Mankind; an Outline of the Monumentology of Atlantic Cult Symbolism), the "basis of the later high religions there". The large stone tombs, the dolmens, still stand out from this period.

"Hünenbetten" and, according to my findings, the temple foundations "as sublime monuments of a high spiritual culture" – this is how Wirth assesses these last witnesses and remnants – into our present day. The religion and worldview of the bearers of this culture, from which they placed these cult monuments in the Nordic landscape, is comparable in purity and depth of ethics and artistic striving for the animated form of that high culture from which the Greeks erected the monumental buildings of the Acropolis or the Romans the Roman Forum. Certainly, centuries of spiritual and artistic development separate these buildings from the Germanic cult halls, but that is no reason why our reverence and admiration for the architectural monuments of our ancestors should be any less than for the artistic creations of these southern cultures, which were only brought to life by Nordic immigration. For this magnificent, monumental stone tomb culture of our ancestors arose from the deeply religious attitude of the Germanic people of those days, as a result of religious feeling and man's deepest reverence for his god.

For two thousand years, the basic conditions for this high religion of the North Sea region may have continued to have an effect.

But in the development of the world and humanity, there is no spiritual manifestation that can remain pure forever. And so, when "the heavy clouds of alien thoughts and teachings" ^{began} to obscure the light of their knowledge of God for these people in the north,¹ the dawn of "Midgard's downfall" approached at the turn of the age. The ancient Germanic faith fell apart with the decline of ancient Germanic morality. This transformation is visible in all its intensity and tragedy in the Edda (written around 800–1250). Kummer points out that "Germanic polytheism," as developed by the wandering imagination in the garden of gods of the Edda, was "a Christian misunderstanding dictated by imported ancient concepts," and that all these gods, in their "human, all-too-human form," who lived in such close communion with humans, were "ideal images of Nordic humanity." This is certainly true with regard to their *joie de vivre* and their strong self-confidence, but should not many of these characteristics, although they may well have been all too well-founded in the nature of Nordic farmers and Vikings, – should not many of their character traits, such as breaking treaties, lavish feasting and drinking binges, polygamy, etc., also reflect the moral and religious decline of an entire cultural epoch? Like the people, the gods also descended from their moral heights and prepared the ground all too well for a new worldview – Christianity – into which the zealous missionaries of Charlemagne, who accompanied his warriors, sowed their seeds with the hope of a secure harvest.

Those who, based on their ancestral memories, recognised in the "Holy Christ" the dying and victorious sun hero, the "son of God" of the ancient faith, believed that the new doctrine offered nothing more than what their ancestors had always reverently worshipped, and voluntarily converted. But those who gave their hearts to this

¹ Kummer, B., *Midgard's Downfall*.

teaching that was alien to their nature, had to struggle through a period of severe spiritual conflict, if Charlemagne's warriors had not already forcibly bent their proud necks under the cross.

Thus, with the end of freedom, the end of their gods dawned fatefully upon our ancestors, just as, after the end of their gods, the teachings of the Heliand fatefully overcame the beliefs of the forefathers.

*

Timeline

Prehistory, prehistory (prehistory)

Last Ice Age (Diluvium) until around 8000 BC
Early Stone Age (Palaeolithic) until 7000 BC
7000–3000 BC Middle Stone Age (Mesolithic)
4000–2000 BC North-western Germany, megalithic tombs, "Hünenbetten" (megalithic culture)
2000–800 BC Late Stone Age (Neolithic)
Bronze Age
800–500 BC Early Iron Age (Hallstatt period)
500 BC to the birth of Christ Late Iron Age (La Tène period)
113 BC Invasion of the Roman Empire by the Cimbri
70 BC The Germanic tribes under Ariovistus invade Gaul
12–9 BC Roman campaigns under Drusus in Germania
9 AD Hermann's (Arminius) victory in the Teutoburg Forest
14–16 AD Roman campaigns under Germanicus into the interior of Germany
98 AD Tacitus writes his "Germania"
200–300 Beginning of Germanic tribal alliances
325 Council of Nicaea
407 The Germanic tribes invade Italy
450 The Anglo-Saxons settle in Britain
474 End of the Western Roman Empire
300–500 Early Saxon period (Lower Saxony)
718 Beginning of Christianisation in north-western Germany
680–754 Boniface, 750 destroys the altars of the Frisians
742 born, 768–814 Charlemagne, 772–804 wars against the Saxons
783 execution of 4,500 Saxons near Verden by Charlemagne
804 † Widukind, Duke of Saxony
814–840 Louis the Pious
843 Treaty of Verdun
1100 The Edda written in Iceland
1204–34 Stedinger Wars of Liberation

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