A distinct section of the early bronze age society? Stable isotope investigations of burials in settlement pits and multiple inhumations of the Úntice culture in central germany

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OBJECTIVES: Inhumations in so-called settlement pits and multiple interments are subordinate burial practices of the Early Bronze Age Úntice culture in central Germany (2200-1700/1650 BC). The majority of the Úntice population was entombed as single inhumations in rectangular grave pits with a normative position of the body. The goal of the study was to test archaeological hypotheses that the deviant burials may represent socially distinct or nonlocal individuals. MATERIALS AND METHODS: The study comprised up to two teeth and one bone each of 74 human individuals from eight sites and faunal comparative samples. The inhumations included regular, deviant burials in so-called settlement or storage pits, and multiple burials. We investigated radiogenic strontium isotope compositions of tooth enamel ((87) Sr/(86) Sr) and light stable isotope ratios of carbon and nitrogen of bone collagen (δ(13) C, δ(15) N) aiming at the disclosure of residential changes and dietary patterns. RESULTS: Site-specific strontium isotope data ranges mirror different geological properties including calcareous bedrock, loess, and glacial till. Independent from burial types, they disclose low portions of nonlocal individuals of up to some 20% at the individual sites. The light stable isotope ratios of burials in settlement pits and rectangular graves overlap widely and indicate highly similar dietary habits. DISCUSSION: The analytical results let to conclude that inhumations in settlement pits and multiple burials were two of the manifold burial practices of the Early Bronze Age. The selection criteria of the individuals for the different forms of inhumation remained undisclosed.
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