

# *Settlement and Landscape*

*Proceedings of a conference in Århus, Denmark,  
May 4-7 1998*

*Edited by Charlotte Fabech & Jytte Ringtved*

Jutland Archaeological Society

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# Cattle and martiality: changing relations between man and landscape in the Late Neolithic and the Bronze Age

*Harry Fokkens*

The transition from Stone Age to Bronze Age has always been seen as one of the major changes in prehistory. Metal tools were considered far more efficient than their stone equivalents and bronze created many more possibilities for the production of tools, ornaments and prestige items. Until the 1960s such a technologically oriented point of view was the logical consequence of the main scientific interests: establishing chronology and identifying 'cultural identity'.

These topics have long since ceased to dominate our analyses. Now we try to formulate social models of Stone and Bronze Age societies – models that integrate the data from graves and hoards with the data from settlements, models that try to create an image of local communities in interaction with each other, with the ancestors, and with the supernatural. Looking at the data from such a perspective, the technological division between Stone and Bronze Age becomes less meaningful. Instead, an overall picture of continuity emerges. Of course there are changes, but not at the very beginning of the Bronze Age, and not only because of the introduction of bronze.

When I discuss the transition from Stone to Bronze Age, I will focus on the development of settlement and landscape in the lowlands bordering the North Sea. I use the concept 'settlement' in a broad sense. For the moment I prefer to leave the spatial aspect of dwelling outside the concept, because I believe this causes us to think about settlements in anachronistic (i.e. twentieth century, Western) terms. Therefore, I will avoid labels like

'hamlet' or 'village'. Instead I use the concept 'local community'. A local community is defined as a group of people which inhabits and exploits the same area, shares tools, co-operates in building houses, buries its dead in the same burial grounds, shares ritual places, history, myths, etc. Analysing settlements and landscapes from this perspective comprises not only spatial and economic, but also ideological aspects of dwelling and farming. Moreover, it concerns not only the living, but also their relations with their ancestors and with the supernatural.

## The chronological framework

Although I declared the chronological perspective of minor importance as an analytical approach, a few remarks about the absolute chronology of the period in question are necessary, because in Denmark the Bronze Age begins 300 years later than in the Netherlands (fig. 1). According to the Dutch definition, the Bronze Age starts around 2000 BC, as soon as the first (imported) bronzes appear. In Denmark, not the first use of bronze, but the last use of stone, has determined the periodization (Lomborg 1973). There the Early Bronze Age starts after the Dagger period, around 1700 BC, when bronze has already been in use for a considerable time.

This difference neatly illustrates the problems that arise when technological criteria are used as a major means of partitioning prehistory. In fact, in both countries developments probably run more or less parallel. The Dutch Early Bronze Age is to a

	The Netherlands	Denmark
Early Iron Age	800 BC	500 BC
Late Bronze Age	1100 BC	1000 BC
Middle Bronze Age	1800 BC	
Early Bronze Age	2000 BC	1700 BC
Late Neolithic	2400 BC	2400 BC

Fig. 1. Periodization of the Bronze Age in Denmark and the Netherlands. Dates in calibrated  $^{14}\text{C}$  dates.

large extent a continuation of the Late Neolithic as well (cf. Lanting 1973). Only in the Middle Bronze Age, after 1800 BC, do transformations begin to become archaeologically visible. Therefore I will in this paper consider the developments between 2000 and 1500 BC, with an emphasis on the later part of that period.

## The origin and ideology of the long-house

One of the most fundamental changes during the first half of the second millennium BC occurs, in my opinion, in the organization of the farmstead and its economy. Most prominent in this respect is the development of the long-house. Generally, this is considered to be archaeologically visible in the transformation from the two-aisled houses of the Late Neolithic into the three-aisled houses of the Bronze Age. This development is supposed to mark the introduction of the stalling of cattle within the farmhouse (IJzereef & Van Regteren Altena 1991, 70; Roymans & Fokkens 1991; Rasmussen & Adamsen 1993, 138).

This view, however, is not without problems. There are, in fact, only very few examples of houses with stall partitions. Notably they are present in houses of the Dutch Emmerhout type (with stalls in the middle of the house) and of the Elp type (with stalls at the eastern end) (fig. 2). Outside the Dutch province of Drenthe, very few indications of stalls have been encountered. Within the Netherlands there is one clear example, south of the River Meuse, at Loon op Zand (fig. 2, Roymans & Hiddink 1991). In Denmark a (disputed) example has been found at Spjald (Rasmussen & Adamsen 1993, 138).

The problem is that the houses that display stalls, e.g. examples of the Emmerhout type (fig. 2), are dated late: after 1400 BC (Huyts 1992; Harsema 1993). The three-aisled house as a type, however, is much older.<sup>1</sup> The earliest dates reach back to the 18th and 17th century BC (Bovenkarspel, Zijderveld, Dodewaard: Lanting & Mook 1977). The oldest dates are from Dodewaard: 1782-1676 BC (3430 + 35 BP). The house from Loon op Zand, with stalls, is dated to 1520-1418 BC (Roymans & Hiddink 1991, 114). This seems to indicate that the three-aisled house, which we assume is synonymous with the long-house, originates sometime after 1800 BC at the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age. The same is probably true for Denmark, although – based on his excavations in Djursland – Boas dates this development in Denmark to the 16th century BC (Boas 1997).

It can, of course, not be ruled out that, also in the Late Neolithic, cattle were already housed within the farmhouse. If that was the case, however, it does not show in the structure of the house and may have been more occasional than structural.

So far, several functional arguments have been advanced to explain the practice of cattle stalling. To name a few:

- Stalling of milch cows is necessary for climatic reasons (Behre 1998, 94)
- Stalling is a means of protecting cattle against raids (Harsema 1993, 106)
- Stalling enables the collection of manure (IJzereef 1981; Fokkens 1991, 1998b; Karlenby 1994, 31)

Although these are arguments for stalling, none of them explains why cattle should be kept under the same roof as people. In fact, the long-house is a quite extraordinary phenomenon that is restricted to our part of continental Northwestern Europe.<sup>2</sup> For the above-mentioned reasons, separate byres next to the house would be just as efficient. This implies that the byre-house is more a social than an economic phenomenon.

To me it is quite clear that the basis for the origin of the long-house has to be found in the social importance of cattle. From an economic perspective, livestock was a source of food (milk, meat), clothing (hides), fertility (manure) and draft power (trained oxen for pulling carts and ploughs).<sup>3</sup> These qualities may have given cattle important so-



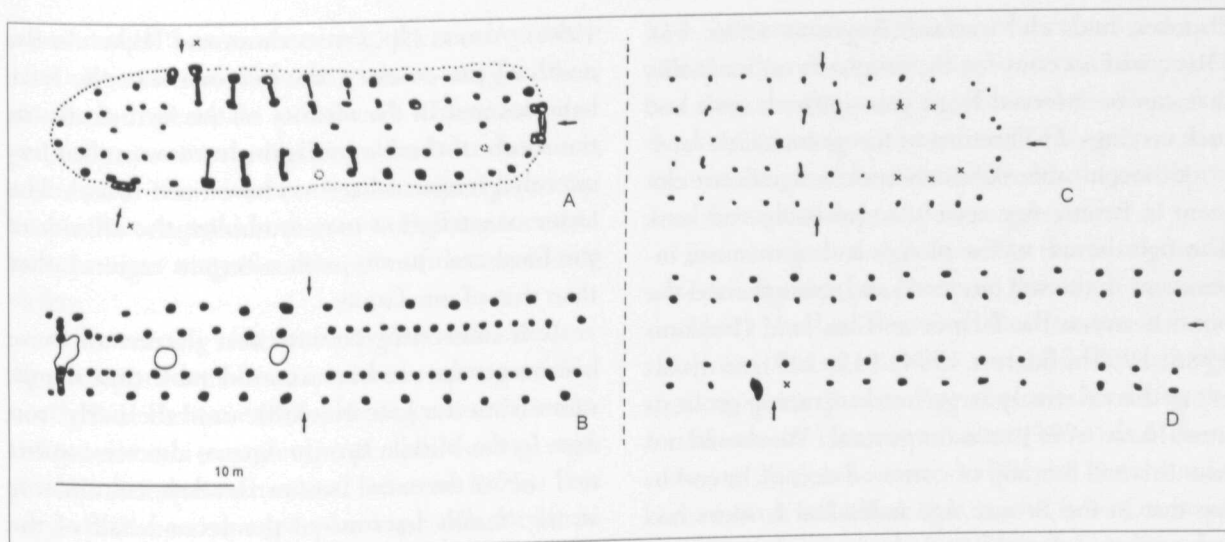


Fig. 2. Bronze Age house plans from the Netherlands. To the left houses from the north (A Emmerhout, B Elp), to the right house from the south (C Loon op Zand, D Oss). After Roymans & Fokkens 1991, fig. 5.

cial value as objects of exchange. Here we enter a complex theoretical realm that I will not try to analyse in detail. Suffice to say that, to me, exchange means first of all gift-exchange. Exchange is about the creation of relations. Thus, to possess and to exchange cattle means to be able to acquire and maintain social relations, to enter into strategic and nuptial alliances. From this perspective the long-house is the symbol of what Roymans calls a 'pastoral ideology' (Roymans 1996, 54).

Two aspects of cattle and of the house may take on different weight if we follow this view through. In the first place, the small size of the cows attracts attention. Bronze Age cattle have been shown to be substantially smaller than their Neolithic ancestors and their present-day equivalents. This does not make sense from an economic point of view. Assuming that height and build were consciously selected and bred, one may also assume that hides, meat, milk and draft power were not the only qualities that were sought in cattle. One might hypothesize that, if numbers were more important than pure economic qualities, smaller cows could have been preferred over large ones. The small size of the cattle could be used as an additional indication of value in exchange relations.

Another aspect that may be interpreted differently if we accept the importance of cattle as a crucial element in Bronze Age society is the size of the farmhouses. Bronze Age farmhouses are often over 25 m long. From an economic point of view, such

large houses were probably quite unnecessary. The amount of cattle that can be stalled in such a farm (30-40) would allow even extended families to support themselves to a large extent through animal husbandry. IJzereef (1981) indeed follows that line of thought. In contrast, if cattle had a large social value, their meat and milk quality may have been rather irrelevant. Cattle may have been slaughtered predominantly on the occasion of (exchange) ceremonies. This means that we have to be cautious with the interpretation of bone assemblages from Bronze Age sites in strictly economic terms.

On the other hand, one could argue that if that was so important, the possession of a large number of cattle would mean more prestige than the possession of only a few. Thus, large farms indicate wealthy people. But this line of reasoning is too simple for me. Exchange is not a synonym for trade, so to possess large numbers of cattle is not the same as being rich. Large byres could also be a consequence of having to sustain large families. It is not the numbers that are important, but the ability to use these numbers in creating and maintaining relations. Relations cannot be bought, they have to be acquired. Personal skills in social contact, reliability in exchange relations, etc., are perhaps even more important than the exchanged objects themselves (cf. Weiner 1988). At the same time we should realize, as also Roymans points out, that if cattle became a valued object of exchange they probably also became a source of

disputes, raids and warfare (Roymans 1996, 54). That could account for the emphasis on martiality that can be inferred from grave gifts, hoards and rock carvings. I will return to this point a little later.

Although cattle definitely were a significant element in Bronze Age society, so probably, was land. Through the use of the plough and of manure, investment in the soil increased and strengthened the bond between the farmer and his land (Fokkens 1986, 1998b; Barrett 1994, 145, 147). Considering the relatively large herds, grazing grounds most likely were just as important. We should not take this too literally, of course. I do not intend to say that in the Bronze Age individual farmers had permanent and exclusive rights to exploit particular plots. But I do think that, even more than in the Late Neolithic, there was a sense of having the traditional rights to use the land, of 'belonging' to a certain area.

### The ideology of the burial ritual. '... Land owns people'

There are some indications to support the latter suggestion. The most important ones are derived from the analysis of burial customs. A crucial assumption in that context is that the dead are seen as ancestors who protect the community. In fact, as de Coppet demonstrates in his seminal article entitled '... Land owns people', not the people but the ancestors own the land (de Coppet 1985). Therefore care and respect for the ancestors is necessary to safeguard the land and the community. Admittedly, he uses only one particular ethnographic example, but the general principle is in one form or another present in most tribal societies. This means that the places where the dead are buried are important for the community because they represent claims – ancestral rights – to the use of the land.

If we follow that argument, a location of a barrow in the vicinity of the farmstead, on arable land, might signify such a 'claim'. In the Holocene region of West-Friesland, the barrows are indeed located next to the farmstead. Moreover, they seem to have been erected only for the first settlers in that environment (IJzereef & Van Regteren Altena

1991). Also at Elp, Emmerhout and Hijken in the north of the country, the barrows seem to have been located in the vicinity of the farmsteads. In the south of the Netherlands, however, more frequently groups of barrows have been found. The latter constellation may symbolize the affinity of the local community with a certain region rather than that of one family.

It is interesting to note that the use of these barrow groups can have a considerable time depth, often from the Late Neolithic until the Early Iron Age. In the Middle Bronze Age we also see continued use of the same barrow develop, culminating in the 'family barrow' of the second half of the Middle Bronze Age. Secondary burial was not customary in the Late Neolithic or in the Early Bronze Age (Lohof 1994). This again suggests consideration and continued interaction with the ancestors.

### Martiality

From the weapons in graves and hoards, the conclusion is often drawn that martiality is an important new ideological aspect of Bronze Age society. Generally this is used to support the idea of increasing social complexity. Some scholars even have visions of warlords with retinues of warriors roaming around Europe (Kristiansen 1994). There are two comments that I want to make on this.

Firstly, I think that martiality is already present in the Beaker assemblage. Battle axes, flint daggers and archers' gear, like beautifully worked arrowheads, wrist guards, and arrow-shaft polishers, are present – in shifting combinations and numbers – in many graves. This suggests that endemic warfare and raiding had already become an important element of Late Neolithic society. Martiality seems to have developed when the large-scale Middle Neolithic tribal communities, with the communal tomb as their symbol, dissolved into smaller social units (Fokkens 1986, 1998b; Barrett 1994, 147). What changes in the Bronze Age are the arsenal and the way of fighting. In the Late Neolithic and the Early Bronze Age (until c. 1700 BC), the weapons that we find in graves and settlements are restricted to (battle) axes, flint or copper daggers and archers' gear. Of those, archers' gear is most common, possibly indicating that ambushing was the most com-

mon way of 'outmanoeuvring' the enemy. After 1800 BC, swords (first only short, dagger-like), shields and spears are introduced. This means that gradually man-to-man fighting – on foot – becomes customary. The adversary is not stalked from the bushes, but engaged in the open. Fighting seems to have become a significant aspect of demonstrating virility.

An interesting observation is that, in the Bronze Age, weapons are often associated with razors. Recently Paul Treherne therefore suggested that martiality and body treatment, especially shaving, were closely related to each other (Treherne 1995). This suggests that warriors prepared specially for battle and that dress and appearance were very much part of the ritual and ideology of fighting.

## The constitution of a person

A second comment that I want to make on the issue of martiality is that we have to be very careful about labelling people buried with weapons as a warrior elite. Since the number of barrows is small, we assume that until the Late Bronze Age only a selection of the population, probably not more than 10 to 15%, was entitled to a barrow burial (Lohof 1994). Because of the exclusiveness of the barrow burial and even more of bronze grave gifts, the social-evolutionist approach of the 1970s and the 1980s considered the people who were buried underneath barrows to represent (male) elites with high status. Following 'World System' and associated theories, it seems to have become widely accepted that especially from 2000 BC onwards the whole of Europe was related in one large network of elites who exchanged bronzes and created complex power structures everywhere, or in Kristiansen's words: distance = exclusiveness = value.<sup>4</sup>

With a food metaphor, one might call this a 'tasteless' view of the European Bronze Age: an extremely strong sauce labelled 'power and prestige' dominates all more delicate local and regional flavours. It is a typical twentieth century Western model of culture.

I want to contest this view. Of course, there were developments and innovations with extensive spheres of influence. But these European trends, and the artefacts associated with them, did not

have intrinsic values. Whenever they entered a regional cultural context, they were re-interpreted and their meaning and significance was adapted to the local ideology and tradition. This means that, for instance, bell beakers or swords do not represent the same values and ideas everywhere.

Returning to the Bronze Age burial evidence, one can say that yes, indeed, graves of males do dominate the burial record. But females are certainly not absent. Neither are children, although until the Late Bronze Age they are scarce in the burial record. Therefore, Lohof (1994) and Theunissen (1993), who have studied the Dutch burial record in detail, think that in the Low Countries barrow burials were not exclusively for elites, but that they represent an entity like a corporate group or kinship group. This principle originates in the Late Neolithic and does not change between 2000 and 1500 BC (Fokkens 1986, 1997; Lohof 1994).

Instead of interpreting everything in terms of prestige and power, there is an alternative way to explain grave gifts, but so far it has received very little attention. In this respect I follow Bazelmans (1996), who uses ideas of Mauss and Dumont. These authors stress that a person is 'constituted' of elements obtained through exchange. Exchange means exchange with people, ancestors, ghosts and gods (Bazelmans 1996, 81). These relations are articulated during several stages of life. The birth, life and death of a person are often seen as processes of merging and loosening of his or her 'constituents' (Bazelmans 1996, 79). The objects of exchange gain meaning and importance in relation to the context of the exchange. This meaning may be entirely different from their actual form and function.

Applied to the Bronze Age, this interpretation stresses the role of material culture in relation to the constitution of a person. The right to carry weapons, for instance, may well have been an important part of becoming and being a man, even if these weapons were used only occasionally. It is quite imaginable that at least part of the arsenal of the Late Neolithic and Bronze Age 'warrior' was presented to boys during the 'rites de passage' of becoming a man.

There are many ethnographic examples of such practice. For example, Thesiger shows that among the Danakil in Ethiopia, it was customary to present



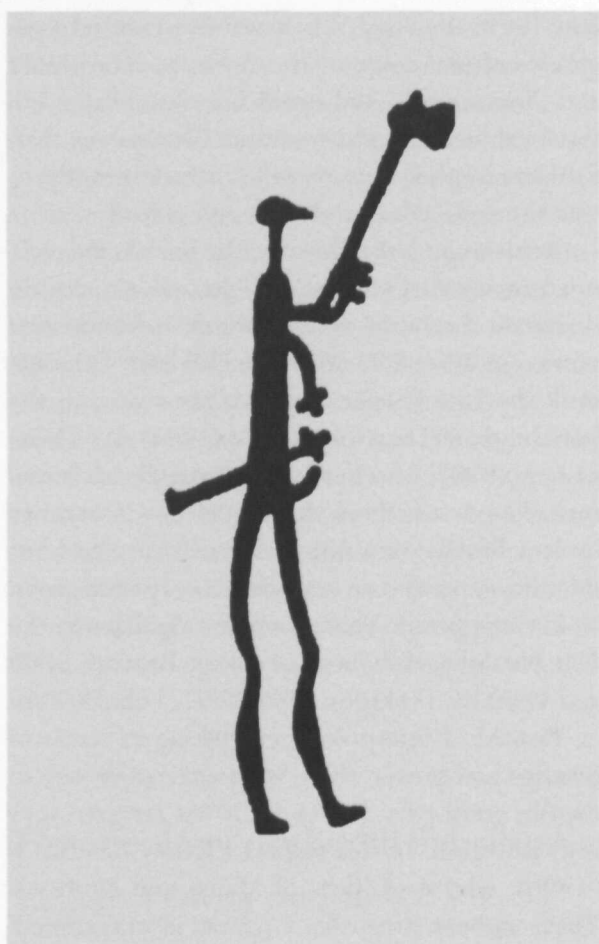


Fig. 3. Rock engraving of a Bronze Age warrior (Vitlycke, Bohuslän, Sweden).

boys with a dagger at the beginning of their manhood. That dagger becomes part of their virility, especially since boys only become men when they have killed another man. As proof of their prowess, they castrate the victims and display the trophy. The number of kills is signified in their body adornments (Thesiger 1998).

Presenting weapons to a boy entering manhood may have been conceived as a gift of the ancestors or the gods, obliging the boy to defend the property of either of them. To a certain extent, this would explain the high degree of standardization of grave gifts in, for instance, the Beaker and the Sögel graves.

From such a perspective, weapons are constituents of a man, tokens that he is no longer a boy, that he is obliged to defend his community and take part in raids. Conversely, taking part in raids and warfare was probably an important means of proving manhood. In this context it is noticeable that, in Scandinavian rock art, swords, shields, axes and halberds

are often shown in combination with another clear sign of virility: the erect penis (fig. 3).

One could take this line of thinking even one step further by supposing that, after having reached a certain age, a man abandoned his weapons. Subsequently, he would no longer participate in raids, but serve the community, for example as an elder and a counsellor. The 'ritual of abandonment' could involve the presentations of his weapons and the adherent obligations to his heir. The weapons might also be 'given back' to the gods through deposition in a marsh or river. From that view, deposition actually is an act of exchange with the supernatural.

Naturally, when they died these elders would not be buried with their weapons. But it would, I fear, be one step too far to use that as an explanation for the many graves without weapons. Or would it not?

This is but an idea of processes that could have happened. It certainly cannot be used as a new general explanation for the interpretation of grave gifts, since cosmologies and related ceremonies varied in every region and period. I have merely tried to demonstrate that power and prestige are not the only possible explanations for the presence of bronzes in some graves and their absence in others.

As a footnote, I must add that I have spoken only about men, but the same type of reasoning is applicable to women (e.g. Sørensen 1997). They, too, are 'constituted' through exchanges with people, ancestors and gods. Their role may have been just as significant for the reproduction of the community as that of the men, but possibly was – in any case archaeologically – less visible (cf. Weiner 1988).

In the foregoing, I briefly mentioned hoarding. This is another much discussed aspect of the Bronze Age. Yet, as Vandkilde has demonstrated in her thesis, here too elements of continuity with the Neolithic exist (Vandkilde 1996). One of them is that in the Early Bronze Age, it was predominantly axes that were deposited. This seems to be a continuation of the Neolithic practice of stone-axe hoarding, which does not imply that its meaning, or the rituals associated with it, remained the same. Especially the Late Bronze Age shows a spectacular increase in the practice of hoarding, suggesting an increased exchange with the supernatural. Paradoxically, this may mean that the areas that economically are considered marginal and peripheral

wastelands – the bogs, marshes and rivers – formed the core elements of their cosmological space.

## Conclusion

To conclude, I think that the landscape of the Bronze Age was much more a cultural landscape than that of the Neolithic. Large parts of the forest had been

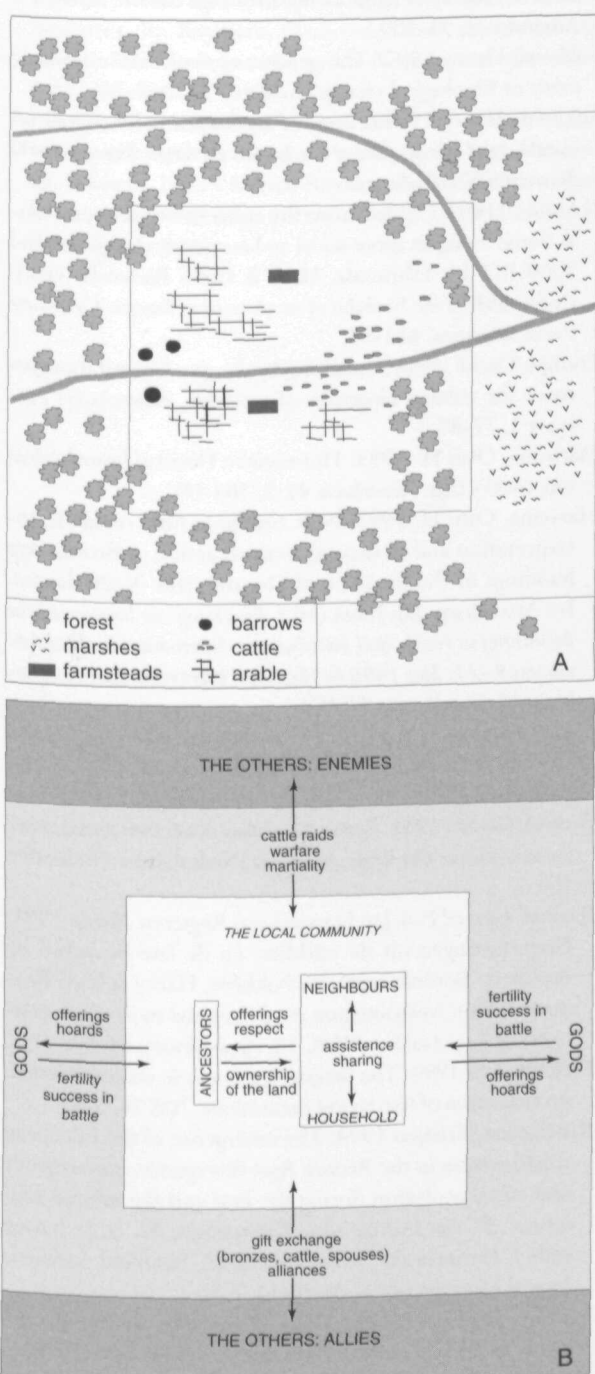


Fig. 4. Model of two dimensions of the Bronze Age cosmology. A: the spatial dimension, B: the ideological dimension.

transformed into arable fields and settled areas. Within this spatial setting, the people, their cattle, arable land, the ancestors and the supernatural were closely linked in a complex cosmology. In the following 'pictorial narrative' I have tried to indicate a number of the elements of that ideological constellation and their relations. I have separated two dimensions, the spatial and the ideational (fig. 4).

The farmstead with the long-house and the surrounding yard is at the heart of the spatial dimension of the cosmology. Close-by are the farmsteads of relatives and neighbours that constitute the local community. Probably such a community consists of not more than two or three large farmsteads with some 40 people keeping about 40-80 cattle. They share the same ancestors. They help one another in tasks around the house and in agricultural practice. Cattle graze in the fields and along the brooks around the farmstead, watched by the children of the community. Their manure fertilizes the fields, increasing the yield, enabling offerings to the ancestors and the gods.

In the direct vicinity of the farmsteads, the barrows are situated, symbolizing the ancestral rights to the land. Offerings to ancestors and respect for their resting-place ensure the continued use of that land. In the forests, marshes and rivers beyond, dwell the gods. Offerings to them of products of the fields and of valuables ensure fertility of the herds and the fields, and success in raiding and warfare.

The whole spatial setting of the farmstead and the landscape around the settlement is thus charged with meanings that are essential for the existence and reproduction of the local community. Also contacts with the outside world serve that purpose, either through exchange or through raiding and warfare.

From this perspective, the transition from the Stone to the Bronze Age is not an economic revolution. It is a transformation of the complex ideological relations between people, animals, the ancestors and the supernatural, which is manifested in the exploitation and signification of the landscape.

## Notes

1. Harsema (1997) thinks that prior to 1400 BC three-aisled houses with a separate byre existed. However, in



his examples of these byres, no evidence for stalls is visible either. They could just as well be associated dwellings or sheds.

2. The three-aisled Bronze Age long-house has a wide distribution in Northwestern Europe. It appears in Central Sweden (Karlenby 1994), in Denmark (Rasmussen & Adamsen 1993), in Northern Belgium (Crombé 1993), in the Netherlands and Northwestern Germany (Roymans & Fokkens 1991), and in France. Roymans & Fokkens (1991) thought that the type was restricted to the area north of the loess, but new discoveries in the Lorraine (Blouet et al. 1996) and Burgundy (Darteville 1996) demonstrate that along the Rhine and the Moselle, the *Hauslandschaft* of the long-house certainly extends in a southerly direction.
3. In this respect, I disagree with Behre (1998, 96), who states that the animal-drawn plough was an innovation of the Bronze Age. There are many ploughed fields known from the Neolithic and also graves of (pairs of) oxen.
4. At a conference in Lisbon, in October 1995, Kristian Kristiansen, summarizing the session on 'hierarchy and power', showed an overhead sheet with the mentioned equation.

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