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DAVID R. FONTIJN

## SACRIFICIAL LANDSCAPES

CULTURAL BIOGRAPHIES OF PERSONS, OBJECTS AND 'NATURAL' PLACES  
IN THE BRONZE AGE OF THE SOUTHERN NETHERLANDS, C. 2300-600 BC



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*Non multo post in Cantabriae lacum fulmen decidit repertaeque sunt duodecim  
securae, haud ambiguum summae imperii signum.*

(Suetonius, book VII: Galba, Otho, Vitellius)

*Und dast Sterben, dieses Nichtmehrfassen  
Jenes Grunds, auf dem wir täglich stehn,  
Seinem ängstlichen Sich-Niederlassen -:*

*In die Wasser, die ihn sanft empfangen  
Und die sich, wie glücklich und vergangen,  
Unter ihm zurückziehn, Flut um Flut*

(R.M. Rilke 'der Schwan')



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### 11.1 INTRODUCTION

In the southern Netherlands, but elsewhere as well, weaponry is one of the principal categories of material in deposition for the later Bronze Age (Harding 1999, 158). 31 % of the deposited objects from the Middle and Late Bronze Age are weapons.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, weapons, and swords in particular, were often deposited in specialized locations only: an example *par excellence* of selective deposition. For both reasons, I feel it is necessary to devote an entire chapter to the cultural biography of weaponry. In the previous chapter it was argued that the significance of weapons should be understood from their life-paths before deposition, and that these were tied up with the construction of personal identities. In line with the general evidence on prehistoric weapon graves, it is assumed that we are here predominantly dealing with male identities.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter will review the biographies of weaponry, and confront them with general ideas on the nature and significance of warriorhood in the European Bronze Age. The point I want to make is that the Dutch-Belgian evidence on weapon *deposition* illustrates that it does not really give information about warfare and violence itself, but rather about martial ideologies. I shall argue that weaponry was an ambiguous category in material culture, and that martial identities were temporary ones, constructed and deconstructed in ritualised circumstances.

### 11.2 THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN MULTIFUNCTIONAL TOOLS AND WEAPONS BEFORE THE MIDDLE BRONZE AGE

Practically, almost any tool with a heavy weight or a sharp cutting edge can be used in battle. In this sense, a bronze dagger can functionally produce the same effect as a bronze dirk. The meagre evidence of prehistoric battle victims indeed shows that people were killed with wooden clubs, arrows or axes (Mercer 1999). West of the research region, the Early Bronze Age mass grave of Wassenaar is a case in point. Here, the remains of twelve individuals were found, all probably killed in battle (Louwe Kooijmans 1993b). The find of an arrowhead in the breast of one victim shows the use of bows and arrows in the massacre, and cut marks on the jaw and arms of others the use of cutting implements, probably bronze axes (Smits/Maat 1993, 24-5). This brings me to an important distinction to be made: the distinction

between multi-functional objects, for which a weapon function is just one example, and between objects that are specialized weaponry. Axes, bows and arrow and spears belong to the first category, swords to the second. As the latter was not developed until the Middle Bronze Age, one may ask whether we can speak of proper weapons in the earlier periods.

Beaker graves are often taken as the first examples of an individual buried with objects that had a weapon function (chapter 5). Fokkens (personal comment), for example, remarked that the surface retouch of the flint arrowheads is a treatment beyond purely functional aims, suggesting that they had an added significance and were not just hunting tools. The recurrent presence of such arrowheads seems to indicate the importance of long-distance fighting, but it might also express a double role in prestigious hunting practices (cf. Fokkens 1999). A comparable arrowhead was found in the body of one of the victims of the Wassenaar burial, illustrating its weapon function (Louwe Kooijmans 1993b, 9). The copper tanged dagger that is sometimes present in Bell Beaker graves could then symbolize the role of fighting at close range (giving a wounded enemy the *coup de grâce*, Fokkens 1999). Again, such a function is also conceivable for hunting. As a matter of fact, a study of tanged daggers themselves led me to the conclusion that they were anything but functional and effective weapons (chapter 5). On the basis of the fact that they were repeatedly deposited in graves, we can conclude that bows and arrows and daggers were paraphernalia of personhood. It is possible that they were weapons exclusively, but this cannot be proven. Perhaps, it was their combined significance in both warfare and prestigious hunting practices that they were meant to express. As we shall see later on, both options are related to a comparable concern with martial values in the expression of personhood in such a grave.

### 11.3 WEAPONS OF THE MIDDLE AND LATE BRONZE AGE

For the Middle and Late Bronze Age, the evidence for a category of objects with specialized weapon functions is much clearer. I shall now present that evidence, and for each object type briefly synthesize the evidence gathered so far on their biographies of production and life-path.

### *Swords and daggers*

The first 'swords' deposited in our region are Sögel and Wohlde types, dating from the last part of the Middle Bronze Age A (chapter 6). They are no more than lengthened versions of daggers, either with a broad blade (dirks) or with a small one (rapiers). More versatile 'cut-and-thrust' swords are only known since the Late Bronze Age (Bridgford 1997; this book chapter 8). Swords are known all over Europe, and it is generally assumed that they were the paraphernalia of an elite, judging from their elaborate character, their presence in the largest graves and in specialized deposits (Fontijn 2001, 272). In some regions, swords seem to have been quite numerous. Tables 11.1 and 11.2 summarize evidence from a number of them, and illustrate that the evidence from our region is relatively modest. It is clear, however, that the southern Netherlands outnumber the north Dutch region. Apparently, sword deposition was much more frequently practised here than in the northern Netherlands, which is a region with an otherwise rich record of deposited bronzes. The difference makes itself particularly felt for the Late Bronze Age.

With a sword, there is actually not much one could do but fight, and even then the use to which it could be put is restricted. The earliest swords are relatively short dirks or rapiers consisting of a wooden handle that was connected to a bronze blade by means of notches or rivets. Such a hilt-blade connection is quite vulnerable, and such objects are not suitable for parrying blows or hacking, but rather for stabbing at close quarters. Harding (1999, 166) even goes so

far as to question whether a rapier thrust could cause a fatal wound. He makes the argument that Bronze Age scholars like Kristiansen have all too often assumed that swordfights were conducted in the manner of Shakespearean actors (Harding 1999, 166). For rapiers and daggers this is indeed hard to believe; the cut-and-thrust sword that was developed in the Late Bronze Age, however, must have been a much more versatile and efficient weapon (Chapter 8). Impact and damage on the cutting edge of such swords from Britain and Ireland has been shown to result from such use (Bridgford 1997). Similar traces were observed on some swords from the study region, but this aspect needs further attention.

According to Treherne and Sørensen, the sword departed from earlier axes and daggers in being 'the first object clearly designed for combat' (Sørensen 1991b; Treherne 1995, 109). It was not just a specialized weapon, but also a new form of personal weapon the production of which demanded much more than regular bronze axes (long, vulnerable moulds). A sword, however, did not give its user any practical advantage over warriors with axes or archers. What's more, during the first centuries when swords were used (or rather dirks and rapiers), they were in practical terms quite vulnerable objects as evidenced by a number of objects studied (chapter 6). Still, swords became an inextricable element of material culture since their first occurrence everywhere in Europe. Almost any sword known in the southern Netherlands seems to have been imported from abroad, or if locally made, produced in a supra-regional style. The only exception I know of is the Middle Bronze Age B rapier from

Region	Number of swords	Density per 1000 square km
Switzerland, Austria, South Germany	1161	4.22
Italy	232	0.77
Romania	353	1.48
Hungary	428	4.60
Former Yugoslavia	234	0.91
Denmark, north Germany	1245	6.88
Britain	660	2.87
Ireland	624	7.61
Southern Netherlands	68	0.23

Table 11.1 Bronze Age swords from different European regions compared. Data from Harding 2000, table 8.1.

Region	Swords
Northern Netherlands (prov. of Drenthe/Overijssel)	9
Central Netherlands (prov. of Gelderland/Utrecht)	2
Southern Netherlands (study region)	68
Western Netherlands (prov. of Zuid-Holland/Noord-Holland/Zeealand)	2
Western Belgium (prov. of Oost-Vlaanderen/West-Vlaanderen)	29

Table 11.2 Bronze Age swords of adjacent regions in the Lower Rhine Basin compared. Data from Butler 1990; O'Connor 1980; Verlaeck 1996.

Antwerpen-Appelstraat (chapter 7). The earliest swords we know are carried out in quite similar forms, with set patterns of decorations (the Sögel dirk), suggesting that they were made as a category in themselves, with no references to other categories of material culture. For the Middle Bronze Age B and Late Bronze Age, decoration hardly mattered anymore, but particularly for the Late Bronze Age it is interesting to see again that individual swords of the same type are very similar to each other (Ewart Park and Thames swords, Gündlingen swords).

For the Middle Bronze Age B, there is some evidence that rapiers circulated for long periods: many show traces of resharpener, and repeated repairs. Moreover, broken blades were used to make smaller rapiers or daggers (chapter 7). Thus, daggers were often just derived from swords, and therefore probably not equivalent to them. Unlike swords, daggers may have been locally made as well (the Cuijk mould, see chapter 7), and were probably not specialized weapons but rather multi-functional tools. As the number of daggers known is small and evidence on their deposition sketchy, I shall further leave them out of consideration.

The genesis and incorporation of swords by most regional groups – including the southern Netherlands – testifies to a growing symbolic emphasis on warfare that was more pronounced than in the preceding period (Treherne 1995, 109). In other words: in the emergence of the sword we see a growing emphasis on the social and ideological significance of warfare.

#### *Battle axes*

For a sword a weapon function is quite obvious, but what about axes in deposition? Was an axe deposited because it had played an important role in the reclamation of new land (or symbolized such a role), because it was a foreign object, or because it figured in an historic battle? It is difficult to make that out. Getting ahead of what I shall say on the role of axes in chapter 13, it seems that the elemental role of axes in deposition was due to the fact that they connected many different fields of life, instead of representing just one. It is, sometimes possible, however, to make a distinction between axe biographies primarily reflecting a role as weapon or as agrarian tool. Besides, there is the theory that specialized battle axes seem to have been made as well.

The traces of a heavy use-life (worn edges, re-sharpened cutting edge facets) observed on most deposited axes are generally unlikely to have resulted from the cutting off of so many heads. Rather they testify of a use-life as a wood-cutting tool. When normal axes were deposited together with weapons, however, it is likely that their role as weapon was expressed, or its dual role as weapon and tool of reclamation. This applies to the palstave-spear hoard from Sevenum (Middle Bronze Age B, chapter 7), and the

Late Bronze Age hoard of Pulle, where one axe accompanied a number of swords and spears (chapter 8).

There is also some evidence for specialized battle axes. In the Middle Bronze Age A, deposition of heavily used Oldendorf axes contrasts with that of nick-flanged axes. In chapter 6, I argued that this typological difference is likely to represent a functional difference. The visually contrasting form of nick-flanged axes probably coincided with a specialized use: these axes were meant to be battle axes, part of a specialized elite warrior equipment. For the Middle Bronze Age B and Late Bronze Age, specialized battle axes are unknown, or the large Grigny mid-winged axes must have served as such (chapter 7). At any rate, the depositional context of these large Grigny axes differed from contemporary palstaves (chapter 7). There are no reasons to suggest the same for the other winged axes (mid-winged and end-winged); these neatly fit in the general patterns of axe deposition (chapter 7 and 8). Therefore, it is interesting to see that those axes for which we can assume a specialized battle function on other grounds, were deposited in the southern Netherlands in a different way than the regular axes.

#### *Spears and arrows*

After axes, spears are the most predominant object in deposition (chapter 10). Like swords, the thrusting spear is a new object in material culture in the Middle Bronze Age (Harding 2000, 281). Principally, spears are multi-functional objects, usable both in battle and in hunting. A specialized weapon function, however, is the most likely. The first evidence for spears in hoards in the southern Netherlands is, as elsewhere (Harding 1999, 162) associated with swords (chapter 6: the Overloon hoard). On top of that, most spears are thrusting rather than throwing weapons. They can for example be used for boar or bear-hunting, but this is not a kind of hunting that is likely to have taken place regularly. It is a kind of hunting that gives prestige to the hunter, rather than a regular supply of meat. Moreover, the available zoological data on subsistence economy in general indicate that the role of hunting must have been peripheral (Van Dijk *et al.* 2002, 607-11; Schoneveld 2001, 187-8). This indicates that spears may have been used for hunting purposes, but it is unlikely that this special use explains the large numbers in which they figured in deposition and the production of spears in the first place. We can therefore assume that a weapon function was the most significant.

The same line of reasoning applies to the few finds of bronze arrowheads. They are basically known from similar contexts as spears, but in much smaller numbers. Unlike swords, the majority of spears were probably produced locally. For arrowheads, we have evidence of their local production in the form of the Oss mould (Chapter 7).

Unlike swords, spears are known from all over the southern Netherlands. From the numbers in which they are found and their wide distribution over the region we can conclude that the spear was the general weapon with which Bronze Age conflicts were fought out rather than an elite-associated object. The majority of spearheads are plain and pegged, another factor that sets them apart from the often decorated and elaborate sword types. Their form hardly changes since their introduction in the Middle Bronze Age A, which makes individual spearheads notoriously difficult to date (chapter 6). There is considerable variation in size of the blade, and length of the socket, but so far there is no evidence that it represents typo-chronological developments. Although most spearheads were probably produced locally, just like axes, they differ from axes in lacking locally or regionally-specific display elements. Imported and visually deviating spears are also known from the Middle Bronze Age A and B: Tréboul spearheads, side- and basal-looped spearheads and flame-shaped ones). As in the case of axes with a specialized battle function, these deviant types tend to have been deposited in major rivers, in zones where other weapons and axes were deposited as well (fig. 6.10 and 7.10). Most plain, pegged spearheads show traces of resharpening, implying that they were used. Resharpening was less often observed on the deviant imported spearheads, but the number of detailed object studies is still too low to be decisive.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Weapon sets*

For the Bell Beaker grave, the argument was made that they probably represent evidence of bow and arrow as a long-range weapon, and the dagger as an implement for fighting at close quarters. A similar combination of aspects of warfare can be recognized among personal weapon sets recorded from graves in the Netherlands as a whole. In one of the earliest weapon graves, the Sögel grave from Drouwen (northern Netherlands), the presence of flint arrowheads recalls those of the former Beaker graves with the dagger now being replaced by a bronze dirk (fig. 11.1). In Middle Bronze Age B weapon graves, flint arrowheads were replaced by bronze ones, but they still seem to have been part and parcel of this kind of weapon set. In Meteren-De Bogen, the only sword-grave from the southern Netherlands, bronze arrowheads were probably combined with a bronze rapier (Butler/Hielkema 2002; Meijlink 2002). Spears are in the Middle Bronze Age only known from early burials: those with Wohlde rapiers (Butler 1990). In our region, the earliest dated spears occur in the hoard of Overloon, again together with a Wohlde rapier (chapter 7). The sword-arrowhead combination thus seems to have been a long-term characteristic of personal warrior sets, the roots of which can be traced to the Bell Beaker grave.

#### *Conclusion*

Summarizing we see that during the Middle Bronze Age A a new group of objects becomes important in deposition that from then on will be an inextricable element of material culture: swords. The sword is the first specialized weapon we know of, and for that reason informative of the significance attached to warfare. By its special nature and treatment, it becomes clear that it had a special meaning, and probably served as an elite weapon. Parallel to swords, bronze spearheads become prominent in deposition. Their biography must have been largely in the field of warfare as well. Bronze arrowheads and specialized battle axes are also known, the former particularly in association with sword graves. In all, we can safely speak of the emergence of an entire weapon complex since the Middle Bronze Age. What does this imply for the role and meaning of warfare in Bronze Age society?

#### 11.4 THE NATURE OF BRONZE AGE CONFLICTS AND WARFARE

Throughout this chapter, the argument is developed that weapons were more than just the tools of warfare. Still, it is in reference to the practice of warfare that their meanings of weaponry as a category originate, and therefore it is vital first to consider the kind of conflicts in which weapons were used. Needless to say that the conflicts themselves hardly have any archaeological visibility. The mass grave of Wassenaar is practically the only direct evidence that armed conflicts took place during the Bronze Age (Louwe Kooijmans 1993b; 1998). Ideas about the kind of warfare practised should therefore primarily be based on basis of the evidence of settlements and graves and what has generally been inferred on social structure.

Louwe Kooijmans (1993b; 1998) argued that there are virtually no indications that warfare was a fundamental element of Dutch Bronze Age societies. Defensive settlements are lacking, and the evidence of warrior graves is so rare that warfare cannot be seen as an organizational principle of social ties in themselves. For the Netherlands and Belgium, there is no reason to assume the existence of retinues or warrior aristocracies as fundamental social units, contrary to what has been supposed for other European regions (Kristiansen 1999; Randsborg 1995).

On the basis of an ethnographic survey of warfare in tribal societies, Louwe Kooijmans goes on to argue that Bronze Age conflicts should generally be seen as small-scale, endemic warfare. In his view, the most probable option is to assume a kind of warfare that took place among groups that were socially and spatially distant (raids). Such conflicts are generally small-scale and do not cause many casualties, but can sometimes result in excesses. The Wassenaar grave, where males, females and children were killed, may be more



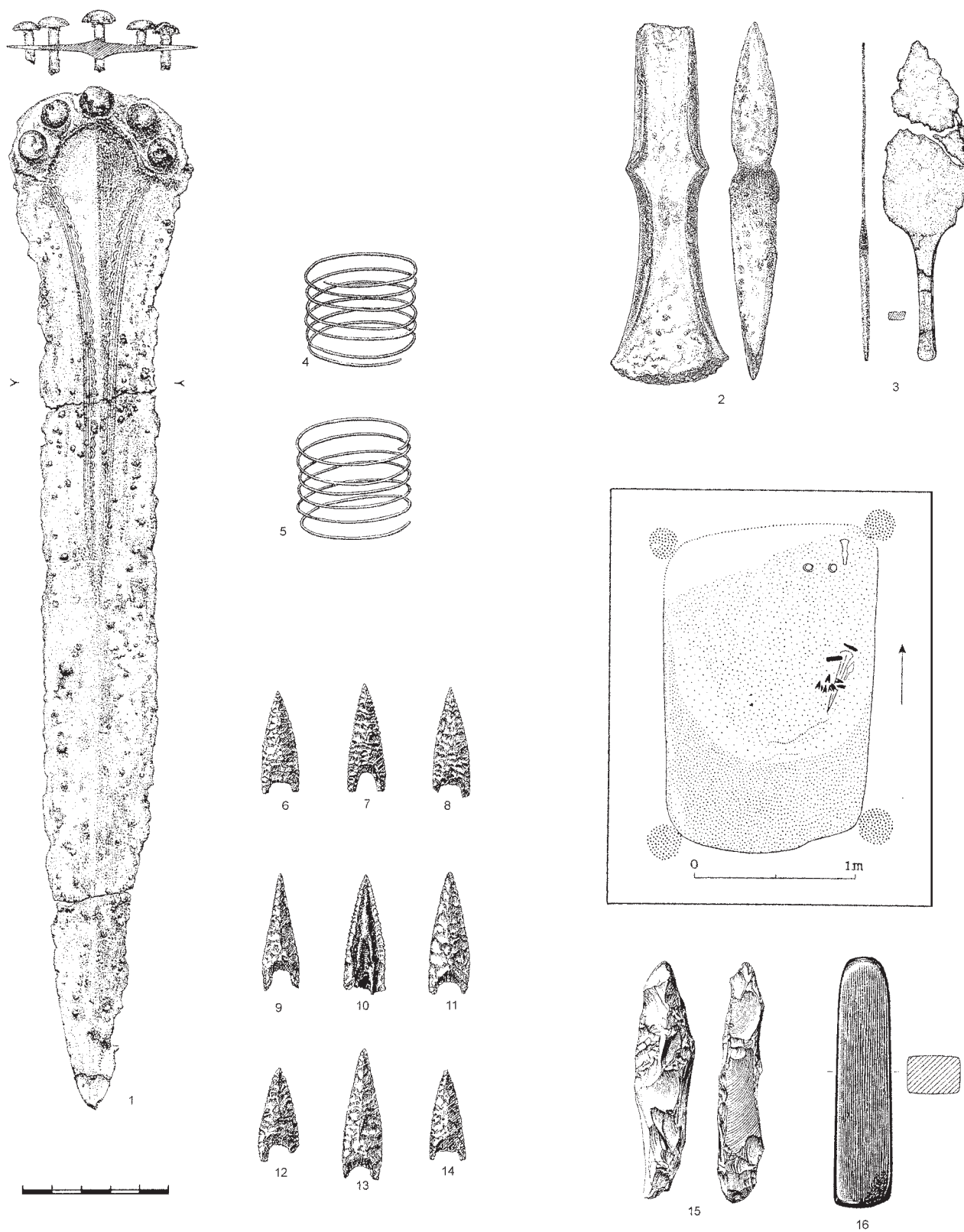


Figure 11.1 Contents of the Drouwen burial. The inset shows the position of the objects in the grave (after Butler 1990, fig. 14).

in line with such an excess than with regular feuding (Louwe Kooijmans 1998, 337-8). Cattle-raiding is seen as one of the most probable causes of violence in the Dutch Bronze Age, by Louwe Kooijmans (1998), Fokkens (1999) and Roymans (1996). All authors emphasize the important role cattle must have had, not only economically, but socially as well. To Fokkens, the very existence of the long-house that is so typical for the Bronze Age, where people and cattle live under the same roof, indicates that cattle were socially very significant. Possessing and exchanging cattle would have been a means to acquire and maintain social relations and 'to enter into strategic and nuptial alliances' (Fokkens 1999, 37). Stalling cattle may have been a way to protect cattle from being raided. With regard to the social significance of cattle, following Roymans, we may even speak of a 'pastoral ideology' (1996, 54). It may be no coincidence that such an ideology emerged parallel to the significance attached to martial values.

Armed conflicts around cattle raids are a very different kind of warfare than the kind of battles that Osgood and others (2000) see as typical for the European Bronze Age: conflicts caused by over-population. Although such conflicts may have existed, we would expect a stronger emphasis on defensive settlement if it were the main reason. Moreover, battles would have had far-stretching results, deciding on life and death of entire social groups. The kind of small-scale, low-casualty conflicts Louwe Kooijmans and Fokkens envisage for the Dutch Bronze Age are more in line with the evidence we have. It also bypasses the functionalist assumption inherent in the accounts of Osgood and others (2000) that warfare is a product of population increase. In Louwe Kooijmans' and Fokkens' line of reasoning people fight 'because they do' (Louwe Kooijmans 1998, 337). As we shall see further on, this is more in keeping with the evidence on the ritualized aspects of warfare that we see in the weapons themselves, and the significance of fighting to personal life cycles.

### 11.5 WARFARE AS IDEOLOGY

So far, the picture sketched of the nature of Bronze Age conflicts was hardly based on the evidence of the weapons themselves. When we turn to the evidence of weaponry, it becomes apparent that it tells us not so much about the actual practice of fighting, but rather about the ideological values associated with it.

The first indication can be found in the contextual evidence. Weapons may be so remarkably missing from funeral and settlement context, high numbers of them are known in other contexts. These do not reflect prehistoric battle-grounds, but deliberate depositions in watery places. That weapons are – after axes – the most prominent category to have figured in such ritual practices tells us about the ideological significance of weaponry.

The second indication can be drawn from some of the objects themselves. It is one of the few bronze object categories of which ceremonial versions circulated in both the Middle and Late Bronze Age. The best example are the giant ceremonial swords of the Plougrescant-Ommerschans type, described in chapter 6. For the Late Bronze Age, some full-hilted swords can be interpreted as ceremonial swords (chapter 8: in particular the one from Buggenum). Plougrescant-Ommerschans swords are not so much swords as idealized versions. For these swords, I argued that they were probably the ceremonial counterparts of real utilitarian swords in circulation (Fontijn 2001; chapter 6). Their very design and shape makes it clear that they were never intended to be used. Their biography must primarily have been one of circulation over vast distances. In his elaboration of Mauss' original work on gift exchange, Godelier (1999) recently recognized evidence for the existence of a special type of valuable. These are valuables that are generally considered to represent a community's most important inalienable possessions, intimately linked with the group's history, embodying crucial values. Such objects are not just personalized, but rather like very special persons. They have become so valuable that they cannot be given to people anymore, but are regarded as only fit to be 'gifts to the gods to be hoarded' (Godelier 1999, 61). Such valuables look like tools or weapons, but are never of practical use. They are often abstractions. 'This seems to be the pre-requisite for their being able to 'embody' social relationships and thought systems and then to represent them' (Godelier 1999, 162). Furthermore, such objects are often very well made, to valorize the object's owner. In the case of the ceremonial weapons of the Plougrescant-Ommerschans type, their existence implies that both for the society on whose behalf they were made (probably in north-west France or southern England) and for the party at the receiving end of the exchange chain (communities in the Netherlands), swords symbolized values that were held in high esteem. The symbolic aspect of weapons must therefore have been more important than it may appear at first sight, and this brings us to the conclusion that more than warfare alone, martiality itself was a crucial ideological value of Bronze Age communities living in the southern Netherlands.

### 11.6 WARRIOR IDENTITIES

Having established the significance of martial values, it is now necessary to find out how such values were constructed. Ideology is not just a mental construct, but rather something that is constructed in life, something which people believe in, since people 'live their ideology as real' (Treherne 1995, 116). Ideologies are reflected and constructed in the practices and life-styles of people. It is therefore to the intermingling of martial values and real life that we should turn. The point

will now be made that in the archaeological evidence of sword deposition, we can see at least a glimpse of this connection between martial values and real life. I shall take the evidence for elite sword-bearing warriors as a starting point, and argue that what we see of these warriors indicates that warriorhood was a stage in life for some, and that weaponry was only part of a more encompassing cultural idealization involving the construction of martial personal identities.

#### 11.6.1 *Sword fighting and becoming a person*

I shall first elaborate on the question why sword fighting is more than any other kind of fighting *potentially* related to the shaping of significant personal identities. My point comes down to this: Bronze Age swords are not the product of a progressive development in increasing the effectiveness of weaponry. As we have seen, some scholars even go as far as to consider it unlikely that Middle Bronze Age dirks and rapiers were capable of causing fatal or even debilitating wounds (Harding 1999, 166). Rather they testify to a strong and durable commitment to a peculiar way of fighting, in which warriors agree to engage in face-to-face combat. The type of sword-like weapons used before the advent of the true, versatile Late Bronze Age sword, ensures that the manner in which dirk, rapier or sword fighting took place was constrained and sometimes demanded special techniques (in the case of long rapiers, see chapter 7). The Middle Bronze Age dirks and rapiers are much smaller than fencing foils, which means that warriors were very close to each other. Moreover, they were not well balanced and the hilt-blade connection was vulnerable to breaking. From this, it follows that *the idea of* close-range fighting was held in higher esteem than the existing, more effective and less risky long-distance fighting with bow and arrow, or throwing and thrusting spears. That specialized objects – swords – were designed for the purpose of close-range fighting is indicative of the high appraisal of this way of fighting. The elaborate design, decoration and symmetry of some swords seems to be in keeping with this special significance attached to swords. Another argument concerns their limited practical use, which hardly surpasses the effectivity of regular axes, an effective alternative tool for close-range fighting. That nevertheless effort were taken in the production and exchange of dirks and rapiers, and that they became a lasting element in local material culture without ever becoming effective weapons before the Late Bronze Age is an argument that it was not so much close-range fighting that was valued but sword fighting itself. This brings us to considering a kind of close-range fighting that was ritualised and guided by specific codes rather than practical.

By its very nature sword fighting draws on the courage to enter into a close-range fight and the skill to use a sword. Courage and skill are both qualities that are generally seen as

adding to personal identity. ‘Honour’ may even have been seen as a vital constituent for personhood, and sword fighting as a special arena in which an individual became an ‘honourful’ one. It is tempting to refer here to Van Wees’ analysis of warrior ideologies in Homer’s *Illiad*. In the idealized image of warriorhood that is central to these Greek epic poems, ‘honour’ (*timè*) is an abstract, immaterial value that one has in one’s own and other people’s eyes. It is a socially constituted value: in Homer, honour is the actions and words by which others acknowledge one’s status, corresponding to what we call ‘deference’ (Van Wees 1992, 69). Thus, it is not an innate, ascribed or age-related status, but a quality one can achieve in the eyes of others. Deference, or honour is therefore a specific constituent of personhood as defined in chapter 3. Honour is scarce, which implies that becoming honourful has to be acknowledged and conferred in a social arena. It can also be denied or withheld (Van Wees 1992, 66, 71). In Homer, honour is expressed in receiving deference mostly in face-to-face interaction. The fight between two individual warriors in front of others is an important, almost ritualised arena in which a person can become acknowledged with the quality of ‘honour’. It may be obvious that we are dealing here with Homeric warrior ideals that need not coincide with those of communities living in the southern Netherlands at all. I do think, however, that the peculiarities and constraints of sword-fighting and the entire concept of pre-Late Bronze Age swords should be understood in such a context.

#### 11.6.2 *The evidence of warriors’ graves*

The second argument for regarding sword-like objects as being related to the construction of a specific identity can be read from archaeological evidence in a more straightforward way. Since the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age, there is an overwhelming body of evidence that dirks and rapiers became a prominent element in a specific type of male graves all over Europe. For our region, Sögel and Wohlde (or related) dirks and rapiers are the best examples. Treherne (1995) has dwelt on the European-wide distribution of such warrior graves. He argues that they refer to a widely shared conceptualisation of persons as a specific type of warrior. This warrior ideal is not only related to sword-fighting, but also to a specific way of bodily adornment. He points to the recurrent presence of tweezers and razors. There is even evidence that shaving was part of the portrayal of an individual as this specific type of warrior during the funeral. A specific style of hair-dressing seems to have been relevant as well. Treherne gives cross-cultural examples of a perceived relationship between physical strength and hair.

The Sögel dirk graves are the closest example to the southern Netherlands displaying such grave sets. The richest Sögel grave of northern Europe is even situated in the northern Netherlands,



in the grave of Drouwen (fig. 11.1; appendix 7.2). It neatly illustrates some of the elements mentioned by Treherne. It contains a nick-flanged axe, a bronze razor, a decorated dirk, golden spiral ornaments, a stone polissoir (for sharpening the dirk?) and a set of flint arrowheads. I have already argued that this type of grave has many elements in common with the Neolithic Beaker graves with the dagger being replaced by a sword. Similarly, we are dealing with a type of grave that has a wide distribution over northern Europe. It is the consistency of the weapon and ornament/toilet article set, regardless of cultural and economic differences, that is most conspicuous.

Kristiansen (1999) has also recognized the wide dispersal of this kind of warrior grave across Europe, and he sees it as argument for the appearance of a new chiefly-elite culture all over Europe, embedded in new rituals and new ideas of social behaviour and lifestyle. This emergence of what he calls the 'warrior aristocracy' should have been based on a new power system of clients/retinues, that served as a basis for mobilizing war parties, raids, trading expeditions. For some European regions his theory seems to fit the evidence. In Seddin, Eastern Germany, for example, a large number of hierarchically ranked graves is known, where the topmost layer of graves were

warrior graves (Harding 1999, 169). The Dutch evidence at first sight seems to fit in with Kristiansen's theory: from the north and the west, warrior graves with that characteristic grave set are known (Sögel-Wohldede graves). The richest grave of all Sögel graves is actually situated within the Netherlands. Appendix 7.2 and fig. 11.2 list all known Middle Bronze Age 'warrior graves' in the Netherlands. The clearest examples are all graves with dirks and rapiers. In the north, such sword-graves only date from the Middle Bronze Age A, in the west only from the Middle Bronze Age B. Although without swords, comparable warrior graves are in the north known from the Middle Bronze Age B as well. In the grave of Sleenerzand-Galgenberg phase 2 and Hijken-tumulus 9 find no. 39, there is for example continuity with the Sögel grave in the presence of sets of arrowheads (although now of bronze), gold spirals (for hair-dressing?), a pair of tweezers (only in Sleenerzand) and a flint strike-a-light (Hijken only) (Butler 1990, 65-8; 86). In the western Netherlands, in Velsbroek, a rapier-grave was found with, again, gold-wire coiled rings. This grave also shows similarities to warriors' graves from other regions (for example: a grave from Essel, Kr. Stade in northern Germany (Butler/Steegstra 1997/1998, 177-8).

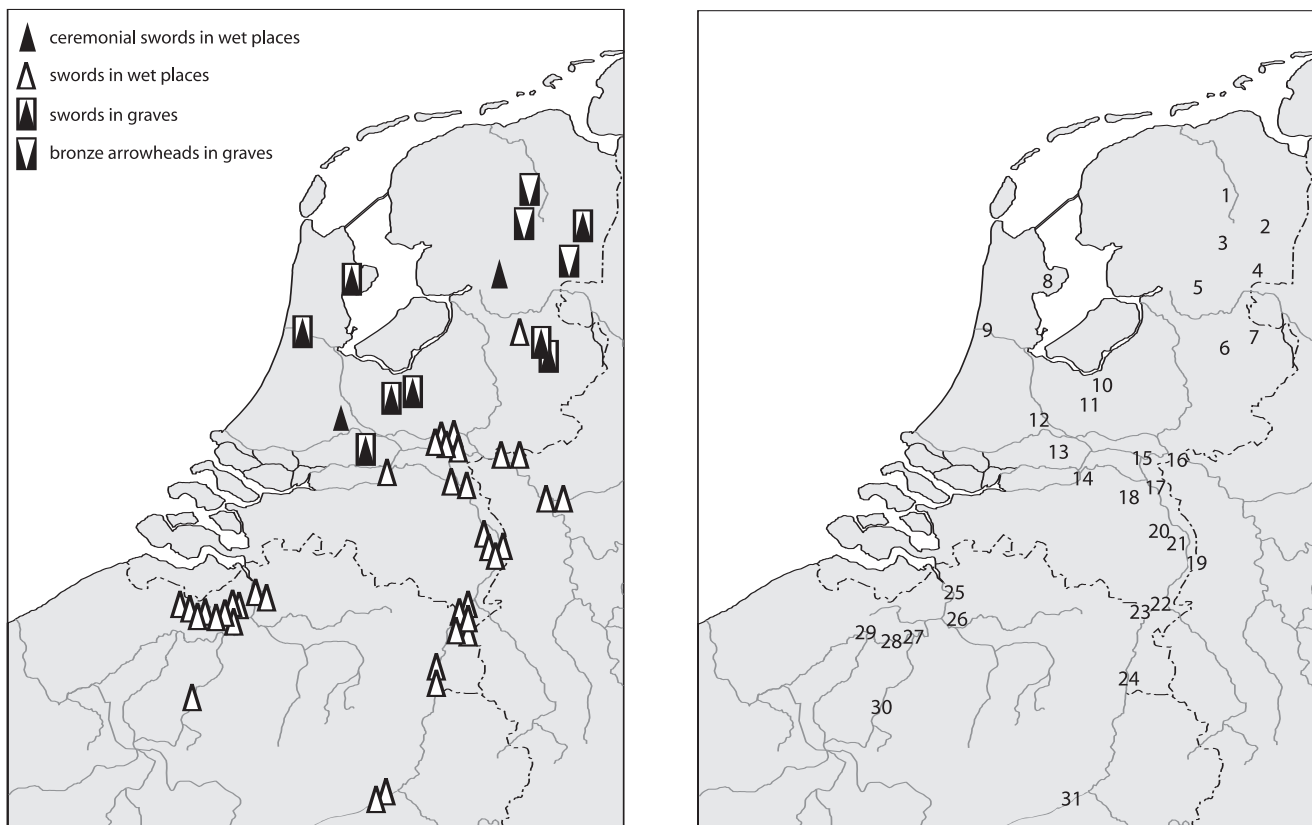


Figure 11.2 Middle Bronze Age swords in the Netherlands and their depositional context. See also appendix 5.6 for a description of the sites.

11.6.3 *Warrior identities and 'imagined communities'*  
 Apart from the similarity in grave sets, I still think there is no reason to assume a kind of warrior aristocracy comparable to what we know from a region like Seddin. Lohof has emphasized the rarity of this kind of warriors' graves. Several hundred years separate the construction of the Drouwen grave and that of Slenerzand (1994, 110). If there were a warrior aristocracy, it cannot have been represented by those rare warriors' graves. Lohof (1991; 1994) convincingly argued that on the whole the Dutch Bronze Age was not a ranked society at all. The rarity of the event of the construction of warriors' graves becomes even more prominent if we realize that barrow graves are the graves of only a minority of the entire population (10-15 %; Lohof 1994). The meaning of such a grave should therefore be interpreted in ideological terms rather than in political terms only. In the north and the west of the Netherlands, the expression of a martial ideal in such a grave was apparently the exception rather than the norm. This indicates that it was related to quite specific occasions only, for example linked to special events in the history of a group (claiming new territories, the establishment of a new group after group fission). This does not imply, however, that a link between sword-bearers and power was wholly absent. As a high-quality imported object, acquired through long-distance exchange, it signals the power of the owner to have access to such exchanges. Also, possessing weapons implies the possibility of fighting; using violence, or threatening to do so, is still a powerful way to impose one's will upon others.

The widespread evidence on warrior graves like those of the Sögel-Wohlde group indicates that the 'warrior ideal' expressed in such a grave was capable of crossing cultural boundaries. There is no need to doubt the local character of most warrior graves, and it therefore seems that the portrayal of the deceased in this specific, non-local way was deliberate. We are dealing here with conceptualisations of personhood that are rooted in supra-regional traditions. This kind of 'warrior ideal', with its emphasis on a specific bodily adornment, probably deviated deliberately from local appearances. This expression of warriorhood must in some way have referred to worlds that were beyond the daily reality of most members of the local community. A person was here defined in his membership of non-local, *imagined communities* (cf. Isbell 2000). Remarkably, the male, martial warrior-equipment is the best example we have in our region for such international appearances. The next chapter will discuss whether they had a female counterpart.

The evidence of warrior graves and the prominent role of swords in them confronts us with the ritualised, idealized nature of this particular imagery of warriorhood. It also shows that this representation of martiality is more than just bearing a sword. It involves specific, almost stereotyped

bodily appearances. This would be in keeping with an observation made by Harrison on the nature of warrior statuses in tribal societies. They are 'something on the outer surface of the self that can be worn or shed'. 'Aggression is an undertaking that requires a ritually transformed self' (Harrison 1995, 87, 91).

11.7 *WEAPON DEPOSITS AS GRAVELESS GRAVE GOODS?*  
 So far, the evidence on the role of weaponry in the construction of personhood was inferred from the European phenomenon of the warriors' grave. In the southern Netherlands, however, weaponry seems to come predominantly from depositions in watery places and not from burials. The question we shall now have to answer concerns this remarkable practice to keep weapons apart from graves. We shall start our inquiry by asking whether this is what happened in prehistory: could weapon deposits themselves not be directly related to graves?

Fig. 11.2 shows the distribution of Middle Bronze Age warriors' graves in the Netherlands, most of which contained swords. It is easy to see that the southern Netherlands are relatively rich in sword finds, but that they are almost exclusively from depositions in watery places, unlike in the west and north of the Netherlands. Moreover, in those cases where we have detailed evidence on the original associations of the sword finds, it appears that some of them display weapon sets that in the north are only found in graves. These are the weapon sets from Overloon (Middle Bronze Age A) and Escharen (Middle Bronze Age B). They were already discussed in chapter 6 and 7 respectively. The Overloon hoard in particular illustrates the point I want to make. It was argued that in Overloon we must be dealing with the personal sets of at least two warriors, which were deposited in a peculiar way. They were placed in a remarkable position (fig. 6.7) in a hillock within a swampy stream valley. It is in its contents a typical set for a Wohlde type of warrior grave. In chapter 6 it was argued why it is very unlikely that we are dealing here with a disturbed warrior's grave. Still, the Overloon hoard is a good example of what Eogan (1964) has called 'graveless grave goods'. The type of object is characteristic for graves, and yet there is no evidence for a grave at all. Eogan seems to have used this term to refer to missing information (graves that were not recognized). For the Overloon hoard this is not likely, but how are we to make sense of the similarity between weapon deposits and funeral goods?

#### *Weapon deposits as the remains of graves*

The interpretation that is closest to what Eogan originally meant sees the contrast between barrows and urnfields lacking weapons versus river deposits as one between non-martial and martial graves kept separate in the landscape. In

this contrast river finds would represent the remains from deceased warriors deposited in the river with their equipment. Bradley and Gordon (1988) have successfully shown that in the river Thames, England, there is not only a large amount of Late Bronze Age swords dredged up, but large numbers of skulls as well. <sup>14</sup>C-datings of some showed that a proportion of these indeed date from the Bronze Age. Although the association between the skulls and the swords cannot be proven, the idea that these weapon depositions are related to burials becomes more conceivable. In the Netherlands, Ter Schegget (1999) has recently done a comparable survey of human bones from the Dutch rivers. She showed that the Dutch rivers also yielded large numbers of dredged-up bones. Only a few (27) have been <sup>14</sup>C-dated, however. (Ter Schegget 1999, fig. 2, table 1 and 2.) One dates from the Late Neolithic (Deurzerdiep 1) and two date from the Bronze Age (Deurzerdiep-4 and the Rhine near Elst/Amerongen. Only the find from Elst is from the research region. This is a mandible dated to the end of the Middle Bronze Age to the Late Bronze Age. It may be clear that this one find can neither support nor falsify the river burial theory.

#### *Weapon deposits as funeral hoards*

Another way to make sense of personal weaponry deposited outside the grave would be to see them as funeral hoards (*Totenschätze*), an explanation recently put forward by Roymans and Kortlang with regard to the Late Bronze Age sword finds from rivers, and by Warmenbol (1996) with regard to the lavish bronze and gold deposits in the cave deposition site at Han sur Lesse (south Belgium). The studies by Wegner (1976), Torbrügge (1970-71) and Bradley (1990, 102) provide the basis of this theory. They all observed that weapon sets that were first deposited in graves were at a later stage in the Bronze Age placed in hoards. For that reason, they have been interpreted as hoards of personal equipment, deposited at the moment of death, but buried separate from the grave. The implication is that weapon deposits are related to the conceptualisation of the deceased, but in a skewed manner: his martial paraphernalia were deposited outside his grave (one of the options depicted in fig. 11.3). What would make the specific interpretation of weapon sets as burial gifts deposited outside the grave less appropriate to the case of the southern Netherlands is that here – unlike regions such as southern Germany or the northern Netherlands – weapons seem to have been kept outside the grave from the very beginning. We cannot really envisage a *translation* of funeral goods from one context to the other in the course of the Bronze Age, because they never seem to have been deposited in graves in the first place. This still does not make the link between the death of an individual and the deposition of his weapons improbable; the link only seems to have been not as direct as can be seen in other regions.

#### *Weapon deposits as rites of passage during life*

A third explanation has been suggested by Fokkens (1999) and myself (1999). Building on the theory that weaponry was associated with the constitution of personhood, we suggest that weapon deposition might coincide with a rite of passage during life, when the warrior becomes an elder (fig. 11.3) If this were the only viable explanation, then we would still need an additional explanation why weapons were never deposited in graves. Middle and Late Bronze Age graves do not just represent older men, who had already given up their warrior status (Theunissen 1999; Fontijn/Cuijpers in press). Young men are represented as well, but practically none carried weapons.

Alternatively, we could think of situations in which warrior identities required only a temporary shift in identity, adopted by a group by means of a collective ritual, involving special dress and bodily adornment, before a raid took place. The special fighting regalia and weapons were then laid down (deposited) after the battle was over, transforming warriors back into ordinary men. The latter option is particularly known from ethnographies on tribal warfare in the Sepik region in Papua New Guinea (Harrison 1995). Fig. 11.3 summarizes the different moments at which martial paraphernalia may have been laid down.

#### *Conclusion: the non-martial character of graves*

To question at what occasion weapons were regularly deposited, no conclusive answer can be given. Central to all explanations put forward here is the point that within the prehistoric communities involved there must have been some cultural understanding stating why the paraphernalia of martial identities did not belong in the barrows and urnfields of the later Bronze Age. There is much to be said for the idea stated by Roymans and Kortlang (1999, 56) that there was a general taboo on placing weapons in graves, and the present research now shows that this taboo was much older than they originally thought (stemming from a period as early as the Middle Bronze Age A, perhaps even the Early Bronze Age).

We should realize that this involves more than understanding a burial for what it is not. Central to such a taboo must be a specific understanding of the cultural issues at stake in the burial ritual: notions about the sort of values that need to be emphasized in order to send the deceased to the hereafter in the appropriate way. Apparently, these were values conflicting with and perhaps even contradictory to values celebrating martial ideas. Given the strong emphasis on collective ideals, both in the collective barrows of the Middle Bronze Age and in the Late Bronze Age urnfields, it might be ventured that the values emphasized in burial rituals had a heavy accent on group identity, collectivity and solidarity. Such values may be at odds with martial ones, celebrating competition and capacities to use violence (cf. Roymans/Kortlang 1999, 56).

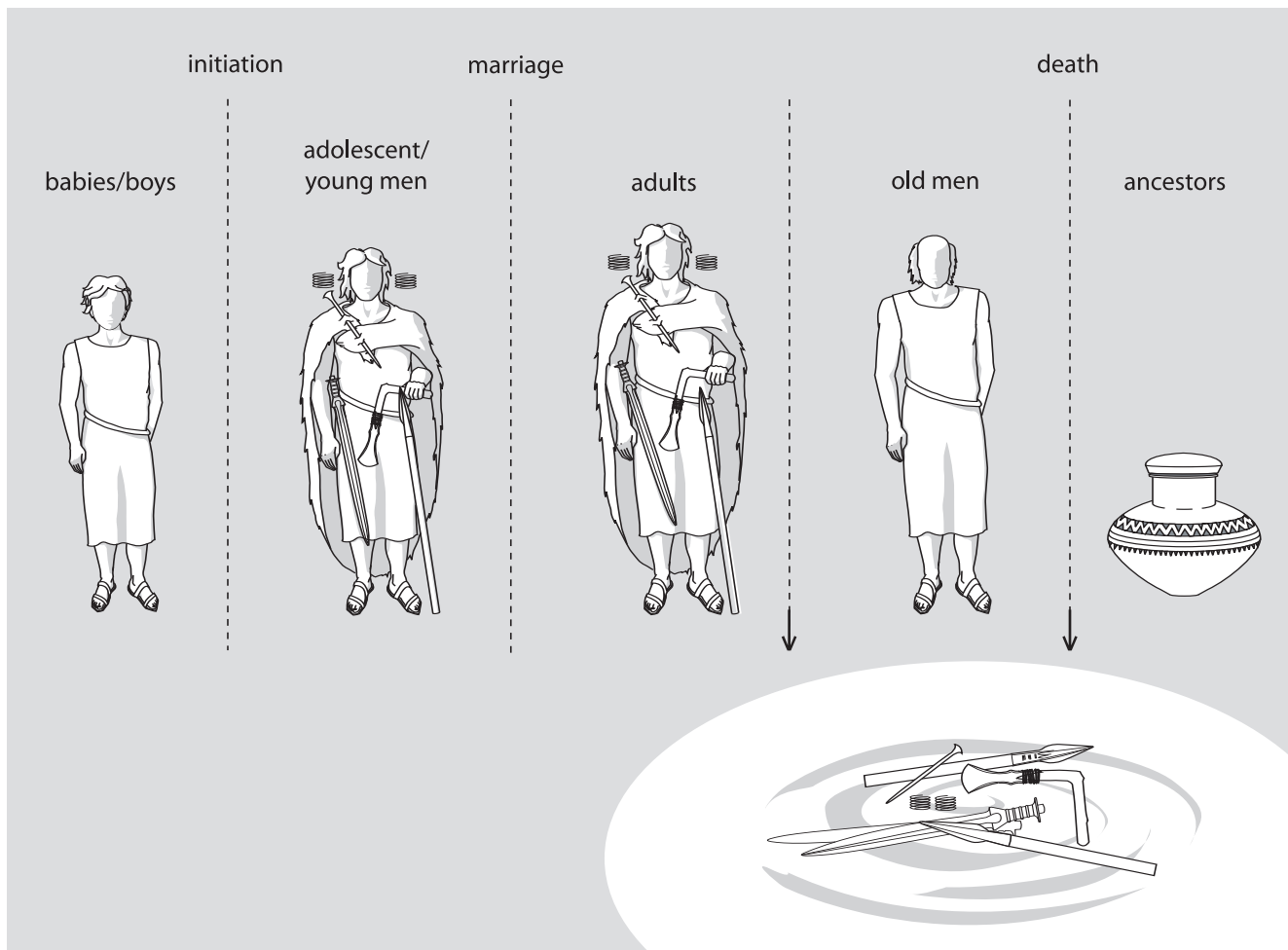


Figure 11.3 Hypothetical life-cycle of a warrior. The assumption is that a martial identity was confined to a specific stage in the life-cycle and that weaponry and specific body ornaments were instrumental in signalling this stage of personhood. Consequently, the deposition of these objects marks the transition to another stage of life. Shown are possible moments at which such a deposition may have taken place.

#### 11.8 WARRIORHOOD AS AN AMBIGUOUS, TEMPORARY IDENTITY

Having seen the dichotomy between identities constructed in graves versus the evidence that martial identities existed, we can conclude that the rigid keeping apart of weapons implies that they represented an ambiguous category in material culture. This is something that is true in many cultures: weapons are often seen as an ambiguous, even dangerous, object category.

In socio-political terms, weapons are dangerous because their presence in a social group implicates 'haves' and 'have-nots', and thus potentially a group who can impose their will upon others (Claessen 1988, 7-8). In the kind of society we are dealing with there was no authority with an effective monopoly of force (Roymans 1996, 14). Essentially, this applies both to power relations within a particular group and

to relations between groups. In essence, the presence of weaponry can thus be threatening to an established social order; it can both derive from and cause social tensions in all kinds of ways. For the small-scale, largely egalitarian Bronze Age societies we are dealing with, the presence of weapons among some members of the local community might present a potential threat to social cohesion.

Using violence, or the capacity to do so, is ambiguous in a more ideological way as well.

Blok (1994, 34) argues that using violence against others is a transgressive, polluting action, since it transgresses the boundary between the category of life and death. As such, it may have repercussions for the way in which people deal with weapons, both in daily life and in ritual. For this reason, the use of violence is often related to rituals (Blok 1994, 34).

In our case, I argued that weapons are not just tools, but inextricably linked with martial identities, either at a communal or at a personal level. With regard to the latter, I presented evidence that the conceptualisation of sword-bearing warriors implied specific bodily adornment as well. What matters is therefore not just the weapons; rather it is martial personal identities that were considered ambiguous and transgressive. But what the deposition of weapons implies is particularly the surrender of the paraphernalia of warriorhood; in other words, the de-construction of martial identity in a ritual act. This comes close to the picture of warrior identities in tribal societies as sketched by Harrison (1995) for the Sepik in Papua New Guinea. He illustrates that tribal warfare is not just directed against distant tribes, as is often thought. Rather, he shows how people living next to each other, and even related by descent, may still fight. Violence, in his view, can be a concomitant of sociality. It is the same actors who are violent and sociable towards one another *in different contexts*. 'Their basic assumption is not that there are radically distinct categories of people (friends and enemies, kin and strangers, in-group and out-group) but that there are radically distinct modalities of action' (Harrison 1995, 85). For neighbours or kin to meet each other as enemies, a temporary shift in identity is needed. Such shifts are ritualised, and the identities themselves are acquired by a transformation of the self by means of self-decoration (for example: wearing special fighting regalia). Such decorative elements are often seen as ancestral, and by wearing them people take resort to a shared, imagined group identity that refers not only to the warriors present, but to their forebears as well. The implication is that it is groups that are hostile, whereas individuals are sociable. I already referred to his observation that aggression thus is 'something on the outer surface of the self that can be worn or shed' (Harrison 1995, 87). I think this example is interesting, as it illustrates how martial identities are very much contextually and ritually constructed by body decoration and weaponry. It is precisely for this that we have evidence (the 'warrior ideal', fig. 11.3). At the same time, it also implies that a ritual act is needed to transform the warriors back into normal people. It is this deconstruction of the martial identity that is reflected in weapon deposition, on whatever occasion it took place (at death or during life). In the face of participants, the objects that make a man into a warrior were laid down, and given to supernatural entities. The paraphernalia of warrior identities were thus cosmologically authenticated and fixed, yet the warrior – or the group he represented – was transformed back into a non-martial person.

This idea would fit in with what we assume about the kind of conflicts that took place. Endemic warfare may have taken place, and could even be valued without being a threat to sociality, because it involved structured rituals in which martial identities were adopted and also laid down (deposition).

This may have prevented the emergence of more permanent, hierarchical warrior identities, as known from other regions (the warrior aristocracy). The rituals to deal with the ambiguity of weaponry involve a strict separation of depositional contexts, where rivers and streams were the martial domain, whereas martiality was denied and values of collectivity and sociality celebrated in the context of the collective cemeteries (collective barrows and urnfields).

#### 11.9 THE SHIFT FROM RIVERS TO GRAVES

Considering the traditionality and wide acceptance of this particular way of depositing weaponry, it must have been based on deep-rooted views on the biography of weaponry. The subsequent shift of sword deposition from rivers to burials which took place during the Early Iron Age therefore seems a sharp and decisive break with the past. In interpreting this view, Roymans (1991, 56) sees the new weapon graves as the expression of an elite whose power was more than before individually based.

##### 11.9.1 *Ha C chieftains' graves as reflecting a different kind of elite?*

With the discussion on 'warrior aristocracies' in mind, we might ask ourselves whether the presence of chieftains' graves in the southern Netherlands implies that we now finally have tangible evidence that such an aristocracy existed in our region? In my view, the answer should be negative. Like Bronze Age warrior graves in the northern Netherlands, 'chieftains' graves' occur only rarely in our region. Only in a striking minority of urnfields do we encounter such graves, and they are certainly not common to all micro-regions in the southern Netherlands (fig. 8.15). Nowhere do we find evidence that there was more than one rich weapon grave in the same cemetery, contrary to the situations in Belgian cemeteries to the south of the research region (for example: Court-St. Etienne yielding no less than 16 of such graves). The chiefly status seems to have been determined primarily by the personal qualities of the leader; there is no evidence to suggest that such elite positions continued for several generations (see also Roymans 1991, 55). So far, the shift in weapon deposition on the transition from the Bronze to the Iron Age has been explained mainly in terms of a shift in power base. Roymans (1991) sees weapon deposition in rivers as related to the activities of a warrior elite whose power position was based upon exclusive access to bronze exchange networks. With the collapse of the interregional bronze exchange during the Early Iron Age, this power base shifted to an exclusive 'middle man' position in the exchange of hides and salt between the Lower and Upper Rhine area (Roymans 1991, 54). The assumption is that the individuals in rich Ha C graves like the ones from Oss or Wijchen held such middle man positions. On top of that, Roymans argues



that these graves represent a higher rank level than existed previously (1991, 55).

Writing more than ten years after Roymans' seminal article on this matter was published, and having considered metalwork deposition in its entirety (instead of focussing on weapon deposits only), I find this shift to burial deposition even more problematic to explain. Surveying the entire evidence for Bronze Age deposition of prestigious metalwork, it seems to have been a practice guided by very specific and traditional rules. The expression of an elite position in burials as was practised in the Early Iron Age took place in a very different context, at a time when these 'rules' were apparently losing significance. As the entire way of expressing status in the Iron Age differed from that in the Bronze Age, how are we to make out that a Ha C grave like the one from Oss or Wijchen expressed a power position that was in an absolute sense of the higher rank than those of the Late Bronze Age elites? Moreover, it is difficult to verify the hypothesis that it was the control on the salt and hide trade which provided the power base for the new elite. Hide trade is archaeologically invisible. The evidence from settlement excavations, moreover, indicates that Early Iron Age houses do not have the lengthy byres that characterize those from the Middle Bronze Age (Fokkens 1997; Gerritsen 2001, 255). It is therefore hard to conceive that hide trade gained in importance during the Early Iron Age. The salt trade is equally difficult to use as an argument. Salt trade, assumed to be reflected in the finds of the characteristic *briquetage* pottery is only attested since the Ha D phase (Van den Broeke 1986). Even if it did circulate before, then there is still no way to verify whether it was the control of the salt trade on which power positions were based. Next, the exchange of salt and hides seems to be confined to a specific sphere of exchange that cannot be seen as equivalent to the sphere in which prestigious metalwork circulated. With regard to the latter, there is not so much difference between the circulation of prestigious Ha C metalwork and that of the Bronze Age apart from the stronger emphasis on central European goods and objects associated with new elite ideals. On the other hand, it would also be wrong to see the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age as reflecting essentially similar socio-political contexts. Some scholars have argued that the Early Iron Age heralds a phase of strong demographic growth, with more emphasis on territoriality and claims to the land by individual local groups (Gerritsen 2001, 256-8; Roymans/Kortlang 1999, 38-9). If they are right, it is likely that this involved new socio-political relationships between groups (alliances, competition, tensions).

#### 11.9.2 *How did a shift to burial deposition become socially acceptable?*

Given its emphasis on the practice of deposition, this book cannot fully come to terms with the Bronze-Iron Age

transition and the ensuing socio-political developments. It seems more realistic to focus on the changes in the practice of deposition itself. The fundamental question to be asked is this: given the established structure of depositional practices, how could such a shift to burial deposition become socially acceptable and 'the right thing to do'? I shall try to deal with this question by considering changes in the fields of circulation, deposition, burial ritual and the ritual construction of power.

#### *Circulation: a decisive shift in the constitution of supra-regional exchange networks*

Throughout this book, we have seen that the southern Netherlands of old had a link both to central Europe and to the Atlantic. In chapter 8 it was established that during the last phase of the Late Bronze Age the large numbers of Plainseau imports indicate a firm link between our region and the Atlantic Belgian and north French ones. As shown, these are not just about the flow of bronzes; ideas were communicated as well. For example, the evidence of ornaments implies shared ideas on the appearances of high-status females (chapter 8 and 12). At the beginning of the Early Iron Age, bronze circulation seems to have decreased here like it did in the adjacent regions. Nevertheless, within the remaining bronze circulation changes took place as well. In general, Atlantic products seem to have lost their prominence to the benefit of those from the adjacent German regions and the central European realm (chapter 8). Again, this does not only apply to circulation of products, but to ideas as well. Deposition of weaponry was not practised in Late Bronze Age urnfields in the southern Netherlands, but in the German regions to the east it took place occasionally (for an example from the Rhineland: Gering-Kehrig, Kr. Mayen grave no. 16; Desittere 1968). Gündlingen swords were produced both in Atlantic and continental regions, but the form their deposition took in the Lower Rhine Basin is different from what was normative in the Atlantic: as we have seen, they were in our region deposited both in rivers and in burials. Elsewhere in Atlantic Europe, they were still exclusively placed in rivers as before (Warmenbol 1988, 262). So, even if the majority of those swords were still Atlantic products, as Warmenbol (1988) claims, it can yet be argued that a part of these was now deposited according to ways which are more in line with German, continental traditions than with Atlantic ones. This seems to have been a decisive shift. For the Middle Bronze Age B and the Late Bronze Age, the general impression was that the biographies of metalwork in the southern Netherlands had more in common with those from the Atlantic than with those from the continental regions, even though products of both spheres were present (chapter 7 and 8). This clearly changes with the adoption of the essentially *continental* habit of sword deposition in burials during the Gündlingen phase. The

re-orientation towards continental ideas becomes more profound during the Ha C phase, when the richest warrior sets in burials show no less than a prestigious continental elite outfit with elements unprecedented in indigenous martial sets: horse-gear, bronze vessels and parts of ceremonial four-wheeled wagons. The Lower Rhine basin remains exceptional in this wholesale acceptance of these ideas on chiefly appearances; they are unknown to the north-west French and British Atlantic regions.

*The diminishing significance of metalwork deposition in watery places*

Next, we should realize that the shift to burial deposition took place at a time when deposition of metalwork in natural, watery places as a whole was on the wane. Ahead of the arguments presented in chapter 13, I would like to remark here that the entire phenomenon of bronze deposition must ultimately have been related to what can be termed the 'sacrificial economy' of what were essentially 'importing' societies. Deposition as a way to uphold scarcity and converting metal from commodities into gifts (chapter 13) lost significance in the face of the general transition to and mastering of iron working, a material that was, unlike copper, locally available. There are other indications as well to assume that the fundamental characteristics of bronze biographies ending up in deposition were gradually 'hollowed out' as early as the Late Bronze Age. Chapter 13 will address this subject at large, but for the moment it suffices to remark that the shift to burial deposition took place against the background of a deposition tradition that in its entirety was losing significance.

*Changes in the burial ritual itself*

Not in the last place should the shift to burial deposition be understood in the context of changes in the burial tradition itself. Burial ritual can be argued to be made up of two fundamental oppositions: the expression of a deceased individual and the way in which this individual was represented as part of the larger collective whole of which he/she was a part. From the Middle Bronze Age B on, it can be argued that there was a gradual shift to a more pronounced representation of individuals. Middle Bronze Age B barrows are clearly collective graves, in which in our region there is not much differentiation between the individual graves making up the entire barrow (Fontijn/Cuijpers in press). Nevertheless, the barrow ritual is very unrepresentative since it contains only the graves of a minority of the population. Fokkens (1997) has recently argued that it is particularly this element that changes profoundly during the Late Bronze Age. An urnfield is a case in point of a collective cemetery, in which nevertheless the burials of almost any member of a local group had a grave. Graves are much more than before

created as the final resting place for a particular individual; only a minority carries signs of secondary burials. The burial ritual echoes a strong egalitarian ideology, since burials hardly show signs of individual differentiation. The Late Bronze Age elite, whose existence can be assumed on the basis of the sword deposits, is invisible in these urnfields. The general impression of a Late Bronze Age urnfield is one of a cemetery governed by a strong notion of the collective in which every member of society had his/her prescribed place (cf. Roymans/Kortlang 1999). It is precisely this relative non-differentiation that changes in the subsequent Early Iron Age. The cemeteries of this period undoubtedly display a similar concern with collective identities as they did before, but this time there is more variation in the burial ritual itself. Apart from the regular differentiation between long barrows, ring-ditch graves and flat graves, there are extremely large long barrows like those from the Someren urnfield (length: 145 m), or ring-ditch graves three to four times larger than the average size in the cemetery (Kortlang 1999; Roymans 1991, 57). Roymans speaks of a trend towards individualization of the burial ritual (1991, 56). In some cases, this 'individualization' resulted in the location of such monumental graves in a position isolated from the collective urnfield (Fontijn 1996b, 84). The increase in differentiation in graves does not just apply to those containing Ha C imports; the extremely large long barrows of type Someren, or many other large ring-ditch structures do not contain such imports. It must have been a much more general phenomenon, culminating in the final disintegration of urnfields at the end of the Early Iron Age. Ha D/ La Tène A chieftains' graves, then, were no longer positioned in a large collective urnfield, but isolated, sometimes themselves forming the focus of a small cemetery (Fontijn 1996a, 83-4).

Summing up, it can therefore be said that from the Early Iron Age on, this trend of differentiation between burials in an urnfield made the burial ritual gradually more suitable as an arena for claiming and challenging status positions, which was after all what happened during the Ha C phase. That it is part of a wider transformation implies that it was not just related to the Ha C chieftains' graves alone. The earliest sword burials in the preceding Gündlingen phase can now be much better understood as a transitory phase. The individual differentiation brought out in the deposition of swords seems to have been counterbalanced by a stronger emphasis on the collective element of these graves. From what we know of these burials (Neerharen-Rekem and Weert tumulus O; chapter 9), it is clear that they were still with one foot in the Late Bronze Age burial tradition. Although tumulus O already seems to have been a large barrow, both graves are still strongly constructed in a collective rather than an individual vein. Tumulus O is exceptional for being a barrow containing several graves, instead of just one. Neerharen-Rekem no. 72

is also a collective grave, containing the cremated remains of what probably were three individuals, buried together.

*A new elite ideology...*

Part of the strategy of differentiation in burial rites was the provision of graves with Ha C imports. There is not much that indicates that modest burials with Ha C imports contrast sharply with the earlier graves with Gündlingen swords, and we can hardly see these as a break with traditions that became established during the Gündlingen phase. In the case of the richest graves, the ones from Wijchen and Oss, however, the situation is markedly different. In spite of all the evidence that suggests that Ha C chieftains' graves were a logical continuation of developments that had their roots in earlier phases; these graves display a clear concern with deliberate 'otherness' and differentiation as well. This is not only visible in the extraordinary size of the Oss barrow or the isolated position of the Wijchen grave, but in the burial set as well. In chapter 9, I concluded that in a number of ways the burial set in such graves embodied a new elite ideology, imported from central Europe, that had no precedents in contemporary conceptualisations of martial personhood. This contrasts sharply with the profound stability of martial sets that we have recognized throughout the Bronze Age. Even the Gündlingen graves with their associations of spears and swords still fundamentally reflect the essentials of Bronze Age warriorhood. The presence of lunula-shaped chapes may be related to an incipient emphasis on horse riding, but this is speculative (chapter 8). Nothing prepares for the wholesale adoption of ceremonial wagons pulled by horses, and the fine large bronze vessels. In chapter 8, I argued that the concern with 'novelty' also comes to the fore in the material used (iron) or the technological refinement (the bronze vessels). Fig. 11.4 shows the object categories present in regular urnfield graves with gifts, to be contrasted

<b>Body ornaments</b>	
Dress Ornaments* Toilet articles	
<b>Tools</b>	<b>Food/(Drinking?)</b>
Flint tools Spindle whorl Knife	Ceramic pots Meat?

Figure 11.4 Categories of objects in non-martial LBA/EIA urnfield graves. Unless indicated otherwise these are of bronze. An \* means that iron, gilded or gold examples exist as well.

with the object categories in Ha C chieftains' graves (fig. 11.5). With regard to Wijchen and Oss, there thus still seems to be scope for Roymans' original point that some of the chieftains' graves relate to the emergence of new status positions of people who deliberately sought to differentiate themselves from existing elites by having exclusive access to a new complex of rituals associated with the world of the Southern Hallstatt elite (Roymans 1991, 61).

*...and the continuation of the Bronze Age attitude towards weaponry*

There may have been a deliberate element of 'otherness' involved in the adoption of the Ha C burial set; beyond doubt there were indigenous elements as well. For the present discussion, the most important of this is what seems so far the most pronounced break with past depositional practices: the fact that swords were now placed upon the remains of the deceased, instead of being placed in a river. In view of the theory on the temporary and ambiguous character of martial identities current in the Bronze Age, does this new habit imply that martial identities were now more than before presented as 'fixed' and inextricably linked up with a certain individual? I think the evidence on the way weaponry was treated indicates that this was not the case. Both in the Gündlingen and in the Ha C phase, most swords were intentionally damaged before being placed in the grave. This is in sharp contrast to the swords deposited in rivers, which are generally undamaged and in splendid condition (sometimes sharpened as if for use; chapter 10). The way in which the swords were damaged suggests deliberate ritual acts. The Mindelheim sword from Oss was not simply broken, but elegantly bent in a spiral-like form. We see something similar in the case of the sword from Meerlo, which is more or less compressed in the form of a post packet. It might be ventured that this treatment of swords echoes the age-old taboo on placing weapons in graves; now swords were

<b>Body ornaments</b>	<b>Riding/Driving</b>
	<u>Horse gear</u> <u>Horse harness</u> <u>Yoke</u> <u>Wagon parts</u>
<b>Weapons</b>	<b>Drinking/Food</b>
<u>Sword</u> <u>Axe</u>	Situla <u>Knives</u>

Figure 11.5 Categories of objects found in Ha C chieftains' graves. Underlined items are often made of iron.



placed there, but they were made unusable. A martial element is present, but treated in such a way as to suggest that it no longer plays a role as a marker of warrior statuses. It is important to realize that a similar destructive attitude is not observed on the other prestige goods (the wagon, horse gear or the bronze vessel).

### 11.9.3 *Conclusion: the continuing ambiguity of warrior statuses*

Reviewing the discussion on the transformation of weapon depositions, it seems too simple to explain the shift to burial deposition in a functionalist fashion as the expression of a new elite, claiming their position by referring to new (Ha C) status goods in new contexts (graves). On the other hand, there are cases (Wijchen/Oss) in which the signs of attempts at breaking with the past must reflect a deliberate attempt at differentiating and claiming new, unprecedented (?) status positions. These went hand in hand, however, with attempts at naturalizing these new positions by claiming bonds with former owners of the land. This is most clear in the case of Oss, where the large monument was built over what must have been a Middle Bronze Age A barrow (Fokkens/Jansen 1998).

In general, the transition to burial deposition must be seen as a gradual one, taking place against the background of more general changes in circulation, and changes in the social significance of deposition and burial ritual. It would be wrong to state that nothing changed. For the southern Netherlands, there is no empirical support at all for Treherne's (1995, 108) theory that the European warrior ideal rested on four fundamental pillars: an association with the ideals of

- 1 drinking/alcohol and drinking bouts,
- 2 warfare,
- 3 riding/driving and
- 4 body ornamentation.

The elements of warfare and bodily ornamentation were as we have seen characteristic for the Bronze Age ideals of warriorhood in our regions. The element of drinking and riding/driving, however, were added to it with the adoption of the Ha C chieftain ideology, whilst bodily ornamentation seems no longer to have had any significance in it. The idea of a European warrior ideal as conceived of by Treherne seems – at least for our region – to be a modern invention that does no justice to historical developments in martial ideals.

The crucial question that concerns us here is whether the transition to the Iron Age heralds an essential change in the cultural attitude towards weaponry and the martial identities associated with these. The answer is negative. The ambiguity that was found to be so characteristic in the attitude towards weaponry in the Bronze Age does not seem to change fundamentally, but rather it is expressed differently

### 11.10 CONCLUSIONS

The above study of weapon deposition leads to the following conclusions.

- 1 Since the Middle Bronze Age A, the evidence of weaponry displays a commitment to battle and violence that goes beyond purely practical needs. Swords and sword fighting in particular had a special social and ritual significance. It was related to personal life cycles, and the fact that ceremonial swords were made and circulated neatly points out that the cultural attitude towards these objects had ritual overtones. In all, there are arguments to suppose that warfare and violence was as much an ideology of martiality as a practice.
- 2 Martial values were inextricably linked up with life cycles of male individuals. Battles themselves should probably be understood as related to them. They were probably in the first place endemic conflicts involving small war parties rather than an all-out warfare of communities whose very existence was threatened. Since weapons are general in the southern Netherlands we can suggest that most local groups were from time to time in one way or another occupied with battle. There is no evidence at all, however, for the existence of retinues and warrior aristocracies as we know them from elsewhere.
- 3 There is evidence to suggest that some regions knew a sword-bearing elite, not to be confused with a warrior aristocracy. In some cases, such elite warrior identities involved special paraphernalia, including ornaments. The warrior equipment had clear links with those of other regions, suggesting that such martial identities referred explicitly to membership of non-local, 'imagined' (elite) communities.
- 4 Weapon deposition took a particularly selective form in the southern Netherlands. Weapons generally seem to have been kept from graves, suggesting a widespread taboo on their presence in burials.
- 5 If weaponry was related the achievement of social roles during the life cycle of an individual, its deposition then implies that this role and status was laid down together with the physical laying down of the objects which signalled it. It is unclear whether this happened during life (becoming an older man, or after a successful battle), or at death. At any rate, it implies that martial identities were ambiguous ones, to be constructed and deconstructed in ritualized circumstances. Their selective deposition seems to have been one way to deconstruct such martial identities.
- 6 In the Early Iron Age, weapon deposition shifts entirely from rivers and marshes to burials. Clearly, this implies some decisive changes in the cultural attitude towards weaponry, coinciding with the adoption of a new warrior elite ideology. Most changes can be understood as the

culmination of a larger process of change in depositional practices which was already under way for some time. Although the paraphernalia of martial statuses expressed in the 'chieftains' graves' definitely changed, there seems to be continuity in the ambiguity surrounding the cultural attitude towards weaponry.

## notes

- 1 Counted are swords, spears and daggers.
- 2 Ehrenreich 1997, 124; Treherne 1995; Sørensen 1998, 262).
- 3 Resharpening probably removed traces of wear and use. It is unclear whether we should expect regular use of a thrusting spear in battle to result in clear cut or impact marks on the edges such as known from swords (Bridgford 1997).