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SACRIFICIAL LANDSCAPES

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

UNIVERSITY OF LEIDEN 2002

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Non multo post in Cantabriae lacum fulmen decidit repertaeque sunt duodecim secures, 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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14 The landscape of deposition

14.1 Introduction

So far, we have discussed the relation between objects, people and land predominantly from the point of view of people 'doing things' with objects. Attention has also been paid to the ways in which objects 'do things' with people: the constitution of personal identities by wearing and using weaponry and ornaments (chapter 11 and 12). In chapter 3 it was argued that in deposition there is also a relationship between people and land, and between specific types of objects and specific types of places involved. In depositional practices, landscape is more than just a receptacle of objects. In this chapter we will chart the ways in which the land itself was defined and structured by the acts of object deposition. The argument will be constructed as follows.

First, we shall deal with the question what depositional locations are both physically and historically speaking (section 14.2). Then, they will be studied from different perspectives: as places within the landscape of daily life (14.3), as locations within an environment peopled by different social groups (14.4), and as locations within a cosmological landscape (14.5). Accordingly, we will try to find out about the general cultural attitudes that make the practice of placing objects in the land a logical one in the first place (14.6). Then, having paid ample attention to the way in which depositions construct the identity of places, we shall study the other side of this coin: how people construct identities from using depositional places (14.7). Finally, section 14.8 will summarize the main conclusions arrived at.

14.2 Deposition in a historical landscape

In the long term, the most fundamental development which takes place in the landscape during the period under study seems to be the formation of a structured cultural landscape (Fokkens 1999). Throughout the Bronze Age, the landscape became increasingly characterized by the signs of a tangible, ancestral past. Barrows and urnfields represent the most important and lasting intentional act of the inhabitants to shape their landscape, but, as Gerritsen argues, to the inhabitants the ancestral nature of the landscape also came to the fore in other signs of former occupation. In the course of the Bronze Age relocating a farmstead was less a matter of entering areas that were not yet marked by previous phases of habitation, cultivation and burial, 'and more a matter of returning to named places with historical and ancestral meaning'(Gerritsen 2001, 254). Reviewing the chronological developments that were outlined in chapters 5 to 8, it can be argued that depositional places became part and parcel of this historical landscape in the course of time.

14.2.1 The system of selective deposition as reflecting structured perceptions of the land

In the Late Neolithic B and Early Bronze Age, object depositions must have been rare. It was argued that objects were placed in a variety of (wet) places, but hardly in major rivers. The majority represents single deposits. There is virtually no evidence that the same place in the landscape was re-used for subsequent deposition in the same period (chapter 5). A fundamental change takes place during the Middle Bronze Age A. After a period when metalwork deposition seems to have been almost non-existent (since around 1800 BC), a major increase in its frequency has been attested from 1600 BC onwards. Now we see the first indications for the strict structuration of the practice in the sense that specific objects ended up in specific places only (chapter 6). It is only in this period that rivers became significant for depositions. They acquired special meaning since they were the places where prestigious weaponry (swords, battle axes) was deposited. Whereas from now on barrows and settlements came to have a growing significance in the landscape as foci for social and ritual practices, the general absence of metalwork deposits in such places becomes only more pronounced. For the Middle Bronze Age A, it can be argued that the landscape was seen as structured in such a way that there was a general agreement on which kinds of places were appropriate for depositing which type of object, which also implies that other environmental elements were not considered the right place to deposit objects. The system of selective deposition as it took shape then very much seems to have been based on a shared, cultural understanding of the landscape. This interpretation of the environment is reflected by the system of selective deposition, but also reproduced by every new deposition. We must be dealing with a system which is profoundly traditional (see also chapter 10). This can be inferred from the observation made

that since its origination in the Middle Bronze Age A, the kind of places where prestigious weaponry, ornaments and functional axes were deposited does not alter until the end of the Bronze Age. It only became more pronounced, because from the Middle Bronze Age B on, there are clear indications that – for example – sword depositions were not only carried out in the same *kind* of place, but also in the same area. For the Middle Bronze Age B, there is compelling evidence that certain environmental zones were time and time again revisited for carrying out depositions: they became historical 'multiple-deposition zones'. Examples are the inland swamps between Echt and Montfort, the terrace swamp near Belfeld, the stretch of the river Meuse near Roermond-Herten, the river stretch of the Waal near Nijmegen, and the Rhine-Waal bifurcation near Lobith-Millingen. Figure 14.1 and 14.2 illustrate the situation in a part of Dutch Middle Limburg. Showing multiple-deposition zones in the river Meuse and in the adjacent inland swamps. For most of these areas a history as multiple-deposition zone can be recognized from approximately the 13th century onwards (*the Bronze final I* phase).

With regard to this structuration, two questions come to mind.

1 How could such a long-term history of using and valuing watery environments exist?
2 What does it mean that objects with a specific life were apparently meant to be placed in specific kinds of places only?

14.2.2 Multiple-deposition zones and the landscape of memory

Let us first deal with the question how this long-term use of depositional places could exist in the first place. The evidence implies that since the Middle Bronze Age B, people *repeatedly visited specific zones in the land in order to carry out specific types of depositions* (chapter 7). If we add to this what we know about the practice itself and the character of the places selected, the conclusion is that these 'multiple-deposition zones' thrived on collective memory. After all, there is no evidence for lasting markers, other than natural ones. It is unlikely that throwing an axe into a marsh leaves any trace, other than memory traces. To an outsider, there would be nothing to indicate that a particular marsh had a long-term history as a receptacle for objects. Still, the evidence shows that particular locations were preferred for such acts time and time again. Therefore, it is argued that depositional zones were first and foremost 'landscapes of memory'. The repeated use of former depositional locations must have been deliberate: such places were apparently meaningful and historical, and therefore probably seen as appropriate to the act.

How could this knowledge be transmitted? Internal and external place characteristics

The question that immediately comes to mind is: how was such remembrance possible? This question shows our underestimation of the transmission of knowledge in non-literate cultures. Historical and ethnographic sources make it clear that comparable natural sacrificial sites have equal long-term histories as those of the Bronze Age.[1] Myth and folk-tales appear to be central to such remembrance. Küchler (1987) and Rowlands (1993) both make the point that in the transmission of cultural knowledge there is a tension between constancy and variation. For memorizing particular swamps and rivers as historical depositional locations, people must draw on mental templates: a range of possible place-images and a range of possible interpretations of them (Rowlands 1993, 141). For recognizing historical depositional locations a combination of both internal and external place characteristics was relevant (Chapman 1998, 111-2. Internal place characteristics draw on memorized group histories, actual or mythical. Here we should think of a precize understanding of the local history of a place, for example 'knowing' that a particular place was the location of the first settlement of a group's ancestors. External place characteristics do not derive from the knowledge of specific histories of a place, but rather from cultural knowledge. By our cultural knowledge, we can recognize a regular church everywhere by its external characteristics, but apart from recognizing it as a church we often know nothing about the specific local history of the building. Now let us return to the discussion of natural places in the Bronze Age. We have seen that there was a general cultural preference for using watery places for deposition in north-west Europe. An inhabitant of another part of the southern Netherlands may well have recognized a major river or a swamp in the Meuse valley as a potential depositional place on external place characteristics alone. This is different, however, from knowing the exact zone in the river where the local people used to deposit axes (internal characteristics). Recognizing places as cultural categories draws on sterotyped place-images. It is probably impossible to grasp what exactly constituted such place-images, but it is for example remarkable that in large parts of north-west Europe the confluences of major rivers, or the zone where a smaller river flows into a larger one, seem to have been preferred for the deposition of swords (Wegner 1976; Torbrügge 1970/1971). Perhaps this was one of the characteristics of rivers that was culturally valued?

Physical characteristics as supporting memory

This brings us to the physical characteristics of these zones. Although they were probably not marked by human hands in a lasting way, the ones I recognized are associated with

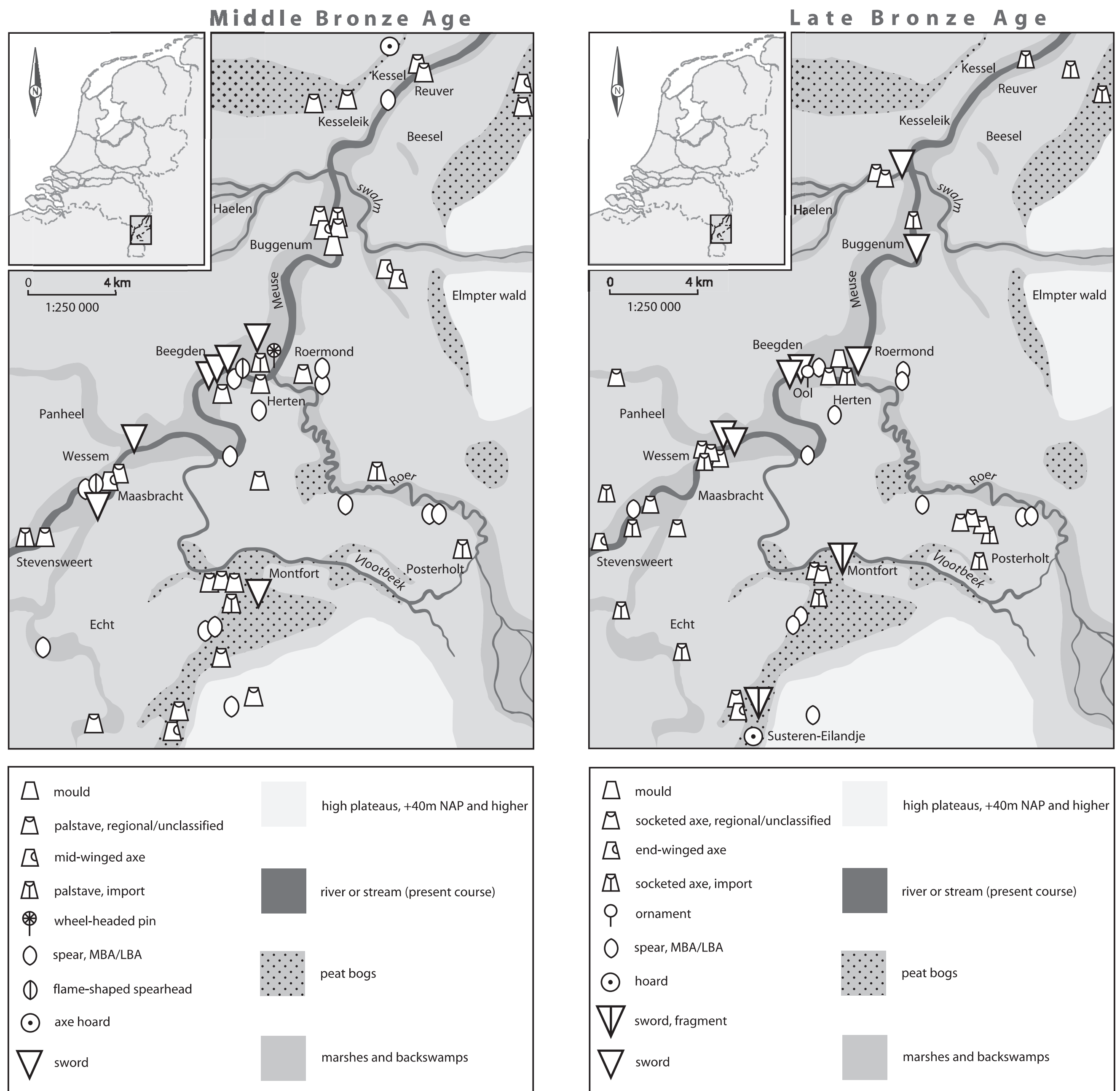

Figure 14.1. Deposition in the river Meuse and in the adjacent inland marshes in Midden-Limburg for the Middle and Late Bronze Age. Only contextualised finds are mapped.

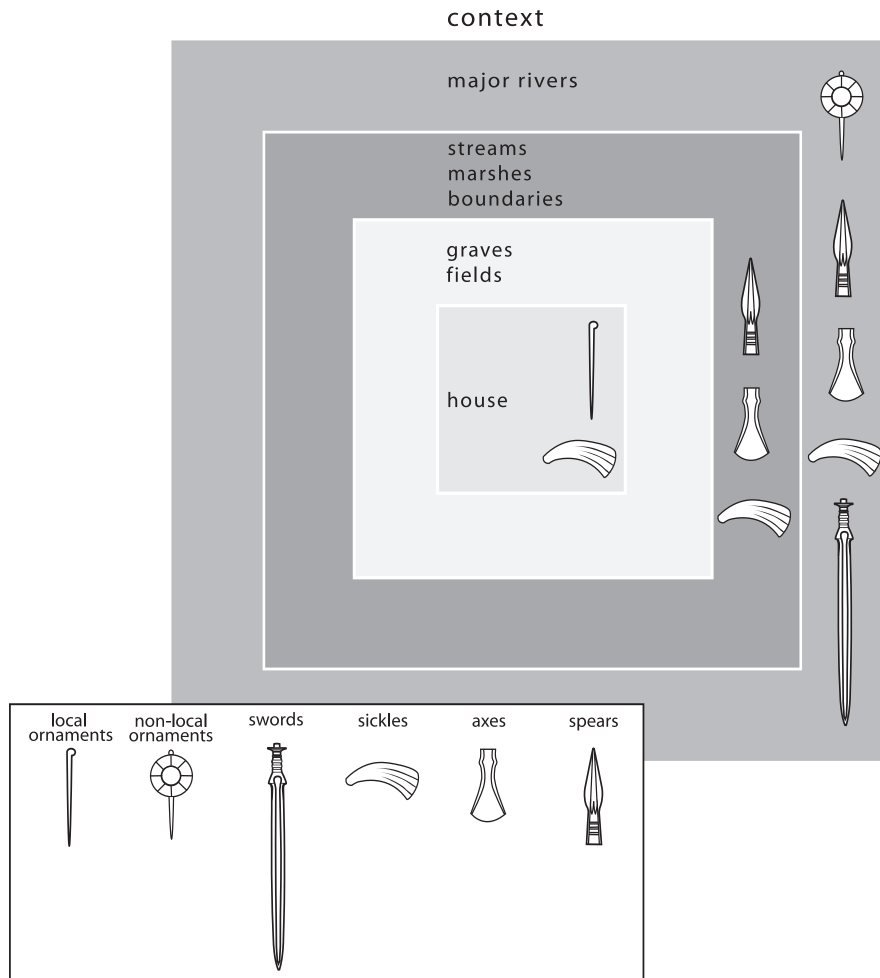

Figure 14.2. Deposition of different categories of objects from a perspective which takes the settlement to be the central point from which the surrounding world was ordered.

prominent natural features. The Echterbroek-Montfort swamps are enclosed by higher grounds on all sides. On one side (the southern), the dry, higher grounds are separated from the swamp by a steep elevation. In the landscape, this swamp must therefore have been a visually separated, enclosed area. The terrace marshes to the north (some of which also saw multiple deposition, as the one near Belfeld) were a relatively small strip of land, visually marked from a distance by the prominent ridge of the high terrace that represents its eastern boundary. For the river locations, we see similar features. The Waal near Nijmegen is recognizable from a distance for the high hills that mark this part of the river. The same goes for the Rhine near the Bijlandsche Waard: there is a prominent hill, flanking the river. In both cases the river itself also displays a prominent feature: the Bijlandsche Waard represents the bifurcation of the Rhine (present-day Oude Rijn and Boven Rijn). Near Nijmegen, a small stream flowed from the north into (the predecessor of) the river Waal.[2] In Roermond, a similar situation can be observed: here the river Roer flows into the Meuse (fig. 14.1). All this suggests that a multiple-deposition zone was probably recognized and retrieved by specific natural characteristics that made them stand out in the landscape.

'Zones' rather than 'places'

Having established the crucial role of memory in the re-use of depositional sites and charted how it could be transmitted, the following empirical observation seems easier to understand. There is hardly any evidence that depositional sites can be seen as *places*. The situation in the micro-region of 'Midden-Limburg' is a case in point (fig. 14.1). It represents an area where both river dredging and reclamation of

swamps have of old received relatively ample attention from amateur archaeologists. The remarkable observation with regard to the river finds is not that there are zones where no metalwork was found (which would be understandable given the differences in dredging intensivity, chapter 4; fig. 4.4), but rather that almost everywhere metalwork has been found. We are certainly not dealing with one cult place, centred around Roermond, but with a situation in which the river has almost everywhere been used by local communities for depositing prestigious metalwork. We are dealing with depositional *zones* rather than places. There is no evidence for a real ritual focus; it rather seems as if it was the entire river that mattered and not just a specific place in it. The concentration of metalwork near Roermond-Herten is at best a case of higher depositional intensity in a river zone where metalwork was deposited almost everywhere. This can be substantiated by comparing the river finds from Bronze Age swords with those of Late Iron Age swords, like Van Hoof (2000, 57-8; table 4.1) did. As they are comparable in size and character, it can be assumed that Bronze Age and Iron Age swords were subject to the same kinds of site-formation processes. Nevertheless, Iron Age swords are only known from one particular place in this same stretch, whilst Bronze Age swords have been found almost everywhere. For Late Iron Age depositional sites we thus seem to be dealing with just one *place* which served as a focus, in the Bronze Age with an entire river stretch. Excavations of Late Iron Age cult places in or near rivers corroborate this view. Sites like the Hertogswetering near Oss (Jansen *et al*. 2002) show that on such sites large amounts of deposited items are found in a relatively confined area. Some of these Late Iron Age cult sites continued to function as sanctuaries throughout the Roman Period (Roymans 1990, 87, 89).

At first sight this appreciation of landscape in terms of zones rather than places may be easily understandable because it seems simply impossible for societies to recall the exact place in a river where earlier depositions had been carried out. On the other hand, memory must have been equally faulty in the Iron Age: as far as we know, the Iron Age cult places near rivers did not have true lasting markers either. Moreover, Bronze Age river deposits from other regions also attest to the use of zones in the rivers rather than of focal places (for example: the Scheldt in west Belgium; Verlaeckt 1996; the Thames in South England: York 2002). The implication then, seems to be that in depositional practices Bronze Age perceptions of landscape were different from those of the Later Iron Age, even though there is a similarity in the preference for rivers. Valuing zones or environmental elements in a landscape rather than sites pinpointed on a map is widely known from non-modern societies (Hubert 1997, 11-2). Sacred sites are often wider areas of land, like natural outcrops, lakes or entire mountain-sides.

14.2.3 What does the difference between adjacent multiple-deposition zones imply?

The second question to be addressed now is what the existence of multiple-deposition zones meant. It may be evident that such a zone represents an important place in the collective history and memory of groups. It is harder to understand how *several* of such zones could exist in each other's vicinity. This seems to have been the case in 'Midden-Limburg', where the river Meuse and the inland swamp near Echt and Montfort in the Roerstreek are examples of such a situation (illustrated on fig. 14.1). We are dealing with adjacent deposition zones, in the river and on the land, that are different both in their physical characteristics, geographical position, as well as in the kind of practices carried out there.

The Echt-Montfort swamp is a particular, enclosed area, where throughout time dozens of axes and some spears were deposited. The objects are scattered over the swamp: there is a concentration on the northern fringes (Montfort), on the western fringe (Echt), and more in the heart of the swamp (Putbroek) (fig. 14.1). This implies that different groups were involved in depositional acts, possibly living on different sides of the swamps. This swamp does not seem to have been the exclusive deposition zone of one local residential group. The same applies to the river, a communal zone *par excellence*. For the river, due to dredging, less is recorded on concentrations within this stretch, but as dredge finds have been done both on the westernmost side (for example Heel and Panheel) and on the easternmost side of the Meuse valley (Herten and Roermond), it might be suggested that we see a similar use of the river by different groups, this time possibly involving quite different audiences than in the case of the Echt-Montfort swamp. For the river, we may think of groups living west of the Meuse versus groups living on the east side. The river depositions may also have taken place from boats. This river is not – like the inland swamp of Echt-Montfort – a peripheral, enclosed area, but rather a crucial landscape element, that probably stood at the heart of the daily lives of the people living on either side of the river (as a major transport route, but also as the major dividing element between groups living on either bank of the river). This river was known to all communities living in the Meuse valley, and must have been a common reference. By its very nature, such a major river seems much have been a shared, collective and a central element in people's perception of landscape to a much greater extent than an inland swamp.

There is also a difference between the kind of depositions that was carried out in both zones. Swords and spears are far more prominent in the river than in the Echt-Montfort swamp (13 contextualised sword finds and seven spear finds in the river against three sword finds – two of which no

more than a fragment – and five spear finds in the swamps and inland streams). These differences are interesting if we realize that the two zones are only separated by a few kilometres. We do not know exactly where on the east bank of the Meuse Bronze Age communities were living, but their settlements should probably be looked for on the fertile loamy parts of the middle terraces (personal communication L. Verhart). From most possible settlement locations, both the Echt-Montfort swamps and the river are near. It is therefore likely that the same local groups used both the river and the inland swamp for carrying out depositions. The pronounced martial character of the river depositions when compared to those from the swamp, implies that the different zones were seen as imbued with different meanings.

14.3 Deposition and the landscape of daily life

So far attention has been paid to the way in which selective deposition structured the land and how this structure was rooted in history. It was also argued that depositional practices are about valuing zones, or elements in the landscape rather than places, and how certain elements (rivers for example) had different connotations from others. All this is about understanding landscape from its constituting elements ('rivers', 'dry land' or 'swamps') and not from a dwelling perspective which takes the routines of daily life of an average local group as central to the interpretation of landscape (cf. Ingold 1993). It will now be argued that if we consider the spatial information on bronze deposits from such a perspective, more can be said on the identity of depositional zones.

14.3.1 Depositional zones as remote and peripheral areas

Our starting point should be the general assumption that the landscape of daily life is understood from the point of view of the places that are most central to one's life. In the perception of a household, it seems reasonable to assume that their dwelling area and the surrounding agricultural fields and pastures were the central point from which the surrounding world was ordered (Chapman 1998, 112-3). Fig. 14.2 brings this out by seeing the house, farmyard and agrarian land as the centre of the world of daily existence. Agrarian settlements are located on relatively high and dry areas, with fields and pastures, but also barrows and urnfields. In the southern Netherlands, wet, marshy areas and stream valleys are almost everywhere located in the vicinity of settlements. In the sandy core area, settlements are found on sand ridges that are intersected or ringed by marshy streams and sometimes larger swamps. In the clayey river area, they were situated on crevasse sediment or alluvial banks, with streams, rivers or their marshy backswamps surrounded. In the Meuse valley, settlements were generally located on extensive terraces, which are also intersected by smaller streams and marked by extensive swamps near terrace ridges. In the Meuse valley and the central river area, most settlements were near to a major river (outer ring on fig. 14.2). Only the central part of the southern Netherlands is remote from any major river. The outer ring of fig. 14.2 therefore simply does simply not exist in those areas. Interestingly, depositions typical for major rivers like swords are virtually absent here as well.

If we now try to order the evidence of bronze deposits according to context (e.g. farmyard, river, stream valley, inland swamp), type, and origin/affiliations (local or supra-regional styles) then we arrive at the picture as shown in fig. 14.2. Sickles are the only artefact that is found on all contexts. On farmyards only relatively simple tools and ornaments in local or indistinctive styles are found. In and around barrows or in other dry locations (agricultural fields/pastures?) bronzes are generally absent, whereas these were placed in the surrounding streams and marshes: numerous axes and spears are known from such contexts. The most valuable items are to be found in the major rivers: numerous swords and ornaments of supra-regional styles, as well as axes and spears. The objects with the most outspoken supra-regional character are thus to be found in the zones that are relatively the most remote from the dwelling area of the local group. At the same time these rivers have the special quality of representing the main connection between the local world and those of groups much further away.

Perceived from the perspective of everyday life the conclusion is that depositional locations are not to be found in a direct relation to the areas where that life took place. Only farmyards can sometimes function as foci for deposition, but more regular and lavish depositions took place in parts of the landscape that are 'remote' and 'peripheral' from this point of view.

14.3.2 Depositional zones as natural, unaltered places

Above, depositional locations were approached in a negative way. Emphasis was laid on their peripheral position within the landscape of agrarian life. This does not recognize that they have qualities of their own. Instead of being peripheral, they are better characterized as being shaped by other forces than human ones. They are literally uncultivated: as far as we know, there were no lasting human markers, and there were no man-made cult places. This is true for most societies of the north-west European Bronze Age (Harding 2000, 309). One of the few exceptions seems to be the small ritual building that was found in the peat bog near Bargeroosterveld in the northern Netherlands (Waterbolk/Van Zeist 1961). Although hoards have been found in the vicinity there is no evidence that this building was itself a place for metalwork depositions (Butler 1961a).

Depositional zones were 'natural' ones. In this sense, 'nature' does not imply that they had an existence outside 'culture'. Ingold (1992; 2000, chapter 4) gives convincing ethnographic examples of 'natural, unaltered' zones around cultivated ones, which were nevertheless perceived as entirely cultural by the inhabitants (populated with spirits). 'Nature' is always a social construct and the ways in which it is conceptualised are culturally specific (Descola/Pálsson 1996, 15). For archaeologists, who do not have access to knowledge of indigenous narratives on the uncultivated zones in the land, it is perhaps better to avoid the concept entirely. However, a contrast between the cultivated and the uncultivated land, must have mattered, since it comes to the fore in the specific selection of objects deposited in the peripheral, natural zones surrounding the cultivated land. These are first and foremost axes, mostly displaying clear traces of an intensive use-life. These tools of cultivation, however, are clearly absent from cultivated places (in farmsteads or in barrows, chapter 13). On the contrary, they were deposited in locations that were as a rule not cultivated, and that do not seem to be related in any way to the life the axe had led (for example, they were not deposited in the locations of the forest where wood was cut). What we seem to observe therefore is a deliberate differentiation and contrasting of zones in the landscape played out in selective deposition.

To this we should add that these depositional zones were not just 'natural': there is a clear preference for locations that are wet. This preference dates from long before the Bronze Age. The earliest examples known from the study region date from the Early Neolithic (chapter 5). Originally it might have been rooted in animistic hunter-gatherer ideologies about communication with the spirits of nature (Louwe Kooijmans 2001). We can only guess at the motivations for the preference for watery places in the case of our Bronze Age farmers, but it is clear that the preference for watery places increased throughout the Bronze Age: deposits became increasingly water-bound since the Middle Bronze Age A (chapter 6). This is not just true for the southern Netherlands, but for large parts of Europe as well (Bradley 1990). It has therefore often been suggested that this significance of watery locations is based on widely shared religious beliefs. Whatever the precise religious motivations may have been, the presence of water itself may have been another quality that gave these depositional zones their significance (Richards 1996, 317). The qualities for which water was valued may be various (purity, pollution, regeneration, fertility; see Douglas 1994, 162), and probably inaccessible for archaeological studies. What archaeology does show, however, is that water was of elemental significance for the selection of locations for deposition.

14.4 Depositional zones in a social landscape

In discussing depositional locations from a dwelling perspective, an important element is still missing out. Depositional zones were approached from the world-view of a hypothetical household, but what is persistently missing in this view is the presence of other people. In this section, it will be argued that there is another important quality to zones that were used for depositions: they represent *boundaries*, not only between social groups, but between people and supernatural entities as well. Although it may seem odd to treat social groups and supernatural entities under the same heading, ethnographic studies provide arguments that the supernatural and the living society are often seen as inextricably related and representing society at large (Bazelmans 1999, 67).

Depositional zones are not just watery, natural places. In a very physical way they all have the quality of being transitional zones in the landscape. Fig. 14.3 is a reconstruction of settlement on the sandy cover sand region of the interior part of the region. It shows the position of houses, fields and graves (based on Theunissen 1999) and the locations where we find bronzes: in the numerous marshy stream valleys in between. With regard to the stream valleys, extensive swamps and the major rivers, their transitional character is obvious. The same, however, can be suggested for some of the dry locations mentioned here. In the case of the hills of Arnhem, Beek (municipality of Bergh), and Nijmegen, the dry deposits tend to be located near the steep slopes of the ice-pushed ridge. Large swamps are barriers in the land that one has to cross. In some cases their passage might even have been difficult and risky.

Wet zones as dividing and linking elements in the social landscape

Since watery zones provide natural, clear-cut divisions of the inhabitable land, it is generally assumed that they represented social boundaries. As transitional zones, however, their character is ambiguous. Inhabitants of any micro-region may perceive streams, rivers or swamps as meaningful physical and social boundaries (cf. fig. 14.3). At the same time, they are unbounded themselves. We may ask ourselves what exactly was seen as the limiting, bounding part of the line, what was seen as belonging to 'us' and to 'them'? As highlighted in section 14.2, we have examples of swamps and rivers where objects were deposited on either side of their extension, that is, by groups living on different parts of it: the Echt-Montfort swamp, and deposits on either bank of the river Meuse. These wet zones, lacking any visible marker within, were probably contested and differently interpreted by groups living on their fringes.

Streams and rivers, however, are not only a dividing element in the landscape, they provide social links as well.

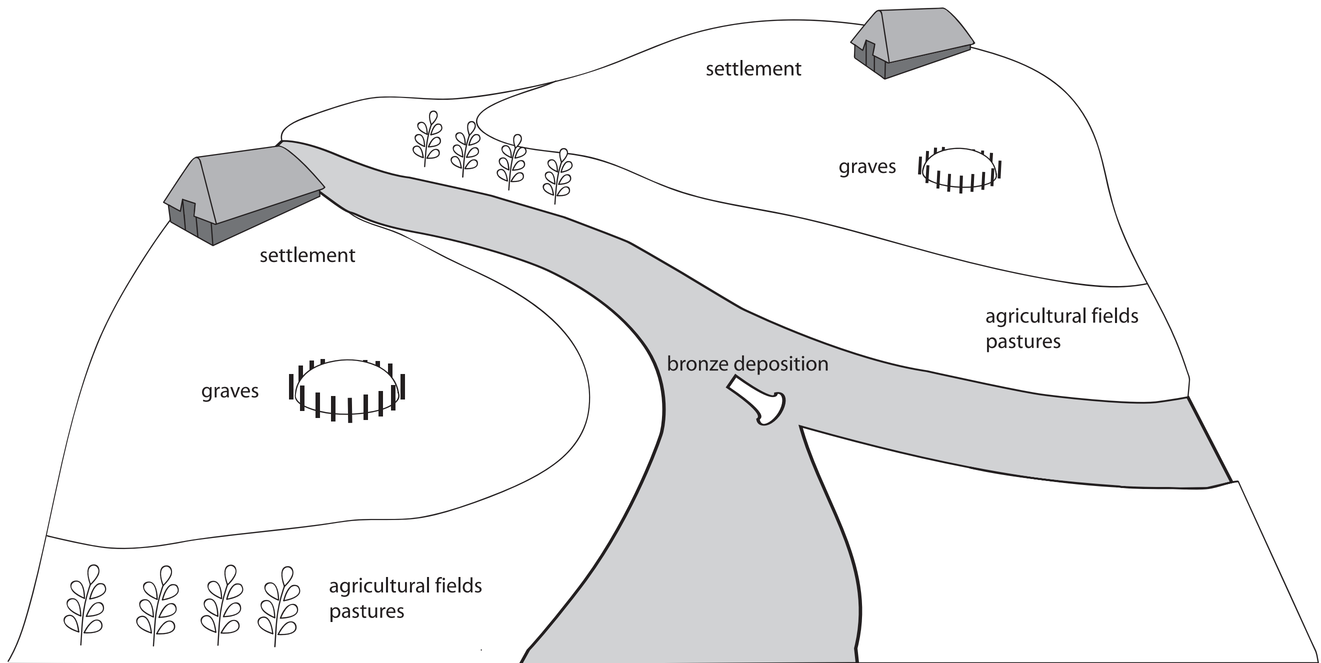

Figure 14.3. Simplified picture showing the cultivated Bronze Age landscape of the sandy areas in the central part of the study region and the location where bronze deposition took place.

The local groups living near streams, and especially major rivers, must have realized that those streams came from somewhere and went somewhere else. They must have been aware that the part of the river they knew intimately knew, was only part of a much more encompassing world that was not known by experience, but only in folk-tales and myth. A major river like the Meuse was a shared point of reference both for people living upstream and for people living many kilometres downstream. After all, the rivers must have been the major transport route by which the imported metalwork was brought to them from far. Helms (1993) has shown how knowledge of places far away can be a powerful authoritative resource. The entire Bronze Age period provides evidence that objects from far away were locally appropriated and valued. Unless one envisages regular journeys over land, which should have taken years, the most likely way in which such foreign objects entered a region in the southern Netherlands is via the major rivers. We shall never know how a local group perceived the world they lived in, but I think that in any cosmological map the rivers must have been seen as the threads connecting the own group with the outer world (Needham in Oliveira Jorge 1998, 186). Perhaps this was one of the reasons why the metalwork that had the most outspoken non-local and supra-regional characteristics was preferably deposited in just these major rivers (14.3.1, fig. 14.2).

14.5 Depositional zones in a cosmological landscape

14.5.1 Wet zones as cosmological boundaries

Wet places are not only boundaries between people: they may also have been regarded as boundaries between worlds. They 'seal off' the invisible parts of the world: the muddy bottoms of streams and rivers, the land underneath a marsh. The sediment-rich streams and rivers of the southern Netherlands are mostly turbid and not transparent. This applies particularly to swamps, where water plants often conceal the watery component. Throwing a gold-glimmering bronze axe into such a place must have been an act whereby the onlookers really got the impression that the object disappeared completely. Sunk to the bottom of a marsh, it could no longer be seen or retrieved anymore.

The theory that these watery zones were thus in some way also regarded as cosmological boundaries would be in line with what the anthropologist Douglas (1994) sees as vital to the nature of boundaries: their transgression is both powerful and dangerous. Applying Turner's terminology, they might well have been perceived as 'liminal' places. It is of particular interest that both Douglas and Turner emphasize that the transgression of such boundaries is often circumscribed and should be maintained with ritual action. This seems in line with some characteristics of depositional practices that were summed up above: the idea that they thrive on specialized

knowledge and memory, their qualities as areas shaped by forces outside human powers in a world that became increasingly defined by the latter and their ambiguity in the social landscape.

Although impossible to prove, it might not be too far-fetched that deposition was ultimately related to a belief in an 'under-world'. Such a belief is widespread among many religions (Bradley 2000, 28-32). If such a world was thought to exist, then the marshes and rivers might have been seen as the openings and gaps in the land by which to approach it, or to communicate with it. I do not claim that the evidence of object depositions shows that such a belief in an under-world existed (although such a statement has recently been made by Randsborg 1995). What is noteworthy, however, is the following characteristic of depositional practices in our region recognized in chapter 10: objects were placed in marshes or streams in undamaged condition. Sometimes they were even resharpened as if for use (chapter 10). This is in line with the way in which the object was treated during its life of use and circulation, and it can be taken as an indication that depositing an object was not envisaged as destruction, but more as a final form of exchange, this time possibly being perceived as exchange between people and supernatural beings. For the participants, however, deposition practically represented a final loss, and whether or not a belief in sacrifice to the supernatural was relevant, the characteristics of wet places may at least have contributed to the dramatic impact of the act of deposition: the total disappearance of an object that was literally 'taken up' by the land.

14.5.2 Deposition in watery places: gifts to gods?

Now that a parallel has been drawn between deposition and exchange, a more detailed discussion of the way in which these places were conceptualised becomes inevitable. In this book I have so far been reluctant to suggest that swamps or rivers were seen as the dwelling places of particular gods or spirits. In chapter 2 we have seen that this idea has been forwarded by many authors, steered by parallels with historical examples of object depositions in watery contexts. I then argued that this parallelism is one of the ways in which scholars try to cope with the irrationality of metalwork deposition. Indeed, there are many historical examples illustrating that watery places were seen as the residences of deities or even as deities themselves (Wegner 1976, 100-2). The closest ones in time are the Germanic and Celtic sources. Roymans (1990, 89) gives the example of the Gallic king Viridomarus who claimed descent from the river Rhine (3rd century BC). An example of particular interest for the present study is the historical and archaeological evidence for a Roman sanctuary dedicated to the goddess *Rura* on the bank opposite the place where the river Roer discharges into the Meuse, near Roermond. *Rura* is a personification of the river Roer (Roymans 1990, 89). The link between this historically known sanctuary and river deposits seems obvious. In the Late Iron Age, several La Tène swords were deposited in this part of the river. The same happened hundreds of years earlier. Does this imply that the Bronze Age depositions should also be considered as votive offerings to a river deity? In chapter 2 it was already argued that we should be very cautious in making such an argument for methodological reasons. Having now assessed the peculiarities of Bronze Age depositions, new objections can be raised.

Objection one: unique characteristics of Bronze Age deposition

Bronze Age metalwork deposition reveals a system of selective deposition: specific items were deposited in specific kinds of places only. In historical sources there is nothing to indicate that a similar system was at work. Rather, they inform us of undifferentiated mass depositions of wealth at natural or man-made sanctuaries. On top of that, we have seen that the Bronze Age depositions seem to be aimed at zones rather than places. This is quite unlike the situation in the Late Iron Age, where depositions indeed seem to have focussed on one particular place in the river (section 14.2.2). It was remarked that sword depositions from the Late Iron Age indeed all came from one place in the river Meuse near Roermond, whereas the Bronze Age swords come from an extensive zone in the river, including Roermond.

Objection two: changes in the practice of deposition itself

Using historical sources as parallels for practices which took place hundreds of years earlier suggest a long-term stability in religious ideas. This, however, does not seem justified by the evidence itself. First of all, metalwork deposition in watery places almost totally disappears after the Late Bronze Age to re-emerge only in the last centuries of the Late Iron Age. Although there seems to be some continuity in the outline of the practice (an emphasis on swords and a preference for placing these in rivers), it is hard to conceive that Late Iron Age sword depositions elaborated on ideas which had been extinct for over 600 years. Even if this were possible, it was not until the Middle Neolithic that deposition of valuables really became a socially significant practice (chapter 5). This means that it came into being at a time when people were exploring the landscape within an extended broad-spectrum economy, in which hunting/gathering views probably mattered side by side with agrarian notions. Although this should be investigated more fully, it may well have been the case that deposition originated from an animistic ideology (Verpoorte 2000). We have been able to trace it throughout time, and have seen it flourish and further develop with the introduction of truly agrarian

societies in the Bronze Age during periods when the land became an increasingly cultural landscape. For Celtic and Germanic societies, there is evidence that more or less personified gods were venerated. Godelier (1999), however, remarks that among hunter-gatherer societies such concepts of gods are not general. Ebbesen (1993) supposes that for the earliest Neolithic deposits in Denmark we might be dealing with offerings made to 'spirits of nature' rather than to such personified gods (see also: Ebbesen 1993; Koch 1998; Louwe Kooijmans 2001). Randsborg (1995) argues that the introduction of the Celtic-Germanic personified gods did not take place until the Iron Age, and replaced a religion that centered around the veneration of ancestral beings. Man-made rectangular cult places like *Viereckschanzen* are in his view the places where these new personified gods were venerated. The earliest *Viereckschanze*-like cult place from the southern Netherlands, the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age cult place from Nijmegen-Kops Plateau, however, seems directly to have been associated with an urnfield and the burial ritual taking place there and with ancestral burial monuments (Fontijn/Cuijpers 1998/1999; Fontijn 2002). There is no reason at all to suggest that such a 'new' cult place had anything to do with the veneration of a new type of god. Summing up, we can say that the extremely long history and the fundamental societal and ideological changes that took place in the course of it should stop us from transferring ideas from the proto-historical Celtic/Germanic world to societies of the Bronze Age. Through this time, religious ideas themselves were probably in a state of flux, and it seems unwise to project Celtic/Germanic gods back to earlier times, given the differences in the depositional practices.

Conclusion

It is not likely that a one-to-one continuity existed between the Celtic/Germanic sacrifices to personified gods and Bronze Age object depositions. At a European level, however, it is likely that the roots of Celtic/Germanic sacrificial practices of metalwork deposition should be looked for in Bronze Age depositions. The presence of a system of selective deposition for the Bronze Age suggests that particular places held particular identities. Whether or not these were seen as associated with different religious entities, it at least indicates that special parts of the land were seen as imbued with different qualities. Pálsson (1996) mentions a study by Gurevich on the Scandinavian Middle Ages that is informative in this respect. From ancient Scandinavian cosmologies Gurevich infers that these people regarded the land and its owners as one, and the land acquired its qualities from the latter and vice versa. 'A man was closely and indissolubly linked with the land he cultivated; he saw in the land a prolongation of his own nature. And the fact that a man was thus personally linked with his possessions found reflection in a general awareness of the indivisibility of the world of men and the world of nature' (Gurevich 1992, 178). Such a general notion of linking up people and land is interesting for the present study: as we have seen throughout the book, one of the categories of objects deposited in the land were personal valuables (ornaments, weapons). Assuming a more mutual relationship between people, personhood and the land of the kind described by Gurevich would make more sense of the deposition of the paraphernalia of personhood in natural places.

14.6 Deposition and cultural attitudes towards the land

The discussion on cosmology brings us to a more fundamental point. Whatever the social aspects of the practice of deposition, the practice exists in the first place because placing objects into the ground was considered an act that made sense in people's understanding of the world. Ultimately, it must have been rooted in general religious beliefs. There is no claim here that we can have access to such beliefs, but there is one point that we should take further: the cultural practice of placing objects into the land must somehow be related to an understanding of the land itself.

14.6.1 Exploitative and communalist attitudes

Recently, anthropological studies have revived the discussion on the cultural attitude towards the land. Pálsson (1996), for example, distinguishes between the following attitudes: the orientalist attitude and the communalist one. An orientalist attitude towards the land is about domesticating and exploiting the land. The communalist attitude is one that draws on a generalized reciprocity between people and land: the environment is a 'giving environment', with which people maintain reciprocal relations. It rejects the notion of a separation between humans and the natural world. As Brück (1999, 336) has recently stated, the communalist attitude is based on assumptions that special relationships are realized between people and the environment. She argues that the fact that depositional practices existed shows that the Bronze Age attitude towards land was 'communalist' rather than exploitative. There is something to be said for her view. After all, what we have recognized is a more than 2000-year-old tradition of placing valuables in the land. Several times it was argued that objects were placed in the land in neat, sometimes splendid, condition. There is no indication at all for deposition implying the ultimate end of the object itself. It is only the circulation among human beings that is terminated by it. Earlier on in this chapter it was already remarked that deposition has in fact all the characteristics of objects in formal gift exchanges. Regardless of the way in which the depositional location was

perceived: would it be too far-fetched to suggest that this implies that deposition itself was seen as a form of 'giving' to the land as was done earlier? After all, one of the most crucial elements in the life of deposited objects was a life-path of exchange itself. Deposition might therefore be seen as the ultimate form of exchange: the form that results into ultimate inalienability. Deposition, then, would come close to a form of sacrifice. As a matter of fact, literature on sacrifice in ancient society and anthropology generally shows that the concept of a gift to the gods, expectations on reciprocity and sacrifice largely overlap (Burkert 1996, 149-55).

14.6.2 Deposition and notions on reciprocal relations with the land

The long-term and widely-shared tradition of deliberately placing valued metalwork into the land will undoubtedly have been understood differently from time to time and place to place. This need not rule out that it was on the whole structured by a general belief that it served to maintain reciprocal, mutual relations with the land. Of great interest is the study of the anthropologist De Coppet (1985) who showed that in non-modern society it is not simply people who own land, but the land itself is ultimately seen as an ancestral creation, to which the living community only owes its existence. In his terms 'land owns people', just as much as people own land. Meillassoux in Bradley 1984) has remarked that this is generally true for agrarian societies who after all build their own existence on the activities of their forebears: the land these reclaimed and made fertile, the living areas they created. For the Bronze Age, we can at any rate state that the profound and widely-distributed traditions of re-using and reclaiming ancestral burials (barrows; urn-fields), for which our area yields so much evidence, testifies to a general tradition of veneration and valoration of ancestors, and in its turn, this reminds of both De Coppet's and Meillassoux' theory. Bringing the discussion back to the practice of deposition we can say that in world-views in which the notion of land as an ancestral entity is so important, a notion of sacrifice to and exchange with 'the land' may well have had a place. It would tally with the often-held view that sacrifice itself is a feature of agrarian societies rather than anything else (Jonathan Smith, check!!).

Admittedly, the above is hard to test and run the risk of being essentialist. What I still prefer to maintain, however, is the idea that deposition has something to do with notions on reciprocal relations with the land, Pálsson's 'communalist' attitude towards the land. However, contrary to Brück (1999), I would refrain from labelling 'Bronze Age attitudes towards the land' solely under this heading for the following reason. Apart from the 'odd' deposits of valuable metalwork in watery places, we also have evidence on Bronze Age homesteads, reclamations and agrarian practices which seem to be of an exploitative, 'orientalist' nature rather than anything else. For the southern Netherlands, the Bronze Age heralds the first large-scale opening-up of the landscape. There is, for example, evidence that by the Early Iron Age large heath landscapes existed in the southern Netherlands (De Kort 2002). The farmyards, the fields and the agri-cultural practices of the mature Bronze Age are generally felt to have some familiarity with farmer's life as it existed in Europe before the Industrial Revolution (Brück 1999, 329). Similarly, it might be this 'feeling of familiarity' that makes Vandkilde (1996, 262) argue that the domestic in the Bronze Age is basically the non-ritual domain that represents true images of the social reality.

14.6.3 Depositions and the logic of taking and giving

Equating attitudes towards the cultivated environment as familiar and rational, while labelling those towards the uncultivated as ritual and irrational does not help us any further. In her attempt to resolve this dichotomy, Brück (1999) argues that the argument that 'odd' deposits were placed on Bronze Age farmsteads shows that these farm-steads were not associated with a rationality that is ours, in spite of their superficial similarities with modern farmer's attitudes. Therefore, she apparently concludes that Bronze Age attitudes towards the land were entirely 'communalist' and as such entirely different from our own. As we have seen in chapter 7, 'odd' deposits are also attested for farm-yards in the southern Netherlands, and we might therefore be inclined to adopt Brück's view for our region. In my view, however, the evidence we have on the practice of object deposition itself suggests a more nuanced view. As we have seen, depositions were carried out in such a way that they reflect a contrast between the cultivated and the natural zones in the landscape (see fig. 14.2 and fig. 14.3). True, metalwork was sometimes deposited at or near farmyards or in or near barrows, but this stands in striking contrast to the overwhelming majority of metalwork that was placed in rivers and marshes. This may again be used as an argument in support of the old theory which contrasts between 'familiar', 'rational' agrarian places in the landscape, and the 'odd, ritual' zones in rivers and marshes. In my view, however, the evidence provides arguments for links between these areas as well: the 'familiar' evidence on Bronze Age farming settlements seems to have been deliberately linked to the evidence on the 'odd' deposits in watery places. This is most clear for the most frequent type of deposition, that of axes. I argued that most deposited axes show traces of an intensive (agrarian) use-life, but that their deposition seems to have been kept outside farmyards and graves (chapter 13). They seem to have been preferably deposited in the watery places, generally outside those locations where they had been put to use. The deposited axes thus seem to have linked the

'cultivated' and the 'uncultivated' domain. If we would phrase it in terms of the traditional nature-culture dichotomy, then the axe is the tool with which 'nature' was transformed into 'culture'. But the same tool was itself placed into locations that are themselves uncultivated. Some sort of reversal of contexts seems to have mattered, whereby the cultivated and the uncultivated land were meaningfully integrated in such an act. If we would phrase this in the terms used by Pálsson (1996) then we have evidence of an 'orientalist' exploitation and domestication of land that is at the same time accompanied by a more mutual 'giving-back' attitude witnessed in the axe deposition. A similar example of taking-and-giving in deposition would be Louwe Kooijmans' recent re-interpretation of the antler tool finds in the Neolithic flint mines of Rijckholt, province of Dutch Limburg. He argues that the huge numbers of antler picks found in the mining shafts cannot have been lost or temporarily stored items. In his view, it would fit the data more to think of them as deliberately deposited tools. If he is right about this, then this would be another example in which the object that was used to 'take' from the land and 'transform' it, is finally 'given back' to it (Louwe Kooijmans 2001).

14.7 Depositional practices and the construction of communities

We have now charted several aspects of the identity of depositional zones – historical, social, cosmological – but so far we have focussed too much on the identity of places themselves. Participants carrying out a deposition do not only construct the identity of such a place. In carrying out a deposition they also define themselves by it as a sacrificial community.

Places in the landscape and the construction of communities

In his study on late prehistoric societies in the southern Netherlands, Gerritsen (2001) has recently shown how different practices carried out in the landscape were related to the construction of communities. The best example are perhaps urnfields: these are the communal burial grounds of several individual households that in daily life lived dispersed across the land. In an urnfield, the deceased is redefined as a member of a larger community including not only his own household, but others as well. By burying the dead of dispersed groups into the same cemetery, a sense of communality was expressed that did not come to the fore in other aspects. By using the urnfield, people defined themselves as a burial community.

Gerritsen argues that one individual can at the same time be a member of quite different communities like a household, an age group spanning several households or a burial community. A community is a symbolic construction: it is about creating insiders and outsiders. Membership is based on practices, knowledge and symbols by which a group distinguishes itself from others (Gerritsen 2001, 123-4). One of the valuable points made by Gerritsen is that he was able to show how the construction of communities was often tied up with specific practices carried out in the land (for example, the urnfield).

Gerritsen did not discuss the evidence of depositional places, although it must be assumed that here, too, special collective practices were carried out and hence possibly a sense of community was derived from it. There are arguments, however, to suppose that such 'sacrificial communities' were constructed in a different manner and occupied with quite different ideas. To start with the latter: it is intriguing to see that some of the ideas and values which must have mattered there seem to be in total opposition to those emphasized by burial communities in urnfields. In chapters 11 and 12 it was for example concluded that objects related to martial identities are persistently missing in deposition in burials, but figure amply in depositions carried out in watery natural places. The same applies to ornaments that refer outspokenly to supra-regional appearances. These must have been worn and used by local communities living in the southern Netherlands. Nevertheless, they too seem to have been kept out of urnfields but were placed in major rivers, marshes or remarkable 'in-between' places (the example of the Lutlommel hoard, chapter 12). Simple and locally shaped ornaments, on the other hand, were deposited in urnfields, and, as we saw, their meanings were idiosyncratic to the local community involved (chapter 12). Apparently, different places had different meanings. Rivers and marshes were associated with martiality, whereas burials were not. Selective deposition was one way in which this was played out.

Phenomenal and imaginary landscapes

We should not make the mistake of thinking that we have now laid bare a mere symbolic system of places. There is also a profound difference in the way the identity of these places was defined. Barrows, cemeteries, fields, houses or farmyards: they are all elements in a phenomenal, visible landscape. In the case of barrows and urnfields, we are dealing with a ritual act, the result of which was clearly meant to be seen by a larger group than the participants alone. Some barrows were clearly built in large sizes to impress onlookers, others drew attention by elaborate peripheral post structures. They were visible signs in the landscape significant to one's own group as well as to others. Here, visibility was an authoritative resource; it was the result of a deliberate social strategy.

Throughout this chapter it was argued that all this was different for depositions in natural places. Here, it is only the act of deposition itself which mattered and not its

visible result. The fact that natural places were repeatedly visited through time implies that the authoritative resource here was memory, not visibility. However, as a social strategy, a practice thriving on memory alone is much more vulnerable to manipulation. Participants may claim to visit a place where their ancestors did the same as they are planning to do, but it is impossible to check this. As a matter of fact, archaeology shows that repeated use of the same location is not a matter of re-using a particular place; rather, the deposited objects always show a clustering in a spatially circumscribed zone. Although natural places are phenomenal just like barrows or urnfields are, their meaning as sacrificial sites is not: they only exist in practice and in collective memory. Deposition relates more to an 'imaginary' than to a phenomenal landscape (cf. Hirsch 1995; Gerritsen 2001, 125).

Depositions and the construction of sacrificial communities

The implication of this is that knowledge of the zones where earlier depositions took place must have been an important social resource, to use Giddens' phrasing (Giddens 1984, 33, 373 check). The knowledge of what took place in the remote locations in the landscape must have been an essential element in the history of the local group as transmitted from generation to generation. This becomes particularly interesting if we realize that such a collective memory was not only about where to deposit objects, but also about where to deposit a specific kind of object (cf. the difference between adjacent multiple-deposition zones: weaponry in the river and axes in the swamps, section 14.1). The point made here is that such knowledge is about knowing 'the proper way to do things', and knowing (or claiming to know!) the right places to deposit things might have functioned to create insiders and thus to define a 'sacrificial community'. We are in no position to see which selection of people was involved in such practices (a household, an urnfield group, a larger corporate group?), but it is likely that the community formed was not just 'real', but 'imagined' as well. It was apparently vital to re-enact past events, to do things in the same ways as one's (real or claimed) forebears did.

Selective deposition and 'keeping things apart'

One of the most puzzling aspects is the contrast in the ideas and values mattering to burial communities versus sacrificial communities, particularly in the Late Bronze Age. The ideology of urnfields largely denies differences in social power, whilst the evidence from metalwork strongly suggests that such differences existed. We know that weaponry was widely in use, and certain people must have managed long-distance exchange networks, claiming membership to far-flung communities by adhering to non-local imagery (chapter 11 and 12). The paraphernalia of such statuses and their obvious high appreciation may well have been considered ambiguous, at odds with the specific local identity and ideals on collectivity and solidarity between the members of the local group. Selective deposition may have been an attitude to deal with such conflicting ideas and values. It might be ventured that this ambiguity was one of the reasons why weapons and special ornaments were deposited in such a way that they disappeared for ever without a recognizable trace. The preference for remote places which were not yet altered by human hands may also relate to this. Would it be a coincidence that such places are unbounded and ambiguous like the objects placed in them?

14.8 Conclusion

Even after such a lengthy discussion it remains extremely difficult to understand the landscape of deposition. Summing up, the following points have been made.

1. Selective deposition reflects a structured cultural understanding of the land, in which different places and zones had different and possibly even conflicting meanings (for example, weapon deposition sites and the collective, egalitarian-shaped urnfields).
2. The landscape of deposition is primarily a landscape thriving on collective memory. In contrast to other structuring elements, like barrows or settlements, it should primarily be understood as an imaginary rather than a phenomenal landscape. For multiple-deposition zones, we may think of gatherings of a specific selection of people – a sacrificial community – knowing how, where and why to act.
3. From the point of view of the landscape of agrarian daily life, depositional places are generally remote and peripheral ones. They are unaltered 'natural' and predominantly watery places, zones rather than places. Specific environments in the landscape, like stretches of rivers extending for several kilometres and extensive zones in marshes repeatedly saw metalwork deposition. Clear focus points ('cult places') are lacking. This makes it appropriate to speak of the existence of entire 'sacrificial landscapes'.
4. Socially and cosmologically, depositional places are ambiguous ones, being both dividing and linking elements in the land.
5. Since specific types of objects seem preferably to have been placed in specific types of environments (swords in rivers), such places must have been considered to have been imbued with a specific identity. The idea of the land as being imbued with specific (personal) qualities seems to make some sense, as does the idea that deposition was perceived as some kind of 'giving', a definite form of

exchange. In terms of the attitude towards the land, depositions of agrarian tools (axes) in uncultivated places may even reflect an ideology of reciprocity with the land. It is one step too far, however, to specify this further and claim that depositional places were the residences of personified gods similar to what we know from much younger historical sources on Germanic/Celtic societies.

notes

1 See Mulk 1997 for an example from the Saami, the indigenous people from the northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and north-west Russia.

2 The giant *Bombenkopfnadel* of type Ockstadt in Oosterhout was probably found in the remnants of this stream. See chapter 8, section 8.6.2.