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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

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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')

contents

15 Final reflections: what is selective deposition and what does it bring about?

15.1 Introduction

Three questions were central to this book. The first was whether deliberate deposition of metalwork took place. Our review of the evidence showed that for all periods studied at least 50 % of the metalwork finds, but probably much more, were intentional deposits (chapter 10).

The second question was about the structure of depositional practices. The answer is that we are indeed dealing with selective deposition. Specific objects, with specific types of cultural biographies ended up in particular places in the landscape and not in others. In chapter 10, the structure of selective deposition was set out. It proved to be a rigidly structured and profoundly traditional practice. Burials, farmyards and all sorts of natural places (major rivers, stream valleys, peat bogs, hoards on dry land) proved to be places where specific objects ended up. It was argued that the distinction between two kinds of valuables mattered: those related to the construction of specific kinds of personhood (ornaments, weaponry) and valuables related to communal identities (axes in particular). Chapters 11 to 13 discussed the evidence of their biographies in detail. Martiality was recognized as a specific theme to be played out in deposition. In the case of deposition of paraphernalia of personal identities a further distinction was recognized between local and non-local identities (chapter 12). Deposition of axes and other tools proved to be more complex. A distinction was recognized between cases in which axe deposition was primarily related to its life as general exchange item and to depositions of axes related to an intensive use-life.

The third question was how to make sense of these patterns of selective deposition. Why did different types of deposition exist side by side? Since this question can only be answered after a review of all separate themes, dealt with from the point of view of relations between people and objects (chapter 11 to 13), and the relations between people and land (chapter 14), it is only now that we can turn to this last research question. It may be the most intriguing one, it is also the most difficult one to deal with. The point made here will be that we are dealing with attitudes towards objects and land that are alien to us, and hardly have counterparts in ethnography or history. An attempt is presented here to make at least *some* sense of them. It will be argued that selective deposition represents different ritual practices in which specific ideas and values were emphasized *and* deconstructed.

15.2 Circulation of foreign materials and social realities

Local communities in the southern Netherlands can basically be considered as *importing* societies. Even when a thriving bronze industry emerged, people still depended entirely on sources from far outside the region. In chapter 5 we saw that this was already true for most Neolithic communities as well: the majority had to import flint – and sometimes stone as well – from beyond. Thus, the necessity to participate in exchange networks spanning vast areas must have been an essential characteristic of the *longue durée* history of prehistoric communities in the southern Netherlands. For both the Neolithic and the Bronze Age, prehistoric communities in the southern Netherlands can be characterized as *importing* communities. This may be an important point because it has consequences for the way local communities perceived themselves as part of the wider world. Helms (1988, 22) shows that it is fundamental for any social group to recognize spatial and cosmological frames, in which one's own group occupies the central position. Whatever the conceptualisation of such frames, the point is that they are basically about the *identity* of the group as constructed in opposition to the world beyond. The communities under study systematically derived vital items via long-distance contact networks. It can therefore be assumed that for those communities there must always have been a tension between two different kinds of social reality.

1 The reality of the *local* community rooted in a 'sense of belonging' to a specific locality. This is the reality of daily life. It is about the feeling of belonging to the people one works and lives with. It is also about feeling attached to the peculiarities of one's dwelling area: the specific environment, the buildings, the monuments and its idiosyncratic local history (Gerritsen 2001). For the kind of communities we are studying this local identity must have been the most important and pervasive social reality (Chapman 1998, 110).
2 There is also a reality that is detached from locality. This is the reality of the *importing* society, a reality in which

> one's own group is perceived as being part of a wider social network (Barth 1992, 29). This is the reality in which people saw themselves as necessarily linked to a more encompassing social world, acknowledging that the cycles by which a social unit reproduces itself draws upon resources derived from a wider geographical and social world (cf. Barrett 1998, 19).

These two realities necessarily need co-exist. For a local group to reproduce itself, the world beyond that group is vital (if only for the exchange of marriage partners and of crucial non-local materials). At the same time, the outside world is potentially ambiguous and dangerous. A sense of belonging to a wider social world denotes the dependency of the local group on others for the reproduction of the local group. It emphasizes the group's dependency on factors beyond one's own control. Crucial is the realization that *the vehicle that effectively links both realities is the imported object or material or individual (marriage partner)*. Helms shows how foreign things for that reason alone tend to be seen as imbued with meaning. They are an objectification of the reach of the local group upon resources beyond their existence as determined locally (Helms 1993, 99). And this brings us to the special significance that was attached to the non-local bronzes.

15.3 Bronzes and the significance of non-local identities

Throughout this book we have seen how important non-local materials were. Bronze objects continued to be imported even when a thriving local industry existed which was capable of producing them. Moreover, many imported bronzes were indeed indispensable tools, but even for the Middle Bronze Age B and Late Bronze Age only axes were a tool of daily life for which stone or flint equivalents no longer existed. The other tools were still made from materials that were procured closer to home. The southern Netherlands are not unique in this. Bradley has shown that one of the characteristic features of the European Bronze Age is the enormous distance travelled by some types of artefacts. He makes the argument that it must have been the foreignness of the metal itself which mattered. A continuation of importing and using finished products even when these could be made locally is also witnessed in countries possessing sources of their own. Bradley gives the anomaly of the situation in Britain. Here artefacts made of continental metal even eclipsed the products of local sources. This means that there must have been a *cultural preference* for foreign material (Bradley 1990, 131-5). Such a preference has wider implications than just the objects themselves. There is also evidence for bodily adornments using exotic bronzes. Some people were 'dressed in internationality'. Specific personal appearances were geographically widespread. Think for example of the personal imagery displayed in Bell Beaker burials, in Sögel-Wohlde and Ha C warrior equipment (chapter 11), or in the international female dress styles of the Middle Bronze Age B and Late Bronze Age (chapter 12). By adopting such imagery, membership was claimed of distant non-local communities. Following Isbell (2000), we may perhaps speak of membership of 'imagined' communities. The point is that within communities there was a concern with concepts of personhood in which the links with the world beyond were emphasized. As Barrett (1998, 23) puts it: 'In such cases the biographical histories of objects and of the body itself may have converged in such a way as to ensure that the body's identity was expressed in terms of distances travelled and of absent origins'. The significance of adopting such non-local identities seems to have been considerable. When local bronze industries emerged there never seem to have been attempts to make tools or ornaments that primarily emphasized locally or regionally-specific identities. In Denmark, for example, outspoken regional ornament styles did exist, and the entire bronze industry there seems to have been closed rather than open, in spite of the reality that it was just as the southern Netherlands a region which depended on the importation of bronze from far-away regions (Sørensen 1987). Summarizing, we can assume that the world beyond daily existence mattered considerably in the southern Netherlands, not just in a practical way (the importation of badly-needed materials) but in an ideological way as well. Still, it can be argued that inherent in this situation there was a certain tension between the significance of local and non-local identities which had to be managed and resolved. In what follows it will be argued that depositional practices were related to this, but first some attention needs to be paid to what deposition involved and how it worked.

15.4 Accepting their logic: a sacrificial economy

In chapter 2 it was argued that the main problem we come up against in our attempts to understand depositional practices is that the logic of this deliberate giving up of objects defies fundamental modern assumptions on (economic) rationality. We saw that many explanations offered tried to restore a sense of familiarity by seeing deposition as a practice which in the end fulfilled economically rational aims, or by seeing them as predecessors of odd – but more familiar – sacrificial practices known from historical sources on societies of much later periods. I argued that both explanations fail to explain the peculiarities of the Bronze Age practices studied in this book. The (political-) economic explanation cannot explain the existence of a system of deposition that is as profoundly structured as the one studied in this book. A link between Bronze Age practices and those of the Late Iron Age or Roman Period also fails to make

sense of those particularities of the older Bronze Age system (chapter 14). The only way out seems to be to cut this discussion short by simply accepting that the deliberate giving up of (valuable) objects was *apparently a culturally prescribed and meaningful way to deal with objects*. We must be dealing here with a widespread sacrificial mentality that can be traced back in our region at least until the Early Neolithic.

We saw that an enormous variety of items figures in these early Neolithic depositions: pots, animal parts, simple tools (chapter 5). Of special importance for the present study is that among these there were also objects that must have been imported from elsewhere. The *Rössener Breitkeile* and later on the flint Buren axes and cigar chisels are a case in point (chapter 5 and 13). We are dealing here with biographies of objects in which a life of circulation ended in deliberate deposition. It is precisely this deposition of such non-local items that would assume enormous proportions in the Bronze Age. In the case of bronzes the element of giving up is even more pronounced, as now not only a usable object was sacrificed but recyclable material as well (chapter 5). Still, it is precisely with the emergence of a supra-regional bronze exchange that bronze deposition increased dramatically. For the Bronze Age, the statement on the sacrificial mentality can be further refined: *the economy of exchange itself was sacrificial in nature*. Importing materials from abroad was apparently seen as inextricably linked to giving a part of it up. Hence, we may even speak of a *sacrificial economy*.

It may be true that the logic of a sacrificial economy conflicts with the logic of commodity exchange. On second thoughts, it has considerable affinity with the logic of gift exchange. Gift exchange is also essentially about the social relevance of 'giving away'. This giving is, however, not done haphazardly: there is a specific social and ritual context involved, there are norms regarding what to give to whom, and there are expectations about the results of the act (*do ut des*) (chapter 3, fig. 3.1; Bazelmans 1999, 14-20). This is not unlike the rather rigid patterns of selective deposition, that I described for the Bronze Age. In deposition a specific context is selected (a particular zone in the landscape), and a specific type of object (e.g. swords in major rivers). There are also historical precedents (multiple-deposition zones) and rigid rules (no depositing of weapons in graves). In this light, the irrationality of the 'giving up' of valuable things has a counterpart in gift exchange. Given the earlier exchange history of so many items which ended up in deposition, deposition may well have been seen as affiliated to gift exchange. As in gift exchange, the object is not kept but given away. In gift exchange, it is the giving up which imbues the owner with fame and renown, and it can be assumed that depositing the object has a similar effect. Perhaps even more, since deposition is about the most definite way in which the object is given up: it prevents the object from playing any role in future exchange histories. These parallels to gift exchange may to some extent remove the oddness this sacrificial economy may have to us, but do not explain why deposition was practised. For this, we have to pursue the analysis and focus on the peculiarities of deposition as a practice.

15.5 Deposition as a practice

Although I tried to study depositional practices in all their intricacies, we have to accept that archaeology fails to provide detailed information on the practice. At best, some impression could be gained from the location where it was performed. We know something about the treatment of the object deposited as well as its earlier history, but many questions remain. How was the actual depositional procedure carried out? On what occasion was it done, which people were present, what further activities did it involve and so on? All these aspects may contribute to a further understanding of the meaning of depositional practices, but they are practically beyond the limits of archaeological knowledge and we should rather focus on those aspects that we are able to grasp. These are as follows.

Deposition implies religious and historical knowledge

In general, it was a practice that was carried out in a specific context in the landscape, often beyond the world of daily agrarian life. The places have qualities of their own: they are mainly non-cultivated, and they are wet places. This in itself implies a particular view of the environment as a space imbued with specific meanings, where watery and 'natural' places had a special, probably religious, significance. On top of that, they generally lacked man-made markers and as some zones witnessed a long history of deposition, we may assume that people's reading of the environment was not just based on cultural religious knowledge ('wet' places are right for depositing metalwork'), but specific historical knowledge as well ('it was this particular wet place where objects should be deposited'). This implies that specific knowledge was required for carrying out a deposition in the proper way. In the case of zones that saw repeated visits, such knowledge must have been a social resource. Knowing the right place to go and the proper way to act may have served to construct a group of insiders, a sacrificial community (chapter 14). The peripheral and sometimes remote position of depositional zones, and the lack of clear man-made markers seems to be in line with this, since it suggests that it was a practice that was deliberately severed from daily reality and involved a sense of secrecy (chapter 14).

The paradox of deposition: meaning performance and *deconstruction*

We have seen that on the whole objects were deposited which had already been imbued with meaning by their

previous life-path. It can be assumed that deposition itself was also a practice in which further meaning was enacted (chapter 3): it involved a special event in which the histories of people, objects and place were brought together and transformed. The special emphasis on the objects (their selection and treatment) implies that deposition can be seen as an act in which the accumulation of meaning which took place during the object's life-path was celebrated, magnified and culminated. The paradox is, however, that this same act also led to the final disappearance of the object in question: the termination of its meaningful life. In a way, deposition is both about meaning performance and its deconstruction. *This makes it a very suitable practice for coping with objects which are important and meaningful, but which are nevertheless also seen as circumscribed and ambiguous for the society in question*. We have seen that certain deposited goods were meant to signal specific social identities which may have been considered ambiguous. Think for example of the paraphernalia of martial identities as described in chapter 11, or the paraphernalia of supra-regional dress, indicating ties with the world outside the local community (chapter 12). Deposition is an act in which a group ostensibly draws attention to such identities in the face of participants in a specific ritual context. The act probably performs and celebrates this meaning, in an act that ends up in its final deconstruction when the participants literally separate the paraphernalia of such special personal identities from a human body by letting them disappear from sight for ever.

15.6 Deposition as ritual

Chapter 2 discussed whether we can make sense of deposition as a ritual practice. In my view, any attempt to understand Bronze Age depositional practices by seeing them as sacrificial practices for which the historical and ethnographic record has parallels fails to see the uniqueness of it. Bronze Age deposition is a historically unique phenomenon because of the enormous scale and impressive time span at which it was practised (almost the whole of Europe, and for a period as long as the Neolithic until the Iron Age). It is especially its structuration as a system of selective deposition which makes it so special. The way in which the landscape was used does not support the idea of the existence of cult places that we know from the Iron Age and the Roman Period, but rather the existence of entire 'sacrificial landscapes' (chapter 14). This does not imply that the logic of deposition is entirely alien to us. In particular, scholars have been inclined to see it as the logic of a specific ritual of sacrifice (a votive offering or a gift to god). I discussed these views in chapter 2, and objected to them by asking: which ritual logic? There are many theoretical views on what rituals are and what they bring about. I refrained from selecting one because it might bring with it assumptions that may be unjustified for the case under study. The alternative chosen was to pay attention to what archaeology tells us about it: how was it structured, how did it constrast with other practices? We now have some general idea on the nature of Bronze Age deposition and we can now confront these findings with several theories on ritual.

Ritual as meaningless, traditional behaviour

One theory sees ritual as meaningless, non-discursive routine behaviour, the wider meanings of which escape the participants. Its significance should rather be in the field of the social effects it brings about (chapter 2; Bloch 1989; Verhoeven in press). We have indeed seen that deposition is a profoundly traditional practice in its selection of places and objects. With regard to these aspects, the structure of selective deposition as it emerged during the Middle Bronze Age A did not undergo real changes until the beginnings of the Iron Age (chapter 10). The traditionality is indeed profound and suggests that general ideas on the right way to carry out a deposition were based on beliefs and narratives which were so traditional that they were largely beyond negotiation. On the other hand, in every single act, the practice and its rules were re-invented and it would reflect a very cynical view on mankind to rule out human agency in this by assuming that the participants acted as some kind of robot devoid of interpretations and agency (section 3.2). Crucial to deposition is that we are not dealing with largely symbolic objects which no longer had any role in daily life. On the contrary, most objects deposited had a life in daily existence, be it in agrarian life (axes, sickles), circulation, in personal life-cycles (body ornaments, weaponry) or in specific activities (battle). This implies that their roles and meanings were subject to evaluation and negotiation in daily life and it is very hard to understand the complex selective attitudes towards these objects in deposition as a reality that is totally separate from the meanings of these items in daily life.

Seeing ritual as permeating all fields of life

It may be obvious that the present study cannot be reconciled either with the theory of some post-processual archaeologists that ritual permeates all fields of prehistoric life and therefore has no true meaning as a separate practice (chapter 2). It may be true that there are elements of religion or superstition to all human practices, but what we have laid bare in the case of metalwork deposition indicates practices that were carried out in separate contexts. It involved a specific selection of items, places and ideological themes (for example: issues relating to martial values). This comes close to Bell's (1992) concept of 'ritualisation': practices that denote a differentiation of one particular practice and ideological value from others (see also chapter 2).

Ritual as revealing values at their deepest level
Since deposition as a practice has this 'separateness' and seems to focus on specific themes, one could bring this further and confront it with the theory on ritual which states that rituals reveal ideological values at their deepest level (chapter 2; Barraud/Platenkamp 1990, 103). Martiality, for example, seems to have been such a theme that was privileged in depositional practices (chapter 11). Does this imply that martial values were among the most essential ones of the society in question?

First of all, we should be cautious about the way in which depositional practices reveal the significance of a specific value, since their messages are ambiguous. In deposition there is a clear focus on specific items and hence the ideas and values with which these were associated. At the same time, however, deposition is the practice in which the items embodying such values are removed from society (section 15.3).

Second, the present research has tried to confront the evidence of depositional practices with that of other ones, including ritual ones; for example, the burial ritual. This exercise has shown that the themes of different 'rituals' are not in line with each other. On the contrary, they can even be conflicting. For example, we have seen that there were specific zones in the landscape where weaponry was deposited. It was shown that this was not just deposition of the tools of warfare, but of the paraphernalia of martial identities. The striking observation is that the pronounced emphasis on weaponry contrasted with depositional practices in other contexts where the personal identities mattered. In burial deposition, weaponry is notoriously absent, and seems to have been deliberately avoided even in the most monumental barrows (chapter 11). We saw a similar phenomenon in the case of the deposition of body ornaments (chapter 12). Lavish, non-local ornaments that sometimes were part of entire costumes are equally absent in burials, but they were deposited in quite different zones in the land (rivers, multiple hoards in a peripheral place). The evidence of deposition of ornaments in Late Bronze Age urnfields, however, shows that here social identities were constructed which primarily had meaning at the level of the local community itself (chapter 9, 12). There is no case of representations of deceased individuals that were shared among remote communities, however. Summing up we can say that we are dealing with contrasting, perhaps even conflicting, sources of evidence indicating that different values were significant to different ritual practices.

Conclusion
Depositional practices indeed seem to have been 'ritualised' in the sense of Bell (1992), but there is no case for the often-heard theory that this reflects the profane-ritual dichotomy, in the sense that only the 'non-ritual' domain of settlements and daily life represents 'true' images of social reality (Vandkilde 1996, 262). Farmyards were sometimes depositional places as well (chapter 7), but as such different from major rivers or marshes. Nor is there a case for the theory that deposition, as a ritual, reveals either the most fundamental values of society, nor images of life that are the reverse from daily reality (cf. Staal 1989). The contrasting evidence of the different kinds of deposition seems more in line with a situation in which different ritual practices constituted separate 'fields of discourse' (Barrett 1991). Martiality was 'true' in one context, but denied in another. The contrasting evidence of different sorts of depositions presupposes not the celebration of one particular ideological value, but rather a more encompassing system of values (cf. Bazelmans 1999, 41-6). We will now bring this further, by arguing that selective deposition was implemental in managing and effecting such an ideological system of values.

15.7 What does selective deposition bring about?

Depositional practices as mystifying ideologies?
In chapter 1, the paradox of bronze deposition was introduced. Deliberate deposition of metalwork was most current in those regions lacking ores of their own (Bradley 1990, 131-5?). Since the evidence for biographies of foreign items ending up in deposition existed for such a long period of time, it must have been related to the way in which importing societies managed the opposing kinds of social realities: those of the local versus the non-local world. Foreign objects, ideas, people and styles of personal representation are beyond the control of local producers. Therefore they are by definition different as a cultural category (Sørensen 1989, 185). Scholars enhancing the prestige good model have realized the political-economic aspects of this for a long time (chapter 1). The circulation of foreign things was something which cannot have been taken care of by everybody. It implies 'haves' and 'have-nots' in largely egalitarian societies, potentially leading to social tensions which had to be resolved. The reader will recall that the prestige good model saw the function of the deposition of so many of these items as some sort of political-economic levelling mechanism (chapter 1 and 2). The idea was that it had the double function of resolving social tensions caused by the unequal access to socially important items, whilst it created scarcity at the same time. In this way deposition of bronze would prevent deflation of the prestigious value of bronze and paradoxically uphold the very system of empowering prestige good circulation (chapter 2). This mirrors the Marxist view that ritual acts are 'false' images of social reality, mystifying and recreating the true power relations (Treherne 1995, 116).

The alternative: selective deposition as related to a complex whole of ideas and values

I now hope to have shown that the different ritual practices, selective deposition in natural places, burial ritual, and rituals carried out on farmyards all display an emphasis on different ideological themes that may even be conflicting. In the field of settlements and daily agrarian life there is not one faint hint at a world in which there were individuals who had access to long-distance exchange networks, and who distinguished themselves from others by wearing lavish ornaments or weaponry. The burial ritual of the Late Bronze Age is also profoundly egalitarian in nature. The emphasis seems largely to have been on an ideology of collectivity (chapter 11; Roymans/Kortlang 1999). The final representations of the deceased in burials known to us did not have the slightest reference to martiality either, even though we know from the large quantities of weaponry deposited in marshes and rivers that some of the males buried in an urnfield must once in their lives have taken up weapons. The same goes for the supra-regionally styled body ornaments. Again, in the burials there are practically no references to the fact that such non-local identities were valued. Still, the evidence from deposits in rivers and hoards implies that they were: non-local ornaments and probably entire supra-regional dress styles were known (chapter 12). Even the exchange of marriage partners from far-away regions might be envisaged. Nevertheless, in burials and urnfields in particular, there is nothing to remind us of that. Instead, localism is pervasive in the dress and adornment of the deceased, and the entire burial ritual seems to be imbued by an egalitarian ideology (Roymans 1991, 30). In sum, there is no evidence for a 'true' image of society, as there is none either for rituals which mystify them. As suggested above, the reality seems to be different ideological themes being emphasized in different ritual contexts, together constituting a complex whole of ideas and values.

Deposition as a way to recontextualise objects and the ideas they stand for

Back to deposition: what was the exact role played by depositional practices? Let us first once more take up the general observation that depositional practices were conceptually linked to foreign objects. As said before, the strangeness and foreignness of the imported object is something that should be dealt with by people who acquired it. In one way or another, the object should be recontextualised; there should be practices suppressing strangeness and enabling a certain level of relocation and comprehension (cf. Barrett 1999, 23). These might involve practices which ignore the dependency to which the imported object testified, and re-align the object with the moral order at home (Bloch/Parry 1989). As histories of long-distance exchange so often ended up in deposition, we may assume that deposition was one way to achieve this. Any attempt to make some sense of the understandings people had of it is speculative. It was argued that we can make the point that in a general way deposition might have been rooted in a cultural belief that reciprocal relations existed between people and the land (chapter 14; Pálsson 1996). The local landscape is the most conspicuous environment from which local communities can derive a sense of belonging (Gerritsen 2001, 125-6). Placing foreign objects in this landscape might therefore be considered as a compelling way to realign a foreign idea, symbolized as *pars pro toto* by the object selected, with the local order at home. Bloch and Parry (1989) see such procedures as widespread. On the basis of ethnographic examples they point out how sacrifice or transformation of some representative item was a way to make foreign, ambiguous items derived from beyond morally acceptable at home (chapter 13). A political-economic aspect of levelling and creating scarcity mattered as well, but if we take the actions of prehistoric communities seriously, we should accept that the practice itself existed in the first place because people *believed* in it.

Selective deposition and the contextualisation and ordering of ideas and values

At this point in the book it may be clear that deposition was about much more than just recontextualising foreign items. Rather it seems to be *about the recontextualisation or ordering of specific ideas and values*. Many of the objects deposited have far more meanings and qualities than just the quality of being exotic. They are about personal statuses and identities, related to life-cycles, social power and special activities (warfare, participating in long-distance exchanges). They are about communal practices and identities (axes), or highly specific ideas and values celebrated in ceremonial items (swords and ornaments). In chapters 11 and 12 we have seen that many of these things are about items and values which are charged, ambiguous, or confined. In largely egalitarian societies like those we have been studying, martial identities can be ambiguous, dangerous ones. In chapter 11, we have seen that there is no evidence at all for warrior aristocracies. There is only evidence for people laying down the paraphernalia of martial identities – and hence the identity itself – in a conspicuous ritual. It was argued that this is in line with situations in which small-scale warfare is endemic, but only of ideological importance (taking place as part of the life-cycles of individuals). In such circumstances, aggression is something that requires a ritually transformed self. Referring to the anthropologist Harrison (1995, 87, 91), martial identities are essentially temporary ones. They are something on the outer surface that can be worn or shed by wearing or laying down the appropriate paraphernalia in ritualized circumstances. It was

argued that the practice of weapon deposition in special places and circumstances (in a multiple-deposition zone) may well be understood as the reflection of the ritual laying down of such roles (chapter 11). Supra-regional personal appearances that were constructed by wearing foreign of foreign-styled ornaments may also have been charged, confined ones. They underline the reality of importing communities which may have felt at odds with the reality of the local group, who defines itself as belonging to the people they live and work with on a daily basis and their attachment to the local environment. The contrasting evidence of local identities in urnfields and supra-regional ornaments in rivers or hoards suggests that both realities were kept apart in rituals.

We saw that deposition by its very nature has this quality of coping with ambiguous and circumscribed identities and the values they represent (section 15.5). The meanings of the objects are celebrated and magnified in front of onlookers but deconstructed as well. The ritual ends up in their definite disappearance. Particularly in the case of ornaments and weapons, the paraphernalia signalling it are laid down, making the element of deconstruction almost a tangible one. It may be no coincidence that depositional locations are themselves often as ambiguous in nature as the objects which were placed in it (chapter 14).

Selective deposition, thus, is a system of 'keeping things apart', a system of resolving ideological and political tensions stemming from different (sometimes conflicting) ideas and values that every society has. To archaeologists, it gives a skewed picture of social realities. If we concentrate on studying burial sites and settlements in order to distil a picture of prehistoric reality from them, then we should realize that they do not give us the picture of small groups that in spite of their localism had exchange contacts with communities far beyond and were informed about and sharing some of their cultural and religious ideas. Nor do they inform us on the high ritual appreciation of natural places in a time in which the contours of a man-made, cultivated and deforested landscape became more pronounced, nor on the reality that these seemingly peaceful communities did not only practise warfare but even valued it as well.