



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Bronze war, A collective burial at Wassenaar

Louwe Kooijmans, L.P.

Citation

Louwe Kooijmans, L. P. (2005). Bronze war, A collective burial at Wassenaar. In . Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/11180>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)
License: [Leiden University Non-exclusive license](#)
Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/11180>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

THE
PREHISTORY
OF THE
NETHERLANDS

VOLUME 1

Edited by

J.P. Louwe Kooijmans



The Prehistory of the Netherlands

Volume I

Edited by

L.P. Louwe Kooijmans

P.W. van den Broeke

H. Fokkens

A.L. van Gijn

AMSTERDAM UNIVERSITY PRESS

The publication of this book was made possible by grants from:

- the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO)
- Archol BV, Leiden
- The Prince Bernhard Cultural Foundation (PBCF)

Cover illustration: Flint arrowhead from the Middle Bronze Age burial at Wasenaar, c. 1700 BC, see feature L, p. 459 (photo J. Pauptit, Faculty of Archaeology, Leiden University).

Cover design: Studio Jan de Boer BNO, Amsterdam

Lay-out: Perfect Service, Schoonhoven

ISBN 90 5356 160 9 (both volumes)

ISBN 90 5356 806 9 (volume 1)

ISBN 90 5356 807 7 (volume 2)

NUR 682

© Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam 2005

All rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the written permission of both the copyright owner and the author of the book.

Contents Volume I

Preface 13

Introductory

- chapter 1 A prehistory of our time 17
Peter van den Broeke, Harry Fokkens and Annelou van Gijn
- chapter 2 The discovery of prehistory in the Netherlands 33
Ayolt Brongers
- chapter 3 Shaped by water, ice and wind: the genesis of the Netherlands 45
Kier van Gijssel and Bert van der Valk

Part I Hunters and gatherers

- chapter 4 Palaeolithic and Mesolithic: introduction 77
Wil Roebroeks and Annelou van Gijn 500,000 years ago to 5300 BC
- chapter 5 Neanderthals and their predecessors 93
Lower and Middle Palaeolithic
Wil Roebroeks
- chapter 6 The first 'modern' humans 115
Upper Palaeolithic
Eelco Rensink and Dick Stapert
- feature A A lost craft 135
flint tool manufacture in prehistory
Jaap Beuker
- chapter 7 From tundra hunting to forest hunting 139
later Upper Palaeolithic and Early Mesolithic
Jos Deeben and Nico Arts
- feature B A drowned land 157
Mesolithic from the North Sea floor
Leo Verhart
- chapter 8 Living in abundance 161
Middle and Late Mesolithic
Leo Verhart and Henny Groenendijk

5300-2900 BC

- feature C Mesolithic along the Overijssel Vecht 179
camp sites and burial pits at Mariënborg
Ad Verlinde
- feature D Hunting camps in the swamps 183
the river dunes near Hardinxveld
Leendert Louwe Kooijmans
- chapter 9 Hunters and gatherers: synthesis 187
Jos Deebe and Annelou van Gijn
- Part II The first farmers**
- chapter 10 Early and Middle Neolithic: introduction 203
Annelou van Gijn and Leendert Louwe Kooijmans
- chapter 11 Colonists on the loess? 219
Early Neolithic A: the Bandkeramik culture
Marjorie de Grooth and Pieter van de Velde
- feature E Mines in the marl 243
the flint extraction at Rijckholt
Marjorie de Grooth
- chapter 12 Hunters become farmers 249
Early Neolithic B and Middle Neolithic A
Leendert Louwe Kooijmans
- feature F Stone Age farmers along the North Sea 273
the Rijswijk-Ypenburg cemetery
Hans Koot
- feature G Import from all quarters 277
stone axes in the northern Netherlands
Jaap Beuker
- chapter 13 Megalith builders and sturgeon fishers 281
Middle Neolithic B: Funnel Beaker culture and the Vlaardingengroup
Annelou van Gijn and Jan Albert Bakker
- feature H Funerary buildings from erratic boulders 307
the construction and function of the hunebedden
Jan Albert Bakker
- chapter 14 The fruits of the land 311
Neolithic subsistence
Corrie Bakels and Jørn Zeiler
- chapter 15 The first farmers: synthesis 337
Annelou van Gijn and Leendert Louwe Kooijmans

Part III Mixed farming societies

- chapter 16 Late Neolithic, Early and Middle Bronze Age: introduction 357 2900-1100 BC
Harry Fokkens
- chapter 17 From stone to bronze 371
technology and material culture
Jay Butler and Harry Fokkens
- feature I Opening up the peat bogs 401
the timber trackways of Drenthe
Wil Casparie
- chapter 18 Longhouses in unsettled settlements 407
settlements in Beaker period and Bronze Age
Harry Fokkens
- feature J Shell fishers and cattle herders 429
settlements of the Single Grave culture in Westfrisia
Willem Jan Hogestijn
- chapter 19 Mounds for the dead 433
funerary and burial ritual in Beaker period, Early and Middle Bronze Age
Erik Drenth and Eric Lohof
- feature K Barrow research and palynology 455
methods and results
Willy Groenman-van Waateringe
- feature L Bronze Age war 459
a collective burial at Wassenaar
Leendert Louwe Kooijmans
- chapter 20 Mixed farming societies: synthesis 463
Harry Fokkens

Contents Volume 2

1100-12 BC

- Part IV Increasing diversity**
- chapter 21 Late Bronze Age and Iron Age: introduction 477
Peter van den Broeke
- chapter 22 All-round farming 491
food production in the Bronze Age and the Iron Age
Otto Brinkkemper and Louise van Wijngaarden-Bakker
- feature M Salt makers along the North Sea coast 513
the production of salt for the hinterland
Peter van den Broeke
- chapter 23 Hamlets on the move 519
settlements in the southern and central parts of the Netherlands
Kees Schinkel
- chapter 24 Farms amongst Celtic fields 543
settlements on the northern sands
Otto Harsema
- feature N Dwelling mounds on the salt marshes 557
the terpen of Friesland and Groningen
Jaap Boersma
- chapter 25 Colonists on the clay 561
the occupation of the northern coastal region
Jaap Boersma
- feature O Oak or alder? 577
the use of wood in Iron Age farms
Caroline Vermeeren and Otto Brinkkemper
- chapter 26 On unsteady ground 581
settlements in the western Netherlands
Robert van Heeringen
- feature P Peat farmers 597
settlements on the peat to the south of the Meuse estuary
Marco van Trierum
- chapter 27 Blacksmiths and potters 603
material culture and technology
Peter van den Broeke

- feature Q Ancient attire 627
 remains of prehistoric clothing
 Willy Groenman-van Waateringe
- chapter 28 Urnfields and cinerary barrows 631
 funerary and burial ritual in the Late Bronze and Iron Ages
 Wilfried Hessing and Piet Kooi
- feature R *An alternative to the pyre* 655
 Iron Age inhumation burials
 Peter van den Broeke and Wilfried Hessing
- chapter 29 Gifts to the gods 659
 rites and cult sites in the Bronze Age and the Iron Age
 Peter van den Broeke
- feature S Bog bodies 679
 human remains from the northern part of the Netherlands
 Wijnand van der Sanden
- chapter 30 Increasing diversity: synthesis 683
 Peter van den Broeke

Conclusion

- chapter 31 The Netherlands in prehistory: retrospect 695
 Leendert Louwe Kooijmans

- Abbreviations 721
Literature 722
Location maps of regions and sites 797
Site index 807
Thematical index 813
Index of persons 832
Acknowledgement of the sources of illustrations 833
The authors 839

Note on the dates used in this book

Dates before 50,000 are based on various physical dating techniques, other than radiocarbon, and expressed as 'years ago'.

Dates in the period 50,000-10,000 years ago are based on uncalibrated radiocarbon dates and expressed as 'years ago' or 'years BP' (= Before Present).

Dates in the last 10,000 years are based on calibrated radiocarbon dates and expressed as 'years BC'. Only these dates can be equated with calendar or solar years.

See chapter 1, section 'periods and dates' for the principles of radiocarbon dating.

L Bronze Age war A collective burial at Wassenaar

Leendert Louwe Kooijmans

The grave

In 1987 a discovery was made at Wassenaar that has shed a somewhat different light on the Bronze Age.¹ It all started

with some flint and a few bell beaker sherds found during construction work for the new district Weteringpark. It was a great surprise when the small-scale salvage excavation that was then carried out brought to light a large burial pit

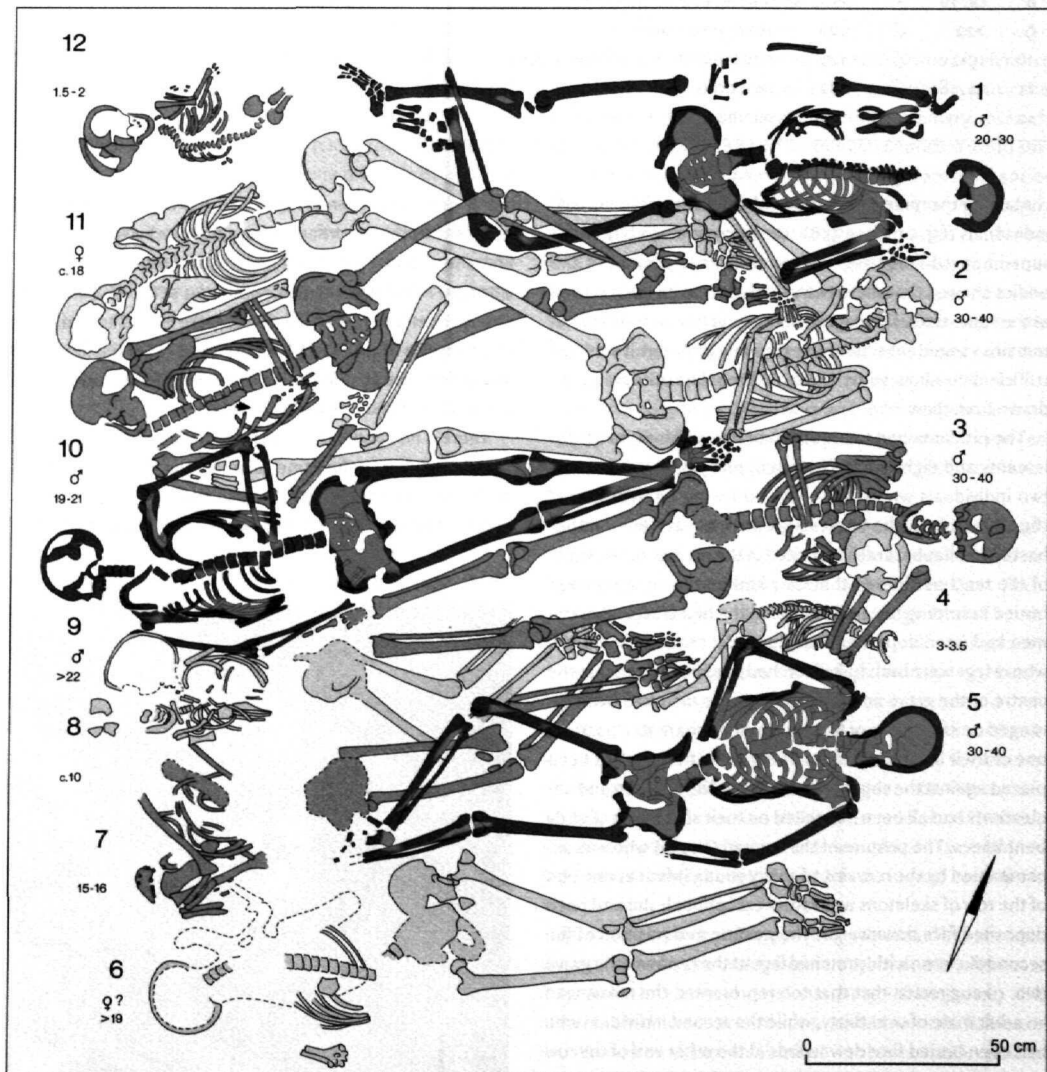


fig. L1

Excavation plan of the Wassenaar burial, with skeleton numbers, sex and age determinations. The position of the arrowhead is indicated in skeleton 10.

Wassenaar, composition of the burial group					
ind.	age (years)	sex	stat. (cms)	burial posture	traumatology
1	20-30	♂	167	one leg bent	—
2	30-40	♂	182	one leg bent	blow, lower jaw
3	30-40	♂	176	stretched on back	blow, right humerus
4	3-3,5	—	—	on one side	skull separate
5	30-40	♂	169	one leg bent	blow, frontal bone
6	>19	♀?	170	face down	—
7	15-16	—	ca. 170	?	—
8	ca. 10	—	—	on one side	—
9	>22	♂	176	stretched on back	—
10	19-21	♂	177	one leg bent	shot-in arrow
11	ca. 18	♀	182	face down	—
12	1,5-2	—	—	on one side	—

fig. L2

Wassenaar. Group composition.

containing the more or less orderly buried remains of twelve individuals (fig. L1, plate 35B). The microstratigraphy of the superimposed limbs and the compact arrangement of the bodies showed that these twelve people had all been buried at the same time. The degree of preservation of the skeletal remains ranged from poor to extremely poor but it was still sufficient to allow some basic anthropological data to be drawn from them.²

The pit contained the remains of two children, two adolescents and eight adults: five men, one young woman and two individuals whose sex could no longer be determined (fig. L2). At first, the bodies appeared to have been rather hastily and haphazardly deposited in the pit, but closer study of the remains showed that they had on the contrary been buried according to careful rules. In the first place, all of the men had been deposited face upwards; the oldest (No. 3), whose legs were both fully stretched, had been placed at the centre of the grave and the four younger men had been arranged on either side of him in a rather remarkable posture: one of their legs was bent and the foot of that leg had been placed against the shin of the other leg. The children and adolescents had all been deposited on their sides, with slightly bent knees. The posture of the woman (No. 11) who was accompanied by the remains of a very young infant at one end of the row of skeletons was rather exceptional: she had been deposited face downwards. The posture and position of the second skeleton with stretched legs at the centre of the grave (No. 9) suggested that that too represented the remains of an adult male of over thirty, while the second individual who had been buried face downwards at the other end of the row (No. 6) was probably a woman, just like No. 11. The fact that limbs of the deceased had apparently been rearranged during the burial procedure made it impossible to determine the order in which the bodies had been interred. It is most likely

that the two older men at the centre of the grave and the two women with the two infants (Nos. 4 and 12) were deposited first and that the younger men and adolescents were then arranged in the open spaces remaining between them. This arrangement shows that the bodies were buried according to some precise ritual, in which the age and sex of the deceased determined the position in the grave and the posture and order in which they were deposited in it.

There is no doubt about the facts that all of the individuals were killed during the same calamity and that they were all buried shortly after. There are also sufficient arguments to assume that an armed conflict was the cause of their deaths.

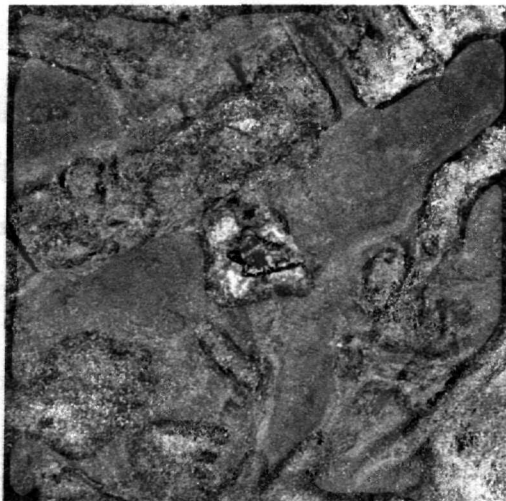


fig. L3

Arrowhead, as shot in between the ribs of individual 10.

First of all, a flint arrowhead was found in the chest of individual No. 10 (fig. L3-4). Other indications are the gashes in the lower jaw of No. 2, in the right upper arm of No. 3 and in the skull of No. 5. We must bear in mind that a violent death need not necessarily leave any visible marks on skeletal remains, that any evidence of violence may have vanished in the case of poorly preserved bones and that skeletal remains are often shifted from their original positions by burrowing animals, uprooting or rooting. None of these, however, can explain the position of the skull of the body of the young child (No. 4): the skull was separated from the body spatially, but also by the left arm of the older man beside it (No. 3) and, as gruesome as it may seem, it must have been buried like that too. Finally, the composition of the group, in which able-bodied men predominate, brings to mind an armed conflict between neighbouring communities in which 'innocent civilians' fell victim, too. The careful burial rite suggests that the deceased were buried by surviving relatives rather than by their opponents.

The conflict took place around the transition from the Early to the Middle Bronze Age. Samples of charcoal from the burial pit yielded two ^{14}C dates of 3420 ± 80 BP (GrN 14949) and 3380 ± 80 BP (GrN 14950). The date of about 1700 BC obtained after calibration agrees well with the typological resemblance of the arrowhead to arrowheads in an assemblage from Vogelenzang that also included some sherds with 'barbed wire' impressions.³

The Bronze Age context

The Wassenaar grave is unique in the archaeology of the Netherlands, but that is no reason to regard it as evidence for a highly exceptional event, such as a once-only conflict in an otherwise peaceful Bronze Age. Graves of this kind are archaeologically invisible because they are not marked by funeral monuments and contain no grave goods. Moreover, skeletal remains buried under such conditions are not usually preserved. There is very little we can say about the frequency of the conflicts that led to such massacres. Neither



fig. L4

Arrowhead from the rib cage of individual 10. Natural size.

the settlements nor the graves of the Bronze Age conjure up images of warlike or aggressive communities. As far as we know, no fortifications were built in the Netherlands in the Bronze Age and, unlike in many other areas in Europe, the deceased were only rarely accompanied by weapons. Nevertheless, we should seriously consider the possibility that armed conflicts which left very few traces in the archaeological record formed a structural part of Bronze Age life in the Netherlands.

Ethnographic frame of reference

Ethnography provides us with a clarifying frame of reference for the issue of warfare in prehistoric societies, in particular tribal communities, although only little systematic research has been carried out so far.⁴ A carefully conducted world survey of fifty primitive communities ranging from band societies to chiefdoms and from hunter-gatherers to plough agriculturists led the American Keith Otterbein to the conclusion that practically all communities wage aggressive and/or defensive wars at varying frequencies.⁵ The more complex the society, the more complex the weapons and the higher the degree of organisation of the wars. Tribal societies have few defences, they cause relatively little havoc, they do not include special groups of warriors and their weapons are not very specialised. In other words, an armed conflict between groups of this type would leave little trace in the archaeological record.

There are two contrasting forms of tribal warfare: duelling warfare and raids. Duelling warfare is best known from Papuan groups such as the Tsembaga and the Dani. Their duels have been described as a rather rough kind of sport. The place, time and form of the duel are all regulated by rules and mutual agreements. Groups, usually neighbouring tribes, take up a position opposite one another and then shoot arrows or throw spears at one another until someone is injured or the two parties have had enough. Sometimes things get out of hand and the duel degenerates into a massacre in which women and children are occasionally killed, too. This duelling warfare is a fine example of a (be it imperfect) form of conflict control in which 'accidents' occur from time to time.

Raids are in our eyes less sporting activities. They are conducted furtively, preferably before daybreak and often at a long distance – several days' marching – from home. The aim is to steal horses or cattle or to abduct women. Raids are usually violent affairs which often involve casualties and in which old people and children are rarely spared. Well-known examples are the raids of Amazon Indians (for example the Yanomamö) and of several North American plains Indians and east African cattle breeders such as the Nuer.

Both kinds of warfare are endemic, which means that there is often no real reason for them and that there is no end to them either. They are a structural part of life. Any trifling matter, such as the theft of a pig, may be the cause of a duel or a raid or they may form part of an endless sequence of revenge and retaliation.

Tribal warfare in European prehistory

There are now three very different arguments for extrapolating the ethnographic picture of endemic warfare amongst tribal communities to a prehistoric context.

The first argument is of a functionalistic nature. Endemic tribal warfare, it is argued, is good for the team spirit, it gives men the opportunity to show their courage and strength, it provides some distraction in an otherwise uneventful and monotonous existence and aspiring leaders can prove what they are worth. It must have meant very much the same to prehistoric tribal societies as it does to the communities mentioned above.

Secondly, elsewhere in Europe, if not in the Netherlands, there is plenty of evidence for warfare in the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age. Fortifications, specialised offensive and defensive weapons, warrior graves and hoards of weapons are all directly associated with warfare. Besides fairly complex, centrally organized societies, these finds imply a relatively sophisticated level of warfare, which must have evolved from earlier, simpler, forms of armed conflict that are less clearly visible in the archaeological record.

Thirdly, all kinds of collective burials with varying evi-

dence of violence have been found all over Western Europe, if sporadically. Their dates vary from the Bandkeramik via the Michelsberg, Funnel-Beaker and SOM periods to the Beaker period. In many cases the deceased were simply dumped in a pit or in a cave, sometimes accompanied by hundreds of arrowheads. In this respect the Wassenaar grave is far from unique, although the grave's relatively late date and the evidence for the careful burial rite do set it apart from the others.

We would like to conclude with an answer to the question, 'raids or duels?', but that does not appear to be possible. On the one hand the possibility of conflicts between civilian communities seems quite feasible in the presumably densely occupied dune area, but on the other hand the specialised cattle breeding of Bronze Age farmers may have been a good context for cattle raids. Whatever the answer to this question may be, the discovery of this grave has lifted the idyllic haze from the Bronze Age and forces us to take another look at the periods that preceded and followed it.

Notes

- 1 This is an abbreviated and slightly altered version of Louwe Kooijmans 1990 and 1993c. Preliminary discussion in Jungerius/Smits 1988.
- 2 In view of the poor condition of the remains, this was done in the field by the anthropologist Mrs E. Smits.
- 3 Groenman-van Waateringe 1966, fig. 46; Ten Anscher 1990.
- 4 References in Louwe Kooijmans 1993c.
- 5 Otterbein 1969.