



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

## **Monuments on the horizon : the formation of the barrow landscape throughout the 3rd and the 2nd millennium BCE**

Bourgeois, Q.P.J.

### **Citation**

Bourgeois, Q. P. J. (2013, January 10). *Monuments on the horizon : the formation of the barrow landscape throughout the 3rd and the 2nd millennium BCE*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/20381>

Version: Corrected Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/20381>

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

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/20381> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

**Author:** Bourgeois, Quentin

**Title:** Monuments on the horizon : the formation of the barrow landscape throughout the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC

**Date:** 2013-01-10

## MAKING SENSE OF THE BARROW LANDSCAPE

### 2.1 Introduction

In this Chapter I will explore how we should approach and make sense of the barrow landscape. I will first outline how archaeologists have tried to explain its particular distribution. Two general approaches can be identified (Last 2007, 2). Firstly approaches that only consider the role of the individual barrow without taking into account its position within the wider landscape – so called barrow-centric approaches. And secondly, approaches that do consider the barrow within the wider landscape, yet do not account for the deep temporality of the barrow landscape.

I will argue that explanations concerning barrow landscapes have generally been retrospective and singular in nature and I will conclude the Chapter with an alternative approach on how we should understand and research the formation of the barrow landscape.

### 2.2 The barrow as an exclusive and visible burial ritual

If we are to understand the nature of the barrow landscape, we need to start with the barrow itself. What is a barrow and what makes it so special?

Firstly, the barrow as a burial ritual – creating mounds of sods, chalk, turf or stones heaped up on top of a grave – was exclusive. Even though it is difficult to estimate the exact percentage, only a small portion of people in prehistory ended up underneath or in a barrow (Lohof 1994, 113; Wentink in prep.).

Secondly, through the construction of a mound, people physically altered the landscape and manipulated its inherent visual structure (Llobera 2007b, 53). By building a barrow they created a visual image immediately recognisable for what it is: a burial place (Fontijn 2011, 437). This is contrasted with the burial of deceased in flat graves, and other aspects of life which appear more transient and fleeting, although not necessarily less significant (*cf.* Fontijn 2007).

Once a mound is constructed, the space where it is located must be interpreted in a different way than before (Barrett 1994, 113) and it is transformed into an evocative space (Smith 2003, 73). That space now becomes a conspicuous and meaningful *place* (Thomas 1996, 88; *cf.* Tuan 1977, 161-166; Cummings and Whittle 2004, 9-10).

And thirdly, the medium of choice for a burial, the mound, indicates it was meant to last (Barrett 1989, 123; Bradley 2003, 222) and therefore to remain visible and interpretable for what it is (Sherratt 1997, 355). Once constructed, the mound becomes a *lieu de mémoire* (Fontijn 2011, 430; see Chapter 9), a location where subsequent onlookers were forced to engage with the monument. How subsequent generations then reacted to the barrow, however, was beyond the control of the builders and may well have been far removed from the reaction they sought to elicit (Holtorf 1996, 123; Bradley 2002, 85).

In essence, by building a mound people visually and permanently demarcated the burial place of an exclusive group of people.

### 2.3 Barrow-centric approaches: barrows as the resting place of individuals, the elite, warrior aristocracies and ancestors

Traditionally much of the research concerning barrows has focussed on the grave it covers, the social position of the person within that grave and the significance of the objects that accompanied him. This focus is understandable as barrows are usually erected over individual graves as opposed to the collective burials of the preceding period (*cf.* Barrett 1994).

It is in this light that a barrow is thought to physically fix the place of an individual (ancestor) in the landscape and to create a place to remember the individual dead (Barrett 1994, 112; Bogucki 1999, 277; Watson 2001, 214; Garwood 2007, 37; Beck, *et al.* 2007, 839; Hanks 2008, 261). The barrow itself by extension becomes '*an eloquent testimony to the identity of the dead*' (Harding 2000, 84) and through the construction of a mortuary monument, '*a chief can become 'immortal'*' (Kristiansen and Larsson 2005, 57). The barrow is thus thought to be inextricably linked to the individual buried underneath it.

As some of these barrows cover graves in which extraordinary and exotic grave goods have been found, they are assumed to be the burials of an emerging aristocracy, where the right and access to a barrow was governed by an elite (Bogucki 1999, 286; Kristiansen and Larsson 2005, 218). The creation of a new barrow is therefore considered to be the reconfirmation of the elite (Kristiansen and Larsson 2005, 240).

In other interpretations it is not so much the elite that is emphasised, but rather the genealogy and ancestry of a community. By associating and building upon older, sometimes much older, barrows, the claims of ancestry and permanency in the landscape would have been reinforced and reworked through time (Barrett 1994, 115; Woodward and Woodward 1996, 228; Garwood 2007, 41; Hanks 2008, 258; Fokkens 2003, 21-23). Thus a barrow can be seen as a *locus memoriae* of the deceased, creating visual remnants of the ancestors in the landscape (Fokkens and Arnoldussen 2008, 8-9).

By extension, in some cases, the building of the mound itself is considered to have been the important action and not necessarily the burial of a deceased member of the community. In a few cases cenotaphs have been interpreted in this way (Garwood 2007, 46; Barrett 1990, 185; Ashbee 1960, 35; Lawson 2007, 129). By building a mound a community would thus create its own focal place in the world by physically monumentalising their real or mythical presence (Garwood 2007, 46).

The discussion on what social category of a person was buried underneath a barrow and what the items accompanying them truly mean, is part of an ongoing debate (*cf.* Brück 2001). The question of the identity and personhood of the dead underneath barrows, whether they are part of an elite, whether they are ancestors or not, is a very complex one and not within the scope of the present research.

It is certainly true that some of these barrows cover spectacular graves, with exceptional items of extraordinary quality and rarity. Several of these graves feature prominently in the narratives on the European Bronze Age. Every self-respecting Bronze Age specialist has heard of *Clandon* and *Bush Barrow*, the *Egtved* mound, and the *Leubingen tumulus* to name but a few. These names ring out to us and take up a central position in our image of Bronze Age society (*e.g.* Bogucki 1999).

The problem however is that these mounds are singled out and isolated (Last 2007, 2). Yet they are invariably part of a group of barrows, in fact usually hundreds of others are located in the vicinity. They are part of intricate alignments and clusters of barrows where the location of each mound was carefully deliberated.

To continue with the Clandon barrow example, the mound is part of a vast concentration of barrows on the South Dorset Ridgeway. Yet it is *not* located on the Ridgeway itself, where most of the mounds can be found. Rather, it is placed on a lower-lying inner arc of barrows, as are several other rich Wessex graves (Woodward and Woodward 1996, 277).

So clearly a certain logic underlies the placing of each mound, yet in understanding the role of the individual barrow, we should move beyond the grave itself and consider its position within the wider landscape (Woodward 2000, 20; Last 2007, 2). However, if we wish to understand the role of a barrow in the landscape, we first need to understand the scale of the barrow landscape.

## 2.4 The scale of the barrow landscape: from individual barrows and barrow groups to barrow landscapes

The definition of the barrow landscape and how we should understand the role of a barrow within it, is fundamentally a scalar problem (*cf.* Wandsnider 1998). This problem is aggravated by the fact that barrows tend to be dispersed over large areas (*e.g.* Ashbee 1960, 34; Woodward 2000, 80-84). Previous research has generally focussed on barrows as part of barrow cemeteries and small clusters of barrows (*e.g.* Garwood 2007; Fleming 1971). Usually this approach departed from excavations and the mounds which were researched (*e.g.* Geschwinde 2000).

The Goirle barrow group is a case in point. In 1935 Van Giffen excavated seven burial mounds on the *Rechte Heide* in the Southern Netherlands (Van Giffen 1937a; Fig. 2.1). Six of the barrows are placed in a linear arrangement alongside a small stream valley, while a seventh mound is located some 400 m to the southeast of it and slightly off-axis. Is it part of the alignment or not? Additional barrows can be found on the opposite flank of the stream valley, are these part of the same group? And what of another barrow located one km to the south (Glasbergen 1954b, 56)?

A further example can be found in the extensive barrow group of Toterfout I introduced in the first Chapter. Glasbergen excavated a total of 34 barrows located on an elongated cover sand ridge (Glasbergen 1954a, see Fig. 1.1). Almost all of the barrows date to the Middle Bronze Age (see Chapter 5). Glasbergen numbered the Tumuli from 1 to 30 creating the impression of a single cemetery.<sup>1</sup> In reality the barrows are unevenly spread out across the ridge and cover an area of 2 by 0,6 km. Some are placed in small alignments, others in small clusters, others in apparent isolation. What then are the limits of this barrow group? Is it made up of multiple groups as Theunissen suggested (Theunissen 1993)? Clustering can certainly be identified on multiple levels, yet how do we decide which barrow belongs to which group if any?

The examples presented above demonstrate why it is very difficult to delineate and distinguish individual barrow groups from one another. If we adhere to arbitrary definitions – such as ‘*every barrow within 300 m of another*’ (Drenth and Lohof 2005, 453, note 8); within 1,5 km of one another (Roymans and Kortlang 1999, 38); less than 100 m for nucleated cemeteries and approximately 150 m for dispersed cemeteries (Fleming 1971, 141-142); or some other implicit level of proximity (*e.g.* Theunissen 1999, 47; Llobera 2007b, 55; Needham, *et al.* 2010, 32, Fig. 13) – the barrow landscape would be cut up in several groups which in no way reflects its complex spatial composition. Barrows were constructed, not

---

1 It should be noted that the term *cemetery* is perhaps not well suited to describe these barrow groups. A *cemetery* implies a delimited area solely used for burial. As I will argue throughout these Chapters, this was never the case throughout prehistory.

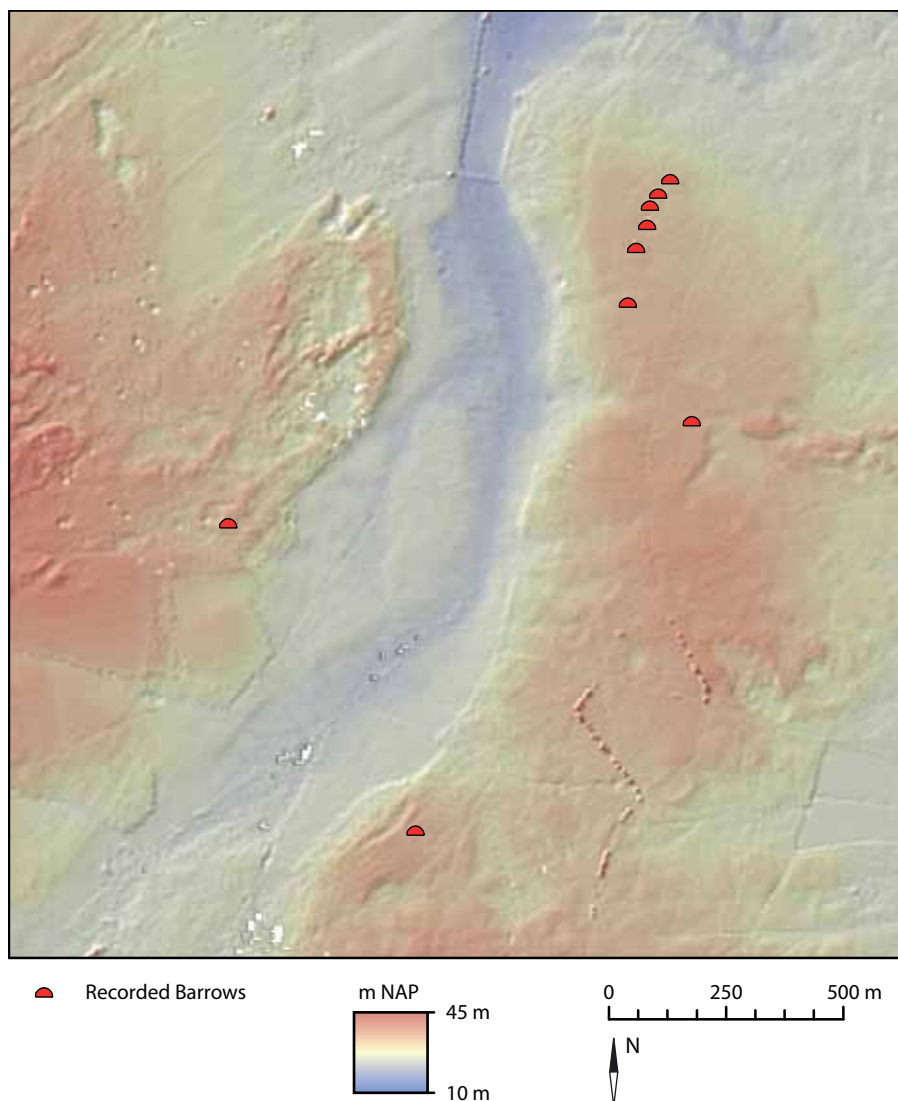


Fig. 2.1: The barrows on the Rechte Heide close to the town of Goirle. The elevation map was created with the AHN elevation data (copyright [www.ahn.nl](http://www.ahn.nl)).

in isolated groups, but rather in wide zones (Fontijn 1996, 78; *cf.* Fleming 1971, 142-143). Therefore the research-unit on which this research bases itself must be the landscape in which these barrows were constructed.

To illustrate this, let us consider a well-studied barrow group in north-west European prehistory, the Normanton Down barrow group. Located approximately a kilometre to the south of Stonehenge, it is the site of one of the most famous and richest Wessex burials in Great-Britain, Bush Barrow.<sup>2</sup> Excavated in 1808, it has taken up a central position in studies on the British Early Bronze Age ever since (Ashbee 1960, 76-78; Woodward 2000, 39; Needham, *et al.* 2010).

The extraordinary and exotic items in the grave have been extensively discussed in multiple articles (*e.g.* the daggers by Gerloff 1975; the gold objects by Kinnes, *et al.* 1988; etc.). These items are seen as the chiefly regalia of an extraordinary individual without par in Southern England (*e.g.* Needham, *et al.* 2010, 31-35; *cf.* Bogucki 1999; Earle 1997). The focus in these studies lies solely on the burial and the associated items.

2 For a recent and extensive discussion on Bush Barrow and the barrows surrounding it, see Needham *et al.* 2010.

Other authors however place Bush Barrow within its context of the Normanton Down Barrow Group (*e.g.* Woodward 2000, 104-105; Garwood 2007; Lawson 2007; Needham, *et al.* 2010). Bush Barrow then becomes just one of the thirty odd barrows placed along a single alignment. Indeed, many of the barrows next to it contain similar prestige items (Needham, *et al.* 2010, 25, Fig. 9), although perhaps not as spectacular as those from Bush Barrow. When viewed on the scale of the Normanton Down Barrow Group, Bush Barrow is considered to be placed within a lineage, with the explicit position of each barrow reflecting historical time and its genealogical ties (Garwood 2007, 43).

Yet the Normanton Down Barrow Group is one of the many groups of barrows identified around Stonehenge (Needham, *et al.* 2010, 32, Fig. 13). When viewed on this larger scale, the Normanton Down Barrow Group is part of an inner ring of barrows encircling and cordoning off Stonehenge (Woodward and Woodward 1996, 288). It has been argued that most barrows on the inner ring were placed in such a way that they would skyline when viewed from Stonehenge itself (Bradley 1998, 126-131; Exon, *et al.* 2000; Lawson 2007, 209-210). From this perspective Bush Barrow then becomes only one of the 260 barrows within a three km radius of Stonehenge (Parker Pearson 2005, 81) and part of an intricate 'sacral' landscape (Field 1998, 321). And this without even mentioning the barrows beyond the World Heritage Site (*cf.* Fitzpatrick 2011, 3, Fig. 2).

The Bush Barrow example demonstrates how the burial itself, even though spectacular, cannot be seen in isolation of its wider landscape setting. Bush Barrow is inextricably linked with the other barrows around it and its position in regard to Stonehenge and other elements in the landscape.

## **2.5 Why barrows are built in certain locations: barrows as the creation of lineal histories, genealogies, demarcating territories and ritual landscapes**

The landscape setting of a barrow has certainly been discussed before. Previous research on the role of a barrow within the wider landscape can be broken down into three positions. On the one hand barrows are seen as marking ancestral presence and therefore ownership of land. Closely related to this is the position where barrows are seen as territorial markers, with mounds 'claiming land' or being placed alongside borders demarcating right of access. And lastly barrows are thought to be the expression of a cosmological landscape, with barrows referentially placed to significant places in the landscape. All three of these positions depart from the visual role of a burial mound.

### *2.5.1 The visual nature of the barrow*

The discussion on the visual nature of a barrow is an extensive one and I will delve deeper into it in Chapter 6. Yet the point I would like to emphasise here is that barrows visually demarcate specific places in the landscape. It marks out that specific location and elicits a specific reaction from onlookers. As I argued in the beginning of the Chapter, it transforms a locality into a meaningful place.

The point is that the end-product of centuries of barrow construction has thus resulted in vast areas where hundreds of these places are visually marked out. It is the cumulation of all these markers which created a visual landscape (Fontijn 2002, 270-271). Barrows, by their visual nature, take up an important role in the structuring of the landscape. Be it as a territorial marker or as part of a cosmological landscape.

### 2.5.2 Barrows marking out ancestral presence

The visibility of a barrow – as a marker – has often been interpreted in the sense of territoriality and ancestral presence (Fleming 1971, 155; Bogucki 1999, 286). The monumental permanency of the barrow and the presence of past generations it implies would signal property or control of land (Hanks 2008, 262). The ownership or, more neutrally, the right of access to land would then result from the association of communities with real or mythical ancestors. The act of placing an ancestor underneath a new barrow is then equalled to a statement of right of access to that land by the community creating the barrow (Harding 2000, 426).

At the same time these barrows are also considered to control or dominate the landscape by the views obtained from them (*e.g.* Thrane 1998, 275; Lagerås 2002; Tilley 2004b, 197). It is often remarked that by standing on top of a barrow, one often has wide ranging vistas. And the ancestors underneath the barrows, through these views, would then control access to land.

The relation of barrows with ancestral presence would imply that the land is owned by the ancestors (*cf.* Helms 1998; De Coppet 1985). A further implication would then be that by the time of the Bronze Age, the land would already have been completely infilled with ancestral presence and ownership. To continue to legitimise the presence of a community in the landscape, people had to negotiate with the ancestors in order to still be allowed access to the land (Fokkens and Arnoldussen 2008, 8-9).

The placing of a new grave in relation to other burials enabled it to be situated historically. The reference to place allowed for the reference to ancestors or genealogical succession (Barrett 1994, 123). Each subsequent construction of a barrow is thus seen as a reworking of genealogical lines, a reshaping of political alliances and the redefinition of genealogical status (Barrett 1990, 183-184). The association with pre-existing barrows may thus have been a form of legitimisation or appropriation (Watson 2001, 207; Bogucki 1999, 286).

Especially barrow lines have been explained in terms of genealogy and legitimisation (*cf.* Barrett 1994; Bogucki 1999, 277; Garwood 2007, 44). The lines of barrows are seen as the expression of the lineal history of local groups. Some authors consider this lineal history as the remnants of dynastic succession (Bogucki 1999, 277; Kristiansen and Larsson 2005, 57; Needham, *et al.* 2010, 31).

This idea in itself is not new, it has in fact been around since the earliest days of archaeology. One can already see it reflected in the use of the name Old King and New King barrows - two linear barrow groups close to Stonehenge. These names were already attached to them in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.

Each individual barrow is here transposed into an individual, with the location of each mound marking out that person as well as its social position within prehistoric society.

### 2.5.3 Barrows as territorial markers

At the same time barrows are thought to ‘*divide the landscape into blocks*’ (Last 2007, 5), effectively monumentalizing boundaries between two different landscapes and territories (Field 1998, 316; Woodward and Woodward 1996, 288; Watson 2001, 209; *cf.* Renfrew 1976). Through their monumental permanency, barrows would be more suited to fulfil this task rather than the more ephemeral remains of the settlements from those same periods (Barrett 1989, 123).

A similar link between ephemeral settlements and permanent barrows is outlined in the influential model by Roymans and Fokkens (Roymans and Fokkens 1991; later refined by Roymans and Kortlang 1999). The model problematised the differences between settlements and barrows from the Middle Bronze Age



as opposed to the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age. It assumed barrows were created by local communities within their own territories (Roymans and Kortlang 1999, 37; Fokkens 2003, 19; Gerritsen 2003, 191-192).

Essentially this model implies that each longhouse, farmstead or settlement site is accompanied by 'its' barrow (Arnoldussen 2008, 84; Bourgeois and Fontijn 2008, 42). The fact that barrows are widely dispersed in conjunction with the *wandering farmstead* model (Schinkel 1998) led them to conclude that territorial organisation in the Middle Bronze Age was loosely defined (Roymans and Fokkens 1991, 11; Roymans and Kortlang 1999, 38; Gerritsen 2003, 198). In this sense the presumed loose organisation of barrows is explained through the loose territorial organisation of the settlements. Implicitly a barrow is thus seen as a territorial marker, fixing the individual settlement in the landscape.

Here, each individual barrow is seen as the expression of changing territorial relations. Wherever people went, barrows went along with them.

#### 2.5.4 Cosmological landscapes

An altogether different approach considers the placement of all barrows within the landscape as the creation of an encompassing ritual landscape. Each barrow is then assumed to take up a specific position within the cosmological landscape. Other elements of the cosmology may include rivers or the sea, specific mountain-tops, etc (Lagerås 2002, 188; Cummings and Whittle 2004, 82).

To give an example, Christopher Tilley suggests that the positioning of barrows in Southern England can be translated into an entire cosmological landscape networking and linking distinctive topographical elements (Tilley 2004b, 197). He argued that by manipulating the views available from barrows people differentially referenced specific places in the landscape (*ibid.*, 198).

There is no doubt that a deeply rooted symbolism permeates all aspects of the burial ritual. Recently Kristiansen and Larsson (2005, 242) have made a valiant attempt at interpreting every aspect of the barrow ritual from the perspective of a Bronze Age cosmology. For example the grassland and the turves used in the construction of the barrow might symbolize the everlasting pastures in the afterlife, or might be considered as a burial gift to the deceased. The oak coffin would then be a symbol of the tree of life, and thus possibly hinting at rebirth. At the same time the position of the mound in the landscape, cresting on the hill tops, might be seen to symbolise the rising sun.

Whether or not this interpretation of the Bronze Age burial ritual is correct is debatable (nor do Kristiansen and Larsson presume it to be!), but the underlying implication is that every action in the construction of a barrow was important to the people building them (*cf.* Watson 2001, 212). As each mound contributed to the formation of the cosmological landscape, the exact position of each new mound will have been meaningful to the societies creating them (Field 1998, 315). The creation of such cosmological landscapes is not only assumed to be reflected in the position of monuments in relation to natural features, but can be expanded to other barrows or man-made features.

The circle of barrows surrounding Stonehenge is one of the most remarkable examples. Here, an inner and an outer ring of barrows surrounds the henge, defining zones and borders within the landscape. These configurations have led to interpretations of rings of the special dead guarding the sacred site (Woodward and Woodward 1996, 288), or to the creation of procession routes leading towards Stonehenge. It is thought that the circularity seen in the henges and the round barrows is recreated in their landscape setting (Watson 2001, 208).

Similarly, in some cases the areas where barrows are found are interpreted as the lands of the dead, where people returned to bury their dead, while they themselves lived in other areas or the lower lying valleys (Fleming 1971, 159). A barrow landscape would thus become or be a true necropolis, where only the sheep would graze on the everlasting hills of the dead. In many schematic representations of a Bronze Age landscape, the dead are placed on the hills while the settlements are located in the valleys (*e.g.* Bradley 2002, fig 3.9, 76).

Here, a barrow and its position within the landscape is seen as something different, set apart from the living with its own internal logic and dynamic.

## 2.6 Problems with the previous approaches to the barrow landscape

There is certainly something to be said in favour of each of these approaches. Yet in my opinion there are two reasons why the previous approaches and explanations fail to understand the nature of the barrow landscape. Firstly the discussions on territoriality as well as the discussions on ritual landscapes do not explain why certain barrows cluster, why some are placed on long alignments nor why others are not. Secondly they fail to engage with the deep temporality of the barrow landscape and they consider the development of the barrow landscape retrospectively.

### 2.6.1 Barrows as claiming land

The question whether or not we can speak of territoriality and tenure in prehistory is a difficult one (*e.g.* Gerritsen 2003, 115-117). I will not enter into a discussion on territoriality itself, rather I am more concerned with the assumption that a barrow functions as a territorial marker.

Essentially the assumption is based on the idea that each social group creating a barrow is territorially defined *and* that they create barrows to manifest these territories in the landscape. Especially the second part of the assumption is, in my opinion, difficult to substantiate.

There is certainly evidence that some barrows have been used as territorial markers in historical times (Bonisch 2007). Several of the mounds in the Low Countries are located on the borders between the Netherlands and Belgium or Germany. In a few cases a border post was planted on top of them, fossilizing the border within the barrow (*e.g.* barrow 6 at Swalmen, Lanting and Van der Waals 1974, 25). Yet as Holtorf observed: '*it is not the megaliths which were, as Renfrew argued, 'territorial markers' (1976), it is us – or he rather – who see them in such a light*' (Holtorf 1996, 130). The point is that some of these barrows *became* territorial markers, yet it remains to be proven that they were created as such.

A second point is then the question what territory each barrow defines? In Dutch Archaeology this is taken as the territory of the *local* group (Roymans and Kortlang 1999, 37; Fokkens 2003, 19; Gerritsen 2003, 191-192). This implies that each local group delineated *their* local territory. It also implies that the people building the barrow were the same people constituting a local group.

Yet what is this local group? In Dutch archaeology it is assumed that the local community is: '*the social unit that in a certain area lives together, uses the same fields and grazing grounds, worships the supernatural at the same cult places and buries their dead in the same cemetery of common ancestry*' (Fokkens 2003, 19). These local communities are thought to consist of a few dozen people (Gerritsen 2003, 112), three to six households (Roymans and Kortlang 1999, 36), or an extended family (Fokkens 2003, 26).

Simply equating burial communities with local communities is disputable however and even the definition of communities is highly problematic (Cohen 1985, 12-13). In essence a community defines itself through the use of symbols – which can take any form, be it manner-of-speech, dress, specific rituals, etc. These symbols are then used to create insiders and outsiders, members and non-members (*ibid.*, 12-15). The important point, however, is that people can simultaneously be part of multiple and separate communities (*ibid.*, 116).

Following Cohen and others, Gerritsen argued for the existence of burial communities during the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age (Gerritsen 2003, 110-115) and Fontijn for the existence of sacrificial communities in the Middle and Late Bronze Age (Fontijn 2002, 270-271; 2008, 103-104). In the same light I would argue that the people building a barrow were part of a barrow community (I will return to this in the Chapter 9).

As I asserted in the beginning of this Chapter, the barrow as a burial ritual was an exclusive way of burial. The barrow then was reserved for a restricted group of people, a selection from prehistoric society and not the local community. There may well have been a certain overlap between the burial and the local community. Yet the shape and form of many of the constituent elements of the burial ritual rather points to the importance of non-local communities (*e.g.* the martial identity expressed in some graves, Fontijn 2002, 246, 273-274; Wentink in prep.).

If barrows demarcate a territory, what territory was it then, that of the local community or rather that of the social group building the barrow?

A more fundamental issue is that territoriality and ancestral presence do not directly explain the distribution of barrows. They do not explain why a barrow was placed where it was.

Additionally there is the implicit assumption that something could be gained by associating with earlier monuments (Gerritsen 2003, 145). But if it was simply a question of associating with earlier monuments, why do certain barrow groups develop into dense clusters where others do not? How should we understand this disparate distribution?

Essentially territoriality explains the development of the barrow landscape from one perspective: throughout the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Millennium, prehistoric communities kept demarcating their territories with ancestral burial mounds. Quite literally barrows are seen as flags with which groups demarcate and signal their position within the landscape.

A last assumption is then that a barrow always functioned as a territorial marker. This, I argue, does not do justice to the vast time scale of the practice of barrow construction nor of the various communities involved. This point brings me to the second problem pertaining to explanations on barrow landscapes: they depart from a singular perspective and are retrospective.

### *2.6.2 The temporality of barrow landscapes: single logic and retrospective explanations*

Fundamental to the study of barrow landscapes is its temporal dimension. The practice of mound building continued for thousands of years and their omnipresence in the modern-day landscape must be seen as a testament to the longevity of the barrow as a funerary marker. The thousands of barrows represent several phases of intensive barrow construction alternated by phases of disuse or only secondary use (see Chapter 3, 5 and 7). We are thus observing the end-product of a long series of practices associated with the barrows and their surrounding landscape (Garwood 2007).

It is imperative to understand that people in the Bronze Age lived in a landscape already filled in with barrows (Ashbee 1960, 37; Kristiansen and Larsson 2005, 338), they had no choice but to react to older barrows: either opposing or associating with them (Barrett 1990, 183). So the intentions and meanings behind the placing of a barrow in the Bronze Age will have differed from those in the early Late Neolithic. This has led to several statements on the difference between Bronze Age and Neolithic barrows (*cf.* Kristiansen 1998, 288; Watson 2001, 213; Last 2007, 3).

Yet this temporal depth is rarely explored and the complex interplay of diachronic events is reduced to a single seemingly synchronous layer and the formation process is explained from a single logic perspective (*e.g.* Llobera 2007b; Tilley 2004b).

To return to a previous example already mentioned above, Woodward and Woodward postulate that Stonehenge was surrounded by a ring of the special dead (Woodward and Woodward 1996, 288), but one must wonder how and when that ring was formed (Garwood 2007, 30). The two rings of barrows did not come into existence overnight, but were the end-product of several centuries of barrow construction (*cf.* Exon, *et al.* 2000; Lawson 2007).

This single logic perspective can be extended to almost every approach to barrow landscapes. Discussions on territoriality, ritual landscapes and expressions of lineages all fail to grasp the temporal depth of the barrow landscapes. At the heart of these theories, permeates a feeling of primal ordering structuring the entire landscape (see for example Field 1998, 315; Harding 2000, 87; Watson 2001, 207; Woodward 2000, 84; Tilley 2004b, 198; Johansen, *et al.* 2004, 38). It is as if the end-product was implicitly ingrained in the placing of the first barrow (Barrett and Ko 2009, 283).

This, however, does not do justice to the many layers of meaning and the chronological ordering of the evidence (Garwood 2007, 31). In essence these are *retrospective* models, that – with the benefit of hindsight – explain the development of the barrow landscape from a singular perspective.

On the contrary, the persistence of barrow construction implies that barrow groups and barrow landscapes are layered with a multitude of meanings that are temporally and culturally separate (Garwood 2007, 31). The barrow landscapes were constantly reworked and added upon. They were not founded on a pre-set plan (Barrett 1994, 24), but rather came into being through the reworking of and acting upon previous elements (*cf.* Bradley 2002). Increasingly the landscape would then become dotted with barrows, creating a physical reality as each barrow transformed, however subtly, the shape of the landscape (Barrett 1994, 113).

## **2.7 Approaching the problem: reconstructing the development of the barrow landscape**

In order to understand why the barrow landscape attained its current form, we need to understand how people created and transformed it (*cf.* Fontijn 2002, 21). As I stated above, each new barrow influenced and directed how a certain place must be viewed. Each new addition to the barrow landscape transformed its structure and must be seen as a meaningful addition to the whole. This active process of shaping and modifying is what created the barrow landscape.

If we wish to depart from retrospective views on such landscapes, we should work the other way round and start by unravelling the barrow landscape and look at *how* people transformed it. We first need to understand *when* and *how* the barrow landscape came about before we can understand why it developed into

the encompassing mortuary landscape we observe today. The patterns in which it formed will then form the basis with which we can try and understand its development.

Essential to such a chronological approach is a barrow landscape in which we can fully reconstruct its development: in other words we need to study a barrow landscape where we can put every barrow in its right place, from first to last.

On a pragmatic level it is thus important to find a balance between sufficient detail on the barrows themselves on the one hand and the necessary contextual scale on the other. For this purpose, the choice was made to study case studies, each representing a particular aspect of the barrow landscape.

However, before presenting these case studies we need to establish two things. First, a chronological framework with which we can determine when each respective barrow was built (Chapter 3). Second, we need to know how representative our dataset is. To understand with what morsels and scraps of the barrow landscape we are dealing, we need to study which significant changes and modifications it has undergone through the millennia. These so-called map formation processes (Fokkens 1998) will be the focus of Chapter 4.

