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

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

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Title: Monuments on the horizon : the formation of the barrow landscape throughout the 3rd and 2nd millennium BC

Date: 2013-01-10

Chapter 9

THE FORMATION OF THE BARROW LANDSCAPE

9.1 Introduction

In both Chapters 7 and 8 I discussed the intricate patterns in the formation processes and reuse of the barrow landscape. Yet both reuse and new barrow constructing took place at the same time, and the question is then what processes lay at the basis of these patterns. How did the barrow landscape form around, at times ancient monuments? And how did, for example, the long alignments come about? But especially, why was a barrow placed in a specific place and not in another? What governed these choices?

In the previous Chapters I approached the barrow landscape from a distant perspective, detached from the human scale, both in a temporal and a geographical sense. In this Chapter I will attempt to contextualize the barrow landscape on a human level. The first implication when dealing with a human level is the vast time-depth of the barrow landscape.

9.2 The time-depth of the barrow landscape and its implications

The barrow landscape can be characterised as a very stable element of prehistoric society. Throughout several millennia the praxis of mounded burial never disappeared fully and time and again earthen mounds were erected over burials. Yet the constituent elements of these mounds each have their own distinct temporality. The shape and the form of each mound as well as the burial it covered will have been distinctly different in specific periods as opposed to others. Because of these differences we have little difficulty recognising a Bronze Age barrow from a Neolithic one.

We now assume several three to four hundred year periods of intense barrow construction took place (see Fig. 3.6). These are usually viewed as monolithic blocks of consecutive mound building which display differing and distinct practices. They allow us to differentiate between activity phases and parts of the barrow landscapes which formed during specific periods.

The long alignments, for example, are typical for the Late Neolithic A. They are certainly extended upon in later periods, yet they all originate in that period. Through lack of a detailed chronological time-frame, most Late Neolithic A barrows are now grouped together in periods of 400 years and we see the emergence of the alignment as one single event. The same applies to Late Neolithic B and Middle Bronze Age barrows.

There are two important points we need to consider in regards to these monolithic blocks. The first point is that these blocks in all likelihood represent several intermittent periods of barrow construction. There are strong indications that within any given region, multiple barrows were built in quick succession (perhaps even in a single year), only to be followed by decades of inactivity before a new construction phase took place (see Chapter 8). At this point the lack of a detailed

chronology cannot provide a clear answer. It is only with techniques such as dendrochronology that these short activity periods can be evidenced (*cf.* Holst, *et al.* 2001, 131-132).

But we should not lose sight of the limitations of our chronological resolution nor of the implications these entail. This brings me to the second point, namely that the best temporal resolution already extends over the actions of many successive generations. A period of 200 years - the best resolution we can usually achieve through radiocarbon dating - in human terms already represents eight to ten successive generations.

The implications are two-fold. On the one hand, we assume contemporaneity between barrows which were in all likelihood separated by significant amounts of time and multiple generations. On the other hand, the significant time-span in-between suggests that at any point in time, knowledge of who lay buried where, and what actions were carried out at which barrow will have been imperfect at best.

As etnographic research has consistently demonstrated, in societies with an oral history, accurate historical knowledge extends back to at the most four generations (ca. 80-100 years, Erll 2011; Assmann 1992, 50; Vansina 1985, 182-184; Bradley 2003, 221). Beyond four generations, knowledge becomes unstable and we enter the realm of the mythical past. Genealogical lists extending beyond these four generations are known, but these are simplified and increasingly inaccurate. In-between the historical and the mythical past lies a *floating gap* which migrates along with each successive generation (Assmann 1992, 48; Vansina 1985, 192-193).
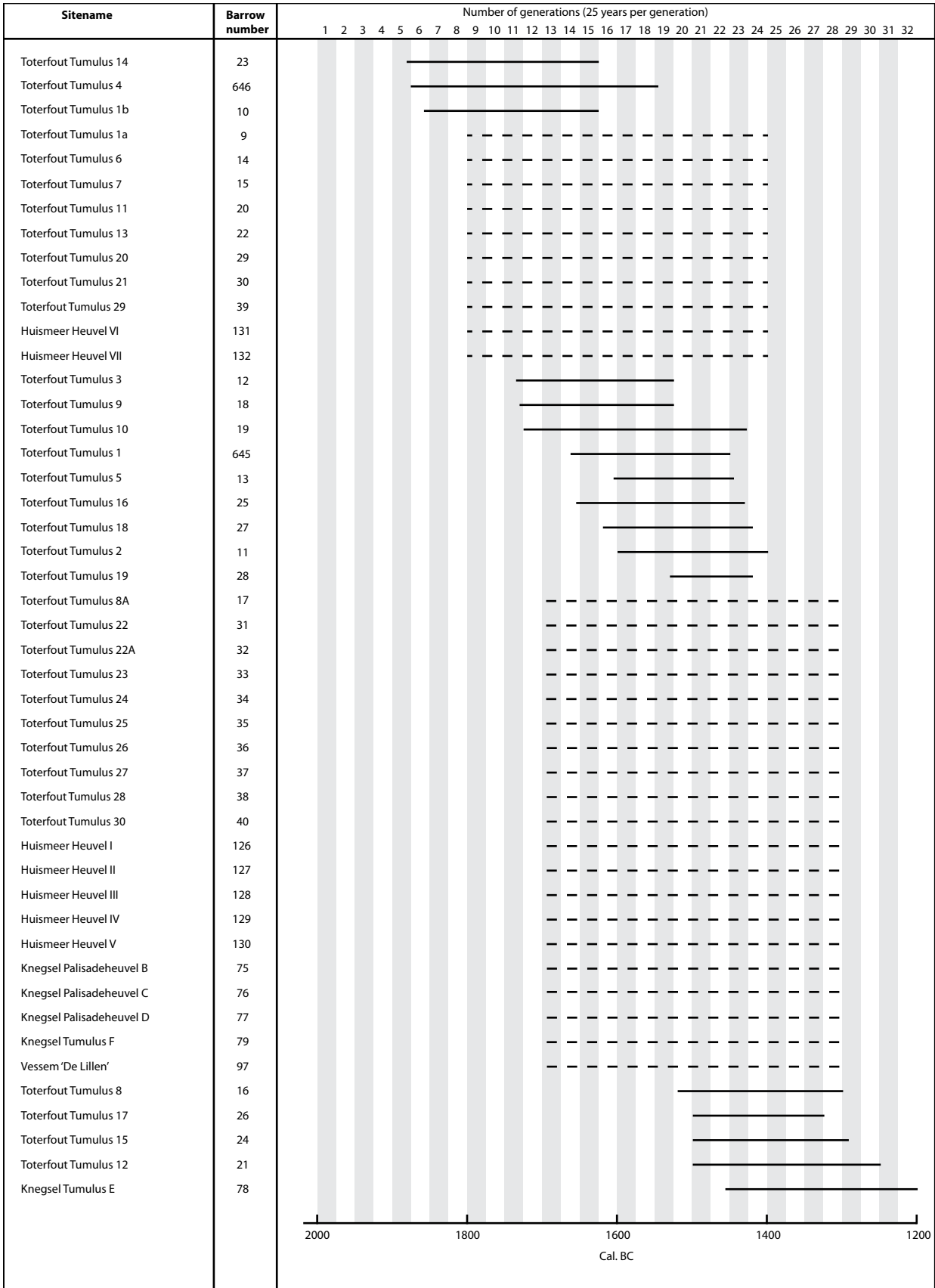
To illustrate both points we can turn to the Toterfout barrow group (Fig. 9.1). Each of the 34 barrows excavated by Glasbergen represents a discrete event, carried out at a specific point in time. On the basis of radiocarbon dates and typochronological evidence we can distinguish between an earlier and a younger group, although the boundaries between the two are fluid (see Chapter 5). The distance in time between barrows of both groups is considerable and in most cases extends over at least a century.

But even between apparent contemporaneous barrows, there is a significant possibility that the earliest barrow was decades if not centuries older than the others. Let us, for the sake of argument, consider both Tumulus 4 and 14 of Toterfout (barrows nr. 646 and 23), the two oldest barrows in the region. On the basis of calibrated radiocarbon dates they are assumed to be roughly contemporaneous. Yet the former may well have been built in, say, 1824 BC and the latter in 1658 BC. In human terms, this is already beyond the limits of genealogical history.

Even if we do assume contemporaneity between some barrows on the basis of similarities in burial practices, most of the barrows already built will have been part of a distant past. The centuries in-between these suggests that precise knowledge of who lay buried where was flawed if it had not already disappeared completely.

These points may seem self-evident yet they illustrate how at every possible moment in time, the role of memory in the transmission of knowledge and the constant reinterpretation of that knowledge were central to the development of the barrow landscape. At the same time it puts constraints on what role direct genealogical connections will have played. I will return to these implications below.

Fig. 9.1 (opposite page): Dating ranges of all primary barrows in the Toterfout region. The grey and white bands indicate each individual generation. The solid black lines indicate radiocarbon dated barrows, the interrupted lines indicate barrows dated on typochronological grounds.

Sitename	Barrow number	Number of generations (25 years per generation)
Toterfout Tumulus 14	23	
Toterfout Tumulus 4	646	
Toterfout Tumulus 1b	10	
Toterfout Tumulus 1a	9	
Toterfout Tumulus 6	14	
Toterfout Tumulus 7	15	
Toterfout Tumulus 11	20	
Toterfout Tumulus 13	22	
Toterfout Tumulus 20	29	
Toterfout Tumulus 21	30	
Toterfout Tumulus 29	39	
Huismeer Heuvel VI	131	
Huismeer Heuvel VII	132	
Toterfout Tumulus 3	12	
Toterfout Tumulus 9	18	
Toterfout Tumulus 10	19	
Toterfout Tumulus 1	645	
Toterfout Tumulus 5	13	
Toterfout Tumulus 16	25	
Toterfout Tumulus 18	27	
Toterfout Tumulus 2	11	
Toterfout Tumulus 19	28	
Toterfout Tumulus 8A	17	
Toterfout Tumulus 22	31	
Toterfout Tumulus 22A	32	
Toterfout Tumulus 23	33	
Toterfout Tumulus 24	34	
Toterfout Tumulus 25	35	
Toterfout Tumulus 26	36	
Toterfout Tumulus 27	37	
Toterfout Tumulus 28	38	
Toterfout Tumulus 30	40	
Huismeer Heuvel I	126	
Huismeer Heuvel II	127	
Huismeer Heuvel III	128	
Huismeer Heuvel IV	129	
Huismeer Heuvel V	130	
Knegsel Palisadeheuvel B	75	
Knegsel Palisadeheuvel C	76	
Knegsel Palisadeheuvel D	77	
Knegsel Tumulus F	79	
Vessem 'De Lillen'	97	
Toterfout Tumulus 8	16	
Toterfout Tumulus 17	26	
Toterfout Tumulus 15	24	
Toterfout Tumulus 12	21	
Knegsel Tumulus E	78	

Generation axis: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32

Cal. BC: 2000 — 1800 — 1600 — 1400 — 1200

9.3 The Barrow Choreography

While the outward form of the mound remained relatively stable for thousands of years, the rituals surrounding these mounds differed greatly (at least those we can see archaeologically). The complexity of the events associated with each mound suggests we should view each one of them as a fossilized choreography, with a specific set of actions determined from the onset (Goffman 1963, 19; Metcalf and Huntington 1991, 174). These actions can be separated by a significant amount of time, but they were implied from the beginning.[52]

If we take a Late Neolithic A barrow as an example – the Putten barrow (barrow nr. 409; Van Giffen, *et al.* 1971; see Fig. 6.7) – the choreography started with the digging of a grave pit, deepening the pit along its edges to create a small ditch, placing stakes within that small ditch and lining the wall with wickerwork. Once the burial chamber was ready, the body and the associated grave goods were carefully arranged within it. Perhaps after an intermittent period a palisaded ditch was erected around the grave and subsequently a barrow was erected over it. Once the mound was built, the choreography was over and the people literally moved on (see Chapter 8, p.189-190).

The barrow choreography for a Bronze Age mound was very different. A distinct set of rituals occurred prior to, during and after barrow construction. If we consider mound 1B of Toterfout (see Fig. 7.5; barrow nr. 10), the choreography started with the creation of a small four-poster construction, perhaps to support a pyre or to create a temporary shelter (Lohof 2000), or perhaps on a more symbolical level as a reference to granaries and fertility (Bradley 2005, 3-10; Fokkens, *et al.* 2009, 215-216). A large urn, with in it the cremated remains of a man, was placed amongst the remains of the pyre. A wide ringditch was then dug, encircling the grave, and the sand from the ditch was thrown inwards to form a bank. A small mound of sods was erected on the inside of this bank and on top of the pyre and the urn. Whether or not a smaller conjoining mound was constructed at the same time is unclear.

In many respects the barrow choreography during the Bronze Age (and perhaps already in the Late Neolithic B) can be said to extend beyond the initial construction of the mound. As I argued in Chapter 7, the similarity in burial practice between some secondary graves and the primary graves implies that their placing within a specific mound was already determined from the onset. In the case of mound 1B the similarity between the primary grave and four of the secondary graves is striking.

Yet as the Wiesselse Weg example demonstrates (see Fig. 7.7), the secondary activities associated with each mound were also finite. Secondary burial did not continue indefinitely and most barrows only had a few secondary graves placed within them. Once the appropriate rituals were conducted, the barrow choreography ended and a new choreography was started elsewhere.

9.4 Idiosyncratic groups

The choreographic approach to the barrow ritual reveals discrete practices which are idiosyncratic for individual regions, specific periods and groups (Bourgeois and Fontijn 2012).

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52 Note that I do not suggest that all actions following the construction of a mound were implied from the beginning, only those actions carried out by the people building the mound. Bronze Age secondary burial in Late Neolithic A mounds was not implied by the original builders, yet when one secondary grave was placed in a mound during the Bronze Age, others were generally meant to follow (see Chapter 7).

As an example we can consider the distinct groups of post circles and their opposition on specific parts of the cover sand ridges of Toterfout (see Chapter 5 and 8). Yet this opposition is typical only for the Toterfout region. A contemporaneous barrow group 20 km to the west, at Goirle (Van Giffen 1937a), does not display such an opposition.

This idiosyncrasy can be extended to every element of the burial ritual. The way in which people constructed graves on the Ermelo heath in the Late Neolithic B, by digging massive burial pits and lining them with burnt or charred planks for instance, is uncommon outside of the Ermelo region (see Fig. 5.21).

Equally the provision of grave goods within the grave follows an idiosyncratic logic. For example on the west-flank of the ice-pushed ridge at Renkum, three of the Late Neolithic B graves contained a set of two almost identical Veluvian Bell Beakers each. Two of these graves contained amber beads as well. This practice is rare outside of this region (Wentink in prep.).

As a last example, the prevalence of mortuary houses at Toterfout is typical for that group of barrows only (accounting for approximately a third of all documented mortuary houses, Lohof 2000; Bourgeois and Fontijn 2012, 521). No mortuary houses have been found under the barrows of the *Huismeer* lake 1 km to the southeast (see Chapter 5).

Although none of these practices are exclusive to a specific region, there is a pervasive feeling of similarity and sameness between specific groups of barrows. While acting out the barrow choreography specific elements of the barrow ritual are selected and manipulated, and each group of people thus creates their own idiosyncratic version of the barrow ritual. It is this combination of elements and the entire choreography which reveals a coherence within a specific region.

This level of idiosyncrasy can also be seen in the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age burial ritual. Each urnfield has its own character, with some urnfields displaying a preference for iron over bronze ornaments or very specific local types of ornaments (Fontijn 2002, 206-207 and 244-246; Fontijn 2008, 92-93; see Harding 2000, 113-114 for several Danish examples).

9.5 Barrow communities

The nature of the barrow choreography and the work involved in it suggests large groups of people were involved in the construction of these mounds. The creation of massive mounds, elaborate post circles, etc. all suggest that more than the directly related took part in the creation of a barrow. At the same time the idiosyncratic nature of the choreographies indicates these groups were restricted in space and time.

These shared practices point towards the existence of a community. As I argued in Chapter 2, a community is very difficult to define (Cohen 1985, 12-13). Communities can exist on multiple levels and people can be part of several and separate communities. A community is defined by a set of shared practices, knowledge and symbols. By adhering to these practices and symbols people create insiders and outsiders, us versus them.

I would argue that the shared practices and idiosyncrasies point towards the existence of barrow communities. Groups of people who shared the knowledge on how to conduct a 'proper' burial and what steps, which choreography, this entailed. And by sharing that knowledge and the practices, people defined themselves as a community.

In this sense, Gerritsen argued for the existence of a burial community in 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; Fontijn 2008, 103-104). Can we, along a similar vein, identify the existence of *barrow* communities in the Late Neolithic and the Middle Bronze Age? Four arguments certainly suggest we can.

Firstly, if we consider that a barrow within any given region was built every few years, it must have been considered a special event. The fact that the construction of a barrow was a relative rare event moreover indicates that only a select few were eligible for burial under a barrow (see Chapter 2 and 8, Lohof 1994, 113; Wentink in prep.). The barrow burial ritual was thus the burial ritual for a restricted group of people, a selection from prehistoric society.

Secondly, the semiotic nature of the burial ritual – through the creation of a mound, with its elaborate post circles and other elements meant to be seen – indicates that people beyond those directly participating were involved.

Thirdly, by placing each barrow amongst a much larger whole, for example on long alignments, people made a statement of adherence to a wider community. Through the placement of their barrow in a specific position relative to other mounds, communities define themselves as part of a larger whole.

And lastly, the constituent elements of the burial ritual point to the significance and existence of communities on multiple levels. There are certainly indications of a local community. The idiosyncratic nature of some elements of the burial ritual supports this.

The differences in-between these groups can be small, but people from a different local community (*i.e.* the neighbouring valley or settlement) will recognise the small discrepancies between how they conducted the burial ritual and how their neighbours did it. Yet at the same time the shape and form of many of the constituent elements equally points to the importance of non-local communities (*e.g.* the martial identity expressed in some graves, Fontijn 2002, 246, 273-274).

The last point highlights the complexity in recognising communities in the archaeological record. Is it then possible to identify specific and discrete barrow communities? Two objections can be raised.

The first objection is that communities are multi-scalar in nature and they are essentially context-sensitive (Cohen 1985, 116). The death of one individual will create a different response depending on the people he knew, the several communities he was a member of, his position within society, the communities and people taking part in the burial ritual, etc. The burial ritual is thus not the expression of a single community, but rather we are seeing the expression of multiple communities.

The second objection is that a community does not exist outside of the bodies of its members (Gerritsen 2003, 112). It is therefore subject to constant change. As time passes the way in which a community expresses itself can change significantly, even if the people themselves are not aware of these changes (Cohen 1985, 91-96).

In a sense attempting to locate specific barrow communities can therefore be seen as futile. The fact is that they existed however, and that at a particular point in time a specific group of people will have considered a particular part of the barrow landscape as theirs. It then becomes more interesting to investigate *how* these barrow communities constantly formed themselves around these older monuments.

9.6 The creation of barrow communities

9.6.1 Collective memory and the barrow landscape

The way in which communities created and recreated themselves brings me back to the point I made at the beginning of the Chapter, that the time-depth of the barrow landscape is already so vast, that we are ultimately dealing with a constant reinvention and reincorporation of that same barrow landscape.

The cumulative effect of barrow building will have created a palimpsest of mounds, which will have had a significant impact on the people living in each respective period (Field 1998, 315; Garwood 2007, 30-31; for a similar argument concerning urnfields see Gerritsen 2003, 125). In many ways they were walking and living among the visible ancestral remains (Ashbee 1960, 37; Bogucki 1999, 277; Kristiansen and Larsson 2005, 338;). The hundreds of barrows, placed in alignments or spread out over vast distances will have created a pervasive sense of a lasting communal presence. The role of memory, its creation and the transmission of that memory will therefore have been central to the creation of community (Cohen 1985, 99-103).

To understand the processes behind the transmission of memory we can turn to the work of French sociologist Halbwachs (Halbwachs 1968 [1950]; 1971 [1941]) and his concept of *collective memory*. In the last two decades the concept of memory has seen a veritable boom within archaeology and other social sciences and Halbwachs' work has been further developed by most notably Assmann (Assmann 1992) and others (for works in archaeology see Rowlands 1993; Holtorf 1996; 1998; Moore 2010; Yoffee 2007; Van Dyke 2009; Roddick and Hastorf 2010; Porr 2010; Dušan 2010; for a general overview see Erll 2011).

In essence collective memory is a form of memory shared by members of a community, and each community has its own collective memory (Halbwachs 1968 [1950], 74; Assmann 1992, 39; Nora 1989, 9). This memory is not based on facts and historical truths, indeed it can be said to be entirely fictitious (Halbwachs 1971 [1941]; Assmann 1992, 40-41). In adhering to this collective memory, a person expresses its membership to a specific community (Assmann 1992, 39). At the same time the collective memory defines the characteristics and the nature of the community (*ibid.*, 40). Each element of the collective memory is defined in space and is attached to an event, a person, a locality or even entire landscapes (*ibid.*, 38, 60; Nora 1989, 12).

Fundamentally, the collective memory creates a fictitious topography with narratives attached to specific places and parts of the landscape (Halbwachs 1971 [1941], 126; Assmann 1992, 60). Older monuments and relics of a distant past become elevated into this topography and part of the collective memory (Holtorf 1998, 24).[53]

I would argue that the reinterpretation of the barrow landscape in the Middle Bronze Age (see Chapter 7) is a form of collective memory. At that time, knowledge on who lay in the earlier Neolithic mounds had already fully disappeared. The collective memory and the mental topography of the Middle Bronze Age will thus have been entirely fictitious.

This mental topography spanned the entire barrow landscape. As most barrows were incorporated in the collective topography, it is the entire story, when narrated in succession, which made up the collective memory. Each barrow gained a significance which surpassed itself and which placed it within the narrative as a whole. This narrative changed gradually through time, changing with each new

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53   And we should not forget the role of natural places (*cf.* Bradley 2000; Fontijn 2002).

barrow being incorporated, and with each slight modification changing the collective memory as a whole without the community noticing the changes (Cohen 1985, 91; Halbwachs 1971 [1941], 144).

The creation of a collective memory in the Bronze Age not only involved the Neolithic barrows, but also older monuments from the Bronze Age itself. If we consider the older and younger group of the Toterfout barrows, the older barrows had already descended into a mythical and distant past by the time the younger barrows were being built. And all of the older barrows had an invented story attached to them. To illustrate this: Tumuli 1B and 14 became focal points for secondary burial and additional mounds were constructed in their vicinity. Yet barrow 4, in a relative sense as old as the others, was apparently neglected. These, seemingly arbitrary choices were governed by this mental topography.

As a further example, we can turn to three barrows I already discussed in detail in Chapter 7. On the Ermelo heath, three Late Neolithic A barrows were built in close proximity to one another (Tumuli I to III; barrows 324-326). From the onset these three barrows were almost identical in size and composition. Yet only one of these was reused in the Late Neolithic B (Tumulus II). A secondary central grave was dug into its top and an additional layer of sods added to the entire barrow. The other two were not reused during this period.

In the Middle Bronze Age, a secondary mound phase was added to Tumulus III, while at least three or perhaps even four were added to Tumulus II. Additionally, secondary burials were placed in both these mounds. Throughout this period, for whatever reason, Tumulus I was shunned. The reasons why some barrows became foci of later activities was not governed by the barrow itself, but rather by the stories that became attached to them.

This collective memory is of course not exclusive to the Middle Bronze Age and will have existed in the LN as well (one can think of the selectiveness in reuse at the Vaassen Tumuli, see p.176). A similar process took place during the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age. But here the collective memory only attached itself to individual (groups of) barrows, and not the barrow landscape as a whole.

In essence the barrow community is thus an imagined community. By manipulating and controlling the collective memory people could control the 'right to be buried among the ancestral barrows'. In turn the collective memory shaped and controlled how people were buried amongst the ancestral barrows (*cf.* De Coppet 1985). Or as Halbwachs puts it:

> *'le lieu a reçu l'empreinte du groupe, et réciproquement'* (Halbwachs 1968 [1950], 133).

9.6.2 Non-discursive construction of community

A community defines itself amongst the remains of the distant past. The physical relics of the past certainly intrude upon the sense of community, but it is not only the past which plays a role in the creation of these communities (*cf.* Moore 2010, 402-404). There is a danger of overextending the concept of collective memory until it essentially equates to culture (Berliner 2005; Moore 2010, 402-404; Van Dyke 2009, 222-223). Collective memory as such operates in the distant past, beyond the floating gap (Assmann 1992, 32), it is about incorporating that distant past into the present.

Yet a sense of community was also created by performing activities around the burial mounds and by creating new barrows. By building a mound a community defined itself. By continuously burying their dead in a similar fashion people

reinforced their sense of community, and it is by 'doing *that they* become' (Budden and Sofaer 2009, 204). This is in a sense a non-discursive process, it is more about *how* something is done rather than *why* it is done.

If someone of a specific group died, people would have had an expectation of what was to follow, they had an idea of how that person ought to be buried. These expectations were determined by previous performances (Metcalf and Huntington 1991, 174). If we continue this line of thought - of barrow building as a performance or a choreography (see above) - it was then the acting out and the repetition of the performance which generated a sense of community.

This sense of community was not only reinforced by creating new mounds, but also by walking past them in day-to-day tasks (Roddick and Hastorf 2010, 172; Ingold 1993, 167). If we accept that the alignments were placed alongside roads, then walking along that road and encountering the barrows when walking from, say, a settlement to pastures would have reinforced the sense of community.

The dispersed nature of the barrow landscape also suggests that the expectation of how one was to be buried extended to that of a place or a *zone* in the landscape (see Chapter 8). When entering a specific place, people belonging to a specific community would havehad a specific expectation of that place. Once again in the words of Halbwachs:

> *'Lorsqu'il entre dans une église, dans un cimetière, dans un lieu consacré, le fidèle sait qu'il va retrouver là un état d'esprit dont il a fait souvent déjà l'expérience, et qu'avec d'autres croyants il va reconstituer, en même temps qu'une communauté visible, une pensée De souvenirs en communs, ceux-là mêmes qui se sont formés et entretenues, aux époques précédentes en ce même endroit'* (Halbwachs 1968 [1950], 160).

I would argue that in the Late Neolithic and the Bronze Age, the heathlands took up such a role (*cf.* Littleton 2007, 1025). It was on these heathlands that the dead resided, it was there that barrows were constructed (see Chapter 8). Barrows and heathland were inextricably connected. If someone of the barrow community died, people expected to bury him on the heathland unless there was a distinct reason *not* to.

Time and again throughout this book, the important position of heathland has been emphasised. As I argued above it remained a stable element of prehistoric life. The large concentrations of barrows as we know them in the Low Countries are especially known from heathland areas. Of course barrows are also known from other areas, on occasion they are uncovered in the river-area of the central Netherlands (*cf.* Meijlink and Kranendonk 2002; Jongste and Van Wijngaarden 2002). Yet, as far as we know, they rarely formed large and extensive groups. Perhaps we should also think in terms of heathland communities different as to those on the wetlands?

The important point is that the barrows were in the first place, built on heathland that was maintained as such for millennia afterwards. If we accept that these heathlands were managed by grazing herds and their accompanying herdsmen, then they are no wastelands but rather fully incorporated into social and every-day life. Yet these communities will have differed significantly through time and their attitudes towards each of these mounds will have changed as well.

9.6.3 Semiotic and relational landscapes

Neither the collective memory nor the non-discursive processes explain how the barrow landscapes attained their specific configurations. Even within extensively dispersed groups such as the Toterfout barrows, we see a deliberate positioning of

each barrow. Small alignments formed, specific barrows were reused in a specific way, some became focal points for further barrow construction whereas others did not. While people had an expectation to be buried on heathland, there was probably also an expectation as to where on that heathland. These heathlands were structured and organised.

This brings me back to the nature of mounded burial. By building a mound communities created a physical reality which transformed the landscape in a lasting way. It is through this creation that a community defined itself physically in the landscape. In this sense, each new mound is the barrow community made explicit.

Yet that mound was built in relation to all other mounds (even in an 'empty' landscape). By referencing older elements, barrow communities redefined themselves in reference to all the other mounds. And at the same time they redefined these as well. Each mound thus stated their place within the wider – and entirely fictitious – landscape. It was a statement of who they were and how they defined themselves in respect to the wider world. These semiotic statements were made in a relational landscape.

Perhaps the long alignment of Epe-Niersen represents the best illustration of this process. Each new barrow being constructed brought with it the dilemma and the choice as to where to place it. By building a barrow on the alignment, people became part of and redefined themselves and the alignment as their barrow community. Yet at the same time, by *not* building on the alignment (as perhaps happened from the Late Neolithic B onwards), people departed from and defined themselves as different from that community and its barrows. And that choice was made visible through the physical presence of the mound.

These relations were not only defined in terms of visual conformance or opposition but could be much more ambiguous. The Epe-Niersen alignment once again provides a good example. In Chapter 6, I frequently discussed the visual hierarchy expressed in the choice of location for each barrow and I especially focussed upon the three barrows on the *Galgenberg*. I argued that these three mounds were effectively skylined when walking along the entire length of the alignment. These mounds expand the alignment and are an integral part of it. Yet at the same time, the choice of location and the visual hierarchy it entails also hints at a difference.

We are left to guess why these three mounds were placed in such an elevated position, overlooking the others. One of these mounds has not been excavated, the other poorly so and the third could not be reliably dated (see Chapter 5). Yet it is interesting that the latter covered a grave with a complex grave ritual. In it were found the remains of a woman in flexed position and placed at her back were the disarticulated remains of at least two more individuals (Bourgeois *et al.* 2009). As far as we know, this was a rare practice in the Low Countries. Perhaps such positions were only reserved for specific people and specific burial rituals?

A similar and ambiguous relationship is also expressed in one of the mounds which is located off the alignment itself. As I argued in Chapter 6, it is cresting a hill when viewed from the alignment. By placing it away from the alignment, the barrow community made a visual statement of not adhering to the alignment, of being different. Yet by maintaining such a distinct visual relation with the mounds of the alignment, we can suggest they still incorporated the alignment into their own barrow community.

With each barrow a new element was added to the visual structure. Each barrow can thus be seen as a meaningful statement. And each barrow visually redefined and restructured the relation of the barrow community with the landscape and with all other barrows within the landscape.

9.7 Conclusion

It is the interplay of these three processes that created the barrow landscape. It came about through a constant structuring and restructuring of the landscape by barrow communities.

By creating a mound, a barrow community manifested itself visually. The material and physical presence of the barrow then positioned this barrow community within the landscape. And by manipulating its position in relation to other elements, meaningful statements could be made. In some cases the positioning may have been governed along genealogical lines, in others perhaps in terms of a hierarchy and others still even as ambiguous and dual statements. It is the cumulation of these statements that created a visually structured landscape.

Yet at the same time, these communities kept burying on these heathlands because it was what they did. It was by building barrows that they became the barrow community. And in a sense the entire heathland was eligible for burial and was defined as a burial *zone*. It was the place of the dead, where time and again people returned to carry out a barrow choreography. Once the choreography was over, they moved on, only to start a new choreography elsewhere.

And in returning to these heathlands, the ancient relics of ages past became, time and again, reincorporated into the collective memory. Some mounds were added upon, others were shunned. Through time the barrow communities of the Low Countries reinvented themselves amongst the remnants of ages past and gradually more and more barrows became part of the collective memory. And by adding a new barrow these communities kept restructuring themselves around these mounds.

Let us consider the interplay of these processes in the light of the alignments. Each one of these started in an 'empty' landscape. The first mounds visually structured the landscape by creating long alignments. Technically with the first two mounds, the axis was already set out, and it is then, by building barrows on the alignment that people became the barrow community.

There may certainly have been a deeper symbolic level to the alignments – one quickly thinks of a journey to the afterlife – yet gradually the alignment started to exist for its own sake (*cf.* Bender 1992, 748). Throughout the Late Neolithic A, people expected each new barrow to be placed on an alignment.

Gradually and through time, the original meaning of the alignment became lost or was actively abandoned (perhaps in the Late Neolithic B?). Yet the alignment as such was still physically present and visible in the landscape. In this sense it continued to become incorporated into the collective memory.

Throughout the Late Neolithic B and the Bronze Age new mounds were built close to ancient ones. The very physicality of the alignment ensured it kept intruding upon the sense of community. But by building new barrows, and burying on the alignment, the new community shaped itself around the alignment. This is especially clear in the Ermelo case, where during the Middle Bronze Age, the previous alignment was copied and added upon.

Yet at the same time, the structures of the previous period were abandoned as well. Especially from the Late Neolithic B onwards new barrows were also built away from these structures, in visual opposition to these alignments. As I argued in Chapter 8 and above, the dispersion of mounds throughout the landscape suggests that instead of alignments, now heathlands took up a central role in the burial ritual and the definition of a community.

Throughout the Late Neolithic B and Bronze Age, a barrow had to be built on heathland, and whether or not they were built close to ancient monuments was then a consequence of the collective memory – the stories which were attached to it – and the statements the community wished to make. In a sense there was enough liberty to start a new group somewhere away from the alignments in 'empty' areas.

A similar process of reinterpretation of ancient monuments occured in the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age. In several cases urnfields formed around a select few barrows of the Late Neolithic and Bronze Age. Once again these were choices, shaped by a form of collective memory. Out of the vast barrow landscape, specific barrows were chosen. Around these monuments, gradually the urnfield communities redefined and restructured themselves, each time they built a new small earthen mound on the urnfield.

This process of reinterpretation and reincorporation continued in later periods, albeit on a lesser scale. The importance of heathland as a burial place decreased and only on specific occasions were people buried on the heathland. The position of the heathland barrows gradually receded into the negative sphere (Roymans 1995).

To continue with our alignments, one of the mounds on the Epe-Niersen alignment – perhaps not by chance the one with the highest visual signature (see Chapter 6) – was used as a gallows mound. It is even indicated as such on maps dating back as early as the 17th Century. The Christian communities of the Low Countries had as such defined the barrow landscape as something outside of their community. The barrows became the areas where goblins, dwarves, demons and witches lived (Roymans 1995). And it became a final resting place for murderers and thieves (Meurkens 2010).

Fig. 9.2: A small marble stone, with the inscription papa *was dug into the flank of a mound, close to the hamlet of Hoogsoeren on the Veluwe (photograph by A.Louwen).*

Yet the story of the alignment does not stop there, and in fact continues into our own time. Perhaps the activities of Holwerda, the Queen, the State Heritage, and now by me can be seen as the latest revival of the Epe-Niersen alignment. It is through my authority as an archaeologist that I claim to date specific barrows. As I write this, new posts carrying a short description on the basis of this authority are being placed close to these mounds.

And even today some of the mounds of the barrow landscape are still used for burial. Near the town of Hoog-Soeren a small stone was inserted into a barrow, carrying the inscription *papa* (Fig. 9.2).[54] We do not know who placed it there, nor if there really is someone buried underneath it, but perhaps this is the start of a new revival?

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54   I am very grateful to Arjan Louwen for pointing my attention to this barrow.