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The longhouse as a central element in Bronze Age daily life

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Our thoughts about daily life in the Bronze Age are guided not only by data but by a number of other factors as well: for instance our own research interests or the way we ourselves think about life, our *Zeitgeist*. Everyone has a different vision of the past, and it is difficult to choose between them. Thinking about the Bronze Age, many of you will see farmers living in large farms, ploughing their fields with a span of oxen. Others see belligerent men fighting each other with sword and spear or paramount chiefs in a permanent struggle for power. Still other scholars are predominantly concerned with pottery typology or study the changes through time of other aspects of material culture.

Which of these approaches is the best? Many scholars push their vision as the only or most important way of looking at the past. In my opinion that's wrong; rather we should look at them as describing different aspects of life in the past, which are complementary rather than in competition. The image I develop here can be interpreted as a personal interpretation of the data that we have. It does not replace other images, but rather tries to supplement them. Many of my ideas have developed through discussion with colleagues, especially within the project 'Archaeology and landscape in the Meuse-Demer-Scheldt area' financed by the Dutch Science foundation (NWO), the University of Amsterdam, the Free University and the University of Leiden.¹ The basic ideas have already been published elsewhere (Fokkens 1996, 1997a, 1999)². Here I intend to elaborate on them.

¹ In several stages of the writing process this article was read and commented on by Luc Amkreuz, Ignace Bourgeois, Mirjam Bruineberg, David Fontijn and Richard Jansen. I am grateful for their discussion and suggestions.

² This article is an edited version of an article that appeared in Dutch as 'vee en voorouders, centrale elementen uit het dagelijks leven in de bronstijd' (Fokkens, 2002).

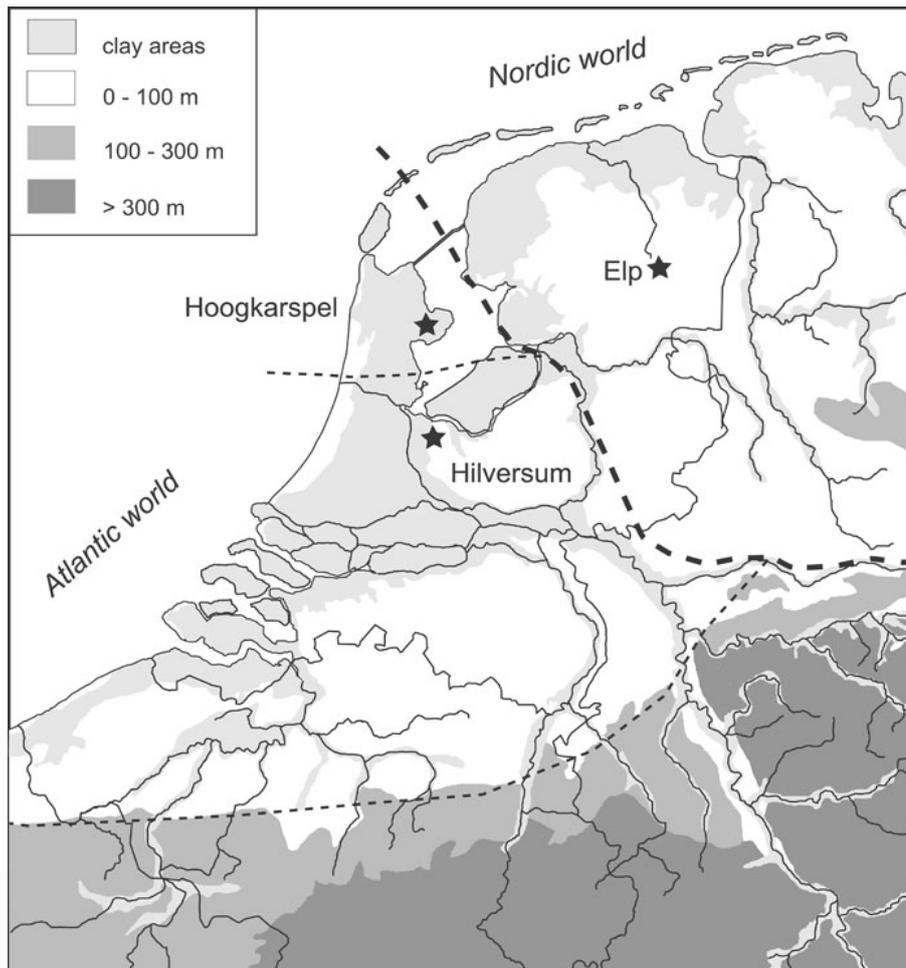


Figure 1 The pottery provinces of the Netherlands and the type sites of the Middle Bronze Age cultural traditions (stars): The Elp Culture north and east of the Rhine and IJssel, the Hilversum Culture west of the IJssel and the Hoogkarspel Culture in West-Friesland and Noord-Holland.

First I want to explain the goals of this paper. I will try to look ‘behind’ our data. We have used our archaeological data to build as clear as possible an image of farming life, house building and burial practice in the Bronze Age. But a lot of questions remain: often, the more data you have, the more questions arise. Questions like: why did people keep their cattle inside the house? Why wasn’t everyone buried underneath a barrow? Why were Bronze Age longhouses so large? Why did people deposit objects in marshes and rivers? *Et cetera*. These are questions that cannot be ‘read’ directly from the data, but ask for other approaches.

The things I will be looking for are fundamental aspects of Bronze Age daily life. Can we detect – by looking at the evidence of course – more about important things like how the farmstead was perceived, the organisation of the small communities in which people lived, or even discuss values like home and family, mortality and the role of ancestors? If we could get some grip on these things, we would come very near to formulating ideas about the cosmology of Bronze Age societies in our region, the Netherlands and surrounding areas. We

would be able to speculate about the balance between factors that are crucial in any small-scale society: the balance between people, ancestors and the supernatural, and about the ways to maintain that balance.

These values and beliefs are - at least in the framework of this article - the things I am looking for. Three broad categories of data are at our service: settlements, burials and hoards. All three of them are closely interrelated, but in this article I will limit myself to just two of them: settlements and burials. I base myself predominantly on Dutch data, both from the north / east and middle / south,* although I realise that both areas are part of two different culture areas: the Nordic world in the north and the Atlantic world in the south (fig. 1) (Fokkens 1997a). But apart from differences between these culture areas, for instance in the exchange networks and burial traditions (inhumation in the north, cremation in the south) there are also many similarities. The development of the longhouse and the development of house types, for instance, show many points of comparison (roymans & Fokkens 1991). The general patterns of burial traditions also developed along the same lines. I am confident about treating them as part of one culture complex.

First I want to discuss one of the developments that are considered to have heralded a fundamental change of farming traditions: the genesis of the three-aisled *longhouse*, 'longhouse' being used here as a technical term to indicate a farm with a living area and a byre included. Next I will develop the argument that both cattle and the longhouse were important symbols for Bronze Age society, and especially that the longhouses, the symbol of family unity, and the cemeteries, the places where the owners of the land - the ancestors - lived, formed central places that were cherished because they were important for the continued existence of the community. Finally I want to discuss the radical changes of both houses and cemeteries in the Late Bronze Age and try to explain these transformations in terms of changes in social organisation which they - in my opinion - relate.

2 The longhouse and cattle as central elements in the Bronze Age.

Until the middle of the twentieth century the longhouse was the normal type of farm in the Netherlands. We are so used to it that we hardly realise that outside the lowlands of north-western Europe the housing of people and animals in one and the same building is very unusual. If we go back to the roots of this tradition, it is generally assumed that its origins lay somewhere in the Bronze Age, between 1800 and 1500 BC. We don't really know whether or not animals were stalled in the Late Neolithic two-aisled buildings, but archaeologically there are in any case no indications of this. In contrast, three-aisled Bronze Age houses do (occasionally) show positive evidence, mostly in the form of stall partitions.

The transition to this 'real' longhouse is generally placed between 1800 and 1600 BC, but this is not uncontested. It is indeed clear that around that time the first

three-aisled houses developed, but whether they incorporated a byre included is disputable. Anyway, it is a fact that the new three-aisled tradition developed in approximately the same period everywhere in the area where the longhouse existed later on (fig. 2, fig. 4). This rather uniform and simultaneous development indicates that the reason for the genesis of the new tradition is not simply a new building fashion, for in that case one would expect regional styles and time paths. It rather suggest a change that was firmly rooted in social and economic aspects of life. I will return to this point in section 2.2.

In an earlier article I discussed the dating problems of the development of the longhouse (Fokkens 2001), but a number of additional remarks can be made. Therefore I begin by briefly revising the discussion.

2.1 The origin of the longhouse

I indicated above that the origin of the three-aisled farmhouse is generally seen as the same thing as the origin of the longhouse, but this 'fact' has not gone undisputed. Harsema (1993), for instance, claims that the longhouse did not originate until 1400 BC. In support of this argument, he points out that in the northern Netherlands, the Emmerhout type (fig. 2F) is the oldest longhouse known. He asserts that before 1400 BC three-aisled houses existed, but without a byre. These byreless farms, which he calls type Angelslo, cannot be distinguished from the Emmerhout type in either structure or length. The only difference is that no stall partitions are visible. According to Harsema, cattle were housed in separate cowsheds. But in fact no evidence of cattle stalls have been found in these either. Moreover, a date for this type is lacking as well, which makes the whole story inconclusive. Therefore I see no reason to incorporate Harsema's Angelslo type in the overall schema of figure 2.

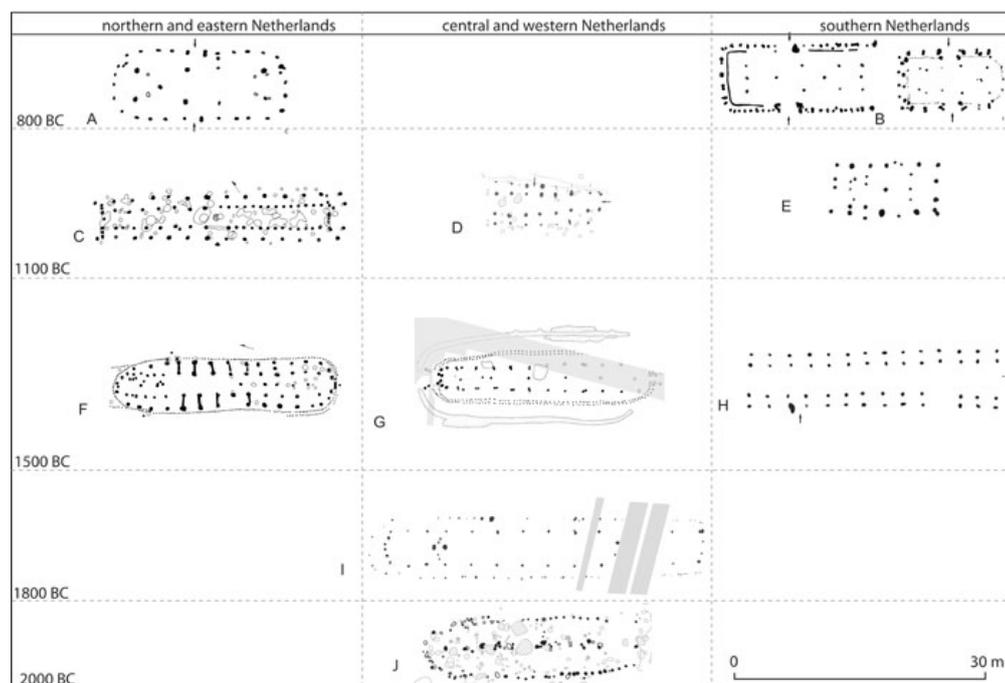


Figure 2 Survey of the development of house plans in the Bronze Age of the Netherlands. A: transitional type Hijken (Een); B: Oss type 2 (left H112) and type 3 (right H132); C: type Elp (Angelslo); D: Texel-Den Burg house J, E: Boxmeer; F: Type Emmerhout (Angelso); G: type Zijderveld: Zijderveld; H: type Oss 1 (Oss); I: Voetakker house 28-1AH; J: Noordwijk. For details and references see Appendix 1.

The question of whether visible stalls can be used as a good indicator for the origin of the longhouse is in fact a very important one. If one looks at the totality of the available material, then only the house plans from the northern Netherlands appear to have had - during a certain period of time - clearly visible stall partitions. It is not easy to find examples outside this area. So far the oldest example, which by the way cannot be dated precisely, is the Loon op Zand house (roymans & Kortlang 1991). A sample of grain from a storage pit inside the house plan has been dated to 1516-1404 BC. The question is whether this pit really belongs to the house itself or represents a re-use phase of the yard. Anyway, the house is probably not older than the 16th century BC.

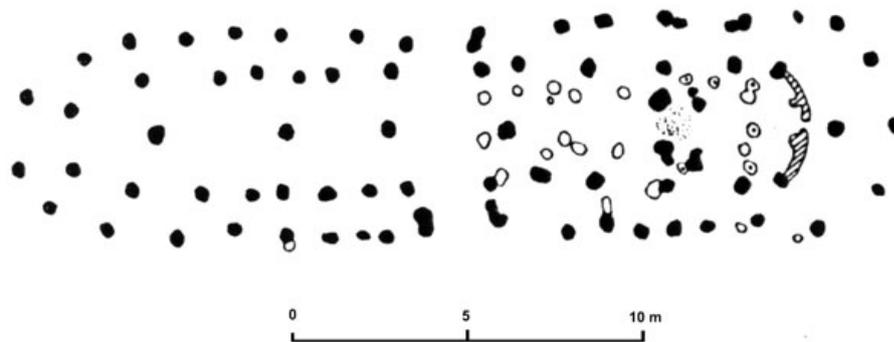


Figure 3 The Bronze Age house plan of Telgte (from Reichmann 1982).

So, in many three-aisled plans stalls cannot be recognised by archaeological means, but that does not mean that there were none. There are other indications of a separated living area and a byre without the visible presence of stalls, for instance, find distributions or traces of inside walls. In the latter case the house is often divided lengthwise into two parts by opposite doorways in the long wail and sometimes by actual walls. Interesting in this respect, is the three-aisled house of Telgte (fig. 3) (Reichmann 1982). On the basis of the finds in and around this house, it can be dated to the period between 1800 and 1500 BC. This plan probably has a byre at the east end.³ The Telgte excavations are also important because the arable land that was observed next to the house and dated to the same period must have been raised by the addition of soil, probably a mix of farmyard manure and soil. These fields were covered with wind blown sand at the end of the Bronze Age (Reichmann 1982: 447).

³ Reichmann, 1982, 438.

Rasmussen's research into the origin of the longhouse in Denmark also shows that it made its first appearance in Period Montelius 1, and had developed fully in Period Montelius II (1500-1200 BC) (fig. 4) (Rasmussen 1999: 287). Especially the East Thy project has produced beautiful examples of early three-aisled plans with stalls.⁴ Nevertheless, even here real stalls are hard to identify. Most authors in Scandinavia use the placement of interior walls and indications of subdivisions in the house as an argument for a byre in the farm (e.g. Rasmussen 1999:287; Olausson 1999:320). Here it should be emphasised that the walls of stalls do not have to be dug so deep that they are visible archaeologically, which means that they may easily have been preserved worse than the main construction of beams and wall posts. Even in West-Friesland and in the Dutch river area, where very thin and shallow farmyard fences and wall stakes have been preserved, stalls are not visible to us. This suggests they were constructed differently, which does not mean that cattle were not housed inside these houses. The find distribution sometimes does indicate a bipartition, as in the case of Dodewaard⁵ and house 28-1AH of Meteren 'de Bogen' (Meijlink & Kranendonk 2002).

The archaeological visibility of stalls is thus a real problem and their absence can hardly be used as an indication of the absence of a byre in the house. To put it another way, our image is probably too much coloured by the Drenthe farms, where stalls are generally easily visible in house plans dated to between 1400 and 900 BC. But that is in fact the only region where this is so and also the only period. Before that time neither in Drenthe are stalls visible. Therefore, if we want to investigate the origin of the longhouse, the presence of stalls should only be a minor factor. I think that we can stick to the general opinion that the transition from the two-aisled to the three-aisled house marks the origin of the longhouse. From the point of view of construction, this enables the placing of livestock in stalls around a central part that can be used for feeding and milking cattle.

For the dating of this development there are in fact very few points to hold on to. The house of Dodewaard can probably be dated early (Theunissen 1999), and

⁴ See for instance the house plan of Legård (Bech and Mikkelsen 1999)

⁵ Theunissen, 1999, 141. A sample from that house was dated to 3430 ± 35 BP (1872-1842 or 1778-1628 at 2σ ; Lanting and Mook, 1977, 120), but Lanting and Mook think that the old date is due to a contaminated sample, even if they don't explain why they think that. Theunissen however, who finally published his findings on the site, is of the opinion the sample does indeed date the habitation phase, which probably means a date between 1778 and 1628 BC.

Meijlink and Kranendonk think that the earliest houses of Meteren 'De Bogen'

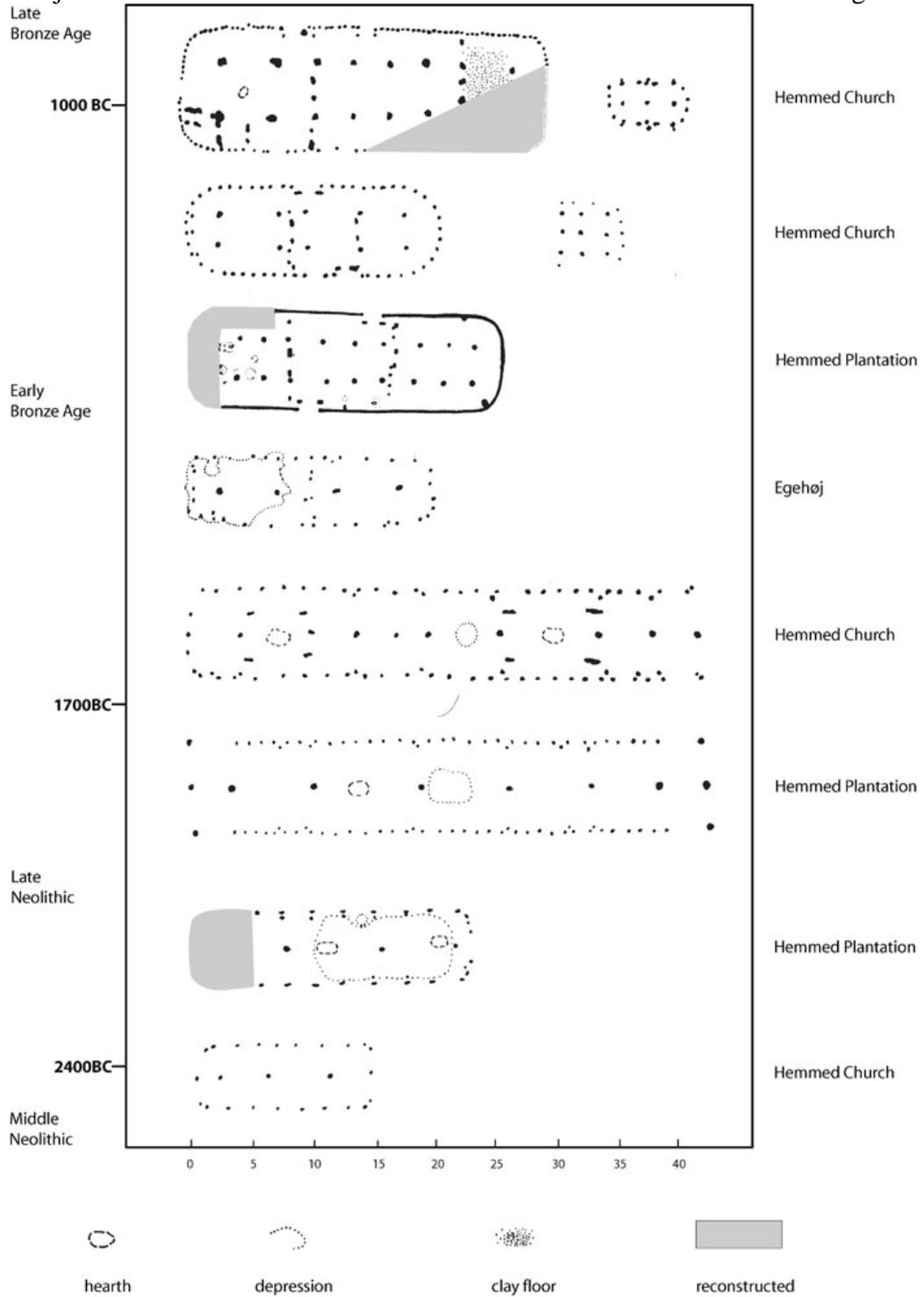


Figure 4 A survey of the developments of the house in Denmark (Jutland) (after Boas 1993).

can also be dated to the period between 1800 and 1500 BC (Meijlink & Kranendonk 2002). We can also look at the youngest examples of two-aisled plans. The clearest example is the Noordwijk plan (c. 1850 BC; fig. 2J).⁶ It has the rather irregular shape and structure that appears to be characteristic of Early Bronze Age farms in our region.

In conclusion, the data seem to indicate that the transition from the two-aisled to the three-aisled farm and at the same time probably to the longhouse took place not much later than 1800 BC. For me that is one of the many reasons to place the start of the Bronze Age around 1800 BC and not around 2000 BC, when little changes and in fact the culture traditions of the Late Neolithic continue (Fokkens 2001). This development bears comparison very well with what we know from Scandinavia. There also the three-aisled house develops at the beginning of the Bronze Age, in Period Montelius I, after 1800 BC (fig. 4) (Boas 1997; Olausson 1999; Rasmussen 1999).

2.2 Livestock and people in one building: what was the reason for longhouses?

Interesting, but very difficult to answer, is the question of why the longhouse came into being. Most authors search for the answer in a practical explanation, often connected to the beginning of cattle stalling. As noted above, cattle stalling inside the house cannot be excluded for the Neolithic but there are no indications of it (Nielsen 1999: 159). One might also say that, even if it was already a custom in the Neolithic, it appears to have become a much more businesslike practice in the Bronze Age. According to IJzereef it is clear that from the Bronze Age onwards cattle were actually bred (IJzereef 1981). The number of cows that could be housed in Bronze Age farms was rather large: 30 head may not have been an exception.

A range of arguments has already been put forward in order to explain this new development.⁷ Some have argued that from the end of the Neolithic cows were milked and that cattle stalling was necessary because cows give less milk in cold conditions (Sherratt, 1983; Zimmermann, 1999, 314; Olausson 1999, 321.). Several authors have pointed to the collection of manure as a reason for stalling (Fokkens, 1991; Karlenby, 1994; Reichmann, 1982; Thrane, 1990.). That manure was used is proved by the research at Telgte (Reichmann 1982), and also on the island of Sylt (Kroll 1987). Without it, cattle farming must have been very difficult on the poor sandy soils of the Pleistocene cover sand-plateaus of north-west Europe. The collection of manure in byres therefore can be seen as an important innovation in farming practice. Protection against the cold has been forwarded as an explanation as well (Harsema 1993). Louwe Kooijmans,

⁶ Van Heeringen, Van de Velde and Van Amen, 1998; Jongste, Meijlink and Van de Velde, 2002. For a discussion of the house, see also Fokkens, 2001. Jongste (2001) has also published a possible house from Rhenen-Remmerden, but the irregular structure does not make it very convincing.

⁷ See Zimmermann 1999, 315-316 for a survey of all reasons that have been forwarded so far.

however, thinks that even in winter cattle were not stalled permanently because the collection of fodder for the livestock would have been too time consuming. In his opinion, therefore, cattle stalling only took place in times of danger (Louwe Kooijmans 1998).

Although all of the above are credible reasons for stalling cattle indoors, none of them explains why they should be housed under the same roof as people. On the contrary, there are many arguments not to keep animals in a house. Zimmermann's research for instance, demonstrates that cattle produce a very moist warmth and are the cause of much vermin. This renders the much-heard explanation that cattle were used as a source of warmth in cold periods much less plausible.⁸ The cattle-as-heating hypothesis is also contradicted by the fact that remnants of walls are often visible between the byre and the house.

The argument I want to make is that the housing of people and animals under one roof is not a logical thing to do. There must have been a good reason, one that probably was not merely economical or practical, but socially inspired as well (Fokkens, 1998a; 1999; Karlenby, 1994; Rasmussen, 1999). The suggestion I want to make is that Bronze Age farmers had a very close bond with their cattle because of the many benefits these provided them with - tractive power, food (meat, milk), clothing (hides) and more. And let us not forget that the cattle also provided manure to fertilise the fields. If cattle were indeed of such crucial importance for the existence of Bronze Age communities, it would not be surprising if they also played a role in the world of ideas and in social processes. In this respect Harsema (1993), for instance, thinks of cattle as a means of acquiring status, but I prefer to think of the complex exchange networks that maintained the society.

In this context one should not think of cattle as a commodity but rather as 'gifts', especially gifts that seal commitments between communities, such as marriages or alliances. From this perspective cattle were an essential element in the subsistence of local communities, not only in the literal sense (food), but also in the metaphorical (social relations). In this latter role, not only exchanges between people, but also those between people and ancestors and the supernatural would have been important (Fokkens 1999). This line of thinking is not mere supposition: Rasmussen points out that it is supported by, for instance, stacks of cowhides in graves and the offerings of animals attested in both Sweden and Denmark (Rasmussen 1999: 287).

Thus cattle represented an important economic, social and ideological factor in the daily life of the Bronze Age farmer. My suggestion is that this fact may have been the most important reason for bringing farmer and his livestock together underneath one roof. Not only 'love' for the animals plays a role here, but also protection against raids (Harsema 1993: 106; Louwe Kooijmans 1998: 333). If

⁸ Zimmermann, 1999, 314. Zimmermann even says about this: 'Almost a legend: the cow keeps the house warm'. He makes a convincing plea for discarding this hypothesis entirely as an explanation for the stalling of cattle inside a longhouse.

cattle were such an important element, cattle raids could be expected in the Bronze Age communities of the lowlands. From other sources – for instance grave goods, rock engravings and hoards - we know for a fact that a strong martial ideology existed in this era (Fokkens 1999; Fontijn in press). In the framework of this article I cannot elaborate on this aspect much further, but I merely want to point out that the concept of martiality implies that its application is often ideologically defined. Martiality does not mean pure aggression or defence, but should be seen as an integral and important constituting part of being a person, or – rather – a man (Bazelmans 1996; Fokkens in prep.; Fontijn in press). Not for nothing do we speak of martial *arts*, arts that enable men to demonstrate their power, courage, honesty, etc. In many tribal societies, therefore, a kind of small-scale warfare or raiding is endemic. These conflicts are never territorial, but always about other things (Louwe Kooijmans 1993, 1998; Otterbrein 1985). Cattle raids fit very well in that picture.

In conclusion we have seen how cattle and at the same time the longhouse were probably central elements in the Bronze Age communities of the West European lowlands. Manure and traction power were important but their role in the social aspect and exchange networks just as much. In fact, the origin of the longhouse probably marks the beginning of mixed farming where cattle breeding and farming are used in close tandem as a ‘survival strategy’ for the exploitation of the Pleistocene sandy soils. In terms of location strategies that means that both grazing grounds and arable fields were important for agriculture and must have been present in the vicinity of the farmsteads. Bourgeois has rightly pointed out that on the sandy soils grazing grounds are very scarce.⁹ But settlements are indeed often located in the vicinity of stream valleys where such grounds can be found. In this respect it is probably no coincidence that the river area (Betuwe) and the clay soils of West-Friesland were favourite locations for Bronze Age habitation. There, grazing grounds were present in abundance.

3 The longhouse, the local community and its ancestors

If the interplay of forces between farming and cattle breeding was that important, then it seems astonishing that there appears to be so little continuity in the location of settlements. It has become quite clear that farmsteads were not located on the same spot for more than a generation or so. After that, they were abandoned and a new farm was built some distance away, a couple of hundred metres or so. This practice continued until the Late Iron Age and was in fact only abandoned in the Roman period (Schinkel 1998). Here we have the paradox that on the one hand the longhouse was of central importance and on the other its material manifestation and its very location appear to have been of lesser interest. So the question arises as to how this central meaning of the longhouse and the values connected with it were given shape within the *local community*.

⁹ Remark made during the discussion of the conference in Brussels, February 22nd 2002.

I have already made use of the term *local community* above but this is a good point to explicate it further. Within the project *Archaeology and landscape in the Meuse-Demer-Scheldt* area, funded by the Dutch Science foundation (NWO) and the Universities of Amsterdam and Leiden, we have started to use this concept to indicate 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 1996, 1991: 41; Gerritsen 2001). A local community consisted of one or two farms, so one could also call it a settlement, but that term does not do enough justice to the social aspect that we want to emphasise.

In the remainder of this article I want to investigate how the crucial role that the longhouse played in the formation of the identity and continuity of these local communities took shape. First I will examine how the principle of wandering farmsteads fits in and subsequently which place the individual households take up.

3.1 Wandering farmsteads

For decades, the displacement of farmyards after a certain period of use, by Schinkel described as *wandering farmsteads* (Schinkel 1998), has been seen as an almost natural element in the agricultural system of Prehistoric communities. The traditional explanation for it, often implicit rather than explicit, is that without manuring, fields could not really be cultivated longer than a few years and then had to lay fallow for a couple of years. In that manner the fields 'moved' and it was seen as a more or less logical step to 'move' the farms as well. This is a functional explanation, which for a large part of the Neolithic period may have had some value, but is less plausible for the period after the introduction of the *ard*, which in the Low Countries takes place – on a large scale at least - somewhere around 3000 BC (Fokkens 1984, 1998c). Especially for the period in which manuring also became part of the system, probably from 1800 BC onwards, this explanation for wandering farmsteads loses its force completely. But only in the last decade have attempts been made to arrive at alternative models. I will return to these a little later.

Most authors have never questioned why farmsteads wandered, but have been predominantly concerned with frequency. For many years, this discussion has been dominated by the discussion about the life span of wood, sometimes called the *wood rot model*. Initially 40 years was considered the normal life span for a Bronze Age farm, but following the results of experimental research 20 – 25 years is now considered a better estimate.¹⁰ Sometimes, therefore, the pattern of wandering farmsteads is described as an 'unstable settlement pattern' or even as

¹⁰ However, if one goes back to the roots of these figures, it becomes quickly clear that they are often cited without any form of source critique. IJzereef and Van Regteren Altena are among the few who discuss the problem in detail (1991, 74-76). They too arrive at a mean life span of 24 years for the Bovenkarspel houses, but stress that this figure is based on the life span of soft wood (willow and ash). They estimate that an oak post of 15 cm in cross section lasts 60 years on average.

‘semi-sedentary’. However, the large scale settlement excavations of the last three decades of the twentieth century, such as those at Bovenkarspel, Elp, Emmerhout, Hijken and Wijk bij Duurstede¹¹, have demonstrated that farm replacements were not only restricted to a few hundred meters, but also occurred within a certain area. Farmyards were even reused after having been abandoned for a few decades, sometimes even longer. *The* example of this practice is Elp, where, according to Waterbolk, the same location was used time after time again during a period of c. 700 years (fig. 5) (Waterbolk 1987). That means that even after a yard had been abandoned for decennia, people still knew where their grandfathers or great-grandfathers had lived. In the case of Elp, but also elsewhere, the position of a burial mound next to the settlement area may have played an important role, both as a physical and an ideological marker of the roots of the local community.

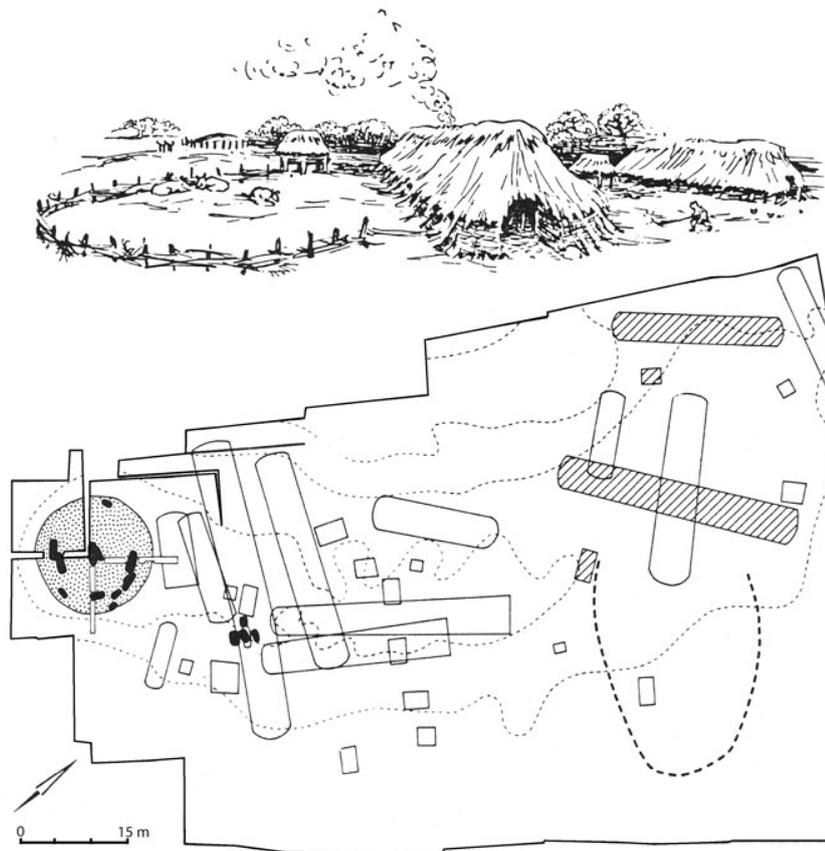


Figure 5 A survey of the settlement of Elp with an artist's impression of the oldest phase (after Waterbolk 1985: fig. 1.11).

11 Bovenkarspel: IJzereef and Van Regteren Altena, 1991; Elp: Waterbolk, 1964; 1987; Emmerhout: Van der Waals and Butler, 1976; Hijken: Harsema, 1991; Wijk bij Duurstede: Hessing, 1991.

There are, of course, also examples of sites where houses never return to the previously occupied locations, or only after several centuries (as in Oss; Fokkens 1991, 1996), and there are regions where houses are regularly rebuilt on the same spot and farms do not wander as much as elsewhere. This situation existed on the clay soils of West-Friesland and in the river area (c.f. Hulst 1991; Kooi 1991; Rasmussen 1999; Ijzereef & Van Regteren Altena 1991). In these regions the environment left little room for locational choices, so the same area was used over and over again. From these areas also many examples are known of rebuilding or extensions. They are in fact so common that one could even consider it as a normal phenomenon (Ijzereef & Van Regteren Altena 1991). In other areas too rebuilding occurs, but much less frequently than in the clay regions. Anyway, it is important to establish that this phenomenon is restricted to the Bronze Age and does not seem to occur in the Iron Age.

3.2 House, family and ancestors

Thus the yards may shift in location after a certain period of time, but we also have observed that they stay within a certain area, which one could describe as the 'biotope' of a local community. Large-scale settlement research shows that in the Bronze Age one, or two farmsteads at the most, constituted such a settlement unit. In an earlier article I have suggested that Bronze Age barrows are associated with such a local community as well (Fokkens 1997a). That model still holds, I think, but there is certainly no one-to-one relationship and there are barrow groups as well. And it appears that there is a great amount of exchangeability between barrows and houses. Waterbolk, for instance, points out that in the turves* from which the barrow of Elp was built and in its subsoil settlement pottery was present. The barrow must therefore have been built in the neighbourhood of a farmstead.¹² And in their turn houses were also built in the vicinity of barrows (Waterbolk 1987: 201). As indicated before, Waterbolk also explains the repeated occupation of the Elp site through the marked presence of the older barrow.

These observations imply that at least a selection of the community was probably buried in the vicinity of a farm, but that due to the wandering of the farmsteads this relation was not continuous. Still, when a new location to build a new farm was sought, a place where ancestors once had lived seems to have been preferred. This was indicated by either a barrow or an abandoned but still remembered farmyard. The importance of the ancestors for the well-being of the community is also demonstrated by the occurrence of barrow groups and the re-use of older barrows, sometimes even after a considerable amount of time. This shows that the worlds of the living and of the dead, of the ancestors, were closely related.

I think, therefore, that ancestors were another central element in the daily life of local Bronze Age communities, maybe even the most important element. In many small-scale societies this is still the case, which is a logical thing if no

¹² Waterbolk, 1987; 201.

fixed rights exist for the use of ground. In such situations the relation between past and present, between ancestors and the living, has to be re-affirmed constantly not only through rituals and oral traditions but also by the ‘physical’ connection with the ancestors through barrows and abandoned but still remembered farmsteads.

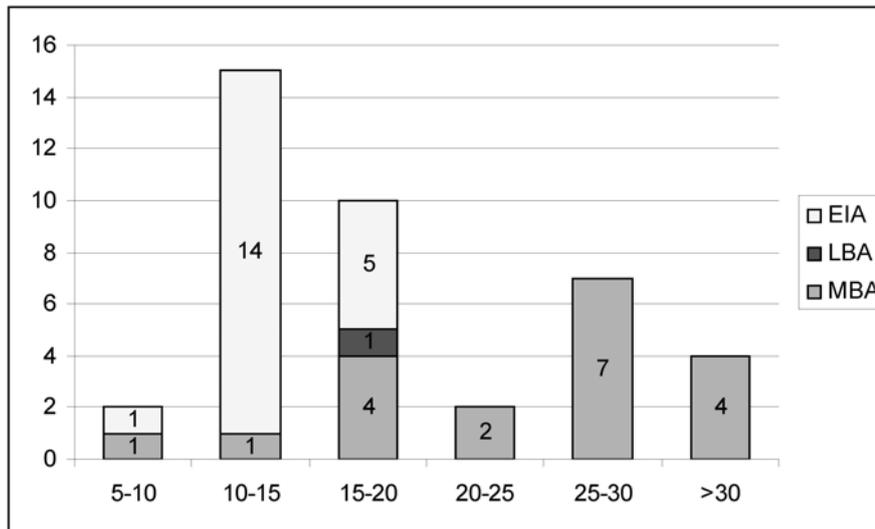


Figure 6 The lengths of house plans from the Middle Bronze Age, The Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age in the southern and central Netherlands divided into several classes (x axis). For details see Appendix 1.

If houses and burials were complementary or exchangeable in this respect, this means that both barrows and farmsteads were important symbols of identity and belonging for the local communities. Here we have come very near to the model that Fokke Gerritsen has put forward in recent years (Gerritsen 1999a, 1999b, 2001). According to Gerritsen there is a close relation between the house as a building and its inhabitants. In our western society this is rare nowadays. However, it is still a well-known phenomenon in the countryside and in many non-western societies the idea that a house and its maker are interwoven is a given. From this perspective, it is not surprising – there are many examples known – that the death of a family head also means the end of the house (e.g. Küchler 1993). When this person is transformed into ancestor during burial rituals that eventuate in the actual interment, even the house is sometimes destroyed (Gerritsen 1999b: 82). But the opposite can happen as well: sometimes the parental home is nursed and maintained for a long time as a symbol of the continuity of the kin-group, even if no one lives in it any longer (Gerritsen 1999b: 82).

This may sound all very plausible, but the question is, of course, how one can prove that a house was important and not forgotten. This is certainly no simple matter. Building deposits in later prehistoric houses show that at least the building of a house was experienced as an important event. But there is evidence for ‘closing rituals’ as well (Van den Broeke 2002; Van Hoof 2002).

Additionally, re-use of the same yard demonstrates that farmsteads were not forgotten completely after their abandonment. This can be demonstrated by the re-use of both wells and yards (Fokkens 1991, 1996; Waterbolk 1987) or by the presence of large silos in probably derelict houses. The fact that in some instances abandoned house sites were built over again also demonstrates that on some occasions the spot remained in living memory for several decades or even longer.

It is striking that it is especially in the Early Iron Age that older monuments and settlement areas were reused. This is quite often the case in the settlements north of Oss (Fokkens 1991, 1996), but even the famous Hallstatt C burial of Oss appears to have been dug into an earlier Bronze Age barrow (Fokkens 1997b; Fokkens & Jansen in prep.) And it is not an exception: in many older barrows Early Iron Age "Harpstedt" urns with cremations have been placed (never more than one per barrow, though) (e.g. Kooi 1979). Re-use of wells has been confirmed in three cases by ¹⁴C-dates (Fokkens 1996). Apparently the Early Iron Age in particular was a period in which it was important to reconfirm relations with ancestors, in this case probably often very ancient ancestors, maybe as a means of, or a reaction to, new claims on land. I will put this point into more perspective in section 4.

3.3 The dimensions of the household and of the local community

Now that we have established that the house was an important symbol for the continuity of the local community, the question arises as to what kind of household was living in these farms and how large the local community was. Was the household a nuclear family, the kind with which we all are familiar with in our western urban communities? Or was it an extended family with more than two generations in one house, which even in our part of the world was the norm in the countryside until the beginning of the last century?

Several times previously (e.g. Fokkens 1997a, 1998c), I have argued in favour of the thesis that most of the large longhouses were the home of an extended family, say about 20 people or more: parents with their children, some of them married and having children themselves. What are these arguments? The first and foremost is that the Bronze Age longhouse was large (30m or more is no exception), considerably larger than Neolithic or, even more so, Early Iron Age houses (fig. 6; appendix 1), and had a very large living compartment. What are the data to support this claim?

Before I go into that, I should mention that not everyone agrees with me. It has been suggested that in the Iron Age house, the emphasis on cattle breeding diminished and was replaced by an emphasis on sheep. Therefore smaller stalls, or no stalls at all, would have been necessary (Roymans 1990; table 5.4 and 5.5). In an earlier article I have already discussed this suggestion and pointed out that the bone spectra do not support this hypothesis at all (Fokkens 1997a). Moreover, the rather quick transformation from one system to the other around 900 BC suggests a more profound cultural change than an economic one alone. Another argument against this explanation, is that it assumes that the size of the

houses was only a function of the large herds of cattle in the Bronze Age. This is an assumption which fits very well in the prestige goods model that at this time still forms the theoretical basis for most interpretations and ideas about the Bronze Age. From such a perspective the person who has the largest herd also has the most status and so the large farms would be merely a function of the striving for more status and prestige. I even heard the suggestion once (I have forgotten from whom) that therefore large farms were a metaphor for status. Even if they were not filled with cattle, they would mean status because they were at least suitable for large herds, a kind of prehistoric *window dressing*. This is of course a typical western capitalistic line of thinking that is totally out of context in small-scale communities, where everyone knows everything about everyone else.

In contrast, I think that the size of the longhouses is a function of the size of the household as well. In several farms not only is a large byre present but an equally large 'non-byre', usually interpreted as the living area, although the function of the latter is generally not clear at all. Only in a few cases are there positive indications of a living area in the form of hearths and partitioning walls (fig. 2,C).¹³

If one takes the large non-byre as a measure of the possible size of households, it quickly becomes clear that these may have been very large, in any case larger than one nuclear family. The living space needed for the latter can be deduced from the Iron Age houses that show 20m² as the average 'living area'. In Bronze Age farms the non-byre is generally 60m² or more (Fokkens 1997), which would suggest that the average household size of Bronze Age farms was substantially larger than its Iron Age counterparts. In my opinion it implies a different social organisation as well. I will discuss this point further in section 4.

My conclusion, therefore, is that the size of the house in the Bronze Age and Iron Age was a function of the amount of both cattle *and* people. From this perspective it is interesting to recall the frequent extensions or rebuildings of Bronze Age houses (especially in the clay areas but also - less frequent - elsewhere). These fit very well in a model of several generations in one house and could be interpreted as an enlargement that became necessary when one of the family members founded a family himself (assuming that married daughters left the house to live with their husbands and parents in law).¹⁴ This enlargement could either be used to house additional people or livestock. Not all Bronze Age farms are that large though, so there must have been exceptions to the general rule of extended families. But there is certainly a tendency for large and even very large farms (fig. 6; Appendix 1).

13 Rasmussen 1999 284-286; Waterbolk, 1987. Most of the houses of the Elp and Emmerhout type show this division in a byre and an equally large 'living area'. In one case two hearths were present in the 'living area', which could be taken as an indication for the presence of more than one nuclear family.

14 See Gerritsen, 2001, 117 for a further discussion of this principle.

I have already observed that a local community consisted of one, or at most two farmsteads, which means that in fact the local community usually coincides with a kin-group, a family. The evidence for continuity in the use of burial and settlement sites ties in with this model very well. These local communities appear to have occupied the same area for very long periods of time, several hundreds of years in some instances.

In communities such as those described above, the founder of the family is generally also the person with most authority, the one who, as head of the family, represents it in its dealings with the outside world. This too is a situation that our parents may still remember from their youth or from stories about grandfather or great-grandfather. It is a kind of society where a 'natural' hierarchy exists, based on age, sex and place in the kinship hierarchy. The large longhouse, built by the family head and therefore strongly related to his kin and his authority, could easily become a symbol for this social organisation itself.

It is more or less clear that in local communities of kin groups the family heads also played an important role after their death as ancestors. And indeed, the social organisation of the living can be seen mirrored in the burial ritual. Here I have to emphasise that only a few scholars in the Netherlands still believe in the oft-heard hypothesis that Late Neolithic and Bronze Age barrows are *elite* burials. Not only has recent research raised doubts about this (Lohof 1991, 1994; Theunissen 1999), but also a more fundamental discussion about the theoretical underpinning of the prestige goods model is beginning.¹⁵ I will not repeat all the arguments against barrows as elite burials here, but only refer to some of the most important.

In the first place there are so many barrows that this would suggest an enormous number of elites. We have to realise here that the number of barrows known to us is probably very much smaller than the original number. The aerial photography programme of the University of Gent, for instance, has demonstrated how many barrows have remained undetected (Bourgeois *et al.* 2002). In the second place the occurrence of grave gifts in the Netherlands that might indicate 'rich' graves is restricted to a short period after 1600 BC and very rare. Moreover, the sets of grave gifts are - as in the earlier beaker burials - strongly standardised. Apparently there was only a restricted set of grave gifts possible, from which at every burial selections were made according to the status of the deceased. Only on a few occasions is the whole set present¹⁶, and even in those instances we cannot speak of wealth. There exists no Bronze Age burial with 10 swords or with 20 vessels. Even hoards generally show only these standard sets, and if there is more than one object of one type, one often can

¹⁵ See for critique on the prestige goods model Fokkens, 1999; in prep.; Fontijn in press.

¹⁶ For instance the famous Drouwen Sögel burial or the recently discovered Amesbury archer (www.wessexarch.co.uk/projects/amesbury/archer.html). The latter is heralded as the richest grave in the Stonehenge area. This is true in terms of its many objects, but on the other hand it is 'just' a stereotype grave with no other items than those of the regular set. What is interesting is that it compares very well with the 'rich' grave of the Lunteren smith (Butler and Van der Waals, 1966, which probably was rich because the person in it had the ability to work copper (or maybe gold). The cushion stones in both graves may tell the story of a famous smith rather than of a king or a hunter.

recognise dual sets only (Fontijn in press) - a finding that also contradicts the prestige goods model, which often explains hoarding as a clever elite mechanism to avoid emulation or hypotheses of similar import.

The above is of course only a very brief summary of complex arguments, but in this context I cannot go into more detail. Based on the arguments put forward above (and others), my thesis is that the social structure that we can see in Dutch Bronze Age barrows, for instance indicated by differences between primary and secondary burials and by the fact that only a small section of the population was buried under and in barrows, is not based on differences in power and prestige but on sex, age and kinship. I think that the social organisation of the households that I sketched earlier is visible in the burial ritual as well. From my perspective a barrow was erected for family heads only. In the Late Neolithic, when barrows are relatively scarce and there are only few secondary interments, the person buried underneath the barrow may have been a person who was the head of an entire kin group, or even of a corporate group. But in the course of time, Bronze Age barrows were erected for almost every family head (fig. 7A).¹⁷

The family head's children and sometimes his grandchildren are buried in this barrow, or - when he was still alive - in the barrow of his father. Also here there are exceptions to the rule, but that in itself does not disprove it. It is, for instance, not very difficult to imagine that a first born son, destined to become the next head of the family, dies prematurely and is buried with the honours that would have been his had he been able to fulfil his destiny. In fact there are examples of such child burials underneath a barrow, and as can be expected they usually show special features.¹⁸ At the end of the Middle Bronze Age child burial occurs more often, be it in general as secondary burials in a barrow. This development can be interpreted as a prelude to the urnfields, where children appear to have all been buried in a visible manner. Of course my model is far too simple to explain every variation, for instance the phenomenon of multiple burials underneath a barrow. But that cannot be helped. It is not my intention here to build a model that explains everything, even if that were possible.

¹⁷ In the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Ages younger barrow periods of secondary burials occur relatively little, but from 1500 BC this a frequent phenomenon. There is an average of 1 secondary burial per barrow, with a range of 0 to 11 (Theunissen, 1999, table 3.12). In the period between 1500 and 1050 the time distance between the person who was buried under the barrow and the ones who were buried later in the barrow became increasingly smaller. We speak of family barrows then, which indeed they probably were. The person in the primary grave is not a mythical but a known ancestor of whom the secondarily-buried dead are direct relatives. For the Late Neolithic the time distance was probably larger.

¹⁸ Theunissen, 1999. One of the special features is a number of other child burials in the postholes of the posts that surrounded the grave before the barrow was erected.

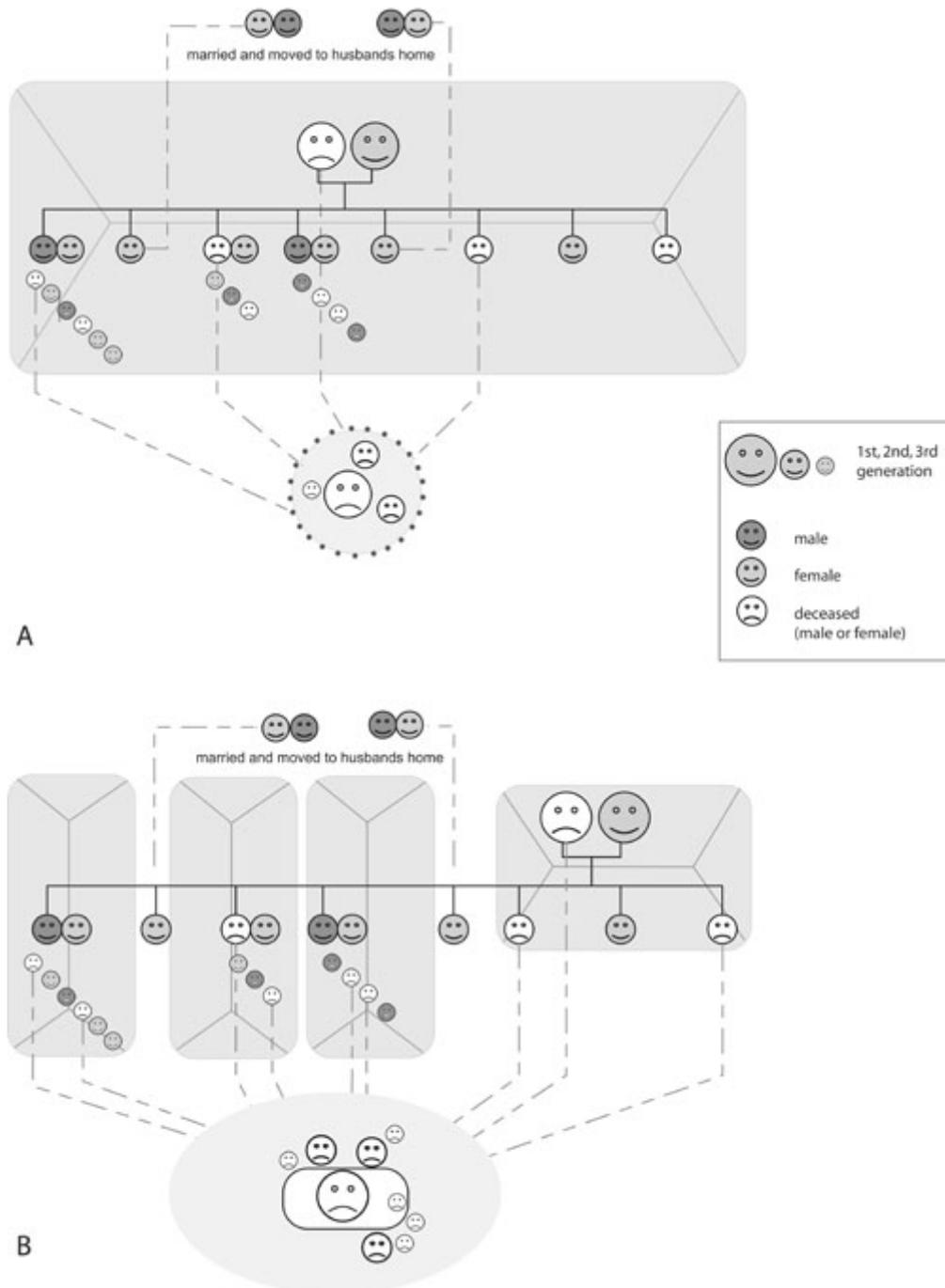


Figure 7 Model for the relations between household and cemetery.

A: In the Middle Bronze Age the local community consists of a longhouse in which extended family lives (parents with their children, married sons and grand-children; the married daughters have moved to their husband's house). The family head is buried underneath a barrow and his or her children are buried as secondary burial in the barrow of their parents, or - when they are still alive - in the barrow of their direct ancestor. Infants who are too young (children or grand-children) get no burial in the barrow, except - in this model - the first-born son.

B: In the Early Iron Age the same extended family does not live in *one* longhouse, but every married son has a house for his family. Together they form a local community of which all members have the right to be buried in the communal urnfield. Their graves are grouped around the long-bed of the family head or his direct ancestor

4 The Bronze Age - Iron Age transition: changes in social organisation?

The situation sketched above pertains to the Middle Bronze Age. It is interesting to see how this changes in the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age. Two clear new developments can be noted. The first is the replacement of barrows by urnfields; the second is the disappearance of longhouses and the emergence of relatively short farmsteads with wall ditches. Both developments are not restricted to the Netherlands but have a distribution over the whole area of the three-aisled Middle Bronze Age longhouse. The urnfields, of course, have an even wider distribution.

It is clear that these developments did not completely run parallel. The urnfields developed earlier than the short longhouse. The latter in the Netherlands is difficult to date because we hardly know of any houses from the Late Bronze Age. It is certain that the large houses of Elp type continued into this period but we do not know exactly how long. The youngest date is attributed to house 7 (1261-899 BC).¹⁹ The Emmerhout type may also have been common well into the Late Bronze Age. One of the problems is that the youngest dates have a long range of c. 250 years (between 1100 and 830 BC.) (Lanting & Mook 1977). This does not take us much further. The Elp pottery does not give us much of a foothold either and the Emmerhout settlement was never published, so no one knows about its sequences for sure. However in Denmark, where many more houses from the Late Bronze Age are known, the transition to the short house is placed around 1000 BC. From the southern Netherlands we know of only one poorly dated house from Boxmeer (fig. 2), which does not give us any clues either.

Even if it is not clear when the transition took place, it is beyond doubt that from 800 BC large longhouses were no longer present. All plans are from that moment onwards of type Oss 2 and 3 in the south and the transitional Hijken type in the North (fig. 2B and A). They consist of a three-aisled inner part, often with wall ditches and very large post pits outside the wall. We assume that they are true longhouses as well, but the structure and construction is quite different from the Middle Bronze Age longhouse.²⁰

One might ask why the settlement data from this transitional period between 1000 and 800 BC are so scarce throughout the country. There was certainly no population decrease because we know many urnfields from this period. At the moment I have no explanation, but a comparison is suggested with the time span between 1800 and 1500 BC. From that formative period of the three-aisled

¹⁹ Waterbolk, 1984. A complication in this case is that the sample dated consists of grain from a pit in the side aisle of the house that could be later than the house itself.

²⁰ See Huyts 1992 for a detailed discussion of the construction.

longhouse we have very little data either, while they are abundant from the period after 1500 BC.

Another important question is what this change signifies. At the beginning of this section I cited a few explanations, all of which are of more or less economic import. I prefer a social explanation however, and I refer especially to the contrast that is present in the difference in house lengths (fig. 6) and its relation to the size of the household. It is beyond doubt that small Early Iron Age houses were no longer inhabited by extended families. They are generally shorter than 15 m and divided into two halves (supposedly a lining and a byre) of 5 x 7 m to 5 x 4.5 m separated by opposite doorways. The extended family as one household had ceased to exist, which implies that compared to the Middle Bronze Age the social organisation of local communities had changed fundamentally. The social hierarchy that was anchored in the longhouse and the barrow, at first sight appears to have been lacking in the urnfields and in the Iron Age houses. In the houses only parents and their children lived together and in the urnfields everyone was buried, even small children (fig. 7, B). The authority of the family head seems to have faded, or so it appears. The extended family had – physically at least - broken up into its constituent nuclear family units, each living in their own farm with their own livestock. Those units and even its separate members now *appear* to have been equal.

I stress the verb ‘appear’ here, because there is more to it than meets the eye. Yes, the family was no longer controlled by the family head in the ‘natural’ way, but its coherence is still there, manifested in other manners. One of these is – as Roymans & Kortlang (1999) and also Gerritsen (2001) have pointed out - the urnfield. In their view the urnfield was one of the key elements in the self-definition of the local community. It was the cohesive element in a cultural landscape where farmsteads wandered. I agree with this model, but I differ with respect to the novelty of that aspect. Roymans & Kortlang think that in the Late Bronze Age local communities started to use collective cemeteries for the first time, emphasising their collective claims on the land in this way. In their view the Middle Bronze Age territories were much less sharply defined and relations between families would have been looser. Population pressure is put forward as one of the reasons for the necessity of developing new means of claiming the land (Roymans & Kortlang 1999). But as I explained in the previous paragraph, I think that in the Middle Bronze Age the barrow or barrow group had more or less the same meaning for the community as the urnfield had later. In my opinion urnfields in principle represent the same social unit as the barrows of the Middle Bronze Age: a group of related families. Urnfield research demonstrates that on average a group of about 20 – 30 persons is concerned, in other words a group of three to five houses of the short Iron Age type (Kooi 1979; Roymans & Kortlang 1999). This is the equivalent of one or two large Middle Bronze Age longhouses, not only with respect to the number of people, but also to the number of livestock.

Although I hope I have now clarified the transition from long to short farms a little, I have not yet offered an explanation. In Roymans' view, rapid population growth is an important factor in the explanation for the emergence of the urnfields. I have already criticised that view before and the arguments that I put forward just now add to that criticism (Fokkens 1997a). If the Middle Bronze Age barrows have the same meaning as the urnfield for the cohesion and social identity of local communities, urnfields cannot at the same time be seen, as Roymans sees them²¹, as a symbol of a more explicit statement of that cohesion in times of population pressure.

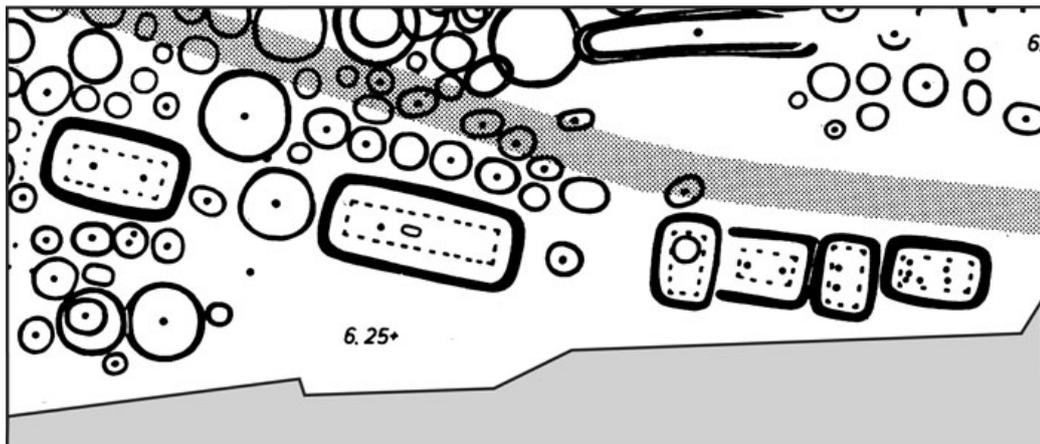


Figure 8 Detail of the urnfield of Vledder (prov. of Drenthe) with a number of long beds of the Gasteren type. The grey zone indicates the possible location of a road. The lowermost part (grey) was not excavated (after Kooi 1978).

Instead I believe that the changes in social organisation that mark the transition to the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age are a function of competition within the families concerning both the leadership role and also the rights to communicate with or represent the family towards the outside world. From the enormous growth of hoarding practices in the Late Bronze Age, it appears that much more metal was in circulation and that probably more people wanted and gained access to exchange networks, while – and now I overstate the case of course - in the Middle Bronze Age there was no question about it: that right was restricted to the family head. The challenge to that natural right may have caused the dissolution of the old form of organisation.

But apparently this development was not so disruptive as to cause the whole structure to collapse. After all, the urnfields show that cohesion remained to be stressed. Neither was it as abrupt as it seems either. It has been noted, especially by Roymans and Kortlang (1999), but also by Kooi (1979), that the oldest

²¹ Roymans, 1991; Roymans and Kortlang, 1999. With reference to Bourgeois' aerial photography project again, which led to the discovery of over 1000 barrows in an area where none was known before (Bourgeois *et al.*, 2002), the greater number of urnfields in relation to barrows cannot be used as an argument for explosive population growth either.

elements in the urnfields are the so-called 'long beds' (fig. 8). They often occupy a central place within the urnfield with the other graves grouped around them.²² The most conspicuous examples are the long beds of Gasteren type from the northern and eastern Netherlands and the adjacent German regions. Like their counterparts from the southern Netherlands, they often contain the bones of several dead, sometimes in clearly separated burials, sometimes in one urn (Roymans & Kortlang 1999). In the case of the Gasteren monuments, the form is clearly an allusion to buildings, and with its multiple burials the relation between longhouse and barrow, both central elements for the continuity of the local community, are given an almost physical expression. They may have been the last references to a social organisation that was dissolving fast.

²² Roymans and Kortlang (1999) interpret the long beds as graves of founders of the social group which buried their dead in the urnfields (*Gründergräber*). I think that they can just as easily be the graves of family heads in a burial tradition reminiscent of the old barrow rituals.

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