A completely normal practice: the emergence of selective metalwork deposition in Denmark, north-west Germany, and the Netherlands between 2350-1500 BC

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Part III

Conclusion

7

A completely normal practice: selective metalwork deposition through the ages

In the previous chapters, the patterns in selective metalwork deposition in the four sub periods between 2350-1500 BC were closely examined. This chapter zooms out and look at the practice from a bird's-eye view. Throughout the 850 years investigated in this study, people deliberately and systematically buried metalwork in the ground, and never retrieved it. Human actions lie at the heart of this practice, and this study allows us to follow these human actions over the course of these 850 years. What did people actually *do* when they deposited metalwork?

Throughout these 850 years, the practice fluctuated, with peaks and dips in the frequency of metalwork depositions, both in terms of the number of depositional events and the number of deposited objects. The relative frequency of metalwork depositions in the four sub periods is shown in Figure 7.1. The relationship between burials, hoards, and single object depositions also changes over time, as shown in the same graph. Although the categories 'hoard' and 'single find' are problematic and have been frequently debated in research on depositions (see Autenrieth & Visser 2019 for an overview), these patterns show that these two categories do in fact represent two different types of depositional events. I return to this observation in Chapter 8. These fluctuations and developments, and what they signify, are discussed in the following sections.

But going back much further in time, people already deliberately and systematically deposited metalwork in specific places in the landscape around ca. 4000 BC, in the Early Neolithic Funnelbeaker Culture, as discussed in Chapter 3 (Klassen 2000). This means that over the course of a staggering *2500 years*, people deliberately and consistently gave up the rarest, most valuable objects they had, for which they depended on metal influx from distant regions. And people continued to deposit metalwork in the research area well into the Iron Age, long after 1500 BC (*e.g.* Fontijn 2002). From our modern perspective, this practice might seem foreign and puzzling, but when we consider this immense time span, metalwork deposition was a persistent practice throughout vast parts of prehistory (Ebbesen 1993, Fontijn 2002, 2019, Klassen 2000, Needham 1988, Vandkilde 1996, Wentink & Van Gijn 2008). People actually deposited metalwork for *much longer* than the length of time since we *stopped* depositing metalwork!

For thousands of years, depositing metal objects in the landscape at regular intervals was thus a natural, self-evident thing to do, as demonstrated by finds across Europe. It was a completely normal practice. From the 850 years investigated in this

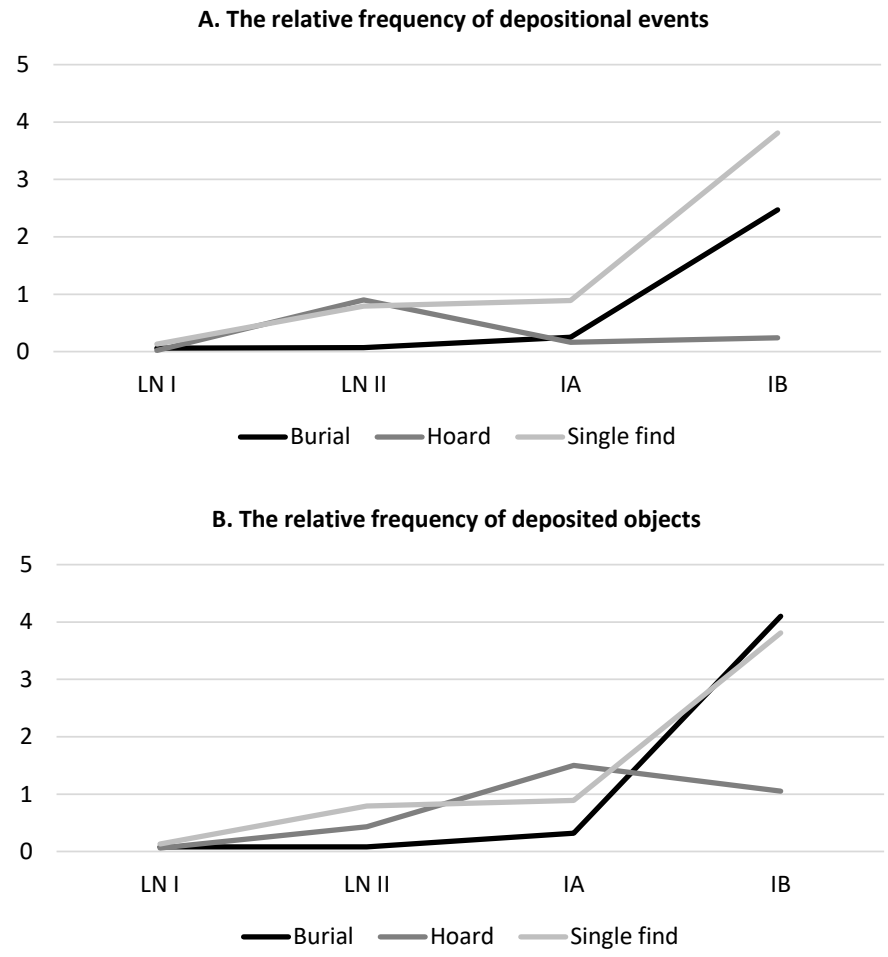


Figure 7.1. The relative frequency of A) sites with metalwork and B) deposited metal objects in the four sub periods. This relative frequency was calculated by dividing the number of objects and sites by the number of years of each sub period, following Holst's method for calculating the relative barrow building frequency in EBA Denmark (Holst 2013:42-113).

study alone, no less than 1850 typologically datable metal objects were recorded in the database, and the quantity of deposited metal objects only *increased* later on in Bronze Age Scandinavia (Vandkilde 2014a, 2014b). And we should keep in mind that what we see is only a fraction of the metal that was in circulation. Different models suggest that perhaps only 5 to 15% of the metalwork ended up in the archaeological record in south England (Wiseman 2017) and in the southern Netherlands (Fontijn 2002:215) in the Late Bronze Age.

This study enables us to not only follow this practice over a vast time period, spanning from ca. 4000 BC to 1500 BC, but also to study its *emergence* from the first introduction of metal in the research area. We have to keep in mind that these metal objects in the Early Neolithic were the very first metal objects that people saw in this region. These objects must have made an exotic and completely foreign impression on them. What did

people do when they deposited these foreign objects? And what did people do when they deposited – in essence very similar – metal objects 2500 years later?

In addition to this chronological depth, this study also provides a vast geographical scope. This is the first time that the practice of selective metalwork deposition is studied in a large area comprising Denmark, northern Germany and the Netherlands, transgressing national boundaries. Throughout this vast area, measuring more than 750 km across as the crow flies, people intentionally gave up metal, all of which had to be imported from afar. This study does not merely focus on metalwork deposition in Denmark, which has traditionally been thoroughly studied for the last 150 years (*e.g.* Worsaae 1866, Vandkilde 1996, see Chapter 1). Instead, it allows us to compare the Danish patterns with patterns from northern Germany and the Netherlands, enabling us to study both regional and supra-regional deposition practices.

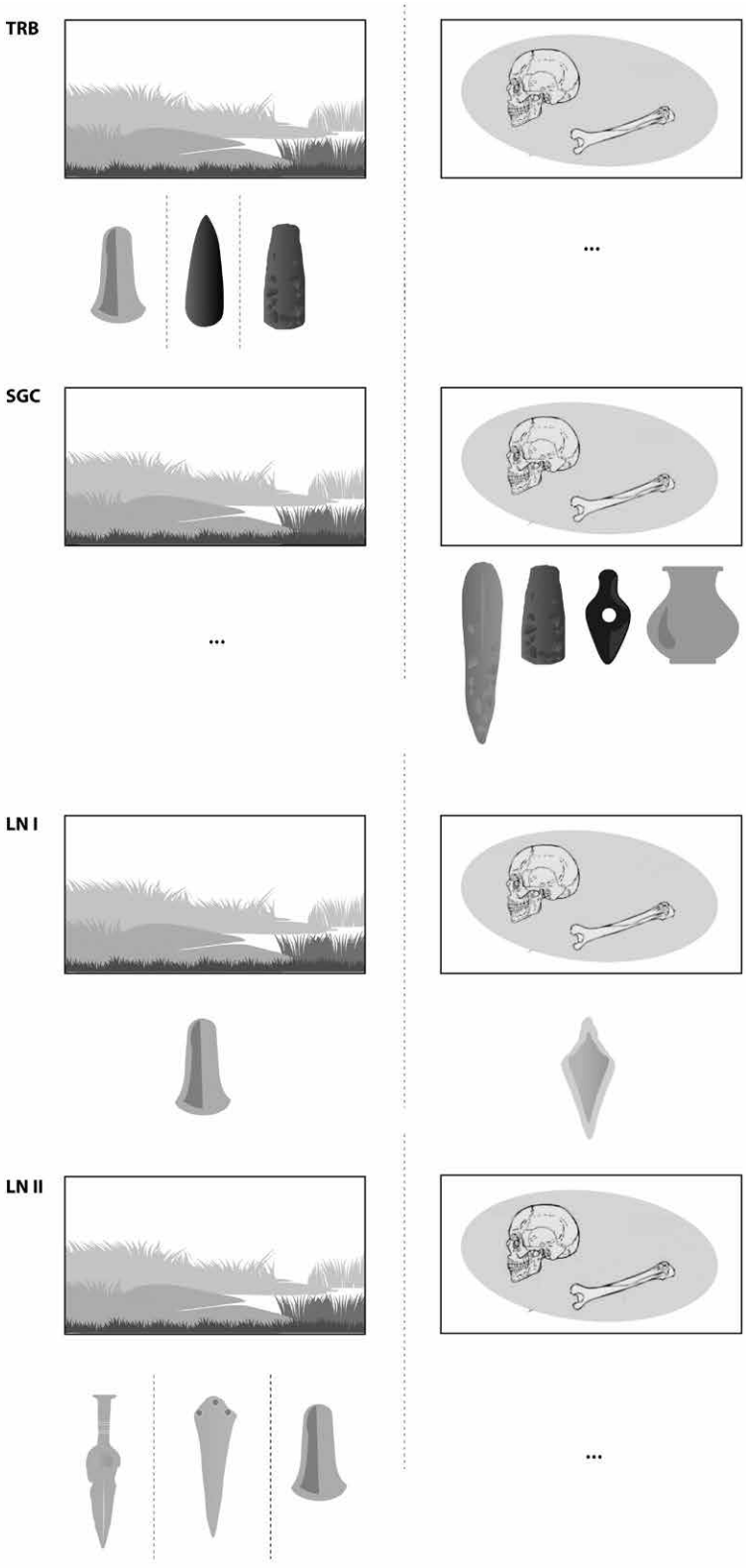
This chapter focuses on the emergence and development of the practice of selective metalwork deposition through the ages. The following sections first focus on the earliest emergence of the practice in the Early Neolithic, after which its developments and fluctuations during the subsequent time periods are considered.

7.1 'Deviating beginnings'

Metalwork deposition emerged in the research area in the south Scandinavian Early Neolithic (EN, 3950-3350 BC, the Funnelbeaker Culture or TRB; Klassen 2000). Already in this early period, people systematically deposited copper flat axes and copper ornaments in specific contexts. As discussed in Chapter 3, a "double exclusivity", defined by Fontijn (2019:29-33) as a characteristic of Bronze Age deposition practices, can already be observed in this early period: people selected specific objects to be deposited in specific places, and avoided other objects and places. But although this early practice at first glance might seem similar to selective metalwork deposition in the Bronze Age, there are fundamental differences between the two practices. With the benefit of hindsight, selective deposition in the Early Neolithic showed 'deviating beginnings' in terms of deposition frequency, the selection of landscape contexts, and the significance attached to the material metal. Therefore, it is argued that selective metalwork deposition in the Early Neolithic and the Bronze Age are two completely different practices. This section takes a closer look at these differences.

Firstly, metal depositions were few and far between in this early period compared to the Bronze Age. Metalwork was deposited in parts of Denmark and northern Germany, but not in the Netherlands, and the number of metal objects in the archaeological record is modest. Roughly 70 copper axes from Denmark and Schleswig-Holstein are thought to date to the Early Neolithic (Klassen 2000:305). Compared to the number of flint axes that was deposited in this period, this is a very modest number. Neolithic flint axe depositions in Denmark are "practically innumerable, and any attempt at counting them is pointless" (Ebbesen 1993:123-124), as discussed in Chapter 3. Copper was clearly only a minor category in the practice of selective deposition, existing alongside other materials that were deposited much more frequently (see Chapter 3).

Figure 7.2 (following page). Visualisation of the selective deposition of metalwork and imported valuables between ca. 3950-1500 BC. Drawing by J. Porck, Faculty of Archaeology, University of Leiden.


TRB
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SGC
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LN I
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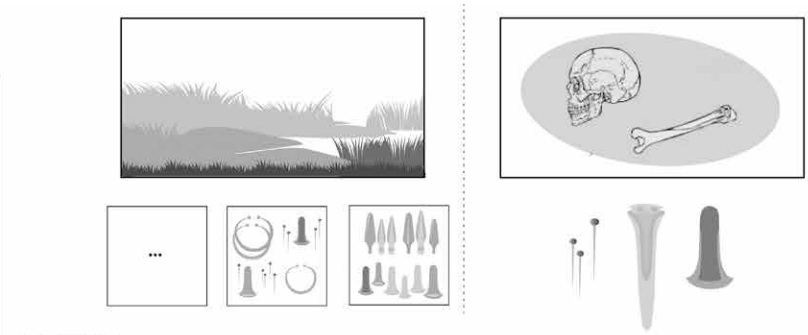

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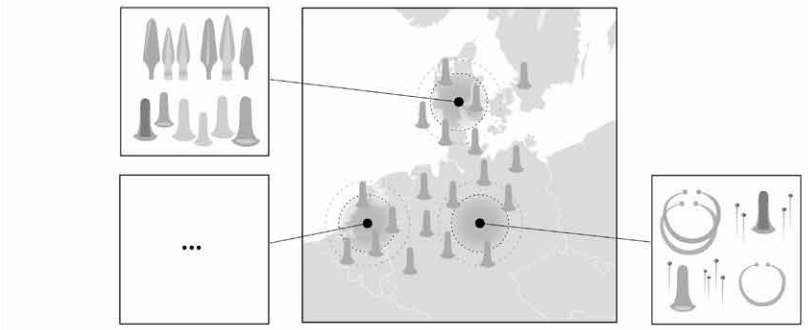
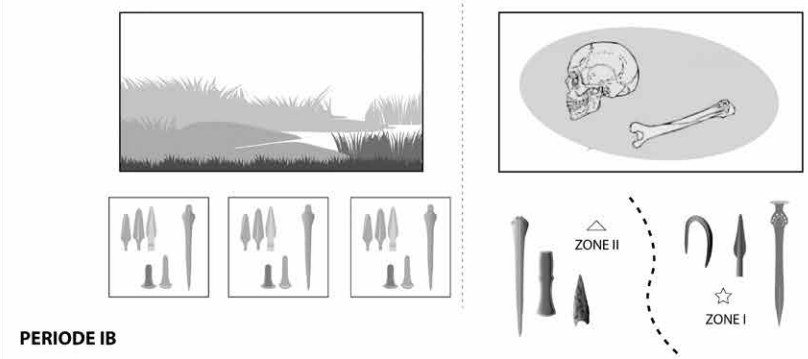
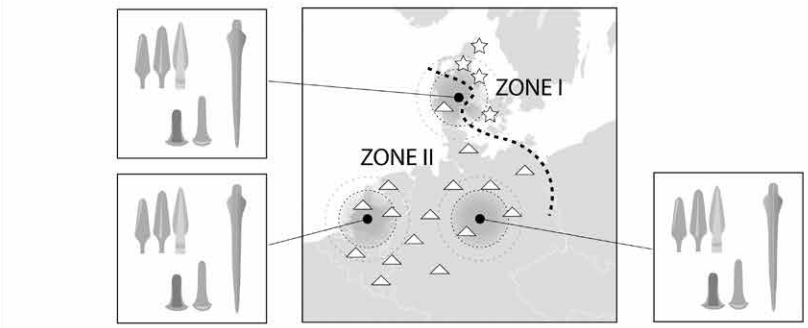




PERIODE IB



Secondly, people selected completely different landscape settings for axe depositions in these two periods. As seen in Chapter 3, copper flat axes were often deposited in dry land contexts in the Early Neolithic, frequently in association with burials (but without being burial finds, Vandkilde 1996:178-180). In contrast, from LN II onwards, the practice of depositing metal axes in wetlands took flight (see Chapters 4, 5, and 6). The conventions behind axe depositions were thus different in the Early Neolithic and the Bronze Age. It is actually striking that copper axes were rarely deposited in wetlands in the Funnelbeaker Culture, since flint axes were deposited in wetlands on a massive scale. Copper axes clearly did not follow the conventions for flint axe depositions.

Thirdly and most importantly, copper was first and foremost considered, treated, and deposited as an exotic material. As addressed in Chapter 3, copper and Alpine jade axes were both imported from outside the TRB domain, and they were deposited in similar ways; they were not used as burial gifts (see Figure 7.2). These similar patterns suggest that they were perceived similarly: just like Alpine jade, copper was 'merely' considered as an exotic material. The well-known Bygholm hoard from Denmark illustrates this idea: copper axes, ornaments, and a dagger were all deposited together in a hoard as foreign valuables. The fact that these early copper axes were not intended for functional use (Klassen 2000:278-283) supports this interpretation: copper axes were treated and considered in an abstract way as exotic valuables. The main objective of the local communities was perhaps exactly the acquisition of exotic objects from faraway, mythical places that were situated far beyond their local, familiar world, rather than the exchange and import itself (Helms 1993:99, Needham 2000:188, cf. Fontijn 2019:37). In contrast, locally made flint axes belonged to a very different sphere: they were intended for functional use and used as burial gifts (Wentink et al. 2011). Furthermore, copper and flint axes were not mixed in depositions; they clearly belonged to separate categories. Copper did thus not have any other significance beyond being an exotic valuable in the Early Neolithic; it did not have its *own*, specific, concrete meaning.

In contrast, from the Bell Beaker period onwards, metal was no longer 'merely' seen as an exotic valuable in an abstract way. In this period – which is more than one thousand years later than the Early Neolithic, and thus as distantly removed from the people in the Early Neolithic as the battle of Hastings is from us – metal became *concretised.* Metal objects were now intended and used as functional tools, and the material metal became associated with different, specific domains, and therefore separated in depositions. This revolutionary development is discussed below in Section 7.3.

7.2 The gap?

Moving on to the Single Grave Culture (SGC, ca. 2850-2500/2350 BC), a number of developments took place that were of vital importance for the later periods under study. The Single Grave Culture was part of the pan-European Corded Ware complex, and is thought to have emerged in the research area as a result of a migration from the Eurasian steppe (Allentoft et al. 2015, Haak et al. 2015). The Corded Ware complex had a shared burial practice: from Poland to the Netherlands, people buried their dead in similar ways; an unprecedented similarity existed across Europe (Bourgeois & Kroon 2017). The dead were buried individually underneath a burial mound, in a specific position, and with a specific burial package (Bourgeois & Kroon 2017), reflecting the emergence of an entirely new idea of *personhood* (Fontijn 2002:59, Treherne 1995:106-113). This burial package

contained, among other items, battle axes, imported flint daggers, and imported flint axes, as discussed in Chapter 3. This is the first period in the research area in which daggers were used as burial gifts, an association that we will return to in the following sections. These particular objects, coming from various regions, were thus used to construct a specific *image* of the deceased in burials. This idea of constructing an image in burials using specific objects is discussed in detail in Chapter 9.

People clearly made specific choices regarding which objects they used as burial gifts in this new, supra-regional burial practice. However, they did not have equally clear preferences for depositions in specific places in the landscape (see Figure 7.2). As seen in Chapter 3, depositions outside burials overall, and metalwork depositions in particular, played a minor role in the research area in this period. Although metal does occur in Single Grave assemblages in Central Europe (Bourgeois & Kroon 2017, Hansen 2012:32), the research area has yielded surprisingly little metal from this period. Compared to the previous period, there is a gap in terms of the metal that ended up in the archaeological record. Although there is still a "double exclusivity" (Fontijn 2019:29-33) in selective deposition in this period, people made completely different choices in terms of which contexts they preferred compared to the Funnelbeaker Culture.

7.3 The reinvention

After this prelude, we arrive at last in the first part of the investigated time period: the Bell Beaker period (Late Neolithic I or LN I/Late Neolithic B or LN B, ca. 2500-2000 BC), during which the research area was part of the pan-European Bell Beaker region, spanning from the Iberian Peninsula to the British Isles and Germany (Müller 2009:77, fig. 79). The period is characterised by a shared material culture and burial ritual, which in the research area are primarily found in the Netherlands (Butler & Van der Waals 1966/67), and Niedersachsen (Lanting 2007/2008:84, fig. 23; Willroth 1996:18). In Denmark, Bell Beaker influences are limited to northern and central Jutland (Sarauw 2007b:29 and fig. 18), and of a local character (Vandkilde 2005a:2). Nevertheless, Bell Beaker routes connected various regions within the research area, including Jutland, and metal is thought to have circulated through these routes (Vandkilde 2005a:30, 1996:295). Metal – now including copper and gold – was thus reintroduced to Denmark and northern Germany, and probably introduced for the first time to the Netherlands (Butler & Van der Waals 1966/67, Vandkilde 1996:177, Willroth 1996:18). Metalwork depositions became of great significance once again after the gap in the Single Grave Culture, although they were still scarce compared to the Bronze Age; the relative frequency of metalwork depositions in this period is shown in Figure 7.1. The distribution of metalwork in Denmark is not limited to the Bell Beaker region, as discussed in Chapter 3.

Similarly to the Single Grave Culture, a shared Bell Beaker burial ritual existed across regions, in which the dead were buried individually with a standardised burial package. Across regions, people had shared ideas on how to bury the deceased, which is remarkable in itself, since Bell Beaker influences are particularly strong in the Netherlands and north-west Germany, but much less so in Denmark (see Chapter 3). Still, similar patterns can be recognised in the entire research area. This supra-regional burial ritual and what it signifies is examined in more detail in Chapter 9. For now, it is important to note that for the first time, this burial package contained *metal*, which was an important development. Copper tanged daggers were consistently used as burial gifts and metal ornaments were

used to adorn the dead in the Netherlands. Although flint daggers were already used as burial gifts in Single Graves, this is the first time that *metal* daggers were used as burial gifts across the Bell Beaker region.

This idea of selecting specific objects to bury with the dead is reminiscent of the burial ritual in the Single Grave Culture. But a crucially important development in the Bell Beaker period was that for the first time, metalwork was *also* deposited outside burials. A separation between metalwork in burials and metalwork deposited outside burials emerged, and this separation is observable in the entire research area (see Figure 7.2). Copper tanged daggers and ornaments were used as burial gifts, while copper axes were deposited in specific places in the landscape, and these two objects and contexts were strictly separated in depositions; they were not combined. In the entire research area, copper axes were *never* used as burial gifts in this period (Vandkilde 1996, Fontijn 2002). Metal daggers were thus associated with the deceased, with an individual, while metal axes did *not* have this association (cf. Vandkilde 1996:267). The material metal itself became differentiated in this period: it became associated with different domains, acquired different meanings, and was therefore separated in depositions (see Chapter 3).

There is thus a clear dichotomy between burials and what they entail, and 'non-burials' – for lack of a better word – and what they entail; people made specific choices concerning which objects they placed in these two contexts (see Figure 7.2). The objects that were placed in burials were closely associated with an individual, with a body, while depositions in *e.g.* wetland settings were *not*; on the contrary, these objects were deposited *away* from the individual, in specific places in the landscape. This important separation in terms of metalwork emerged for the first time in this period. Burials with metalwork and what they signify are discussed in more detail in Chapter 9, while 'non-burials' are considered in detail in Chapter 10.

Returning to the Bell Beaker period, copper axes were relatively often deposited in dry land contexts in this period, just like their Early Neolithic counterparts, but wetland depositions start to become more frequent now, a trend that positively boomed in the following periods. This trend is discussed in more detail in Chapter 10. These copper axes were probably functional tools, in contrast to Early Neolithic copper axes. People no longer considered and treated copper/metal in an abstract way as an exotic material, like people did in the much earlier TRB. Instead, metal objects were now *concretised*: they were considered as concrete, everyday objects, with specific uses and associations, *i.e.* with specific *cultural biographies*, and therefore deposited in the 'right' context. The concept of cultural biographies and its implications for depositions are explored in detail in Chapter 8.

7.4 The big rise

This section moves on to Late Neolithic II (LN II, 1950-1700 BC), which roughly corresponds to the Dutch Early Bronze Age (EBA, 2000-1800 BC). Around 2000 BC, the supra-regional Bell Beaker network disappears, and instead, a number of regional groups emerge and grow in importance. The Únětice region in Central Europe was particularly of importance for Denmark and northern Germany in this period, as discussed in Chapter 4, since most of the imported metal is thought to come from this region (Vandkilde 1996:207-209, Laux 2000:30-35). The 'international' networks in which the research area was involved thus changed in this period: instead of one shared supra-regional network, there appears to now have been a fragmentation of the exchange networks.

There is an increase in metalwork deposition in LN II: this is in fact the first period in which metal was deposited on a large scale all over the research area, as shown in Figure 7.1. Evidently, it had now become an established practice to regularly deposit metalwork in the landscape. This increased rate in metalwork *deposition* suggests that there was more metal in *circulation* as well. Metalwork depositions were remarkably similar in the entire research area in LN II: daggers, halberds, and axes were all predominantly deposited singly in wet landscape settings (see Figure 7.2). From Zealand in the east to the Netherlands in the west, people did the same things, over and over again, demonstrating that there were shared ideas on how metalwork was supposed to be deposited. Clearly, there were shared conventions across the entire research area. Some of these conventions were actually supra-regional: metal-hilted daggers were deposited in similar ways all over north-west Europe (Schwenzer 2004:15-19).

Even though axes were preferably not used as burial gifts both in LN I and LN II, a change in the conventions behind axe depositions can be observed: people selected different landscape settings for axe depositions. Copper axes were deposited in dry land contexts in LN I relatively often, but in LN II the practice of depositing metal axes in wetlands took flight, and this continued to be the main practice in the following periods, as addressed in Chapters 5 and 6. Copper and gold ornaments were generally not used as burial gifts either in LN II, but deposited in hoards. On the whole, metal objects clearly no longer played an important role in burials, which is surprising after the significant developments in the preceding Bell Beaker period, when metal became an important element in the burial package. Metal was thus no longer used to construct a supra-regionally shared image of the dead in burials (this is discussed in more detail in Chapter 9); instead, the focus shifted to wetland depositions.

However, a small group of hoards from this period – including the Pile, Gallemose, Skeldal, Vigerslev, and Wageningen hoards – stand out, because people chose to break with these widely shared conventions when they deposited them. Although they do not contain the exact same combinations of objects, they all combine objects that were otherwise never combined in depositions: they are all "convention-breakers" using Fontijn's term (Fontijn 2019:35). They all combine local objects with foreign objects from the various regions that the local communities were connected with. The south Swedish Pile hoard is a perfect example: it contains Únětice and Anglo-Irish imports as well as south Scandinavian axes (Vandkilde 2017). In this way, these hoards represent the international networks in which the local communities under study were involved. They also contain unique objects, such as the gold beehive-shaped box in the Skeldal hoard, or the puzzling bronze hooks in the Gallemose hoard. Compared to the numerous single object deposits from this period, people deposited a surprising amount of metal in these unconventional hoards: the Danish Gallemose hoard for example weighs almost 12 kg (Randsborg 1991:112)! These hoards also embody various stages in the metalworking process, as discussed in Chapter 4. In addition, people also selected special places in the landscape for these hoards, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 10.

As argued in Chapter 4, these unconventional hoards connect regions, communities, and people with each other, serving as "*Mappa Mundi* hoards" (Fontijn 2019:29-33), and reminding us of Needham's term "community deposits" (Needham 1988:246). These hoards represent the networks in which local communities were embedded, reminiscent of how the Bell Beaker burial ritual reflected the supra-regional Bell Beaker network. The following chapters return to the topic of these unconventional hoards, in particular Chapter 10, since these hoards provide a unique glimpse of the practice of selective deposition precisely *because* they break widely accepted conventions (Fontijn 2019:35-36).

7.5 Prelude to the finale

This section proceeds to the beginning of the Nordic Bronze Age, *i.e.* period IA (1700-1600 BC), which partly corresponds to the Dutch Middle Bronze Age A (MBA A, 1800-1500 BC). The Únětice region loses much of its importance as the main source of metal supply in this period, as discussed in Chapter 5. Instead, the exchange routes become more fragmented, with imports from Central Europe, the Carpathian Basin, and western Europe occurring in Denmark and northern Germany in this period (Vandkilde 1996:220-222). Locally made metalwork becomes increasingly important, especially in Denmark (Vandkilde 1996, fig. 266). The relative frequency of metalwork depositions in period IA is roughly comparable to LN II (see Figure 7.1).

However, it should be noted that there was a striking dip in metalwork deposition in the Netherlands in this period, as seen in Chapter 5. This applies to burials as well as hoards and single object depositions. Compared to Denmark, the number of metal objects from the Netherlands was also lower in the previous two periods (see Chapters 3 and 4). As discussed in Chapter 2, the metalwork recorded from the Netherlands is probably representative; this means that overall, smaller numbers of metalwork were deposited in this region than in Denmark. The dip in period IA may thus reflect an actual scarcity of metal objects in this region. However, it is very likely that at least *some* metal objects were used by the agrarian communities in this region (Fontijn 2002:97). But apparently, people chose to *not* deposit metalwork in this period. In the adjacent regions, people did deposit metalwork, and these depositional events had a social significance. People expressed their ideas on their place in the world through metalwork depositions; I return to this idea in the next three chapters. However, in the Netherlands, depositions apparently did not have this social significance in this period.

The most important development in period IA is that the uniformity of metalwork depositions that was so striking in LN II is no longer visible. Instead, a heterogenisation of the conventions behind metalwork deposition can be observed in period IA: each object category was deposited in its own, specific way, and the conventions were different for each region (see Figure 7.2). People no longer did the same things across vast distances; it appears as if it was no longer of importance to follow supra-regional conventions. Instead, it became more important to emphasise local elements in depositions. Spearheads, for example, were deposited in large numbers in Denmark, almost always in hoards, while they are rare in northern Germany. The increased emphasis on local practices and what it entails is discussed in more detail in Chapters 9 and 10. Overall, most objects were still deposited singly in wetlands, particularly axes; this is a persistent pattern throughout the investigated time period. But burials with metalwork are on the rise; especially metal daggers and ornaments are more common in burials now. This development forms the prelude to period IB, when the dead were often buried with metal objects, particularly with bronze daggers/swords and ornaments (see Section 7.6).

On rare occasions, people chose to deposit assemblages of objects together in hoards. Hoards were obviously a special type of depositional event, a depositional event that stood out. But there are differences between the regions in terms of the objects that people selected. In Denmark, hoards followed local conventions, containing series of spearheads and/or axes. The most striking example is the Torsted hoard, containing seven axes and no less than 40 spearheads, which are among the very first spearheads in the region. Another example are the multiple hoards deposited along the palisade at Boest,

one of them containing five oversized axes. These spearheads and axes are mostly locally made; again, the *local* aspect is emphasised. In contrast, hoards in northern Germany were deposited following Únětice practices, such as the Marwedel hoard, which includes Únětice ornaments and axes (Wegner et al. 1996:377, Laux 2000:35, 42, Laux 2015:3). Nevertheless, all of these hoards do have something in common: they are all excessive in terms of the numbers of objects, size of the objects, and/or the objects themselves. Such Überausstattungen in Hansen's terms (2001) are not found in burials in the region in this period, but only in hoards. Depositing hoards with metalwork in the landscape became a social event that had its own significance in this period.

People selected specific landscape settings for these hoards, which were different from single object deposits: they were often deposited in dry landscape settings in association with man-made structures, such as burials. The hoards deposited in connection with the palisade at Boest are, again, striking examples of this choice of location. These hoards were thus not deposited in unmarked, natural places like bogs, quite the contrary; they were deposited in landscapes on which people had clearly left their mark.

Whereas the LN II hoards discussed above emphasise international connections, these period IA hoards rather appear to emphasise the local communities, particularly in Denmark. These Danish hoards contain series of locally made objects, and they were deposited following local conventions, in landscapes on which people had left their mark. In this emphasis on local practices in Denmark, we might observe the emergence of the Nordic Bronze Age which fully started to flourish in period IB (Vandkilde 2014ab). In contrast, the German hoards emphasise connections with the Únětice region.

7.6 The grand finale: the Nordic Bronze Age and Sögel-Wohlde period

Finally, this section focuses on period IB of the Nordic Bronze Age (1600-1500 BC), the last part of the investigated time period, which corresponds to the last part of the Dutch Middle Bronze Age (Van den Broeke et al. 2005, fig. 1.10) and to the Sögel-Wohlde phase in northern Germany (Laux 2009:3-7). Even though period IA is the first period of the Nordic Bronze Age, period IB has been argued to be the true beginning of the Nordic Bronze Age, since it was a turning point in the quality and quantity of metalwork (Vandkilde 2014ab). The Nordic Bronze Age, with the characteristic style and abundance of metalwork that is typical for this region, is thought to have started to unfold in period IB, with a peak later on in period II and III (Vandkilde 2014ab). By far most of the metalwork in Denmark in period IB is locally made (Vandkilde 1996, fig. 266); foreign imports lost their significance entirely. But also in northern Germany, an important regional development took place: the Sögel-Wohlde group emerged, with its specific style of metalwork of which the Sögel-Wohlde sword is the main object. Southern Jutland and the north-eastern part of the Netherlands were also part of this *Sögeler Kreis*, as discussed in Chapter 6.

All over the research area, metalwork was deposited in this period on the largest scale hitherto, as shown in Figure 7.1. And metalwork did not only occur in larger quantities, but also in a wider variety of object types and shapes, which is illustrated by the axes from this period: while all axes were of one basic shape in the previous periods, high-flanged axes, nick-flanged axes, and shaft hole axes circulated alongside each other in period IB, and in addition, the very first palstaves emerged. Within this wide range of shapes and types, regional styles can be observed: organic-hilted Sögel-Wohlde swords were for example

typical for the Sögel-Wohlde region, while metal-hilted Valsømagle swords were typical for the Valsømagle region in eastern Denmark (see Figure 7.2). The trend towards regionalisation in deposition practices observed in period IA thus continued: regional groups emerged that expressed their regional identity through their own, regional style in depositions.

The most important development in this period is that metalwork became abundant in burials (see Figure 7.2). The dead were now often buried with metalwork, and all main object categories were used as burial gifts. This also includes axes, which is a new development. Particularly bronze daggers/swords were frequently used as burial gifts. Swords were a new object type in this period, and they have been interpreted as signalling an emerging 'warrior ideal' (Kristiansen 1987, Treherne 1995, Vandkilde 1996). This 'warrior ideal' and the role that swords play in it is discussed in detail in Chapter 9.

But although all main object *categories* were used as burial gifts, people preferred particular object *types* in burials, and thus avoided other types. High-flanged axes of types Mägerkingen-Valsømagle and Hüsby were specifically used as burial gifts, while high-flanged axes of type Oldendorf were predominantly deposited in wet landscape settings. The first primarily had a display function, while the latter were utilitarian work axes (Vandkilde 1996:270). The *cultural biographies* of these axes thus played an important role in their deposition, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 8. As the variety of object types and shapes increased in this period, the degree of selectivity also increased: each object type or shape was deposited in its own, specific way. The heterogenisation that emerged in period IA, when each object type was deposited in its own manner, thus increased in period IB.

Although some shared patterns can be observed in the selection of objects in burials, it is also beyond doubt that there was a high degree of variation, which was analysed by applying network analysis in Chapter 6. Regional burial practices existed: in eastern Denmark (Zone I), the dead were buried with a metal-hilted Valsømagle sword or dagger, and in 46% of the burials with additional objects; and in Jutland (Zone II), northern Germany, and the Netherlands, the dead were buried with an organic-hilted Sögel-Wohlde sword/dagger, and in 55% of the burials with additional objects. The classic division between the Valsømagle region on the one hand and the *Sögeler Kreis* on the other is thus confirmed in this study (see Chapter 6 for a more detailed analysis). Furthermore, there were not only differences *between* regions, but also *within* regions: particularly Sögel-Wohlde burials show a high degree of variation, as considered in Chapter 6. While there was a standardised burial package in the Bell Beaker period, it is difficult to recognise a standardised burial package in period IB. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 9.

Despite the abundancy of metalwork in burials, single object deposits were still the most frequent type of depositional event. Hoards also occur, and both single objects and hoards were predominantly deposited in wetland contexts (see Figure 7.2). The focus clearly shifted entirely to wetland settings: irrespective of how many objects people chose to deposit in the landscape, the convention was to deposit them in wet landscape settings. This is in contrast to period IA, when hoards were often deposited in dry landscape settings in association with man-made structures. The most important elements in period IB hoards are axes, spearheads, and swords; they were primarily deposited in one-type hoards, but in a small number of mixed hoards, people combined all three object categories together. These mixed hoards, including the Valsømagle I and II, Oldendorf, and Overloon hoards, are remarkably similar, despite the fact that they are widely dispersed across the research area (see Figure 7.2). There is a distance of roughly 600 km between Valsømagle

and Overloon, and yet these hoards essentially contain the same combination of objects, as discussed in Chapter 6. These hoards clearly reflect the same ideas, which is discussed in more detail in Chapters 9 and 10.

Regionalisation in deposition practices can thus be considered the key word for period IB. Particularly burials were used to emphasise ideas of 'regionality': the Valsømagle region had its own burial practice with a specific material culture, and so did the Sögel-Wohlde region. In both regions, locally made objects in the local style were used as burial gifts, although in varying object combinations. It was no longer important to emphasise the international networks that local communities were part of, which shifted over the course of time, as in LN I and LN II. Instead, it became important to express being part of the local group, which was done by using objects with a recognisable local style in burials.

However, in this regionalisation in deposition practices, a distinct and separate Nordic Bronze Age is in fact difficult to discern. Instead, the Valsømagle and Sögel-Wohlde regions clearly come to the fore as regional traditions in depositions, particularly in burials, but these are not limited to national borders. The Sögel-Wohlde region, of which the centre of gravity was probably located in northern Germany (Bergerbrant 2007:41, Hachmann 1957:30, Sprockhoff 1927:132-133), but which reached from Jutland in the north-east to the northern Netherlands in the west (Butler 1995/1996, Laux 2000, Laux 2009, Sprockhoff 1927, Vandkilde 1996), was particularly prolific in terms of metalwork. In fact, when we take Sögel-Wohlde swords/daggers, which are the typical object for this region, as a way of measuring, the numbers are striking: 41 Sögel-Wohlde swords/daggers from Danish territory were recorded in the database, while 109 such swords/daggers were found in Schleswig-Holstein and Niedersachsen. Although Denmark has indeed yielded the largest total number of metal objects from this period when we follow national borders (see Chapter 6), the abundance that is considered typical for the Nordic Bronze Age (*e.g.* Vandkilde 2014ab) is thus not limited to Denmark in period IB. This is the great value of the supra-regional approach that is applied in this study: regional patterns can be identified that are not limited to national borders. In terms of the abundance of metalwork in Denmark, the early and fast development of prehistoric archaeology in the country should also be taken into account: bronze finds were already in the 19th century collected in the Museum of Nordic Antiquities in Copenhagen and studied by scholars like Worsaae (see Chapter 1). This awareness emerged much later in other regions, like the Netherlands.

Apart from the shared burial practice and material culture in the Sögel-Wohlde region, there are additional similarities between the three countries, as discussed in Chapter 6. These include – but are not limited to – single depositions of work axes of Oldendorf type, which occur in the entire research area, and a number of hoards that are widely dispersed across the research area which are remarkably similar, as discussed above. And when we zoom out, even though the Valsømagle and Sögel-Wohlde traditions are indeed recognised as separate traditions in this study, they also express a shared idea: that of the 'warrior ideal', which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 9.

To conclude, comparing the finds from a large area spanning Denmark, northern Germany, and the Netherlands thus provides a new perspective on the Nordic Bronze Age, and suggests that the 'typical' abundance and style of the Nordic Bronze Age is perhaps not as limited to this particular area in this period as usually assumed. Instead, widely shared ideas existed, some of which were interpreted and expressed in regional material terms, particularly in burials. Hoards were actually remarkably similar across regions.

7.7 Epilogue

As already mentioned in this chapter's introduction, the practice of selective metalwork deposition continued long after 1500 BC, but this time span lies beyond the scope of this study. It is evident that selective metalwork deposition was a common practice from 4000 BC all the way to 1500 BC – although with many fluctuations and developments. This can only be expected during such a vast time span. But regardless of these fluctuations and changes – which reflect the supra-regional networks and the societies that people lived in, and how these shifted and developed over time – the practice of selective metalwork deposition *existed*: for thousands of years, depositing metalwork in the landscape was a completely normal thing to do, and it continued to be so long after 1500 BC. From this perspective, it is in fact puzzling that these days we do *not* deposit metalwork anymore.

After exploring the practice of selective metalwork deposition from a bird's-eye view in this chapter, the next chapter focuses on one specific theme: the *objects* that people selected for deposition. Which choices did people make and what do they signify?