Give peace a chance: on violence and warfare in prehistory and why it matters

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ON VIOLENCE AND WARFARE IN PREHISTORY AND WHY IT MATTERS

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Why do people fight each other?

How is it possible that people kill each other?

And above all: how is it possible that people who are able to peacefully live with each other at one moment, can kill each other at another one?

These are fundamental questions about the human condition – questions that religions, philosophers and scientists have been wanting to solve since times immemorial and that continue to fascinate us today (Browning 1998; Harrison 1995; Morris 2015). So you may perhaps be wondering why I am posing such deep and essential questions at the start of a lecture that is meant to tell you something about our prehistory?

WAR AND PEACE: HOW OUR DEEP PAST IS USED TO CLAIM HUMANS ARE INHERENTLY VIOLENT (OR PEACEFUL)

But the thing is that the prehistory of humankind *is* involved when people deal with such questions. As a matter of fact, it is more deeply involved than archaeologists generally dare to admit. If we talk about the significance that our study of the past may have for understanding the present, archaeologists are usually (and understandably) quite modest about the relevance of their work. Yes, we all would accept that there is something to be learnt from the past, but more often than not, we are asking ourselves whether the fragmented, incomplete and heavily distorted view we have of our own prehistory has any potential for reflection on human social behaviour at all, apart from mirroring assumptions and concerns of the present.

Be this as it may, other scientists and influential thinkers are not that cautious. In answering the question whether humankind is good or bad, peaceful or violent, it is striking to see how many thinkers use a narrative of the past to make a statement on the present. Apparently, there is deep-seated assumption in the discourse that the things that people did in a remote past are relevant to understanding the complexity of the present. Philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1994 [1755], or Thomas Hobbes (1957 [1651]) both referred to a primordial state of humankind – what we once were – in an effort to understand what we have become. Whereas Rousseau considered this primordial state as a paradise of peace that only became corrupted once humans started to master nature, the past according Hobbes is savage, bloody and chaotic. He only sees peace settling in once people signed the social contract to form states (cf. Corbey 2006; Martin/Harrod 2015; Morris 2015; Pinker 2012 for broader discussions on Hobbes and Rousseau).

But whereas Hobbes and Rousseau were philosophers discussing an entirely hypothetical past, this is not true when we consider highly influential studies by social scientists and thinkers of our own time. For example: Lawrence Keeley in his much-cited book *War Before Civilization* (1996) presents an overview of archaeological (and early historical) sources on our deep past and concludes that these all confirm that the past was rife with warfare and interpersonal violence – in a way confirming Hobbes' expectations. Or let us consider the work of Steven Pinker. In his book *The Better Angels of Our Nature* (2012), he presents an evidence-based, influential study on human behaviour through time. It is particularly known for its counter-intuitive conclusion that throughout time humankind became *less* violent. He argues that our recent wars became *relatively* less costly in terms of deadly victims, even if we include the victims of the world wars in the 20th century. Using several sources, Pinker (2012, fig. 2.2) estimates the average death rate caused by warfare in prehistoric and early historic society was as

high as 10 to 20%. This seems excessive when compared to a percentage of death-by-war of 1-2 percent for the 20th century (Morris 2015, 8). The First and Second World War included, that is! Of course it is acknowledged that in prehistory and early history, the absolute numbers were much and much lower than the millions who were killed in the last world war. Yet in percentages – it is argued – a much larger proportion of society is estimated to have been wiped out in prehistoric wars.

Social anthropologists also played their part. More often than not, scholars who use the evidence from our deep past to make claims on the violent nature of human society, refer to ethnographies that make similar claims on non-western societies. The study of the Yanomamö in Amazonia (Chagnon 1983) is probably the most-cited example. In this study, Chagnon claims that indigenous communities that were originally thought to be relatively peaceful, in reality appeared to have an extremely violent culture. Now let us just leave discussions on the quality and representativity of this ethnography aside[1] for now and move on. Whatever our assessment of this work may be, it is remarkable to see this ethnography so often used to make an argument on the violent nature of humankind in general (e.g. Morris 2015; Pinker 2012). Is the assumption that such non western tribes display a view on human communities as they are 'in pure form'?

Another way in which prehistory is implicated in arguments about the supposedly violent nature of humankind, is by going back to human evolution. This apparently goes with the assumption that the true nature of humankind reveals itself in the first representatives of 'our' species. Using scientific publications on human evolution, Yuval Noah Harari in his bestselling book *Sapiens* (2015) describes our own species, *Homo sapiens*, as the most cooperative and socially interactive of all hominins. However, he also sees *sapiens* as the most violent and destructive species to ever have set foot on earth – being responsible for the extinction of other hominins and many species. In another recent

book *War – what is it good for* (2015), the influential writer and archaeologist Ian Morris even goes one step further. He not only uses archaeological evidence to make claims on the violent nature of our early past. He also uses it to claim that warfare actually had an important function in our history: it supposedly "*made humanity safer and richer*" (Morris 2015, 7).

But prehistory is also used to create an entirely different, more peaceful, view of humanity. In his recent, bestselling book *Humankind. A Hopeful History* (Dutch: *De meeste mensen deugen*; 2020), Rutger Bregman uses amongst other things a tiny selection of archaeological studies of prehistory to sketch of picture of human society as one committed to peace and often steered by empathy and altruism. A beautiful view that we would be all too happy to accept.

LET'S TAKE IT BACK TO ARCHAEOLOGY

But is the question really whether 'prehistoric societies' were inherently violent or peaceful? Is this in scientific terms an interesting question in the first place? Above, I presented two entirely opposite views on prehistoric societies that both claim to be based on archaeological evidence. When two entirely opposing views on prehistory are in play in modern discourse, this is often a sign of intellectual deadlock. It does not only signal that the issue at stake apparently matters to us greatly, but also that what we are discussing is not so much about evidence but more about deeper convictions. The examples I mentioned above, many from bestselling authors and influential thinkers, also imply archaeological evidence matters greatly. So I want to take this discussion back to archaeology and to its empirical evidence: what does archaeology really have to tell us about the supposedly violent or peaceful nature of humankind when we carefully consider it? Can it be used for such arguments at all given its limitations and the incomplete-

ness of the archaeological record? What role, if any, could archaeology play in debates on the role of violence or peacefulness in human societies?

It is obvious that many things, including people's intentions, are not preserved in the archaeological record. For instance, there are large areas where evidence of violence cannot have been preserved, for example because soil conditions prevent the conservation of human bone material (such as the loess and sandy soils of the southern Netherlands). But let us not forget that other disciplines also have their problems. Anthropological ethnographies, often considered role models for archaeology, have many shortcomings themselves (cf. the critiques on the quality of the Yanomamö ethnography mentioned previously). The strongly local and short-term view being one, the situatedness of ethnographies in a (post-)colonial present being another. The same applies to the work of historians. As any historian can tell, sources like Caesar's *De Bello Gallico* are far from objective accounts on Gallic societies (e.g. Stevens 1952). There is no doubt that *De Bello Gallico* was Caesar's self-serving propaganda to explain his actions to the senate, and therefore many of his claims, including on mass killings of enemies, must be taken with a pinch of salt.

So what could we learn from archaeology that we cannot learn from, for example, social anthropology or history? I think that the archaeological record of prehistory in general is badly equipped to make systematic calculations of percentages of people who died of violence through time (such as in Pinker 2012, fig. 2.2). Just presenting impressive finds that evidence interpersonal violence (or peacefulness) of human communities from prehistory is in itself not that interesting without further context or insight into long-term patterns of inter-human/social behaviour. For example, there was a lot of press attention a couple of years ago for a new analysis of the data of a cemetery containing the remains of 61 individuals in the Nile Valley at Jebel Sahaba dating back 13,400 years ago – arguably the oldest site with evidence for systematic,

deadly interpersonal violence among foragers (Crevecoeur *et al.* 2021). Research showed many of the deceased buried here died as a result of interpersonal violence. There are now indications that this violence did not result from just one, but from recurrent fights (ibid.). This find was broadly presented to the press as breaking evidence that allows us to refute claims on the supposed 'peacefulness' of early foragers. However, I wonder whether statements on 'the oldest evidence of violence' are that interesting from a scientific point of view, since the peacefulness-claim on such foragers itself was problematic to start with as it was not founded on anything other than deep-seated 'Rousseau-ian' assumptions (cf. Martin/Harrod 2015). It would be more interesting to investigate whether such interpersonal violence among these early Nile Valley foragers was a long-term, widely-shared trait, or whether it resonated into their ideology and social values. Particularly, one would be interested in finding out under what social/environmental conditions violence and early warfare arose[2].

In what follows, I want to return to archaeology. By using two examples, each from a different time period in European prehistory, I hope to show some of the benefits of taking an archaeological approach to the study of the relation between war and peace in human societies. The first case study is the Early Neolithic, a time usually considered to be a relatively peaceful one. The second focuses on the Bronze Age, of old considered one of the most violent periods in European prehistory. A careful consideration of (new) facts, contexts and long-term developments will hopefully show that both archaeological cases have their own story to tell on the role of 'peace' and 'war'.

CASE 1:
THE EARLY NEOLITHIC BANDKERAMIK CULTURE

The Bandkeramik Peace

I want to start with what may be called one of the most important cultures in the history of Europe: the Bandkeramik Culture, or Linear Pottery Culture (LBK for short, after the German abbreviation for its characteristic pottery). The Bandkeramik Culture is dated between 5500-4900 BC (starting in the Netherlands from 5250 BC). If we judge the societies of this culture by the standard of its ability to maintain, expand and distribute itself, people of the Bandkeramik Culture may be considered among the most successful of all prehistory.

7500 years ago, most of the European peninsula was inhabited by foragers, who roamed most of Europe. It was only in the southeast corner of Europe and along the coastal areas of the eastern Mediterranean that farming communities were thriving (Whittle 1996). Just 400 years later, the situation was radically different. In addition to the southeastern and Mediterranean zones of Europe, farming communities had now expanded and migrated to and settled in vast swathes of northeast, Central and northwest Europe; as far east as Moldavia, Belarus and Poland, and as far west as the Paris Basin and the southern parts of Dutch Limburg, with their southernmost settlements in Austria (Louwe Kooijmans 2017, 408-11). A stretch of land covering some 2000 km from west to east as the crow flies. Within just 400 years, an area with the extent of half of Europe was now the domain of new inhabitants. These were people of the Bandkeramik Culture.

These newcomers had an entirely different subsistence economy: they were the first farmers in the regions they settled, and farming was here to stay and would radically alter the further history of Europe.

What makes these 'Bandkeramik' people special within the broader scheme of things is the unprecedented speed with which

they were able to expand their living area to such an extraordinary vast extent. As Bánffy and Oros show (2010), the Bandkeramik Culture originated around 5600 BC on the Hungarian Plain. They argue that this culture developed out of that of the so-called Starčevo farming communities who were part of the southeast European Neolithic cultures (see Louwe Kooijmans 2017, 402-5 for an up-to-date overview). The earliest traces of the Bandkeramik Culture can be seen as an adaptation of the southeast European way of living to the environmental and climatic conditions of the temperate and more humid parts of Europe (ibid.). Apparently, this adaptation was very successful, because in the next century, we see farmer communities of the Bandkeramik Culture spread out of the Hungarian Plains and migrate into new lands to the east and west. This migration must have been steered by a (very) strong growth in population numbers (Louwe Kooijmans 2017, 424-5; Zimmerman *et al.* 2009).

To give an illustration: Louwe Kooijmans (2017, 408-9) reminds us that it took Bandkeramik Culture farmers only some 200 years, just eight generations, to create a zone of claimed and settled areas stretching from their starting point in Hungary all the way to the German Rhineland near Köln. What really stands out is the relative uniformity of cultural expressions found among the earliest Bandkeramik communities. The lay-out of their houses, the organisation of settlements and their material culture such as pottery, flint and stone tools were remarkably similar across Europe for a longer period of time (Sommer 2001). It seems as if these people considered it very important to stick with the norms and values of the ancestral hamlets and villages from which they once split off, and to persist in 'ancestral habits' for generations. There is not only a strong cultural cohesion, but also a strong social integration between the dispersed Bandkeramik communities. There is compelling evidence that Bandkeramik communities in different parts of Europe remained in contact with each other. Non-local materials, such as the amphibolite of which they made

their adzes travelled across vast distances of hundreds of kilometres (Bakels 1987). The early adzes found in the settlements in Dutch Limburg, for example, were made of stones originally procured in what is now Jistebko in the Czech Republic – a strong case for long-distance exchange networks (Louwe Kooijmans 2017, 440 and refs. cited therein). Mediterranean *Spondylus* shells, used as ornaments, travelled across even more impressive distances among Bandkeramik groups. Louwe Kooijmans (2017, 439) mentions a specimen that ended up in the Paris Basin which is some 1500 km from where the shell originated.

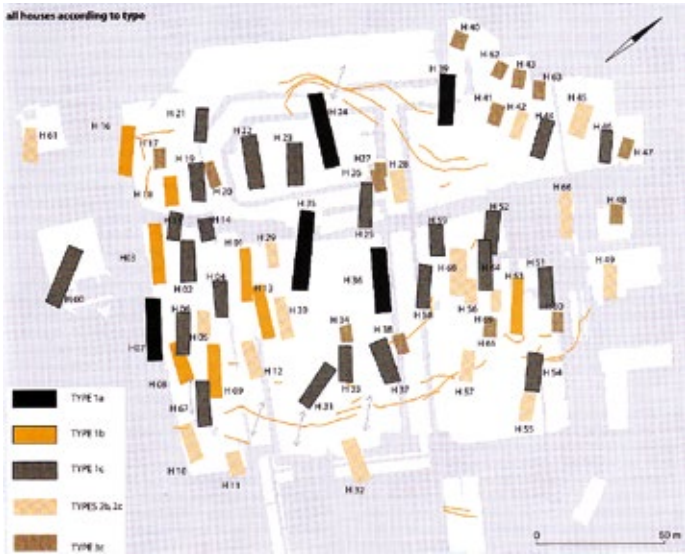

Figure 1. *Overview of house plans of the Bandkeramik Culture settlement at Cannerberg, Maastricht. Drawing from Van Wijk 2016, copyright Archol BV.*

Although there are indications for some hierarchy at the level of hamlets or villages (cf. Amkreutz/Van de Velde 2017, 22; Louwe Kooijmans 2017, 444-6; Van Wijk 2016), in general there is no evidence for central authority from one settlement over others, *let alone* over entire groups of communities (Meyer *et al.* 2018, 6). Every settlement, be it hamlet-sized or the more village-sized ones, seems to have been autonomous (Meyer *et al.* 2018, 6-7; Van Wijk 2016). New settlements were usually built close to existing ones, implying the former were split off from the latter (Van Wijk 2016). Their relative closeness suggests intimate links between neighbours, such as regular inter-marriage, but there also may have been tensions and rivalries. Already in the 1970s, Van de Velde (1979) argued that exchange of marriage partners was patrilocal, whilst inheritance was matrilineal: a potential recipe for tension and antagonism (most recently: Amkreutz/Van de Velde 2017, 20-3). Decades later, scientific research proved him right: patrilocality was demonstrated independently on the basis of isotopic studies (Bentley *et al.* 2002; see also Haak *et al.* 2008 for later evidence on Neolithic patrilocality).

Tensions between Bandkeramik groups as noted by Van de Velde may have led to friction and antagonism. Meyer *et al.* (2015, 11217) argue that competition between specific males (representatives of families or houses?) may have been another source of friction. For the most of Bandkeramik history, however, there is no evidence that such tensions led to structural organised violence between Bandkeramik communities. For hundreds of years, settlements, for example, typically lacked any kind of defensive structures. All this suggests that the social web was for an important part maintained by social exchanges of gifts, commodities and marriage partners. Fission processes, the splitting off of subgroups who founded a new settlement elsewhere, may have been another way to resolve tensions (Frirdich 2005).

Figure 2. Ceramics and flint and stone tools from the Bandkeramik Culture. Photo by Minja Hemminga, Archol BV.

Figure 3. Excavation of traces of a Band-keramik house. Photo by Ivo van Wijk, Archol BV.

Particularly throughout the first centuries of its existence, the Bandkeramik Culture society was not only surprisingly uniform in its cultural expressions across vast distances, it was also strikingly rigid in its mode of subsistence and attitude towards the landscape (Sommer 2001). When a group of people split off from their settlement to create their own settlement, they more or less repeated what had been done before. Settlements were only created on the most fertile soils – usually the loess soils, and they started to grow the same crops and tend the same animals (Louwe Kooijmans 2017, 425 ff.). Apparently, there was not much incentive for adjustment, experiment or change in strategy.
But all of this was to change drastically. Around 5000/4900 BC, there are clear indications that many Bandkeramik societies entered a deep crisis (Meyer *et al*. 2014; 2018).

A VIOLENT ENDING?

A first indication is that the number of Bandkeramik settlements decreased strongly and in some regions occupation seems to have ceased almost entirely by 4900 BC. As Luc Amkreutz and Pieter van de Velde (2017) recently showed, one such a region where this happened is Dutch Limburg. All the available evidence shows that this was a densely occupied region in Bandkeramik times, of which many settlements clusters are known to have thrived up until c. 4900 BC. However, archaeological signs of occupation appear to be almost entirely lacking for the following centuries (Amkreutz/Van de Velde 2017, 26-7). In some regions that were repopulated, former Bandkeramik settlement locations appear to have been avoided, suggesting a deliberate 're-start' took place (cf. the discussion in Amkreutz/Van de Velde 2017, 26-7).
A second indication that the social fabric of the Bandkeramik was changing and perhaps also crumbling, is that the long-distance contact networks that had been maintained for over two centuries,

started to contract. This was a process that already set in before 5000 BC. Instead, contacts seem to have become increasingly regionalized, and there are indications for social fragmentation (Amkreutz/Van de Velde 2017, 27-8; Whittle 1996, 158 with further references). In itself, this need not necessarily be a sign of a pending crisis; after all, regionalisation and diversification of resource procurement networks can be an improvement as De Grooth (2014, esp. 516-7) argues. In some regions there are indications that vital resources such as flint were no longer shared by several communities, however. In the German region around Kilianstädten (Hessen), there is for example evidence that adjacent Bandkeramik communities used different flint resources (Meyer *et al*. 2015, 11218 and refs cited therein). This suggests that equal access through extensive exchange and alliance networks was no longer a certainty for the different communities living there.

Thirdly, in several parts of Europe, Bandkeramik communities started to create large ditched enclosures. This happened mainly in the final stages of settlement history (Whittle 1996, 174; Louwe Kooijmans 2017, 453-5). As these sometimes represent impressive investments of time and energy, they must have been considered of great importance to them. For some enclosures, a function as social meeting places for ceremonial practices has been suggested (e.g. Herxheim; cf. Meyer *et al*. 2014). In other cases, however, it has been suggested that such enclosures had a defensive function (Teschler-Nicola 2012, 119; Vencl 1999, 63).

More tentatively, there are hints from evidence on settlement location that suggest that access to natural sources or ideal settlement locations in the later stages of the Bandkeramik history was not always as 'open' as one might expect. Usually, settlements tend to be located close to streams and rivers (Bakels 1978; Whittle 1996, 161). But with the filling-in of the landscape over time, now some settlements were sometimes also built higher on the loess plateaus, further away from water sources. This necessitated considerable investments such as the construction of elaborate

wood-framed or-lined wells to obtain water such as the 12 metre deep construction at Erkelenz-Kückhoven (Whittle 1996, 161 with further refs). It should be emphasised that this was particularly a feature of the later stages of the Bandkeramik Culture (Louwe Kooijmans 2017, 423). This may be an indication settlement space was (perceived as) restricted or that there now was a necessity to safeguard access to water in uncertain times (Louwe Kooijmans 2017, 423). One site where this happened was at Asparn-Schletz, a location that, as we will see below, became the scenery of a massacre (Teschler-Nicola 2012, 119).

The fifth, and most compelling indication that there was a crisis in Bandkeramik society, however, comes from a relatively new source of information: mass graves containing the bodies of people who were violently killed.

MASS GRAVES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

For a long time, it has been discussed whether the enclosed sites and enclosed settlements had a defensive function, indicating life became insecure and violent. The find of a series of mass graves in the last decades now gives strong support to this theory. In a number of different regions, mass graves have been found that provide new insight into the nature of the crisis of the people of the final Bandkeramik Culture. Below, I briefly summarise what is known about these mass graves and then go on to discuss the implications of these finds[3].

The first find to disrupt the myth of peaceful Bandkeramik farmers was done at **Talheim** in Baden-Württemberg (Meyer *et al.* 2014, 312-4; Wahl/Trautmann 2012). In a pit close to an unexcavated settlement, the bodies of 34 individuals were found. The skeletons of the majority of the buried individuals show traces of having been killed in battle. It is likely that they were buried quite quickly after their death, as this happened carelessly and without

Figure 4. *Skeletons in the mass grave of Halberstadt, Sachsen-Anhalt, Germany.*
Photo attribution: Christian Meyer, Corina Knipper, Nicole Nicklisch, Angelina Münster, Olaf Kürbis, Veit Dresely, Harald Meller & Kurt W. Alt, CC BY 4.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>, via Wikimedia Commonshttps://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/0c/Massgrave_of_Halberstadt.webp (= Fig.1 from Meyer, C., Knipper, C., Nicklisch, N., A. Münster, O. Kürbis, V. Dresely, H. Meller, K.W. Alt,. Early Neolithic executions indicated by clustered cranial trauma in the mass grave of Halberstadt. Nat Communications 9, 2472 (2018). https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-018-04773-w)

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any sign that a ceremony took place. The excavators argue that bodies were thrown in by their murderers. As stone adzes and axes of Bandkeramik types could be identified as the main murder weapon, the perpetrators were not foragers but must have belonged to a Bandkeramik community themselves (Meyer *et al*. 2014, 313). The nature and position of the injuries preserved on the skeletons indicate that they were killed in close-range fighting and probably when they tried to run from their attackers (Wahl/Trautmann 2012, 85). All age classes and both sexes are well represented, ranging from children age 2, up until an old man in

his 60s. The evidence left Wahl and Trautmann (2012) no other option but to conclude that this was an all-out killing in which the entire population of a Bandkeramik hamlet, including very young children, was massacred.

The site of **Asparn-Schletz**, in Austria, close to Vienna, presents another, no less shocking impression of a Bandkeramik massacre. Teschler-Nicola (2012) describes how here the remains of 67 individuals were found in a ditch. This is probably only part of the total number of victims as the ditch was not entirely excavated (Teschler-Nicola 2012, 105). Louwe Kooijmans (2017, 456) estimates the total number of bodies in the order of 200. The ditches were probably part of a defensive system meant to protect the settlement (Teschler-Nicola 2012, 103). On most skeletons and all preserved skulls (N=33), traces of peri-mortem violence was detected (Teschler-Nicola 2012, 106-13). Just like at Talheim, here there is also clear evidence that these people were killed in an attack by another group of Bandkeramik farmers. The large number of deceased, as well as the age profiles (including very young children, adults of both sexes up until elderly people) also points to the gruesome fact that an entire community was wiped out. The nature of the wounds indicates this happened with cruelty and rage. Many individuals had signs of several injuries and blows (up to eight points of impact (ibid., 110), and for one nine or ten-year old child Teschler-Nicola argues that his or her skull was smashed while lying on the ground (ibid., 110). There are two differences with the situation at Talheim. The first is that at Asparn-Schletz there is no evidence that the perpetrators had buried the bodies. Their situation is more in line with one where they ended up in ditches that only slowly silted-up. This fits the observation that the skeletons show evidence of gnawing by animals. Teschler-Nicola (2012, 116) therefore concludes that most bodies just were lying in the places where they were killed for quite some time. Apparently, the attackers had no intention of reusing the settlement and left it without returning. The second

difference to the situation in Talheim is that the number of young adult females are not representative for what one would expect in a settlement. There are about three times more males than females in the 20-40 age group (Teschler-Nicola 2012, 105). She interprets this as a sign that young females were spared and abducted by the attacking group (ibid.). The presence of very young children among the victims indicates females in the reproductive age must have been present in the Asparn-Schletz community (ibid.).

Hundreds of kilometres to the northwest, at **Schöneck-Kilianstädten** in Hessen, a mass grave containing the skeletons of 26 individuals was found that has similarities to that of both Talheim and Asparn-Schletz (Meyer *et al.* 2015). Again, skeletons were found with obvious signs of violence, pointing to other Bandkeramik groups as perpetrators[4]. The bodies were thrown in a ditch, without any sign of care or ceremony, just like at Talheim (suggesting the killers were the ones who dealt with the remains and may have been re-using the settlement). There are only two bodies of females, both relatively old. Therefore, Meyer *et al.* (2015, 11219) suggest that, just like at Asparn-Schletz, younger females might have been abducted. Although there is a dearth of young females, very young children and older people are among the victims – again implying at least a significant part of a residential group was killed. A shocking and new detail of this mass grave was that the researchers found evidence on several individuals that the lower legs were broken peri-mortem. If this happened when the victims were already wounded and worked to the ground, it would imply a clear attempt to restrict movement before they were finally killed. If it happened after death, such a smashing of legs would not serve a functional purpose. Either way, Meyer *et al.* (2015, 11221) argue such acts betray severe cruelty and deep "*hatred and contempt*" of the victims, even if it would happen when they were already dead. It should not remain unmentioned that these mutilations were carried out regardless of age or sex.

Finally, a recently discovered mass grave at **Halberstadt** (Saxony-Anhalt, Germany) should be mentioned as it provides us with different information on the killings (Meyer *et al.* 2018). In a pit in a Bandkeramik settlement, the skeletons of nine individuals were found, seven of whom certainly were of adult males. There is another skeleton that is probably male and one probably female. The way in which their bodies were placed in the pit shows the same carelessness and lack of ceremony we saw at Talheim and Killianstädten. However, there are noteworthy differences (ibid.). For at least seven, it is clear that they were killed by cranial blows (at the back of their head). In one case, the skull was hit twice. However, the fact that we are dealing here with a group consisting of at least seven, probably eight adult males is strikingly different from the previous sites where a cross-section of the average population of a settlement was interred (ibid., 2472). Another striking difference is that the isotopic signature of most individuals differs markedly from those known from the cemetery belonging to the settlements where the mass grave was found. Meyer *et al.* (2018) interpret this as a sign that these people came from a region outside the normal range covered by the marriage exchange network of the settlement. Their hypothesis is therefore that here we have evidence of people belonging to a foreign group who were publicly executed. Were these people taken prisoner after a failed attack?

CONCLUSION: BANDKERAMIK 'BLOODLANDS[5]'?

This mass grave evidence leads the following conclusion.
All mass graves are dated to the last century of the Bandkeramik, 5000-4900 BC (cf. Meyer *et al.* 2014; 2015; 2018). All are from quite different Bandkeramik groups, that were probably not in direct contact or had any knowledge of each other. For example: c. 500 km separate Asparn-Schletz from Talheim. As Bandkeramik society lacked centralised leadership, we certainly should not

think of wars involving professional armies, but rather as events in which entire communities fought each other (cf. Meyer *et al.* 2015; 2018). The observation that we now have signs that they occurred in the 5000-4900 BC in much different regions at the same time, indicates that feelings of crisis and social disruption were a broadly-shared phenomenon, even though it is unlikely that inhabitants of Talheim would be aware that the violence in which they found themselves, was similar to that of people living at Asparn-Schletz in Austria.

The consistent young dating of the mass graves fits that of the enclosures that have also been interpreted as defensive structures indicating people felt threatened and vulnerable. As a matter of fact, such an enclosure was present at the Asparn-Schletz settlement, though it obviously did not help to protect the population (Teschler-Nicola 2012, 103). This could mean that in those regions where human skeletons are usually not preserved (e.g. the loess soils of the Netherlands and Belgium), it is not inconceivable there was also social unrest and perhaps even massacres – something to keep in mind for the Dutch region in the light of the rather abrupt ending of the dense population here (cf. Amkreutz/Van de Velde 2017).

Except for the Halberstadt case, these mass graves do not represent acts of endemic warfare as we know it from ethnographic literature. This is a kind of warfare in which fights regularly take place but usually focus on show and power display, and tend to have few deadly victims (cf. Louwe Kooijmans 1993 (with further refs) and 2017, 458). Rather, the mass graves all indicate massacres took place here, where one group exterminated another one (almost?) entirely, including the youngest members of the settlement (Meyer *et al.* 2015; 2018). If it could be proven that this was intentional, such acts would rank as genocides (Komar 2008). The way in which this was done often shows unprecedented cruelty to the victims, including the deliberate killing of young children. In one case it seems to have involved torture and hu-

miliation (the breaking of victims' legs as supposed to have taken place at Killianstädten; Meyer *et al.* 2015) and perhaps public executions (Halberstadt).
In non-state societies without codified laws, retribution (tit-for-tat) and negative reciprocity are ways to restore a sense of justice (cf. Armit 2011, 500-2). The deliberate erasure of an entire community, such as seems to have happened in some of the cases discussed above, is abnormal and suggests a society whose social ties were upset and probably even heavily disrupted. If Teschler-Nicola (2012) and Meyer *et al.* (2014) are correct about the violent abduction of marriage partners, and if we follow their line of thought, then we should see this is a comparable sign of social disintegration. It points to failure to establish normal alliances that are vital for a group's survival. If female marriage partners normally would be parts of exchanges between different communities, cementing relations between different groups, now apparently these partners had to be acquired by force…

DOES THE CASE OF THE BANDKERAMIK PROVE OUR PREHISTORY WAS DEEPLY VIOLENT IN NATURE?

There are several reasons that may explain why a society that was initially as successful as that of the Bandkeramik Culture finally disappeared. Although this is not the topic of this lecture, some words needs to be said on this. It has been argued that the economic system that drove Bandkeramik societies for such a long time was facing its limitations. It may have been too rigid, unresilient and too focused on occupying only a specific kind of soils and practicing the same kind of agriculture and husbandry – something that might have become increasingly problematic with sharply rising population numbers (cf. Shennan 2007). Perhaps moves to higher loess plateaus lacking direct access to water were already a sign that there were problems finding the right place to

settle (cf. Louwe Kooijmans 2017, 423). It should also be realized that precisely during the last centuries, a change to a drier and colder climate set in, with potentially negative consequences for agriculture, although it remains unclear whether Bandkeramik economic resilience was able to cope with such fluctuations (Louwe Kooijmans 2017, 460). Internal tensions such as rivalries between houses or communities (Van de Velde's opposition between patrilocality and matrilineal inheritance; Amkreutz/Van de Velde 2017) may have risen when one way to resolve tensions – migrating – became increasingly problematic due to lack of space or opportunities (ibid.). Shortening and contraction of exchange relations may also have led to problems in procuring vital resources. Reference has already been made to differential access to flint resources (Meyer *et al.* 2015, 11218 and references cited therein). The precise impact of all such changes is still undecided, however. As Louwe Kooijmans (2017, 460) showed in a recent review, developments differed from time to time and place to place. For example, there must have been a drastic decline (and therefore crisis?) in the German Rhineland and the Low Countries, but this was much less so in the Rhine-Main area (Louwe Kooijmans 2017, 460).

But none of these factors adequately explain why the final stage of the Bandkeramik in some regions was so *violent*. Does the Bandkeramik case simply show that violence was inherent to prehistoric non-state societies, as authors like Pinker or Keeley argue? Was prehistory indeed much like the war-like, barbarian past of Hobbes? If so, does archaeological evidence simply tell us something on the human condition we already knew from historical or ethnographic sources?

The answer to this question should be a nuanced, but clear 'no'. In marked contrast to ethnography, for the people of the Bandkeramik Culture we have a well-documented overview of its nature and development for a period of more than four centuries. This allows us to recognise its success – an unprecedented ex-

pansion in population size and territory by a society lacking any kind of advanced communication or logistics as we know them from historical societies (the wheel, for example, would only be invented 2000 years later!). This success was social as well, since the evidence for long-distance exchange and information-sharing demonstrates how tightly-knit these dispersed communities were during the first three centuries (c. 5500-5200 BC; Sommer 2001). Although there were undoubtedly conflicts, we barely have anything in the way of the defensive structures that were constructed in the final stage of the Bandkeramik Culture, or the mass graves that we discussed previously. If anything, the general history of the Bandkeramik communities shows war and violence *were not integral* to the functioning of that society (as we shall see later on, this was the case during the later Bronze Age). For cultures that immediately succeeded the Bandkeramik Culture, such as the Rössen, Stichbandkeramik or Lengyel groups, settlements were usually undefended and although there are occasionally hints of intra-personal violence visible on skeletons from their cemeteries (Schulting/Fibiger 2012), there is nothing in the way of mass graves like those that marked the end of the Bandkeramik Culture.

HOW SOCIAL INTERACTION AND THE UPHOLDING OF MORAL COMMUNITIES SUPPORTS BOTH PEACE AND WAR

Instead of allowing us to say how 'peaceful' or 'warlike' prehistoric communities generally were, I venture the Bandkeramik case rather shows something else: *that both peace and war result from social interaction and the upholding of moral communities.*
Essential to people of what we call the Bandkeramik Culture, and almost all other prehistoric societies in Europe, is that we are dealing with relatively egalitarian societies without central-

ised organisation, laws or authority. Each settlement was in principle autonomous. As Marcel Mauss reminds us in his seminal essay on the gift (1990 [1923-24]), it is by entering into exchange relations with others that broader social wholes emerge that are vital for survival (cf. also Corbey 2006). No settlement of 40-50 inhabitants can survive long term without exchange of marriage partners, the creation of extra-communal cooperative networks and alliances that secure access to critical material resources. By exchanging commodities, independent communities mutually benefit from each other to obtain crucial resources and materials (Bakels 1987; De Grooth 2014). This usually goes side-by-side with gift exchanges that are fundamental for the forging of relations. Foreigners become in-laws by exchanging marriage partners. As we have seen, there is now empirical evidence that marriage partners (females) were married out to other groups (Bentley *et al*. 2002). As Marcel Mauss sets out in his essay (1990 [1923-24]), the reason why gift exchange creates ties that lead

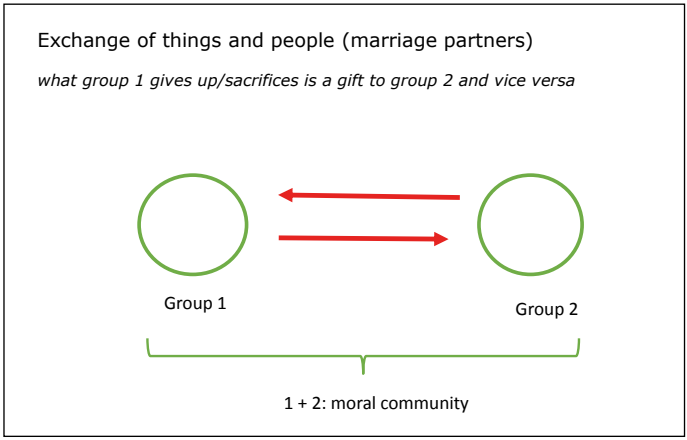

Figure 5: Schematized representation of the relation between intergroup gift exchange, sacrifice (as 'giving things/people up') and the reach of a moral community. By D. Fontijn.

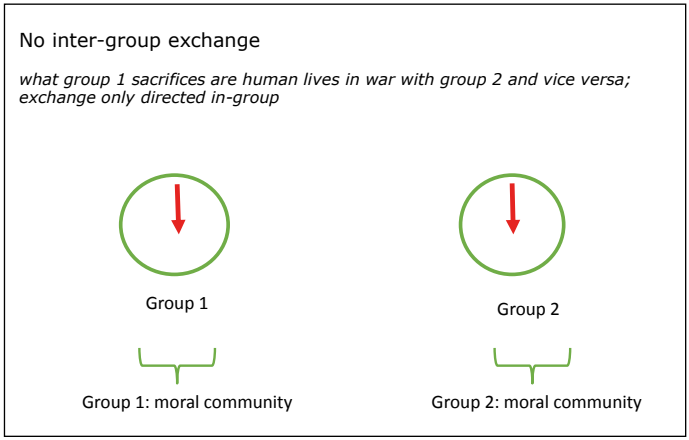

Figure 6: Schematized representation of the potential relation between exchange, sacrifice and the reach of a moral community in the absence of inter-group gift exchange and in the case of inter-group warfare. By D. Fontijn.

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to reciprocity (instead of trade/commodity exchange), is because there is something of the giver in the gift – a society is surrendering something crucial in order to establish a social bond, a moral obligation. The incentive to reciprocate does not arise from laws, *but from judgment and morality* (cf. Lambek 2008). In creating alliances between groups, a community thus extends its moral community (Fontijn 2019).

But as Mauss also shows, if a community does *not* reciprocate, the reverse of moral connection can be the result (see also Corbey 2006). Ties are not forged and instead outsiders are not included in one's sense of community. Morality can now be projected inward – focusing more on one's own group, excluding outsiders with whom no exchanges take place. At its worst, falling outside such ('imagined')[6] moral communities can lead to viewing others

as irrelevant, as enemies to whom only negative reciprocity applies (people to be raided from), or as dehumanised beings that do not deserve the same treatment as insiders (cf. Armit 2011). A violent attitude towards those considered outsiders, potentially culminating in war, can result. Gifts and sacrifices still are made, but these are now directed inwards, into what is considered to be one's own community or tied group of communities (cf. De Dreu et al. 2016; 2020).

In several experiments and other studies, psychologists have provided important insights into how groups of people can (relatively quickly) shift their attitude towards others (De Dreu *et al.* 2020), demonstrating how social interaction both shapes peace and war, as remarked above. Such studies also make clear how much we miss in archaeology regarding the immediate motivations and incentives of the participants involved (for example: what events were the immediate cause of bloodbaths such as the one at Asparn-Schletz?). However, a benefit of overarching studies on the long-term history of the Pan-European Bandkeramik Culture is how they inform us on long-term social patterns and mentalities in a Durkheim-ian sense. Think of how archaeology demonstrates how vital long-distance exchanges were for the Bandkeramik social fabric. The rise of systematic violence is preceded by the contraction and disruption of these networks. We know exchange of marriage partners across communities took place and this amplifies how aberrant the hypothesised abduction of females was – a sign of a social network that was no longer functioning as it should.

THE BRONZE AGE: A PERIOD DEFINED BY VIOLENCE?

This early Neolithic case study hopefully demonstrates that the idea that prehistoric societies were characterised by violence needs to be qualified and seen within a broader social and chronological context. Apart from the defensive structures, Bandkeramik

society did not have anything close to specialised weaponry, specialised warriors or ideological celebrations of violence (at least not observable in the material culture they left behind). Let us therefore now continue our reflection on the nature of prehistoric violence by considering societies who *did* have all of that. It is to the European Bronze Age, almost 3000 years after the Early Neolithic that I now wish to turn.

The European Bronze Age, roughly dated between 2300-800 BC, is in many ways entirely different from the Neolithic. Almost all of Europe was now inhabited by farming communities, who occupied a much broader range of environments than the Bandkeramik farmers. The copper alloy bronze was a vital material, of which objects ranging from essential agricultural tools up to virtuoso ceremonial items were made (Kuijpers 2018). The scarcity of metal sources led to Pan-European bronze exchange networks, connecting distant societies into what has been called the first system that could be considered a forerunner of a globalised world (Vandkilde 2016). Seaworthy ships enabled long-distance connections and trading expeditions across the seas, and there is evidence for structural trade links between the Mediterranean and far northern regions such as Scandinavia (ibid.). Social structure was generally more complex than in the Neolithic, involving societies with inherited leading positions, probably based on access to bronze exchange networks (traditionally called chiefdoms; Kristiansen/Larsson 2005), though there is not anything in the way of lasting, central organisation at the level of early states (with the exception of Minoan and Mycenaean Greece).

Harding (1999, 157) wonders whether violence can be seen as a "*defining characteristic of Bronze Age Europe*". I think there are good reasons for that.

Figure 7. The full-hilted sword, from the river Maas near Thorn, the Netherlands. This sword with battle damage is one of the many Bronze Age weapons that were found in this river. Photo by National Museum of Antiquities (Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden).

First of all, for the Bronze Age we have large numbers of specialised weapons: bronze swords and spears. Both objects were developed in this period and occur in such large numbers that it is inconceivable that they were just made to hunt. They were specialised killing devices (Fontijn 2005; Harding 1999; Sørensen 1991).

Second, the use of these weapons requires skill and training (Gentile/Van Gijn 2019; Van Dijk 2021), implying there was a certain specialisation. The large numbers of spears also seems to suggest group fighting with spears was common, implying collaboration and training of groups of fighters (cf. Randsborg 1995).
Third: we also have evidence of the actual violence in the form of mass graves where there is evidence those buried, died in battles. In contrast to what we saw for the Bandkeramik, such mass graves are known throughout the entire Bronze Age, ranging from the Early (e.g. Wassenaar, Netherlands; Louwe Kooijmans 1993), Middle (e.g. Tormarton, UK; Osgood 2005) and Late Bronze Age (Tollense, Germany (Jantzen et al. 2011; Lidke et al. 2018). Although there are mass graves where it seems inhabitants of a small settlement were killed (including children and females such as at Wassenaar), we now also have finds where over 100 deceased, overwhelmingly male, were the victims (Tollense: Lidke et al. 2018, 163). This points to fights involving an army, not between village communities as has been argued for the Bandkeramik. Hoards consisting of entire collections of spearheads, such as those found at Torsted in Denmark (Visser forthcoming), imply specialised weapons were used by entire groups.
Fourthly, as I will elaborate upon later, there is particularly strong evidence that weaponry and battle were not just relevant in real life, but also in ideological and cosmological terms.
At the same time, the notion of intensive warfare in the Bronze Age is also a bit ambiguous. There may indeed be a lot of evidence for systematic violence, but on the other hand, it is remarkable to see that in large parts of Europe, settlements often lacked defensive structures of any kind. Many graves also lack weaponry, especially in western Europe (Fontijn 2019). The evidence also does not directly point towards a huge increase in violence, but rather to a stronger commitment to a particular kind of violence and a particular social-cultural appreciation of using violence (Fontijn 2002, Ch.11 and refs cited therein; Harding 1999). One reason

to consider this is that the invention and significance attached to swords in the Bronze Age, is actually quite peculiar in terms of efficiency. Swords are certainly not a game changer. Killing with bow and arrow was by far the method that combined high gain and low risk. Swords are designed for face-to-face encounters, but as the Bandkeramik evidence already showed: regular multifunctional axes were also deadly efficient. Rather, swords seem to fit a particular way of fighting: a practice where fighters could approach each other closely, acts that presuppose adherence to certain rules and conventions (Fontijn 2002, 227; Sørensen 1991).

WARRIORHOOD AS A 'TRANSFORMED SELF'

Studying the contextual associations of swords, Paul Treherne (1995) once pointed towards an additional peculiarity. When deposited in graves (as for example happened in Denmark), swords are often associated with toilet articles (such as tweezers and occasionally razors) or particular types of body ornaments (such as golden hair rings). He argues that at death, 'warriors' apparently ought to be clean-shaven, and/or have their body ornamented in particular ways (ibid.). This also becomes clear from Iberian warrior stelae, where objects for "*grooming and personal beauty*" are often shown on depictions of individuals with weapons (Harrison 2004, 111). There are depictions emphasising specific hair styles and perhaps "*coiffures*" (ibid. 112). On some stelae, brooches seem to have been depicted as well as mirrors. This is generally seen as evidence for the point that there was a specific 'beauty ideal' when it came to warriors. In other words: warriorhood requires a transformed appearance, or, as Treherne phrases it "*male beauty*" (Treherne 1995).

Although razors and tweezers are not as common in warrior graves as Treherne seems to suggest, his point regarding a transformed self stands. There is quite some material culture that is

directly associated with the idea of warriorhood, but that lacks practical use. Some of the Late Bronze Age bronze helmets, such as those from Viksø (Denmark) with their extensive 'horns' must be mentioned, or the bronze armour (Kristiansen/Larsson 2005, 332-333; Jensen 1998, 91). These were objects displaying great skill in manufacture, yet the 'armour' seems to have been adorning rather than protecting the body. In Iberia and Corsica, there are many statues of individuals dating to the Bronze Age. From Corsica, there are statues where the only thing that is depicted on the body is a sword, as if this was the 'bare essential'. The imagery of individuals who are naked apart from weapons is also known from other parts of Europe (Harrison 2004, 112). On Scandinavian rock art, for example, there are many examples of individuals who appear to fight and have giant erections (f.i. Kristiansen/Larsson 2005, fig. 162a). Alternatively, on Iberian stelae, it is often only weapons (sword and shield) or weapons plus helmet that are depicted (see Harrison 2004, 188 ff. for several examples). This is another way in which the crucial significance of weapons seems to have been emphasised. Harrison (2004, 59) speaks of "*a warrior code of abstractions*". In all, the evidence for so-called beauty ideals and the imagery of just weapons or of naked individuals carrying weapons all make the point that we are dealing here with warriorhood as an idealised, ideological concept.

BEING A WARRIOR: MORE THAN JUST WEARING AND USING WEAPONS

Apparently, warriorhood in the Bronze Age was much more than just bearing arms (Fontijn 2002, 226 ff.; Treherne 1995). This also comes to the fore from another peculiar trait: in the Bronze Age, there is a category of objects that have the shape of weapons, but are too large or too heavy for any practical use. Alternatively, the 'weapon' was made of an unsuitable, rare metals such as silver

Figure 8. *The ceremonial bronze dirk of Ommerschans, the Netherlands. Photo by National Museum of Antiquities (Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden).*

or gold (Hansen 2001, 152). Case in point are the aggrandised 'swords' (or rather dirks) of the Plougrescant-Ommerschans type, of which currently only five are known in Europe, and a sixth which is of smaller, standard dirk length (Amkreutz/Fontijn 2018; Butler/Bakker 1961; Butler/Sarfatij 1971; Fontijn 2001; Needham 1990). These versions of swords were never used (they are unsharpened and lack rivet holes), but could also not be used as they are too heavy and too large. The Ommerschans sword for example, weighs no less than 3 kilograms. On top of that, they are generally of high quality. This particularly applies to the specimen that was found in Ommerschans, which the National Museum of Antiquities of Leiden recently was able to acquire for the permanent exhibition on Dutch Prehistory (Amkreutz/Fontijn 2018). Butler and Bakker (1960) interpreted these 'dirks' as ceremonial versions of swords. The fact that such an object takes the shape of a weapon indicates that weapons were of more than purely practical relevance; they had ideological and cosmological meanings (cf. Fontijn 2001).

THE INORDINATE EMPHASIS ON WARRIORHOOD AS A SOCIAL/COSMOLOGICAL IDEAL IN BRONZE AGE EUROPE

Thus, regarding the role of violence, the evidence of the European Bronze Age indicates something new when compared to the Neolithic example discussed above. We not only have evidence that violence and battles took place in the Bronze Age, the ubiquitous presence of bronze weapons shows it was a fact of life for all societies inhabiting Europe. The presence of specialised weapons indicate rule-governed fighting. To judge by elaboration and manufacture, battling with swords in particular may have been socially valued (cf. Fontijn 2005). The ubiquity and number of weapons found imply an average farmer probably had a weapon like a spear

and, if the need arose, people from different farms would join to form small battle groups. Since experimental studies suggest spear-fighting requires skill and training (Van Dijk 2021; cf. Gentile/Van Gijn 2019 for the case of swords), we should see warriorhood in the Bronze Age as a role or occupation certain individuals had to be prepared for to take up from time to time – it is conceivable it was part of a Bronze Age life-cycle or '*cursus honorum*' for certain individuals (Fontijn 2002, 231-2). As swords are less common than spears, sword fighting may have been a more specialized role. The fact that swords figure in the more elaborate burial settings in some European regions suggests sword-bearers had a different, probably more elevated, elite role (Treherne 1995; Kristiansen/Larsson 2005).

The prominence of weapons in visual imagery such as stelae or rock art, where individuals are, as it were, just 'dressed' in weapons, implies weaponry was crucial in the constitution of personhood (Fontijn 2002, Ch. 11) – a role that was much more socially celebrated than the more essential occupation of for example 'farmerhood'. It should be emphasised that bellicose societies do not necessarily idealise or aggrandise warrior roles. It is known, for example, that Inca society in South America or Shang dynasty society in China were much engaged in warfare. Yet, in a major comparative study, Bruce Trigger (2007, 242) remarks that warfare nevertheless was barely represented in the iconography or imagery of rulers of the Inca or Shang societies. What we observe in the archaeological evidence of the European Bronze Age, therefore, does not so much inform us on the actual intensity or frequency of violence and warfare, but rather on the (excessive?) social and cultural appreciation of it.

The fact that people invested a lot of time, material and energy to produce ceremonial versions of swords such as the one from Ommerschans, underscores that weaponry had cosmological value and significance. Being a fighter thus was not simply about killing others, but probably also about having a specific role in an overarching cosmological narrative (whatever this may have been).

Finally, there is evidence that warriorhood meant more than just having a weapon. It also implied a specific personal imagery (bodily ornamentation, hair styles etc.; Treherne 1995). The relevance of this becomes only more pronounced if we realise that there were also sets of body ornaments that were only rarely associated with weapons and therefore may be associated with different, *non-martial*, social roles. Case in point are the sets with elaborate belt boxes, bracelets, necklaces or fibulae known from Late Bronze Age northern Europe (Von Brunn 1980).

WARRIORHOOD AS A SITUATED IDENTITY

This brings us to an important question: how is it possible that people who live together at one moment, start to kill each other at another (cf. Harrison 1995)? I already discussed this question in relation to the presence – or lack of – social exchange relations and the construction of imagined moral communities. The evidence of the Bronze Age, however, now also shows us an additional aspect. The Bronze Age offers good indications that in order to become someone who has the potential to kill, appearance had to be transformed. Warriors wore specific ornaments, had specific hair styles, and probably were taught to follow specific codes during their practical training. I have previously argued that being a warrior may well have been a task that was part of a particular life-cycle or cultural biography (sensu Kopytoff 1986; Fontijn 2002, 231-2). This is a point that is supported by the ethnographical studies of Simon Harrison (1995) of Papua New Guinea societies. He argues that people only became ready to fight after certain rituals and the wearing of specific ornaments/paraphernalia. If we consider professional soldiers in our own society, we actually see the same. Special forces go through intensive and tough rites of passage, are identifiable and depersonalised by

similar appearances and sometimes masks. It is a specific 'social front' (sensu Goffmann 1990 [1959]; Wentink 2020). In the case of Bronze Age warriorhood we see also an additional factor: being a warrior is a task backed-up, claimed and legitimised by a grander cosmology, in which fighters participate in essential tasks such as regulating day-and-night (the Indo-European 'divine twins'; Kristiansen/Larsson 2005), and in which virtuoso, 'larger-than-life' versions of weapons invoke notions of weapons as 'other-worldly' objects (Fontijn 2019, 27, 56, 68, 120, 123-4).

Figure 9. A Middle Bronze Age burial mound in the heath landscape between Epe and Vaassen investigated by students from Leiden University. Barrows like this one may contain the remains of many graves, but these were only rarely equipped with weapons. Photo by D. Fontijn.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SACRIFICE AND MARTIAL LANDSCAPES

I have kept the most remarkable insight of Bronze Age attitudes towards warfare for the last. Why were Bronze Age weapons actually preserved in such large numbers? The bronze economy in Europe was not only Pan-European by its structural trade and gift exchange connections: it also thrived because it was the first circular economy in history (cf. Bray/Pollard 2012; Hansen 2011, 138). When a bronze object was no longer functioning, it ended up in the melting pot. Models indicate this must have happened to an estimated 85-95% of the bronze resources (Wiseman 2017). This makes it rather odd that the first evidence we have of a new object such as bronze socketed spearheads is from a situation where people deposited no less than 40 of them plus 7 axes into the ground: the equipment of a small army (the Danish Torsted find; Visser forthcoming)! They are only the beginning of a European phenomenon in which societies everywhere systematically deposited weaponry in the landscape – a phenomenon that continues up into the Iron Age. At Hjortspring (Denmark), for example, an entire ship containing the equipment of a full army appears to have been brought to a small bog and sunk there (Randsborg 1995). Such a 'giving-up' or sacrifice of weapons gains additional significance once we realise that it was not randomly done, but in a highly structured way. In specific regions (e.g. west Europe), swords were only rarely deposited in graves but placed in rivers in large quantities (f.i. Torbrügge 1970-71). Swords and spears also seem to have been kept separate from other depositions that for example figure specific ornaments (Fontijn 2002, 260-8).

Thus, violent as the Bronze Age may have been, the archaeological evidence also provides us with indications that weaponry was separated from the people who used them, by depositing them in inaccessible places such as bogs or rivers. Perhaps such acts were perceived as 'gifts' or sacrifices made to the landscape and/or the

entities supposed to live in it? Speculation aside, these acts also make clear that the bellicose societies also had procedures to systematically (ceremoniously) remove weaponry from their society. These may have been deeds that served to resolve tensions, or ritually mark the end of cycles of conflict (Fontijn 2005; 2019; Levy 1982, 102: 'levelling'). Finds such as the quantity of spears in Torsted or the army-equipment in the Hjortspring boat at least suggest that these weapons were no longer needed in daily life.

Depositing specific objects in specific places in the land is called 'selective deposition' (Bradley 1990; Needham 1989; Fontijn 2002; 2019; Hansen 1994). It implies that when put into the ground, weaponry was not just 'some piece of metal', but held specific social-cultural connotations that apparently meant they had to be deposited in a specific way. In a recent research project at Leiden University, we have been able to investigate this in detail. It appears that the 'conventions' by which certain types of metalwork were deposited, could differ across regions, but in most regions a selective system of metalwork deposition was in place (Autenrieth forthcoming; Fontijn 2019; Kuijpers 2018; Powell forthcoming; Visser forthcoming). This includes a broader range of items, from agrarian tools to ornaments, currency and weaponry. This introduces us to a second uncommon aspect of Bronze Age attitudes towards warfare. The fact that certain zones of the landscape were apparently the appropriate location for depositing the tools of warfare, implies such zones must have been imbued with martial values themselves. Ideas on warfare and warrior ideology (martiality) therewith, were apparently part of the way landscape was perceived in the Bronze Age. As if human violence was ultimately linked to the nature and perpetuation of the all-encompassing and enduring landscape itself (cf. Corbey 2006; Fontijn 2002; 2005).

A VIOLENT PAST? GIVE PEACE A CHANCE[7]!

I started this lecture by illustrating that the evidence of prehistoric violence is far from irrelevant. Regardless whether archaeologists boast about its significance or remain modest, notions on the nature of violence in prehistory are ingrained in many important accounts written by non-archaeologists that aim to describe 'the human condition'. As they are making claims on the basis of evidence that archaeology masters, it is quite odd for archaeologists to stay out of such debates – the data on prehistory do matter.

I argued that our evidence is ill-suited to make generalised statements on the average frequency of warfare in society (in order to use it as a mirror the celebrate the non-violent nature of modern times). Archaeology does have the advantage, however, of allowing a long-term view on social developments, as well as sometimes providing more context to what we see as 'barbarian outrage'.

The recent evidence on the massacres of the Bandkeramik society are easily misused as confirmations of the 'Hobbesian' state of violence and war that is so often presupposed for non-state society. However, shocking as the evidence may be, I also pointed out that the blood baths at sites like Talheim were exceptions. The impressive thing that we see from the full history of the Bandkeramik is precisely that autonomous communities were tied into an overarching social and moral society by impressive acts of collaboration and (gift) exchange. Apparently, Bandkeramik life had successful ways to resolve or avoid conflicts that could arise out of tensions that undoubtedly must always have been there. The repeated acts of exterminating of entire communities that we now have evidence for were restricted in time and place, and – terrible though they must have been – were exceptional when considered from a longer time perspective.

In Europe, the Bronze Age has all the indicators for 'Hobbesian' violence, such as the ubiquity of specialised weaponry, physical evidence for battles on a larger scale than the Neolithic and clear

signs that warriorhood was socially and ideologically highly valued. At the same time, and this is emphasised much less, the available evidence also indicates that it took certain social and ritual procedures in order to become someone who can kill others. We have seen that being a warrior implied a particular appearance (a 'transformed self', Treherne 1995). Likewise, the ceremonial deposition of weaponry also suggests that there were procedures to dissolve an (individual or group) warrior identity (cf. Brück/Fontijn 2013; Fontijn 2005). On top of that, the systematic deposition of weaponry from society confronts us with notions on warfare that may feel odd and unique to us: martial ideals and values may have been anchored in attitudes and understandings of the landscape – something almost uniquely recorded for the European Bronze Age and Iron Age (particularly if we realise that archaeology is able to demonstrate that this happened for most parts of Europe for a dazzling period of over 1500 years!). This stands for a much more nuanced, and cosmologically-driven view on warfare, violence and non-violence (by weapon removal) than any view of 'barbarian' violence offered in pop-science books.

These insights that an archaeological perspective offers are to be combined with those that derive from psychological studies (De Dreu *et al.* 2016; 2020). A war-like or altruistic attitude towards other groups may seem binary opposites, but they spring from the same human need for social behaviour. Exchange of gifts and marriage partners may transform outsiders into members of the same overarching moral community, whilst non-exchange may turn the same outsiders into neutral and at worst anti-social opponents to whom violence is justified (Mauss 1990 [1923-24]; cf. Corbey 2006). Both acts necessitate that people have to 'give things up' – in the former case, marriage partners or valuable things, in the latter human lives that are sacrificed in wars. In both cases, a strengthening of the social and moral web (differently perceived in each case) is the result.

Seeing prehistoric society as either a group of violent barbarians or as peaceful hippies is both non-sensical and goes unsupported by the complex and nuanced evidence that archaeology has at its disposal. Humans are neither inherently altruistic or violent towards each other, but they are first and foremost social beings (cf. De Dreu *et al.* 2006; 2020). And sociality may lead to peace *and* war.

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Notes

[1] https://dwhume.com/darkness_documents/0278.htm

[2] Crevecoeur *et al.* 2021 do pay attention to this, pointing at the impact of climatic deterioration and the contraction of resources.

[3] I will leave out the site of Herxheim and Wiederstedt. At Herxheim, disarticulated remains of large numbers of individuals were found in the ditches of an enclosure, and there are some indications violent interactions took place (e.g. Boulestin et al. 2009; Orschiedt/Haidle 2006). However, there are also strong indications for ceremonial activities in the funerary sphere (Meyer *et al*. 2014). As the site is not a straightforward example of mass grave of the type discussed here, I decided not to include it here. The Wiederstedt site is a Bandkeramik period mass grave where no clear signs of violence have been detected on the human remains (Meyer *et al*. 2014). Although violence need not necessarily leave marks on bones, for the Wiederstedt case there is more uncertainty on what caused the death of the people buried in the mass grave (Meyer *et al*, 2014, 314-5).

[4] As at the other sites, the type of murder weapons (stone adzes and axes) used point to other Bandkeramik groups as hunter-gatherers did not have such tools in large numbers. Also, arrowheads found here and in other mass graves are all of the types used by Bandkeramik communities. There are no flint arrowheads of Mesolithic/hunter-gatherer types found.

[5] For the concept of 'bloodlands': see T. Snyder (2010), *Bloodlands-Europe between Hitler and Stalin.* London: the Bodley Head.

[6] Anderson 2006.

[7] Title of a song by John Lennon and Yoko Ono's Plastic Ono Band; hear it at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3_0GqPvr4U

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