

THE CONCEPT OF 'SELECTIVE DEPOSITION'

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Abstract: *The present article should be seen as an attempt of presenting several problems the archaeologists are confronted with in studying the depositional phenomenon. The concept of 'selective deposition' is analyzed, being discussed aspects regarding both the content and the context of deposition. The importance of taking a general view on such a complex subject is emphasized, and the attention is drawn to the multitude of factors involved in the creation of a deposit the way it presents itself in the archaeological record.*

Rezumat: *Acest articol reprezintă o încercare de prezentare a câtorva probleme cu care se confruntă arheologii ce studiază problema depozitelor. Conceptul de „depunere selectivă” este analizat, luându-se în discuție aspecte legate atât de conținutul depozitelor, cât și de contextul în care acestea sunt descoperite. Se subliniază importanța unei priviri de ansamblu asupra acestui fenomen atât de complex, și se atrage atenția asupra multitudinii de factori ce au contribuit la crearea unui depozit așa cum apare acesta în înregistrarea arheologică.*

Key words: *Bronze Age, selective deposition, deposit, object, content, context, utilitarian deposits/votive offerings*

Cuvinte cheie: *Epoca bronzului, depunere selectivă, depozit, obiect, conținut, context, depozite utilitare/depuneri votive*

Introduction: the content and the context

One of the main problems in dealing with the depositions is that too often the research is focused on certain aspects of the phenomenon, little attention being paid to the whole picture.

For instance, most of the literature on Bronze Age metalwork has a purely empirical character and is little concerned with the more theoretical issues raised by its production, dissemination and deposition. For the most part analysis has treated this material simply as a means to an end, using it rather to chart the extent and development of styles or technologies, or employing the associations between different metal types as the foundation of chronologies¹. Another weakness is that the analysis of the depositional phenomenon is often chronologically biased, only certain segments of a longer history of deposition being studied in detail². Even more, it can be easily noticed that, in trying to determine the reasons why people in the Bronze Age left so much bronze in the ground, essentially similar finds from different areas of Europe are studied according to quite different traditions of interpretation. And, while it cannot be suggested that these interpretations are completely mutually exclusive or that they are mistaken, it should be emphasized that the deposits themselves do not show as much variation as the theories developed to account for them³. Of course, the things are not made any easier by the fact that these theories do not vary only in space but also in time. For example, especially in Western Europe, there has been a marked shift during the last years from a tendency to consider bronze deposits as industrial or commercial in nature, to considering them votive – intentionally placed in the ground, and abandoned for ever⁴.

¹ Bradley 1985, 692.

² Bradley 1998, 14.

³ Bradley 1998, 15-17.

⁴ Harding 1999, 168-169.

All these difficulties become easier to be understood if we take into consideration the remarkable character of the depositions during the Bronze Age, and especially the enormous quantity of metalwork which was consigned to the ground⁵, as well as the amazing variability of their content and context through time and in space. As a result, different categories of deposits were proposed, with consequently different interpretations regarding the reasons for which they were created.

With regard to the content of depositions, several broad categories or polarities were distinguished: complete or perfect objects as against broken or miscast ones; hoards of one object type as against those with several or many types; differences in the types represented, for instance between ornaments, tools and weapons; hoards with objects said to have female associations as against those with male associations; hoards with a markedly industrial character such as those containing ingots or ingot fragments, metalworking tools, scrap metal, casting waste, as opposed to those with what seems to have a votive character. However, attention was drawn that all these are contextual judgments and need fuller discussion, since these indications of internal diversity would suggest only that the phenomenon of deposition was not a unitary one⁶.

With regard to the context, the main gap can be noticed between depositions on dry land and deposition in wetland, with important repercussions on the interpretation of the respective categories. While archaeologists were more eager to consider the dry land depositions as utilitarian in character, the deposition of metal objects in wet and non-retrievable contexts has been interpreted either in terms of votive offerings intended to placate supernatural powers, or as an act of deliberate consumption designed to enhance prestige⁷, or even as combining the votive intention with the attempt of gaining prestige. In their turn, these two main categories tend to split into subcategories, which quite often enjoy their own interpretation.

Of course, looking for patterns is only natural and in no way wrong. Unfortunately, as bronze deposits vary greatly in size and constitution and this variability can be followed in both chronological and geographical dimensions, any attempts to discerning regularities in this material are usually only valid for a restricted area and period. Conversely, when one looks at the picture over wider areas and across chronological divisions, any impression of neat patterning dissolves⁸. But this observation should not constitute an obstacle; quite the contrary, it should encourage archaeologists to take into account all the factors and characteristics involved in the depositional practice, paying as much as possible an equal attention to all of them, and try to get a comprehensive final image. As such, the research has to focus equally on the *content* and the *context* of the deposition.

As well as when studying a culture it is necessary the understanding, as complete as possible, of the relations between the object and the context and, in the interpretation of the material culture, of the relation between its practical function and its social meaning⁹, the same is true for studying the depositions. Although it is clear that this is in no way an easy task, it is surely helpful in proposing a different perspective on the deposition itself. As a result, a deposit could be considered the material reflection of a knot in a net of social relations, actions and beliefs. If it is possible to

⁵ Harding 2000, 352.

⁶ Harding 2000, 354.

⁷ Halstead 2005, 9.

⁸ Harding 2000, 352.

⁹ Gillis 2000, 227.

visualize the position of a deposit as part of a graphic, it would be a point representing the meeting and intertwining of several factors involved in the process of its creation.

The perception of the deposit in such a manner, as the result of a conscientious human action, also emphasizes another important aspect of the phenomenon: its *selective* character. The way it enters the archaeological record (with the condition of complete recovery, of course) the deposit is the materialization of a series of deliberate choices.

A number of three general elements were taken into consideration as playing an important part in the process of selective deposition: objects, people and location. Each is considered to have a specific relationship to each other, which can be studied in isolation. What is relevant, however, is the bringing together of all the elements¹⁰. At these, a fourth element will be proposed as being equally essential: time. In conclusion, the deposit shows the influence of all these factors, the questions to be answered being: what, who, where and when, not necessarily in this order. Only after providing answers to these questions it would be possible to answer also to the most difficult question: why was the deposition made.

I. THE CONTENT

1. The object

The discussion of the elements involved in the process of selective deposition will begin with the objects, in other words with the internal organization of a deposit. Theoretically, this aspect of the research should allow the archaeologists a more objective view, due to the fact that it rather concerns quantifications: the number of objects and their various associations. In reality, similar results of the internal analysis conducted on deposits tend to lead to extremely different conclusions, the objective facts ending in quite subjective interpretations. Unfortunately, this is not the kind of difficulty to be easily overcome, as long as these interpretations are based on different backgrounds and different views on the past societies. And, although these interpretations surely change in time, this does not necessarily bring more unity of opinions. Still, what it could be considered as an asset is the trend of considering the object in all its complexity, from more points of view and at different levels, and the greater willingness to challenge the roles traditionally attached to objects.

The so-called 'social life' of things is more and more an aspect to be discussed not only in the ethnographical field but also in connection with the archaeological record¹¹. In this line of work it is considered that the decisive steps in the life-path of metalwork are production, life and deposition¹². In other words, the metaphorical associations of metal objects and metal making can be understood and expressed in terms of the fundamental processes of conception, birth, adult life, decay, and death¹³.

In the same time, the archaeological studies focus on understanding the objects as signs and symbols, carrying and projecting meaning and message. At one level, the objects are seen as a communication means, transmitting information about the social authority, richness, identity, gender and religious choices. At a more abstract level, the objects serve as material metaphors for concepts which are complex and often difficult to be articulated. As

¹⁰ Fontijn 2002, 34.

¹¹ Appadurai 1986, 3.

¹² Fontijn 2002, 29.

¹³ Saunders 1999, 26.

representations, things are seen as representing other things, ideas, people or places, operating as memory-work¹⁴. While memories are generated through social practice, the involvement of material culture in this process means that, due to their materiality, objects serve as a ground for evoking memory. This is the way in which objects are woven into the fabric of people's social life and the organization and structure of the practices associated with them, that being constitutive of specific modes of remembrance. The specific material performance and narrative structure of memories is productive of particular kinds of subjects, and therefore has a critical effect on the construction of identities¹⁵. A tacit presumption that objects contain a certain degree of stability and durability stays at the basis of the ideas of material representation. This would seem to mean that changes in the state and appearance of objects produce alterations of sense, and that if objects serve to create and sustain social relations, the 'death' of an object through degradation or destruction implies the death or transformation of those relations. This does not mean that the meanings and values of objects are static in any way, or determined by inherent essential qualities. The roles are changeable, so are the meanings and values, and the transformation of an object's context will often bring a change in its meaning. The same as for the human agents, the changing 'identities' of objects are formed by their implication in the life of people and other objects, as well as by their unique historical trajectory¹⁶.

Another aspect of the discussion focuses on the relation between objects and display, emphasizing the fact that during prehistory a change can be noticed from the display of the human bodies in Neolithic to the display of objects through the agency of the human body in the Bronze and Iron Ages¹⁷, and in this perspective the use of metal plays an essential part.

The conceptual difficulties met in the study of the different aspects of past societies, including the depositional phenomenon as a very important part, are in some degree caused by the fact that in the present the world of objects is seen in a different light which emphasizes the division and comparison. Both in the process of production and in the process of appreciation the objects are connected to one another and with people in ways that are hardly noticed in the present. In fact, it is considered that two categories can be distinguished: *things* and *objects*. Things are appreciated through their connections to each other and with people, established through their formal qualities. They exist as ensembles while objects were taken out from relations and given generalized values that do not result always directly from their physical characteristics¹⁸. From this point of view, the ox-hide ingots found in central and eastern Mediterranean and having a standard weight around 30 kg are considered as suggesting rather a common unity of exchange, an accepted standard for a specific weight and content¹⁹. *Things* are part of local sets of social and sacred relations; their formal qualities are important; they form ensembles based on their effects on senses and their social and cosmological connections; their values have no fixed classifications; their exchange creates inalienable connections between people, cosmic powers and places. Quantifiable *objects* can be taken out the immediate sets of social relations and are able to operate in a large social universe; they are

¹⁴ Pollard 2004, 47.

¹⁵ Jones 2003, 84.

¹⁶ Pollard 2004, 47.

¹⁷ Gosden 2004, 35.

¹⁸ Gosden 2004, 38.

¹⁹ Knapp 1990, 113.

somehow dematerialized, in the way that their physical qualities are not always the basis of their value; the time and efficiency, the effort and quantity of raw material used in the process of their making become crucial for their worth; they are alienable and divisible, existing in the interior of an accepted standard of worth (the best example could be money)²⁰.

This kind of observations, based mainly on ethnographical research, led to similar attempts from the part of archaeologists, some of them proposing such models also for the past societies. For instance, the idea was advanced that in the Bronze Age Europe the exchange was implicating a number of regional interlocking networks. While in the interior the goods circulated through gift-exchange or redistribution mechanisms, in the exterior and between networks this circulation took the form of barter or a more commerce-oriented exchange²¹. In this case, the difference between the ways in which objects are seen seems to be in direct connection with the type of network inside which they move, so the type of exchange would be the factor which determines in what category the items are to be included. Starting from a somehow opposite point, that is from the object to the type of network, three transaction forms were proposed for the Urnfield period: trade in ordinary commodities like tools (raw material); trade in prestige goods; exchange of personal gifts as a visible token of political alliance. It is considered that in the archaeological material two main categories of bronze objects exist, which can be related to these three forms of transaction: first, a large and rather ordinary group of objects, mainly simple tools like sickles and axes, meant for re-melting and then converted into local metalwork production, found in very large quantities placed in deposits, seemingly perceived as potential raw material, a kind of bronze ingot and multi-purpose currency which traveled over wide distances, also presenting high frequency and standardized form; secondly, another more spectacular and luxurious group of objects was meant for social display, ritual consumption and warfare (armour, weaponry, drinking sets), which present similarities over vast distances due to exchange and local copying²². Unfortunately, it is possible for the reality to be much more complex than this, and it must be emphasized the risk of drawing such sharp boundaries between these categories of objects from the archaeological record. Like in the case of humans, if it is agreed that objects have a life, then they should also have to be allowed to share with people the capacity of enjoying a range of social statuses and social roles during their lifetime. If this is true for objects as it is for people, than these kinds of models could result in being too simplistic.

2. The content

With regard to the deposition, there are several aspects to be considered: the choice of objects (single object/more than one object; metalwork items only/other materials; characteristics shared by the objects; object associations known from other contexts); the treatment of objects (complete; dismantled; sheathed or covered; left intact; worked before deposition; broken/burnt); the arrangement of objects (in specific order; individual groups within hoard; random)²³. Some of these factors will be discussed below.

²⁰ Gosden 2004, 39 (with the observation that in the present text the term 'object' will be used as a neutral or general term).

²¹ Knapp 1990, 113.

²² Gillis, Olausson, Vandkilde 2004, 101.

²³ Fontijn 2002, 29.

Number

One of the most interesting dichotomies which can be noticed in the study of bronze depositions is that between *single finds* and *hoards*.

A definition says that any collection of more than one object that was found together other than in a funerary or domestic situation can be called a hoard find. There are two implications in this statement: first, there is no minimum or maximum size for a hoard, merely which a hoard is not a single find; second, the context is important²⁴. Let's focus for now on the first implication. Although sometimes it is emphasized the fact that it is almost certainly false to separate collective finds from single finds in terms of the causes of deposition²⁵, this separation takes place a lot more often than it should. And not so many archaeologists would agree that this contrast between single finds and hoards can be a false problem. But it should be admitted that the same idea of 'selective deposition' can be at work in the case of depositing only one object, and this situation has the same right to be the result of a deliberate choice, as the placing in the ground of one hundred objects. It certainly sounds a little harsh, but it looks like this differentiated treatment of hoards and single finds is based more on their different names than on anything else.

The main problem usually emphasized in connection with this subject is that single finds may appear for purely coincidental reasons²⁶. Those most often invoked for the presence of single finds are loss and discard. Objects that were lost are considered as examples of an unintended interruption of an object's life. On another hand, the discard is described as a way of intentionally depositing an object and deliberately ending a biography, the difference between discard and deliberate deposition being that they are steered by different motivations. Discard is thus defined as a way of getting rid of an object that is no longer considered to be meaningful and useful, while in deposition, the act of placing an object under ground is in itself considered a meaningful one²⁷.

But in both cases some question marks arise, if the category of single finds is considered on a larger scale. More precisely, some counterarguments could be mentioned for each of these two explanations. In the case of loss, it could be emphasized that if some objects can be easily subject to it (like pins or other small objects), other categories are more difficult to be imagined in this situation. Taking into consideration the swords or different types of axes, for instance: how easy is to loose something like this and, even more important, how often could this happen? The answer to this question is essential, because if a closer look is taken on the situation of finds, a quite striking observation emerges: the single finds show patterns of deposition characteristic for different areas and periods, and often they and the hoards are highly exclusive on different grounds. So the next question would be: could lost objects show such patterns or would this be proof enough of a deliberate act of deposition? Let's take an example: the swords of 'Mycenaean' type from Transylvania, in the area of the Wietenberg culture, dated to MBA, are all single finds²⁸. Should be accepted an explanation based on loss for these beautiful weapons, most of them around one meter long, this surely makes their owners look quite un-attentive and careless with their belongings. Not to mention the fact that

²⁴ Harding 2000, 352-353.

²⁵ Harding 2000, 353.

²⁶ Harding 2000, 361.

²⁷ Fontijn 2002, 33.

²⁸ Alexandrescu 1968, 3.

all these airy people crowded in this quite small area and lost objects of the same type. To summarize, these patterns observed in the case of single finds are probably the weakest point of the loss theory, because people do not *choose* to loose things. And if they *do*, then we cannot talk about loss anymore, but about deposition.

Such is also the case with the Mycenaean type rapiers mentioned above, for which it was proposed that exactly their condition as single finds suggests an intentional deposition, pleading for a cultic or prestige function of the Romanian specimens²⁹. In fact, as it can be seen, all is a question of interpretation and the difference is in a name, as shown by the so-called 'one-piece hoards' of the south Scandinavian area³⁰.

The discard as it was defined poses different problems, since we do not have a lot of information on what prehistoric people considered to be meaningful and useful, and what not. Often it is proposed that things which are fragmentary, broken, decayed, or otherwise become unfit for daily use enter this category. As a special chapter is dedicated to the dichotomy between complete and fragmentary objects, only a few observations should be made here. First of all, in the category of single finds enters a great number of what can be described as valuable objects, sometimes new and more often in a very good state of preservation, no matter if it is to consider weapons, tools or bronze and gold ornaments, anyway things that could still be used for a long time. Of course, here the change in fashion could be brought as a counterargument, but this surely do not explain why valuable metal was discarded instead of being reused. Secondly, a concentration of these finds would be expected in the most used areas, especially in connection with settlements, and this does not seem to be the case. However, since very little is known about the use and exploitation of the land during the prehistory, this argument cannot be taken too seriously. Thirdly, it is very possible that the modern view on categories of material such as 'refuse', 'garbage' or 'discard' to be extremely different from the prehistoric one; because it is very possible that all those categories were still invested with some sense and meaning, even after their 'life' seemed to reach to an end. Although of a much later period, there is a mention useful in that it shows why a lot of caution is necessary when treating this subject. One of the most interesting Norse myths, Ragnarok describes how the world will end in a final battle that brings together gods, giants, monsters and people. What is important here for our subject is one detail connected with Vidar, son of Odin, who fights and kills the wolf Fenrir in order to revenge his father. The god is described as striding forward and pressing one foot on Fenrir's bottom jaw – and the shoe he wears during this fight *has been a long time in the making; it consists of all the strips and bits of leather pared off the heels and toes of new shoes since time began, all the leftovers thrown away as gifts for the god*³¹. Although there could be doubts regarding the exact expressions used in the original story, the idea is still there: what in modern eyes would represent nothing more than rests with no use, what *represented* rests with no further use for those past people, was still perceived as playing a further role – and by no means a negligible one – on another level, in this case helping a god to fulfill his task.

All these do not mean that the existence of lost or discarded objects in the archaeological record should be entirely rejected, on the contrary, only that more prudence is

²⁹ Vulpe, Lazăr 2003, 51.

³⁰ Harding 2000, 361.

³¹ Crossley-Holland 1980, 175.

necessary in placing any item in one of these categories on the unique reason that it is a single find. It can be even argued that the chances of being mistaken are a lot smaller if all the single finds are considered depositions instead of considering all of them the result of loss and/or discard. In this last situation the risk is quite high in creating a strong bias in the archaeological record, with rather serious implications. For example, in southern Scandinavia, by Period V it was noticed that the number of deposits with female objects is greater than that containing male objects and in Period VI the deposits with female objects are predominant. This growing interest in the deposition of female objects has been interpreted within a religious conceptual framework as an expression of the continually increasing significance of a female divinity in the course of the Bronze Age. However, other possibilities for interpreting these variations in the composition of the finds have to be taken into consideration, because it may be doubted whether the variations are as striking as claimed. If the hundreds of single finds consisting in socketed axes, which are presumably to be ascribed to the masculine sphere, are included and if it is considered the number of objects instead of the number of finds, then it is still objects from the masculine sphere which are in the majority and it is only possible to talk of an increase in the number of objects of female adornment in the deposits³². This is a clear example of the way in which taking or leaving aside this category of finds leads to changes in the overall picture.

The number of items deposited together vary greatly over time and space, reaching a peak during certain periods. The case of Eastern Europe can be mentioned here. Over 70 deposits are known from the Balkan Neolithic and Copper Age, the vast majority deriving from the latter. They range in size from two pieces to over 10,000, a big number being characteristic especially for the ornament deposits (for example Gălăbnik, Bulgaria)³³. The number of the deposited objects decreases in general in this area during the Early and Middle Bronze Ages, only to increase again during the Late Bronze Age, with a maximum reached during Ha A1. In northern Croatia, three-quarters of adequately documented deposits in Br D – Ha A1 contained more than 50 objects, in contrast with only one quarter of those at all other periods. Some of the deposits are truly enormous: six large ones in Transylvania contained around 10,000 objects. This situation is far from unique, quite a lot of other cases being known in other areas and periods, such as the massive hoard of over 6000 pieces from Isleham, Cambridgeshire, dating to the end of the Wilburton phase³⁴.

An interesting feature observed so far especially in northern Europe is represented by the deposition of objects in pairs in or on bogs. Most of these objects were considered to belong to the cultic sphere. This is the case with the horned helmets from Viksø, which were found placed upon a wooden tray, also with the great cult axes, which never appear accompanied by other objects, either placed on a wet bottom or on dry land, and also with the lurs³⁵. Around 100 bronze lurs were found so far in Ireland and approximately 50 come from Denmark, southern Sweden and northern Germany. From all the Irish lurs only one was part of a deposit, and most of them and also all the lurs from southern Scandinavia come in pairs³⁶. Other objects, too, which do not necessarily belong exclusively to the purely cultic sphere, for

³² Kaul 1998, 41.

³³ Chapman 2000, 112.

³⁴ Harding 2000, 356-357.

³⁵ Kaul 1998, 36.

³⁶ Coles 1977, 56-57.

example neck-rings, are often deposited in pairs. The appearance in pairs of the deposited objects may be associated with the depictions in the rock carvings of objects in use, where lurblovers and bearers of cult axes almost always appear in pairs. The fact that this arrangement in pairs can be observed both in depictions of ritual situations and in the actual depositions has led a large number of scholars to point out that this might represent worship of twin gods, as might also be suggested by some depictions on razors³⁷.

Material

It is often considered that copper and bronze may have been adopted because of their exotic qualities and were many times used to make objects that were essentially items of display³⁸. This view regarding the metal seems to influence also the research on the deposits of copper and/or bronze objects. This very 'glamour' of metal sometimes shades the fact that quite a number of deposits are composed of items made of more than one material, and that this situation could be already biased at the moment of the recovery by the fact that some material categories (like some of the organic ones) usually do not survive in the archaeological record.

The impression that the materials found in deposits represent also the result of selection is in some situations supported by the observation that some materials are associated more often with specific contexts. However, the combinations of materials in deposits vary greatly in time and space. For example, the analysis of deposit contents for the Balkan area shows some changes from Neolithic to Copper Age, with a wider range of materials and objects categories used during the latter. This shows that deposits play a more significant role in the Copper Age, as a means whereby people actively use a wider range of material culture in a more diverse set of contexts. But it also makes clear that, whatever the most subtle differences between deposit contents in varying contexts, there is an overall community of accepted use for almost all the classes of material/categories, since very few are excluded from any context of deposition³⁹. In the same time, a detailed distribution of raw materials indicates that only one raw material combination – copper on its own – occurs in all three types of context noticed for these periods (house, settlement, extra-mural location). The diversity of contexts for each raw material is a sign of the different uses to which communities put the total range of their valued resources, suggesting restrictions on the spheres of consumption in which materials may be deposited. The deposits in houses and settlements seek to include a wider variety of raw materials than the extra-mural deposits, which often comprise a single raw material – most frequently copper. While there is only one extra-mural ornament deposit with more than two raw materials – gold, chipped stone and polished stone at Tiszaszőlös, Hungary – the collection of finery of varied raw materials is often the key characteristic of house and settlement ornament deposit. This is as true in the Neolithic as in the Copper Age: the remarkable Early Neolithic Gălăbnik deposit, from western Bulgaria, contains more than 10,000 beads, made of Dentalium, snail shell, bone and stone, as well as a Spondylus ring and a nephrite triple ring. The most diverse ornament deposit is Hoard I from Late Neolithic Čoka, in northern Serbia, where malachite beads are found with objects made of Spondylus, perforated animal teeth, wild boar's incisor, animal bone, snail shell, red ochre, marble and even a small fragment of human rib (a total of 9

³⁷ Kaul 1998, 36.

³⁸ Bradley 2000, 40.

³⁹ Chapman 2000, 114.

different materials). The greatest material diversity in a Copper Age settlement deposit is found at Brad, Romania, with copper, gold, fired clay, marble, 'paste' beads and perforated red deer canines⁴⁰.

During the Bronze Age, this variety seems to decrease again, while a stronger accent is put on metal, although there are still deposits which combine two or three types of material (but with very few non-metallic items), like for example, for the Romanian space, bronze objects in combination with perforated animal teeth (Vârșand, Arad county)⁴¹, clay objects (Augustin, Brașov county; Rebrîșoara II, Alba county)⁴², glass and/or amber beads (Dobrocina, Sălaj county; Ulmi, Iași county; Alțina, Sibiu county)⁴³ etc. From this point of view, the interpretation of the clay vessels in which sometimes the bronze objects are placed⁴⁴ is not so easy, because even if they represent only containers for the more precious content, they would still create a combination of materials. Anyway, at least in some situations the container could have been meaningful in its own right, for example suggesting connections with neighbouring areas, as it seems to be the case with the Vatina-type vessel containing gold objects and two *Columbella* shells found at Rovine, Arad County, in the area of Periam-Pecica culture⁴⁵. Also, several deposits combine the presence of bronze and gold objects, in some cases placed separately in different clay vessels (Cugir, Alba County; Tăuteu, Bihor County)⁴⁶. However, from the statistical point of view, this kind of associations represents a small proportion in the total number of the Bronze Age deposits.

Other types of association can also be observed in areas where greater interest was shown for the correct and complete recording of a deposit's characteristics. In Denmark the association of bronze deposits with food (including animal bones) appears to be especially widespread, and the location where these are found are considered to be connected to the ritual slaughter of animals, the consumption of ritual meals and the provision of ritual libations⁴⁷. Special objects are very often subject to such treatment, like is the case with the two lurs from Radbjerg, Falster, which were deposited on a dry bog-surface, where a layer of earth gradually accumulated over them. Beneath this protective layer numerous animal bones, a few human bones and sherds from clay vessels were found around the two bronze objects⁴⁸. Unfortunately, the fortuitous character of most of the finds leads to a lack of valuable information, the attention of the finders focusing on the metal objects in the first place, and rejecting the rest as 'debris'. As a result, in most of the areas where deposits are found such information is rather an exception, like is the case of the LBA deposit from Bicaci, Bihor County, Romania, where a burnt bone fragment is mentioned together with the rest of the finds⁴⁹.

Some special finds draw attention on the necessity of treating much more carefully these categories of materials found in combination with bronze objects in deposits. Several

⁴⁰ Chapman 2000, 115-116.

⁴¹ Petrescu-Dîmbovița 1977, 46.

⁴² Petrescu-Dîmbovița 1977, 52, 67.

⁴³ Petrescu-Dîmbovița 1977, 57, 77, 81.

⁴⁴ Bader 1978, 81-82.

⁴⁵ Dumitrescu 1937-1940, 127.

⁴⁶ Petrescu-Dîmbovița 1977, 91, 136.

⁴⁷ Bradley 1998, 10.

⁴⁸ Kaul 1998, 36.

⁴⁹ Petrescu-Dîmbovița 1977, 53.

caves, like the Sculptor's Cave and Heathy Burn in Great Britain, show that what would appear to be settlement debris (animal bones, burnt flint, and pottery) was found deposited together with human remains and large quantities of metalwork. It was easily noticed that so much fine metalwork is extremely unusual in a settlement context, and the finds were interpreted as deposits⁵⁰.

Along with the problem of the association between what can be interpreted as 'debris' and bronze objects, these finds put another problem, that of the association between the bronze objects and the human remains. The situation of these caves is not unique, since it has been noticed that especially during the LBA, in some areas, the conspicuous consumption of metalwork at wet places and in dry land deposits often involves the deposition of human bones⁵¹. For instance, it is considered to exist a connection between human skulls recovered from Thames and the weapons found during the same dredging campaigns and in the same locations, based on the fact that they represent a restricted age group (no young ones) and about 60% of them are male. An even more clear connection was noticed in Britain for the dry land ornament deposits, found with small quantities of unburned human bones. It seems possible that high quality bronze objects were deposited with human bones⁵². While different interpretations were offered for such situations, it would be enough at this point of the discussion to emphasize the fact that purely from the point of view of the content these deposits present a combination of materials too.

Colour

The study of metal items was dominated by considerations regarding their utility and typology, and the materiality of metal was considered from the point of view of technological production. More recently, ethnographical studies on objects and production processes, consumption and display show potential ways of researching the colour qualities of metals and their significance in the context of prehistoric societies⁵³.

The ethnographical research shows that – through their different qualities which reach the human senses – the objects obtain their place in the world view of the traditional communities. The way objects look, smell, sound, feel at touch gives them their role in the social network of those societies, establishing their meanings and their symbolism.

Esthetic valuations and cosmogony associations of light and colour are found everywhere in the world. In the Americas the supernatural qualities of light are evident on any activity scale, from spiritual to material, from personal to social. The light links the earth, the sky, the sea and the atmospheric phenomena; even time is associated with different kinds of light. For the Aztec people light is a force of the earthly life filling everything; for Inca the creation of light brought order in the world. The rivers, the lakes and the celestial phenomena were filled with spirituality in concordance with the sacral character of light and the characteristic colours; the mountains and volcanoes were sacred places inhabited by supernatural beings. In the case of shaman trance, the visions are associated with seeing the essence rather than the surface of things, in the same way in which the shiny or colourful

⁵⁰ Brück 1995, 260.

⁵¹ Brück 1995, 259.

⁵² Bradley 1995, vii-viii.

⁵³ Keates 2002, 109.

surface of an object reveals the sacred light from inside⁵⁴. This way, it is possible for a quality of inextricability between materiality, shine and colour to be accorded with the indigenous world views. In a transformational universe, shiny objects could have been perceived as material manifestations of light and of the social relations and spiritual qualities that light encircles. The indigenous notions regarding the supernatural qualities of light and colour as embodiments of the cosmological energy were materialized in objects and validated in the myriads of forms through artistic and ritual display. In the Americas it was considered that different minerals were transformed into 'mirrors', all sharing the quality of luminosity; different minerals having qualities of translucence, preciousness, iridescence, light-giving⁵⁵. The *tumbaga* alloy made of copper and gold or of copper-gold-silver was producing a whole range of colours, from yellow to white, sometimes with reddish tones, and also had a specific odour, and was symbolizing the cosmos, fertility and fecundity, and couples like sun and moon, life and death, male and female⁵⁶. Metals like copper and gold were the most effective Pre-Columbian conveyors of light and brilliance, partaking of light's sacred values, joining and complementing rather than supplanting the brilliant and translucent qualities of shamanic visions, crystals, feathers, lightning, and snow-capped mountains. In other words, the materiality of metal acted as a bridge between mental and physical worlds. As with other shiny media, this overarching quality of metals is not incompatible with a multitude of nontransferable culture-specific meanings and values⁵⁷.

For the African communities copper is 'the red metal', as such being incorporated in the classificatory cosmological scheme white-red-black, as a 'red' object associated with dangerous liminal states and containing power. It is associated with the rites of passage, especially with the passage between worlds. In a more abstract way, red is identified with all passages in a social sense. Copper is associated with attributes of power, warmth, fertility, vitality, and with the color of blood. Its shining reflexive quality enhances the existing attributes; that is why the shining metal is frequently used for the eyes of masks and statues, giving the impression that they look beyond⁵⁸. This fact can thus explain why a keen concern with the exchange value of copper ingots produced in standardized forms and sizes is in no way incompatible with attaching great symbolic significance to copper, which has a range of powerful symbolic references deriving from its reddish color and its metallic sheen and sound⁵⁹.

In India, gold as a dense, unalterable, bright yellow and intrinsically luminous metallic element was considered an auspicious and eagerly desired bearer of power, token of wealth and distinction and symbol of light, life, purity, perfection and incorruptibility⁶⁰.

Following the path offered by the ethnographical and ethno-historical research, the idea that the colour and light of objects play a role in their selection, including for deposition, gained in the present a more important place in the archaeological literature. Still, often it can be noticed a difference in treating gold and copper/bronze, probably as a result of the different

⁵⁴ Saunders 2002, 209-212.

⁵⁵ Saunders 2002, 214-215.

⁵⁶ Gillis 2000, 233.

⁵⁷ Saunders 1999, 25.

⁵⁸ Keates 2002, 117-118.

⁵⁹ Shennan 1995, 305.

⁶⁰ Gonda 1991, 1.

views on these two metals in the present societies. From the dawn of the metal ages until today, gold has been valued and prized by societies and peoples all over the world. This is partly due to its rarity which makes it a valuable commodity, and to its properties which are different from other metals, for instance its malleability, flexibility and homogeneity. The manufactured object is enduring because it does not corrode but above all gold possesses intrinsic beauty and it is considered that objects made from it may have had a symbolic as well as a decorative function in early times⁶¹.

Less lucky, copper and its alloy, bronze, are not as valued by the modern societies, and the way they are perceived in the present may influence a lot the view on their importance for the past societies. As mentioned above, the traditional view in archaeology focuses rather on the utilitarian aspects of copper and bronze, and on problems concerning the extraction, production, technology, exchange networks and so on. Copper is seen in the first place as a rare and valuable exchange object. However, attempts were recently made in considering this metal from a different angle. Its visual properties, such as luminosity and colour, as well as its tactile properties, such as temperature, sharpening, smoothness, are perceived as playing an important role in perception.

For example, the majority of prehistoric arsenical copper objects have less than 4-5% arsenic. Aside from any possible difficulties in making alloys with higher arsenic contents by early smelting techniques, the majority of these objects are wrought and the forgeability of the alloys falls sharply as arsenic contents increases past this value. However, dagger blades with higher arsenic contents are known with wrought blades but their colour would have been as important a factor in their production as their mechanical properties⁶². This aspect was emphasized for example in the case of the northern Italy Copper Age, for which it can be discussed the deliberate selection of rich arsenical copper for producing halberds and daggers, in contrast with more pure copper (less than 1% As) used for flat axes. Although the functional considerations may have played a role (it was necessary for the axes to resist at an impact, and for the daggers to stay sharp), the association of colour may also have been a decisive factor. The arsenical copper is whiter, while pure copper is more yellowish, and this luminous quality of metal is enhanced by producing objects with flat surfaces, which are polished in order to create a reflexive surface⁶³. In the same way, for the European Bronze Age, the differences noticed in the percentage of tin in bronzes were put in connection not only with the search for specific technological achievements, but also with the search for a specific colour or luminosity degree, as it is known that if too much tin is added to copper, the resulting alloy shines like silver⁶⁴. In analyzing Bronze Age axes from north-western Europe, it is emphasized that for the purposes of the makers in achieving a balance between strength, toughness and wear resistance the formulation need not have been too precise within the range 6-12% of tin. Quality control, however, could have been more precise, with a group of axes containing as narrow a range as 10-12% tin, more often the latter, and having an annealed, homogenized, and cold-worked cutting-edge. But interestingly enough, for a time axe makers in the MBA of southern England and Brittany used axes with an even higher range of tin contents at 13-16%. The motives are not certain, because there are beginning to be penalties from the reducing toughness of the

⁶¹ Eogan 1994, 1.

⁶² Northover 1998, 117.

⁶³ Keates 2002, 111.

⁶⁴ Parker Pearson 2005, 73.

metal. Still, on one hand it seems that the wear resistance was improved this way, and on another hand another attribute of these alloys would be their colour, although it is not clear whether this aspect should have had an influence in the production of everyday tools. A little later, from the end of the 2nd millennium into the first quarter of the 1st millennium B.C., there is a growing number of ornamental or non-utilitarian objects in some kind of white metal. Some are of pure tin, while others are copper-based alloys with tin contents up to and exceeding 26%. The alloys are very hard and with a good polish, generally having a colour very like that of steel. The use of cast high tin alloys for a votive or representative function re-appeared in Western Europe in the pre-Roman Iron Age when several tribes used a cast bronze coinage with tin contents up to 26%⁶⁵. In the case of central Europe, in discussing the advantages of the *fahlore* (*fahlerz*) bronze over pure copper as a material for tools and weapons, it is mentioned that their resulting silver colour may have represented also an important attraction⁶⁶. Some interesting observations were made on colour and technology in the British Islands EBA. During this period spectacular objects were created from coloured substances (gold crescent-shaped lunulae, jet or amber spacer-plates, gold-covered jet buttons and lozenges, gold belt-hooks), but this was also the time when a major technological change took place: metalworking. The production of bronze was implicating a transformation process through which the quality and colour of the substance were modified. The substances were combined in order to create alloys, the changing of state corresponding to a change in colour and luminosity⁶⁷.

Tin is usually treated in the same manner as copper and bronze, the main interest being especially on one hand on its place of origin and the ways it followed in reaching its final destinations, and on another hand on the problem of its scarcity and the way communities were able to obtain this precious (from the technological point of view) metal. That it is very possible for tin to have had also other dimensions in the eyes of Bronze Age people is shown in the way it was treated in the eastern Mediterranean during the LBA.

Based on some interesting finds, it is considered that tin had in this area at least two symbolic functions: at one level, it was a symbol of wealth and status; at another level, due to its colour, it was a symbol of the religious prestige, outside economic considerations; also, through its metamorphic ability it was something containing strong magic. With regard to the first assumption, it was quite logical for tin to become a symbol of wealth in the Aegean: it was a rare, non-indigenous metal, an integrant part of the goods transported along the long-distance exchange routes. It was a foreign metal and vital ingredient for weapons and tools, and as such it must have had a high status. There are several contexts that could support this hypothesis, but first it should be mentioned that there are very few pure tin objects in the Aegean Bronze Age. It would appear that tin was little used except as an alloy for bronze, perhaps because it oxidizes easily and becomes powdery, and can even be attacked by tin pest⁶⁸. Still, tin is found in another form: during the last part of LBA tin-covered clay vessels (conical cups, jugs, etc.) began to be present in rich Chamber Tombs and Tholos Tombs. Up to present several hundreds of vessels from this category are documented. It seems clear that covering the vessels with tin

⁶⁵ Northover 1998, 114-115.

⁶⁶ Hochuli, Niffeler, Rychner 1998, 233.

⁶⁷ Jones 2002, 162-163.

⁶⁸ Gillis 1999, 141.

was enhancing their value, as well as the prestige of the deceased and surviving family. In funerary context, tin had a social status as an economic marker of wealth. The second assumption, with tin as a symbol of magic or religious status, a two-steps hypothesis was proposed. During experiments it was noticed that tin, which in its natural state looks like silver, suffers a chemical modification at c. 230° C and oxidizes with a colour similar to that of pure gold. The analyses on the tin-covered vessels showed that on some tin was 'golden', while on others it preserved its natural color. In the same grave some vessels were yellow and some were white, fact which leads to the conclusion that the colour was also important. It is perhaps interesting to notice that yellow and white were at that time especially important in other areas of the Mediterranean, like in Egypt, where it was believed that the flesh of gods was made of gold and their bones of silver. Especially gold, as an un-perishing metal, was important for the Egyptian beliefs in life after death and eternity. Some similar indications seem also to exist for the Aegean, from the mainland (golden masks and body coverings in the shaft-graves from Mycenae; daggers with gold and silver inlays; seal-rings with the disc made half of gold and half of silver; gold objects of varying color from an LBA tomb from Peloponnes) or the islands (scepter with the head made of a combination of gold and silver from Cyprus; 18 LBA bi- or tri-metallic vessels from Crete)⁶⁹.

Types. Many deposits have been traditionally characterized according to their likely owners and the industrial processes which might have taken place when they were deposited. This discussion has concentrated on the Bronze Age, and in particular on its later phases. Several categories have been identified: 'personal hoards' represent small groups of intact tools, weapons or ornaments which may be regarded as personal property; 'craftsmen's hoards' comprise a range of intact tools; 'merchants' hoards' are thought to consist of freshly made pieces (sometimes still unsharpened, and in certain cases coming from the same mould) that were stored together to await distribution; 'founders' hoards' contain many extremely fragmentary items, metalworking residues, but also complete objects⁷⁰.

As it can be noticed, this classification is made possible by the fact that the deposits show a high degree of variation with respect to the categories of objects and their treatment. However, such a classification could be challenged on different grounds, one aspect being on one hand its rigid character and on another hand the blurred borders noticed in practice between the different categories of deposits. Also it is very clear that the chances are high for such an interpretation to be the result of a modern way of thinking rather than a plausible image of the prehistoric situation.

The same as in the case of number of objects or material, the association of certain types of objects can be seen as the result of a process of selective deposition. Such an assumption has the merit of avoiding rigidity by bringing the notion of choice, but in the meantime surely creates some other difficulties, especially by extending the range of reasons that could have led to a certain deposition. Even more, if the idea of selection is accepted this certainly means that the relation between the person or persons responsible for creating a deposit and the deposit itself is far less direct and clear as was (or rather it was wished for) the case for the traditional classification of the deposits; in other words the deposit would cease to represent a direct reflection of the personality of its owner.

⁶⁹ Gillis 2000, 232-234.

⁷⁰ Bradley 1998, 12.

The variety of types and of associations of types of objects inside deposits is huge, but like other characteristics of the deposits, this too presents certain patterns in time and space. There can be one-type or multi-type deposits; favourite or preferred associations, or, on the contrary, mutually exclusive categories; a very clear connection or explanation for bringing together specific types, or very surprising associations, at least from the modern point of view; but no matter the situation there is always a question of choice.

Even the complete avoidance of using some types as subject to deposition should be seen as an aspect of the selective character of this process. For example, interesting observations were made for the British Bronze Age, by comparing the increasing number of clay and stone moulds that have been recognized with the situation presented by the deposits. On one hand, it was already noticed for some time that some of the moulds for specific types of object are found outside the distribution area of the finished products. On another hand, a more serious problem was that clay mould fragments exist for types of object that never seem to have entered the archaeological record. The implications were considered as rather startling, because it means that the research is conducted on the basis of a very biased sample of the metalwork in circulation. For this reason it was emphasized the extreme importance of investigating the circumstances under which objects would have been deposited and never recovered⁷¹.

As a general rule, the number of types of bronze objects which were subject to deposition increases during the Bronze Age; the situation is logical keeping in mind that the variety of the types produced increases greatly in time. Also the number of known associations increases, and, as mentioned before, some preferences can be noticed.

For example, in Bavaria more than 170 deposits are considered to belong to the period of transition between the Bell Beaker culture and the EBA, and the bronze objects are limited to mainly 4 items: neck-rings, neck-ring bar ingots, rib bar ingots and axes. These deposits may be one-type (including only one of the four items) or multi-type (representing different combinations of these items)⁷².

In Denmark, the Late Neolithic II period sees the focus on the early types of flanged axes as subject to deposition. They present a close association with sacrificial rituals in wetlands and, although all the types can be found as isolated finds, one-type hoards or multi-type hoards, there is a certain preference to be deposited alone, and much more rarely together with other objects⁷³.

In Romania, the MBA deposits show a preference for the association of certain categories of objects⁷⁴. Some signs were already present for the Copper Age, when associations of different types of copper axes are known⁷⁵. For a total of 33 deposits (24 certain and 9 uncertain) on the first place come the combinations of weapons (18, two of which contain in fact moulds), followed by the deposits containing weapons and ornaments (8), and then, in much smaller numbers, by other combinations. The situation is much more complex during later periods (Br D-Ha A), but it can be noticed a frequent association between sickles and socketed axes. Even in the case of multi-type deposits bringing together many different types,

⁷¹ Bradley 1998, 21-23.

⁷² Kim 2005, 126.

⁷³ Vandkilde 2000, 25.

⁷⁴ Petrescu-Dîmbovița 1977, 39-51 (data based on information from the catalogue).

⁷⁵ Gavrilăscu, Vulpe 1971, 653.

this association is often a stable element. Also, there seems to be a difference in the treatment of swords: very often only those in fragmentary state are part of multi-type deposits, while the complete items belong rather to a horizon of deposits consisting only of swords or are single finds⁷⁶.

Detailed analyses were conducted for Western Europe. During MBA, in southern Britain the proportions of tools and ornaments varied fairly consistently from one area to another, whilst the balance of tools and weapons showed the opposite pattern (Thames Valley: ornaments 4%, tools 35%, weapons 61%; East Anglia: ornaments 7%, tools 61%, weapons 32%; South coast: ornaments 12%, tools 85%, weapons 3%). It is considered to be more likely that this situation reflects differences in deposition, rather than in regional production. In Brittany a comparable pattern can be seen in the general coastal distribution of MBA weaponry, compared with the concentration of ornaments in inland areas. Here the mutual exclusion between weapons and ornaments in deposits is doubled by a spatial separation⁷⁷. Sometimes the situation is complicated by the presence of combinations less easy to be explained, like is the case with the association of horse-gear for a pair of horses and female attributes in a number of deposits, a tentative explanation being that they reflect complex cult practices (processions) performed on behalf of a community⁷⁸.

Male/female

An interesting sequel to the traditional classification of deposits based on the types of objects they contain is the dichotomy between 'male' and 'female' deposits, in the first category being placed especially weapons and sometimes also tools, and in the second category different ornaments. The explanation for this situation is relatively simple, since at the very basis of any social structure there are some determinants for status differentiation, and *gender* is a basic one. Men and women are ascribed different social statuses and roles in different societies⁷⁹ and this separation is so deeply rooted that people tend to attribute male or female characteristics to every part of their world. Based on ethnographical research, it can be observed that metals themselves make no exception from this rule. In Africa, copper has gender, although the nature of the male-female associations varies between social groups⁸⁰. In Nepal, the craftsmen say that copper is a pure and sacred metal, associated to Shiva Mahadevi and representing the god's semen⁸¹. In the Americas, copper and its alloys had various associations with human fertility, and very often with male virility⁸².

Let's now turn from metal to the object as a form of display. Since objects cannot function outside the social network, their function and meaning will always be connected to the people who own and/or manipulate them. No matter if there are ornaments, weapons or tools, the objects help to create, preserve and reflect a certain image of the person connected to them. The people's social identity is based on the way they look, on their appearance. The material, the shape, the size of an object, the way it looks, feels and sounds create a world of meaning in

⁷⁶ Alexandrescu 1968, 14-15.

⁷⁷ Bradley 1982, 115.

⁷⁸ Roymans 1991, 59.

⁷⁹ Angrosino 1990, 44.

⁸⁰ Keates 2002, 117.

⁸¹ Anfinset 2000, 210.

⁸² Saunders 1999, 21, 25.

the eyes of the beholder. Of course, for the correct decipherment of the significations of an object, a garment or an ornament, it is necessary for the one who looks to share the same world view with the one who wears it. This is a problem even in the case of ethnography, not to mention the archaeological research, for which the information in this domain is biased from the start, and which offers rather glimpses of what the prehistoric perception on self and world must have been.

Still, as scarce as these information are, there is a possibility to make some assumptions on the way the vision of body and gender changed in time and on the role played in the process by these categories of items.

In order to better understand the situation, two factors must be taken into consideration: the body and the environment. Both the anatomy and the ecologic conditions offer opportunities and obstacles for a person and present the natural basis for the classification of the social units and the relations between them. The natural order procures the raw materials for adornment, as well as a potential classificatory structure which can reflect in the way people conceptualize their body and its attire⁸³. From this point of view, the use of metal seems to have produced important changes in the world view of the prehistoric people.

As already mentioned, in the first place a change can be noticed from an accent put on the display of the human bodies in Neolithic to the display of objects through the agency of the human body in the Bronze and Iron Ages⁸⁴. Still, some specifications should be made here, based on observations regarding the Neolithic agricultural societies. It seems that at this point already the symbolic value of the wild existence (hunting) or the abnormal (warfare) took precedence, ideologically speaking, over domestic life and daily routine. It is considered that for this reason the distinction between weapons and tools is ambiguous: axes can be used to chop wood but also to attack a potential enemy; arrows may be fired at wild animals but could also be targeted at humans. Displaying or wielding these items would undoubtedly have allowed individuals to assert their personality and establish their status as individuals. On a more general level, these instruments provided a means of defining and positively identifying the masculine domain – the wildness – in contrast to the female domain – which is considered to be the domestic sphere⁸⁵.

The introduction of copper may have given an important impulse to this process of separation between the two domains, because, at least at a first impression, the men had an advantage over women.

Copper metallurgy provided a means of producing objects for men (axes, daggers), and as such the new metal served the male domain. Later on, the daggers and swords, which were perfected over time and became a source of prestige, were always associated with the masculine domain⁸⁶. In fact it can be noticed how, from 3500 to 2000 B.C., the male image and the male domain, both real and ideological, gradually became established. The male domain contrasts structurally with the female domain, which centers upon the home, family, and reproduction. The archaeological evidence reflects the warrior's ever-increasing status over time⁸⁷. This situation is visible in different parts of Europe, although the ways in which

⁸³ Schwarz 1979, 31.

⁸⁴ Gosden 2004, 35.

⁸⁵ Guilaine, Zammit 2005, 159-160.

⁸⁶ Guilaine, Zammit 2005, 197.

⁸⁷ Guilaine, Zammit 2005, 185.

different communities chose to express this may vary. In Britain and Ireland, the warrior's status during the Bronze Age is reflected inclusively through the case of single graves, which present special items associated to it. During the LBA, the focus is established on toiletry, weapons, and drinking equipment. The association of these items with the masculine body evokes an esthetics of masculinity, associated with the warrior institution. They are significant because they are connected to a particular way of life, in which war, body ornamentation, hunting, horses and drinking are expressions of self identity and personality. The esthetic ideal changes over time, but the 'warrior' remains a substantial category from Copper Age to the Middle Ages⁸⁸. In fact, no one looking at the archaeological record of the European Copper and Bronze Age could doubt that objects of warlike appearance played a major role in the period. That role is a matter for discussion, but the sheer number of artefacts and their ubiquity speak eloquently of large-scale production and large-scale deposition⁸⁹. One aspect which was emphasized is that at least a part of the Bronze Age weapons might represent ritual depositions from battle. This hypothesis was based on the observation that many swords in weapon deposits show traces of battle (un-repaired scars on the edge) and thus had not been re-sharpened, as is often the case in burials⁹⁰.

A similar reflection of this modification in the male domain comes from the depositions in Denmark. During Late Neolithic II, the metal items which were deposited are the flanged axes. They are considered to be multi-functional, based on shape, decoration, context, re-sharpening degree, damage, resistance and micro-structure of the cutting-edge. They are used as tools, but the depositional practice suggests that they are also social symbols: frequent decoration, sometimes elaborated; high degree of polish of the surface; close association with sacrificial rituals in wetlands, where are deposited most often alone and much more rarely together with other objects. During the Bronze Age IA (1700-1600 B.C.), the flanged axes are still multi-functional objects with coherent utilitarian and social uses. However, compared to LN II, some developments appear which indicate what will happen next: the decoration is absent, the re-sharpening is more frequent. Small spearheads, sometimes decorated, begin to appear, automatically belonging to a functional category with clear limitations defined by war and other social uses. A contextual differentiation begins to be seen, these early spearheads, unlike the flanged axes, being present especially in deposits and graves, rarely as single finds. This may mean that a part of the prestige value of the flanged axe was transferred to the novelty of this period, the spearhead. A devaluation seems to take place, with the flanged axes losing preeminence in front of the spearheads. The flanged axes had a variety of functions: tools, valuable items, prestige objects, possibly weapons and a connection with the ancestors and the gods. This fusion of functions that characterizes LN II and BA IA and this rigid coalition between the practical and the social function may be a metaphor for a society with a tight relation between social reproduction and practical production, a rather simple society, with no marked social contrasts. During Bronze Age IB (1600-1500 B.C.) the quantity of metal in circulation increases remarkably, fact that coincides with complexity in a number of domains, including metallurgy. The high-flanged axes show a distinct functional differentiation: a small group containing unsharpened, long, slender, delicate, sometimes

⁸⁸ Jones 2002, 161.

⁸⁹ Harding 1999, 159.

⁹⁰ Kristiansen 1999, 179.

decorated axes and a large group for which the physical aspect is clearly the last concern. The first group is defined by expression, the second by instrumentality. The situation suggests a division between high-status display and battle axes as opposed to low-status axes created for work. This dissimilarity in context confirms these observations: the utilitarian axes appear predominantly as single finds and one-type hoards, while the prestige axes tend to appear together with other prestige items in the graves of high status individuals and in multi-type hoards with other luxury objects. The symbolic significance of the flanged axes underwent changes that double the changes in function. It is possible that the LN II and BA IA axes were symbolizing a harmonious and unified type of masculinity, with coherent and indivisible qualities connected to the production activities, social group, rituals and war. During the BA IB the uniform perception over the axes as synonyms with masculinity splits: the great majority of axes begin to symbolize a type of masculinity alienated and degraded from the social point of view, strictly associated to subsistence and production activities; in contrast, a particular group of elaborated axes, associated with an elitist group, symbolizes a new kind of high rank and superior masculinity, with specialized qualities focused on leadership in war and rituals⁹¹.

The Scandinavian area does not represent an isolated situation from this point of view. Similar cases are known from all over the LBA Europe, when axes tend to cluster into a series of small regional groups, each with its own stylistic devices, while the closest links between sword types may occur over considerable distances, with blank areas in between⁹².

But copper and later bronze were not used only for tools and weapons. Ornaments too are made from these metals, as well as from gold. However, it is quite risky to consider these categories as belonging to mutually exclusive domains and associated with exclusive groups.

It was already noticed that it is all too tempting to reproduce modern prejudices about the significance of different items and their links with different categories of people, so that weapons have exclusively male associations and ornaments are associated with women. The best procedure to avoid the trap is to rely as far as possible on their archaeological associations⁹³. And this could lead to some surprises, since other categories of finds indicate a much more complex situation. For example, the Bell Beaker graves from Bavaria show that the bronze neck-ring is one of the representative items used by both males and females⁹⁴. A Bronze Age grave from Adoni, Romania, presented together a battle axe, an armguard and a gold necklace⁹⁵. The British Bell Beaker male burials show the presence of ornaments like gold discs, gold basket-shaped earrings, beads and copper pendants⁹⁶. The conclusion should be that it is much safer to consider that at least a part of the ornaments should have served to increase the social standing of both a male and female elite⁹⁷.

A big problem, which will be more fully discussed below, is that very often the areas where deposits can be found lack other categories of archaeological record, such as graves, or quite often the categories of objects found in deposits and those found in graves are mutually exclusive. This way, archaeologists are forced to look for parallels in other areas, situation

⁹¹ Vandkilde 2000, 25-28.

⁹² Bradley 1998, 133.

⁹³ Bradley 2000, 56.

⁹⁴ Kim 2005, 129.

⁹⁵ Bader 1978, 119.

⁹⁶ Eogan 1994, 14.

⁹⁷ Guilaine, Zammit 2005, 160.

which is not without risk. For example, in the Scandinavian archaeology many of the ornament deposits have been associated with women because similar items occur in female graves in areas further to the south. The same interpretation may apply to ornament deposits found in other parts of Europe, but it would be wrong to regard them as female equipment unless there are compelling reasons for doing so⁹⁸. On these grounds, for Denmark it is generally claimed that a change took place from the predominance of male equipment during Periods I-III to an increase of female associations during Periods IV-VI⁹⁹.

Some areas and periods present the advantage of offering together information from deposits and graves. There is good evidence from Late Eneolithic cemeteries in north-east Bulgaria for gender differences in value systems in the mortuary domain. If the axe symbolized the *agrrios* and the ornament deposit the *domus*, a potent cross-referenced set of symbolic referents is available. In respect of the EBA deposits in Britain, a distinction has been drawn between the small ones, containing daggers, knives, small tools and lightweight ornaments, often found in graves and with sparing use of metal, and large ones buried as special deposits with considerable quantities of metal. The first set was interpreted as symbols of personal status, rank and sometimes occupation, while the second set represents 'community' deposits buried in knowledge of, and for the benefit of, society at large and useful for keeping personal aggrandisement in check. These two classes of deposits may well be an accurate description of Balkan Neolithic and Copper Age deposits, even though the contents are quite different from those in Britain. The isolate, liminal hoards of a few copper tools and even fewer gold ornaments may be a sign of personal deposits, placed as a mark of a successful male expedition into the uplands for the collection of community resources, while the larger mixed ornament deposits may perhaps be interpreted as community jewelry deposits maintained for ceremonials and special exchanges by women as well as men. One of the supporting arguments for this notion is the sheer number of beads in the larger deposits in comparison with the maximum number of beads in any single grave. The values attributed to copper tools versus ornaments by different members of Balkan NCA communities may be quite varied. For an adult male, the attributes of a single copper shaft-hole axe-adze, weighing 3-5 kg and capable of splitting aurochs skulls, tree trunks or human heads, may have meant an association with high value. For an adult female, the variety of color, shape, material and biographical associations in those ornaments available for village ceremonials may have outweighed the copper tools in value¹⁰⁰.

Another case which can be considered is Switzerland during MBA, when weapons are found in graves and also in rivers, lakes and springs, proving the existence of an over-regional weaponry that shows innovations in the fighting techniques (the swords come to complete the old combination dagger/axe). Also the feminine costume could be determined based on these grave finds: a pair of pins fixing the dress on the shoulders, together with other ornaments, like fingerings and bronze ankle-rings with spiral ends¹⁰¹. The situation changes around 1000 B.C. (LBA), a period for which the graves are little known, because they were usually placed on the lakes' shores, so only indirect arguments can be used in order to create a whole picture of the society¹⁰².

⁹⁸ Bradley 2000, 56-58.

⁹⁹ Bradley 1982, 115.

¹⁰⁰ Chapman 2000, 121.

¹⁰¹ Hochuli, Niffeler, Rychner 1998, 342.

¹⁰² Hochuli, Niffeler, Rychner 1998, 345.

A difference between male and female associated finds was emphasized also in connection with the distance they travel from their production area before ending as depositions. For example studies show that during the MBA in Europe the pins and working axes are produced and distributed locally, while the weapons seem to travel on larger distances, their typology showing also a higher uniformity¹⁰³. Such situations are considered by some archaeologists as a reflection of different types of connections between communities. The short distances on which objects associated usually with women travel are seen as a sign that intermarriage was frequent between community groups inside a regional polity, which was characterized by small local variations in metalwork. Between regional polities 'dynastic marriages' took place to secure alliances and trade networks. These were less frequent, and are to be recognized by the occurrence of a 'foreign' set of female ornaments in burials or depositions. Typical distances are considered to be 100-200 km. While women maintained their local material culture, male chiefs are seen as more inclined to signal participation in international networks by adopting foreign weapon types and bronze vessels, including the social institutions linked to warrior aristocracies¹⁰⁴.

However, it can be noticed that other trends are also accompanying the advance of technological developments which allowed highly sophisticated items to be fashioned from metal. Surprisingly, only very slowly did metal begin to feature in the domestic and day-to-day domain. In fact, excavations of dwellings led to the conclusion that stone tools, varying in their level of sophistication, were still in use at this time, continuing the long-standing prehistoric tradition. Wood was widely used for agricultural and domestic tools, as indicated by evidence from pile dwelling sites. Thus it seems that two distinct spheres existed, even in the domain of tools, a distinction that was further emphasized by these new technological developments. This was no longer a dichotomy between the masculine and the feminine spheres; rather, it was a division between the prestige sphere and the domestic sphere. This was by no means a new distinction and had always existed in one form or another. Still, it was unique in terms of the increasing gap that emerged between the various productions techniques. Metallurgy required full-time specialists, whilst materials like wood and flint were used for more commonplace objects that would have been the result of more routine and less intensive labor. Objects were, therefore, coded or assigned a value. Metal objects were the most highly 'valued': these included weapons and ceremonial objects and even certain items of jewelry, presumably associated with women. Thus, it seems that a 'two-speed' society was emerging in which those with weapons were accorded greater social standing¹⁰⁵.

Complete objects/fragmentary objects

Founders, traders, and the rest. A dichotomy also strongly rooted in the archaeological literature treating the depositional processes is the one between deposits consisting of complete objects and those containing fragmentary objects.

Since the beginning of the archaeologists' interest in the problem of depositions, these were interpreted as the product of a number of different processes, placing them in categories like: founders' hoards, traders' hoards, personal hoards or treasures, votive hoards, equipment for

¹⁰³ Champion *et alii* 1984, 217.

¹⁰⁴ Kristiansen 1999, 184.

¹⁰⁵ Guilaine, Zammit 2005, 198.

the afterlife. These categories may not account for all deposits, but they can be extended to embrace the great majority of finds. What is less certain is whether such categorization actually assists in understanding the phenomenon¹⁰⁶.

One problem is that the perception of this depositional phenomenon is clearly a modern one. If grave goods, for example, are normally interpreted by archaeologists as a 'social' phenomenon, the interpretation of deposits owes more to the ideas concerning the prehistoric 'economy'. As a result, they are classified according to their assumed function, the only common factor being that they consist of accumulation of complete or broken metalwork buried together in apparent isolation¹⁰⁷. Traditionally, 'founders' hoards' – those that contained broken or miscast objects not capable of functional use – have been seen as a direct consequence of the mode of operation of the Bronze Age smith. They are often extremely large and heavy; deposits of hundreds of objects are not uncommon, and some run into thousands. This bulk and weight means that it would be very unlikely that they were transported over any great distance, instead being kept in a single place for future use, the spot carefully guarded and its location kept secret. In this model, when the smith came on his rounds to a village where he had hidden a stock of metal, he would go to it to recover what he needed, reburying what was left over at the end of the operation. While this interpretation accounts for some of the observed facts, it falls short in a number of important respects, not least in the sheer unlikelihood that so many metal deposits of this kind would have survived intact and unrecovered¹⁰⁸.

Another problem is that in the modern eyes the complete and broken/decayed objects usually form two different categories, the latter, due to their state of preservation, becoming meaningless and useless and a highly probable subject for discard.

But the recognition of the fact that things have lives that can be up to some point compared with those of humans forces archaeologists to closer consider the temporality of objects, and as such both the physical and ontological changes which can affect objects during their lifetime. Between these temporal qualities of objects, transience, their ephemeral nature (identified in terms of currency of things, for example fashion items) is important for the present discussion. Because in a different sense the notion of transience could be used in concentrating on the transformation of objects and materials through processes of attrition, decay, mutation and metamorphosis. The instability of some things and substances is as interesting as the stability of others, because it changes attention from concentrating on representation to a more implicated understanding of the materiality and material agent. The transformation of matter brings transformations of the physical and ontological qualities, of the meanings and sense. In the archaeological practice, usually the destruction and decay of objects have *negative* connotations, because these are seen as creating a distortion in the archaeological record, that makes more difficult the successful reconstruction of the past social life. Rarely it is considered that some things were probably thought to break and decay as part of their role in the social practices, and that such a transformation would have had *positive* connotations. As well as human death can be inextricably linked to the physical, symbolic or spiritual

¹⁰⁶ Harding 2000, 354.

¹⁰⁷ Bradley 1982, 109-110.

¹⁰⁸ Harding 2000, 354-355.

regeneration, the same can be true for materials. Even more, there are cathartic qualities of destruction and removal of those things which bear an excess of unfavorable associations¹⁰⁹.

From this perspective, it becomes useful to consider the *treatment* of the objects as being also a form of selection for deposition; in other words, to accept that things can be looked the other way around. Instead of necessarily considering that the fragmentation of objects made them suitable for a specific category of deposition (as it is the case with the 'founder's hoards'), it would be a challenge to presume that at least in some situations the people's will to deposit some objects led to their fragmentation. Such an interpretation could be sustained by the signs of intentional fragmentation of objects like sickles and socketed axes¹¹⁰. While for these categories of objects the fragmentation is often put in connection with their interpretation as pre-monetary elements, in the case of weapons like the swords is considered rather as a result of ritually 'killing', although not often their situation is really clear. As an example, several LBA Irish swords seem to indicate a deliberate destruction of the cutting-edges, and some show signs of intense heat exposal and blows, probably also as a result of deliberate destruction¹¹¹. In fact, it may be interesting here to emphasize the difference which is usually made in producing explanations for the intentional fragmentation or destruction of different categories of objects, the ritual character of this action being especially associated with the weaponry, while for other types of objects a more utilitarian explanation is favoured.

So, maybe it is time for a change of vision regarding not only the way objects were treated for deposition, but the reasons for acting in a specific manner and also the expected results. The problem is that the variation in the treatment of deposited objects is really huge and the patterns are difficult to be found, as a consequence the archaeologists being forced to deal with a whole range of local (in space, but also in time) situations.

For example, some objects show no signs of use at the moment of their deposition. This is the case for many tools and weapons from EBA Britain, with no signs of use or re-sharpening, and some being too big to be practical, with the result that their main function was considered to be that of status symbols¹¹². Other times, there are deposited complete objects which are miscast or show faults, usually the kind that could influence not their esthetical qualities, but rather their utilitarian ones. In Ireland, in general, it seems that the swords deposited in wet places were less used, and it is a higher probability to look 'different'. For these, the tendency is to be over medium quality, but with less attention for possible mistakes in design or manufacture that would have affected the use in battle but not the aspect¹¹³. In Romania, many of the deposited disc-headed axes are unfinished items, worked with an economy of material that seems to reach fraud in some cases, when the blade is hollow inside, in contradiction with the image provided by the few finds from contemporary graves¹¹⁴. At the other end of the spectrum there is the deposition of such fragments, that in some cases it is impossible to determine what object were they originally part of.

Yet another interesting question regards a different aspect of the treatment of deposited objects, outside the degree of fragmentation: when do we face the presence of dismantled

¹⁰⁹ Pollard 2004, 48.

¹¹⁰ Ciugudean, Luca, Georgescu 2006, 46.

¹¹¹ Bridgford 1997, 107.

¹¹² Parker Pearson 2005, 73.

¹¹³ Bridgford 1997, 112.

¹¹⁴ Nistor, Vulpe 1974, 16.

objects? Because of the preservation conditions, in most of the cases it is impossible to be said if, for example, axes were deposited with or without their shafts, or sickles with or without their handles, in other words if they were dismantled or not. However, some very interesting cases show how probable is that special rules governed also this aspect of deposition. In the case of lurs, the items from Ireland were deposited deliberately dismantled, only their body being found, without the parts which normally would have completed the instruments. In southern Scandinavia, the same category of items shows a similar treatment, the cast mouth-piece being sometimes broken and placed separately¹¹⁵. The famous Chariot of the Sun was also the subject of a special treatment. The examination of the chariot and its finding-place revealed that it had been deliberately broken up in connection with its deposition and its individual parts seem to have been scattered over a largish plot of ground on the open, firm and overgrown surface of a bog¹¹⁶.

Still, the biggest problem regards the deposits which range in between the two mutually exclusive groups, that of deposits containing only complete objects and that of deposits containing only 'scrap' metal; because many of them represent in reality combinations of differently treated objects. At Flag Fen, Britain, during more than 300 years (approx. 1280-924 B.C.), complete as well as fragmentary objects were deposited into the water. One sword was so new that was not even sharpened, but the majority of the objects were broken. For example, a lot of swords were cracked or bent in the middle¹¹⁷. And if here it could be advanced as an explanation that the difference in treatment was connected to the difference in time (which in fact does not seem to be the case), other deposits, based on their internal chronology, would come to contradict such a suggestion. Even more, sometimes a difference can be observed between neighbouring areas during the same period of time, as is the case with the areas of lowland Britain and 'Highland Zone', including Ireland. The comparatively small nature of deposits in the latter in comparison to those in the former during the Late Bronze Age is well known, but more significant is the fact that, with a very small number of exceptions, 'founders' hoards' and/or scrap deposits of considerable dimensions are absent from the 'Highland Zone'¹¹⁸. This situation rather appeals to local traditions than an economical matter as an explanation.

What in fact can be observed is that there is a trend manifesting in time in the composition of deposits. Not only that during the Urnfield period in central Europe the number of deposits increases, their content also changes, shifting from an accent put on ingots to similar unused objects around the 13th century (the so-called 'craftsmen's hoards') and to scrap metal (used objects, old, often broken in small fragments), sometimes associated with moulds and ingots, around 10th century B.C.¹¹⁹. Tools, weapons and ornaments are found together in these collections, usually buried on dry land¹²⁰.

What alternative explanation to the purely economic ones could be proposed for this process of fragmentation? If we turn to ethnographical examples, it is clear that traditions of deliberately ephemeral artworks exist in traditional societies from Oceania and western Africa,

¹¹⁵ Coles 1977, 56-57.

¹¹⁶ Kaul 1998, 35.

¹¹⁷ Parker Pearson 2005, 109.

¹¹⁸ Ó Faoláin 2004, 108.

¹¹⁹ Champion *et alii* 1984, 287-289.

¹²⁰ Bradley 2000, 53.

especially from the category of objects produced as part of funerary rituals. The sacrificial objects become temporary receptacles of the 'life force' or 'vital energies' of the deceased, which are then freed through the destruction of the object. The process is designed in order to disperse the potentially dangerous forces in such a manner that will make them not to pursue or hurt the living. The 'destruction' of these objects can take the form of deliberate break down, decay or physical removal (even through the western art collectors)¹²¹. Living aside this connection between the objects created and then removed and the realm of the dead, what is important to mention in this moment is the accent put on display, the destruction of the object being a public action.

The destruction of material symbols as part of the social display was recognized for some time also for prehistory. These practices seem to be quite old, such being the case with the deposits of intentionally broken vessels and burnt flint axes in the Neolithic settlements, enclosures and megalithic tombs from southern Scandinavia. It is assumed that, like in the case of later bronze depositions, the sumptuous destruction and offering were intended to impress both human and supernatural beings¹²².

It is another aspect of fragmentation which should be mentioned here. The ancestral connotations of these fragmentary objects were also significant, serving as mnemonic materials in making the remembrance of the objects' past easier. The fragmentary objects can receive a more central social role than merely as simple materials with recycling potential. The substance remains the same and the original identities are preserved: a sherd stands for the vessel; a bead stands for the necklace; a fragment of axe stands for the axe. This might be the case of the parts of pots being deliberately reused, like the two broken bell-beakers associated with golden bracelets and a copper dagger from Lockington, Leicestershire¹²³. From this point of view some categories of objects are clearly more suitable for fragmentation than others, and here necklaces and other ornaments made of more than one piece are a perfect example. This aspect could be discussed for the Balkan Neolithic and Copper Age deposits, which contain a great number of beads made of different materials. Unless each item was made by the creator of a deposit, every object had its own biographical narrative to be recounted about its route to its depositional place. This way, the deposits formed the stage for the presenting of an entire social network stretching hundreds of kilometers, connecting many individuals in a web of narrative, kin relations and social power. This social 'resource' could have been used in the future for gift exchange with either the living or the dead. The concentration of so many objects provided the crucial possibility of choice – of retaining items which were more valuable than what was called for in the immediate exchange and passing on what was most appropriate¹²⁴.

The fact that these bead strings were formed and re-formed many times during their lifetime appears quite clearly from another example, known for the EBA graves in Britain and Ireland. For this period, the biographical status and the funerary context made the beads (most of them of amber and jet) to be sometimes described as heirlooms. It is assumed that the deposition of fragments allowed social relations between the living and the dead to be established. The deposition of single beads or necklaces' components had the effect of perpetuating these

¹²¹ Pollard 2004, 53-54.

¹²² Pollard 2004, 49.

¹²³ Pollard 2004, 50.

¹²⁴ Chapman 2000, 117-118.

relations, the notion of 'keeping-while-giving' being implied. In contrast with the easiness with which the necklaces submit to the fragmentation, the situation of the complete objects was also taken into consideration. Since relational sociality is established between the dead and the mourners through the fragmentation of the necklaces, what kind of relation types could be represented by the deposition of complete objects? If the construction of the necklace brings into the relationship the memory of many social relations, then the deposition of a complete necklace is a powerful act signalling closing and loss. The deposition of more than one object – the accumulation of objects – cements the social relations through the aggregation principle, while the act of fragmentation establishes relations between people, since distinct elements of the same object are owned in common. For this reason, in Ireland there is a contrasting situation: while, from the decorative and physical point of view, the gold lunulae are similar to the necklaces, because of their un-partitioning nature they are not used to mediate social relations in the funerary domain. More often they are deposited intact, with no proof of their association with the human body, entering the category of 'stray finds' and being placed especially in the water. In fact, the formal nature of some depositions (like the one placed in a wooden box from Newton, Co. Cavan), is reasoning with the contemporary funerary practices, suggesting a personal biography, the significance of which was not necessary to be expressed by placing objects from this category with the human body¹²⁵. This view over the role of fragmentation can find parallels also in ethnographical examples. The importance of beads was emphasized in the case of African communities. For Lovedu, they play an important role in the cult of the dead: the heirs must continue to wear their ancestors' beads in order to ensure the prestige of those in the afterlife¹²⁶. The Yoruba kings were receiving at coronation a new crown which incorporated several beads from the predecessors, in order to maintain the contact between them and the new king¹²⁷.

In the same line it can be assumed that the fragments of bronze could have meant more than simply their value in metal. There are several finds which could serve as a signal that things are not as straightforward as are traditionally considered.

For example, the small pieces or half melted metalwork, which are supposed to represent scrap collected by a smith if found in a deposit, also occur in Urnfield burials in Hesse, just as the occasional bronze finds from Deverel-Rimbury cemeteries in England tend to be in similar condition¹²⁸. Similarly, a special category of finds from Denmark consists in several graves (usually rich) with belt-purses between other grave goods. Some of these contain small pieces of hack-gold or hack-bronze, while such small pieces of hack-metal are of rare occurrence in the remaining graves of the period. These small pieces of bronze have generally been considered to represent a means of payment. On the other hand, the association of these often small and not particularly valuable pieces of bronze with this particular group of graves might suggest that they were considered to be something more than this: that they were looked upon as symbols of the right of access to bronze, to the production of bronze objects and the use of these, perhaps in the context in question the fabrication and employment of bronze objects associated with the cultic sphere in particular. In other words, these small bronze objects might well form a link between the sphere of pure prestige and the cultic sphere¹²⁹.

¹²⁵ Jones 2002, 168-169.

¹²⁶ Pokornowski 1979, 104.

¹²⁷ Pokornowski 1979, 109.

¹²⁸ Bradley 1982, 111.

¹²⁹ Kaul 1998, 18.

II. THE CONTEXT

1. Location

The location is an essential factor to be discussed in connection to the depositional practice, but unfortunately this aspect of the phenomenon does not always receive the full attention that it certainly deserves. This situation is partially the result of the reality that most of the deposits are chance finds, and as such the information regarding the context is absent more often than not. But an even greater problem lies in the way in which archaeologists consider not only the depositional phenomenon, but also the entire world view of the prehistoric communities.

The attention was already drawn on several occasions that a conceptual distinction between nature and culture lies at the heart of modernist epistemologies. Since the beginning archaeology has been, above all, about artifice: identifying, classifying, and recording cultural work, and distinguishing between material culture and natural forms which are not the product of human agency. Recording and recognizing culture, as opposed to nature, provides the conceptual basis for all field archaeology. Discussions of archaeological sites and excavations may sometimes have a few introductory paragraphs describing their landscape settings or geographic contexts, but these are usually little more than scene-settings or backdrops to a description of the details of monuments, finds made in excavation trenches, and so forth. What it is understood to be nature tends to be ignored precisely because it is not culture and is therefore considered to be relatively unimportant in interpretation. This situation started to change during the last years, when it was recognized the need – in thinking about, describing, and interpreting cultural landscapes – of spending as much time and effort considering ‘natural’ form as ‘cultural’ form. Nature began to be seen as providing a fundamental resource through which an attempt to understand culture can be made. If the former is ignored, it is not possible to provide an adequate understanding of the latter. Meaning is created through a dialectic between the two. Nature and culture are two sides of a coin and cannot be separated, part of a complex system of signification¹³⁰. And although there could be problems in assuming that different ages perceive landscapes in the same ways, just as there are difficulties in treating the distinction between culture and nature as universal, there are still good reasons for suggesting that unaltered features of the landscape should be studied more systematically by the archaeologists¹³¹.

The territory. In trying to better deal with the depositional phenomenon, it is absolutely necessary to place the deposit in its context, and in order to do this it is essential to try to understand how prehistoric people perceived the space. In doing so, perhaps it would be helpful to take into consideration some ethnographical and historical examples.

The notion of homogenous space, indifferent from the qualitative point of view, seen as the geometric place of the reciprocal positioning between objects, which in consequence does not change no matter of the observation point, is an abstraction good only in particular fields of analysis. In the case of the human relations, the space – or the territory – was never perceived as homogenous. The qualitative difference of the territorial perception is based on clear psychological impressions, centred especially on the need for security. The result is that what is

¹³⁰ Tilley, Bennett 2001, 335-336.

¹³¹ Bradley 2000, 33.

known is preferred to the unknown, the light to darkness, the enclosure to the open space, the solidity to the uncertainty, the compact to the fragmentary, the stability to the mobility, the familiar to the unfamiliar. All qualities are gathered in the area where the subject is, all that is negative is pushed to the periphery. This is not only a question of practical behaviour, it is more a problem of the symbolic representation of the reality, a system of values. The geographical elements and the cultural characteristics of the inhabitants of the periphery are considered not only different, but also inferior to those from the centre¹³².

The logical result of this situation is, between other things, a continuous and very serious concern for protecting the controlled territory from any dangers, including those – or especially those? – of supernatural origin. For the present discussion, it means that two aspects are to be considered in connection to the depositional practice: the borders and the interior of the territory.

The problem of frontiers. The ethnographical examples show that, although usually the territory occupied by a community is defined only by natural elements, the inhabitants as well as the neighbours know very well between which territorial limits their rights and prerogatives are functioning. The landmarks can be natural, for example a rock, tree, river or lake, of sacred character, or, more often, an object, a pillar, a portico, placed at the territorial limit, accompanied by consecration rites. It is important to emphasize the fact that these landmarks are not placed along the entire frontier, but only at the crossing points, on roads and intersections. As a result, the trespassing of a foreigner is seen as a sacrilege, since the interdiction of entering a territory has a magical-religious character¹³³. A complementary aspect is reflected in the magical precautions taken when people adventure beyond or at the limits of the controlled or domesticated territory. For example, the Guambianos from Columbia consider that the highest area of their territory is dangerous, being populated by a whole range of spirits associated with natural phenomena. Although especially women are susceptible of being influenced, every person must proceed to ritual purification before travelling in that area, in order to acquire magical protection¹³⁴.

This situation is not to be met only in the case of traditional populations, but also for areas much closer in time and space to the Bronze Age Europe. From the written sources it can be easily noticed that in the LBA Near East the territory controlled by a state was rather like an 'oasis': it did not exist the need for a boundary line, but more for some gateways – controlled communication channels with other states or inhabited areas. From the Semna steles of Sesostri III it is seen that a gateway's function in Egypt was to act like a filter permitting only the entrance of desired goods (not people) from an external region which, being seen as foreign and dangerous, was to be excluded and exorcised. The situation was very much the same with the territory controlled by Egypt in Asia; the empire looked more like a network than like a homogenous territory¹³⁵.

Taking the discussion to a more theoretical level, the whole issue of frontiers is extraordinarily complex. They can be looked in terms of scale, of military design, of psychology, of contact and cross-fertilization and of separateness and rejection, as well as in

¹³² Liverani 2001, 17-18.

¹³³ Van Gennepe 1996, 25-26.

¹³⁴ Schwarz 1979, 33.

¹³⁵ Liverani 2001, 52-53.

terms of economic, demographic and political control. Clearly, as seen above, not all frontiers are primarily military. There are many other factors at work: issues of ownership and trespass, privilege zones, exploitation frontiers, ecological frontiers and protective barriers. Frontiers as points of trade control or demographic or ideological control may be more overtly military in form, but do not necessarily imply warfare. Human responses to neighbouring groups may be modified by the landscape and its resources. They may lead to the creation of barriers for both practical and psychological reasons. Natural features can act as divisions between peoples – seas and rivers, mountains, marshes and wastes can inhibit contact and cultural influence. However, frontiers between people often grow up in areas of natural wealth and usefulness. Neighbouring groups may wish to exploit the same water resources or arable potential, mineral sources, hunting grounds or communication routes. The form of contact and the nature of the frontier are then often related to the history of dialogue between the two sides, their perceptions of ownership and fairness, bellicosity or fear, sharing or greed, and degrees of social confidence¹³⁶.

During the Iron Age, the coin distributions appear to support the suggestion that rivers often acted as political boundaries. Also the Iron Age shrines are often situated near rivers or springs and are associated with tribal boundaries. It was considered that this situation may well apply to earlier periods also, with the metalwork deposition being one way of ritually reinforcing and focusing attention on such political boundaries¹³⁷. Following this line of work, the locations of some deposits were put in connection to what could presumably be a question of contested land between rival groups, claimed by one of them in an act of conspicuous deposition. Such an interpretation was offered for northern France during LBA, where the most lavish depositions took place in or near rivers that seem to have been boundaries between different cultural groups¹³⁸.

A similar image, involving rather political aspects, was proposed for some of the Migration Period deposits in Scandinavia, where it was looked for patterns or symptoms of change anticipating the watershed which was the end of this period, in particular trying to trace processes of state formation or the emergence of stratified or aristocratic societies. It is no coincidence that a feature that was emphasized for this later period is the location of deposits in the border zones of emerging polities. But this example also shows the risks involved in interpreting deposits as significantly located in connection to frontiers. Three major weapon deposits, Torsbjerg, Nydam and the smaller Kragehul, lie within the cultural zone of Angles, but in geographically distinct districts. More convincingly distributed around the margins of the settled area are the 'bog people'. The deposition of these, however, begins at a much earlier phase than the weapon deposits and their placement may better represent an embodiment of the boundary between known and unknown, life and death, or used / productive and unused land¹³⁹.

In the case of Marchésieux (Manche), France, where a number of no less than 8 deposits containing well over 400 socketed axes were found in a small area in the peat bog, it was suggested that their distribution in the field is significant, perhaps relating to a path crossing the bog¹⁴⁰, and as such to the trespassing of a distinctive zone.

¹³⁶ Hill, Wileman 2002, 96.

¹³⁷ Brück 1995, 260.

¹³⁸ Fontijn 2002, 34.

¹³⁹ Hines 1989, 195-196.

¹⁴⁰ Harding 2000, 367.

Frontiers between different traditions of land and resource exploitation also tend to be particularly fraught – the boundaries between the ranges of nomadic pastoralists and settled farmers, for example, or between developed and primitive social and economic systems, or hunter-gatherer and agricultural communities. Frontiers create their own cultural and social conditions, sometimes quite contradictory. The frontier community breeds the 'frontier mentality'. Separated from the cultural core of their people, sometimes by very great distances, frontier societies can be either freer in structure, with less emphasis on class or caste status, law or custom, than their cores, or more narrow and traditional, exclusive, suspicious, touchy and defensive. They may be inclined to interact with neighbouring groups, to share resources, offer support in time of crisis, accept and adapt foreign customs and practices as part of their own social identity, learn from other peoples and even intermarry. Conversely, they may make very clear distinctions about their neighbours, restrict contact, avoid any form of social interaction, combine into defensive militia-style groups, and regard their neighbours as rivals to be distrusted¹⁴¹.

At Flag Fen, Britain, a series of pile-driven post alignments 1 km long was found, dated between approximately 1280-924 B.C.. In the water were deposited grinding stones, pots, and hundreds of bronze artefacts (chisels, bracelets, swords, spears, axes, a pair of shears still in its wooden box etc.)¹⁴². One of the interpretations for this post alignment was that it represented a boundary between the fen to the north, which at this stage of prehistory was becoming significantly wetter, and the surrounding dry land regions whose inhabitants may suddenly have found their land under pressure from incursions by fen-dwellers in search for drier pastures for their flocks¹⁴³.

The use of land. The previous example draws attention on the fact that sometimes the deposition of metal objects can be put in connection to the land, the maps showing concentrations in areas with a certain type of soil, or at the boundary between two areas with different qualities of land.

There are observations which suggest that the consumption of fine metalwork was to some extent related to the potential of different groups to produce an agricultural surplus or other commodities¹⁴⁴. In Denmark, since the metal makes its first appearance, around 1700 B.C., large quantities of bronze are placed in graves and deposits. While the graves' analysis indicates a considerable degree of social differentiation, the quantity of deposited metal shows a correlation with the agricultural productivity of those areas where the graves and deposits are found. It looks like there is a clear connection between control over land resources and exchange goods¹⁴⁵. The observation that there is a direct relationship between the weight of metal in both deposits and graves and the agricultural potential of different regions was further refined by the demonstration of the fact that in this area bronzes circulated for various lengths of time before their deposition. The length of that period was apparently determined by different farming practices. It seems that in the Bronze Age the intensity of deposition was

¹⁴¹ Hill, Wileman 2002, 96-97.

¹⁴² Parker Pearson 2005, 109.

¹⁴³ Brück 1995, 260.

¹⁴⁴ Bradley 1982, 117.

¹⁴⁵ Champion *et alii* 1984, 218.

controlled by two factors: the ability to produce a surplus from the land of any one area, and, related to this, the ability to obtain supplies of fresh metal by exchange¹⁴⁶.

Similar observations were made for other areas in Western Europe. In the Wales during the EBA the majority of the metal finds have been recorded in locations associated with boulder clay rather than sand and gravel deposits. They could mark areas of contrasting land use, rather than recording the location of the settlement sites of the time. These locations are less suitable for arable cultivation and more suited to pastoralism. Also an important number of objects come from higher ground, with very different geology (limestone, sandstone, mudstone)¹⁴⁷.

Another example of this relationship between agricultural production and the ability to deposit elaborate metalwork could be represented by Lincolnshire during MBA. In contrast to the distribution of earlier grave goods, now a significant correlation between the location of weapon finds and access to the better soils can be noticed. This pattern does not extend to finds of ordinary tools. In the LBA the emphasis shifts again towards the rivers and their hinterland. There is a similar contrast between the deposition of metalwork in southern England during EBA and MBA. The areas in which Wessex 2 daggers have been found are generally less productive than the parts where MBA rapiers are known. At the same time, the deposition of these types changed from graves to rivers¹⁴⁸.

During the Late Urnfield period in Britain, it is clear from the distribution of the types of gold ornaments that they were worn by people that lived in areas of good agricultural land which would have sustained well-off farming families as is confirmed by the evidence from the homesteads. Kent and Sussex appear to have been particularly wealthy and the rich lands would have represented a major factor¹⁴⁹.

The aspect of local traditions. In Bronze Age Europe the character of the different deposits seems to have been influenced by the places in which they were made. There is no doubt that in many regions particular kinds of locations were treated in special ways. The problem is that these conventions arose as a result of local traditions and were not uniform over large areas, also changing over time¹⁵⁰. A lot of cases could be discussed in connection to this aspect of deposition, for different parts of Europe and also for different periods of time, that show the different ways people adopted in treating the metal objects.

A very good example seems to be that of two areas from Scotland, Aberdeenshire and Argyllshire, likely to have been linked through the exchange of metalwork during the EBA, but despite this fact they present a visible distinction in the treatment of metal. In Argyllshire, the production of metal is memorialized in stone, while in Aberdeenshire this is actively made, circulated and then deposited in significant places. This situation comes together with other distinctive features. In Aberdeenshire the funerary sites are dispersed, hidden, with the grave goods consisting almost exclusively in beakers and conventionally deposited; the rock art is restricted to monuments and immediate environs; the metalworking is known from moulds and deposits. In Argyllshire the cemeteries consist in prominent cairns, with both beakers and food

¹⁴⁶ Bradley 1982, 117.

¹⁴⁷ Halstead 2005, 25-27.

¹⁴⁸ Bradley 1982, 117.

¹⁴⁹ Eogan 1994, 92.

¹⁵⁰ Bradley 2000, 51.

vessels deposited, in a far less conventional manner; the rock art is found on monuments and on the periphery of ceremonial landscapes; the metalworking is known only as rock art motifs¹⁵¹. In fact, such situations should draw more attention on the common aspects shared by the rock art and the deposits. Until relatively recently, the analysis of metal objects showed little awareness of the true potential of this subject matter. The available material was organized according to its associations in the closed groups known as hoards, but too many scholars were uninterested in the reasons why these collections were formed or the places where that happened. The images found in rock art are rather like those deposits: they contain a particular group of signs brought together in a particular place. From this point of view it would be profitable to think of metalwork deposits in terms of the relationship between a prescribed selection of objects and an appropriate point in the landscape. The contents of prehistoric rock art describe a similar kind of relationship, and the two act together to establish the significance of that location¹⁵².

Also for the later parts of the Bronze Age there are cases when the difference in the depositional practice could be linked with such local traditions. Such a situation was noticed long ago in connection to the difference of treatment in the deposition of the bronze helmets. The patterns can be separated by a line from the Baltic Sea to the Adriatic and northern Italy, which is separating a western area from an eastern area, with a Mediterranean area to the south. For the western area almost all the helmets come from bogs and rivers, very rarely from dry land deposits and none from graves. In the eastern area helmets or fragments of helmets come from dry land deposits, with only two river finds and two very late ones from graves. For the Mediterranean world, the helmet accompanies its owner in the grave (Greece), or as a replica made of clay or bronze instead of the original (Italy)¹⁵³. Of course, here the patterns of deposition shown by helmets should be put in connection with the way other categories of objects were treated in the given areas.

A very interesting analysis was conducted on two areas in Central Germany for the Umfield period. The main contexts bring out such sharp divisions between the types of objects that the deposits seem to be interdependent. Material in fact may have entered the archaeological record in a highly structured manner, so that many of these separate deposits may be variants of one underlying pattern. The areas taken into consideration are Middle and South Hesse and North Württemberg, and the analyzed categories are settlements, graves, deposits, single finds and wet finds. There were three degrees of occurrence taken into account, frequent, regular and absence of the respective type in the mentioned context. As already mentioned, the results emphasize the existence of clear differences in context and mutual exclusions of objects inside each of the two areas, as well as similarities but also differences in the depositional patterns between the two areas. For Middle and South Hesse, in *settlements* pins and knives are most frequent, followed by bracelets; in *graves* pins (frequent occurrence), arrowheads, bracelets, razors, knives (regular occurrence); in *deposits* sickles and axes (frequent occurrence), and regularly bracelets; as *single finds* axes are most frequent, followed by pins and spearheads; as *wet finds* pins and swords are frequent, and axes present regular occurrence. For North Württemberg, in *settlements* pins are frequently present; in *graves* pins

¹⁵¹ Jones 2003, 81.

¹⁵² Bradley 2000, 39.

¹⁵³ Hencken 1971, 7.

and bracelets are frequent, while razors and knives are regular; in *deposits* sickles are frequent and axes are regular; as *single finds* axes are frequent, while pins, bracelets, swords, knives, spearheads are regular; as *wet finds* swords are most frequent, followed by pins, axes and spearheads¹⁵⁴.

A similar study of deposition in Urnfield Upper Austria examined the relative occurrence of different object types in rivers, deposits, graves and as isolated finds, paying special attention to swords. Not only were swords much more likely to end up in rivers or wet places than anywhere else in this area (61% of the total), they differed in this respect from other categories of metalwork, especially sickles (mainly in deposits), pins, arrowheads and knives (mainly in graves), and axes and spearheads (mainly isolated finds). The situation in Bavaria with swords is rather similar. Although there are more swords in graves there, still many are to be found in rivers. By contrast, in other areas of Austria swords do not mainly come from rivers, and in Lower Austria and the Tyrol grave finds predominate¹⁵⁵.

The deposits and other structures. A number of factors may have influenced the recorded distribution of the metal objects in the landscape. That is why it is important to stress the fact that the present known distribution is not necessarily fully representative of the pattern of metalwork deposition. The recovery and recording of artefacts could introduce bias into distribution maps. Also the land-use could potentially affect the rate of recovery, with land that is actively disturbed perhaps more likely to result in the more frequent discovery of objects. On another hand, the processes in prehistory will also have affected the distribution of metalwork: from its point of production an object may have undergone a number of exchanges during its life cycle. The final deposition of an object therefore should be seen as the culmination of a process of displacement¹⁵⁶. Despite these difficulties, it still could prove really helpful to study the patterns of deposition in connection to other prehistoric structures like settlements and necropolises.

The deposits and the settlements. The possibility of intentional deposition could suggest, together with the processes of exchange and displacement in prehistory, that an object's location does not necessarily reflect any utilitarian sphere in which it may have existed during its life cycle. This means that there might be no relationship between the distribution of recorded objects and nodes of domestic activity. Yet even if a mutually exclusive relationship can be shown to exist between the location of the known settlements and the distribution of metal objects, it may infer areas of contrasting activity in the landscape, and all such activity has to be related to a pattern of settlement ultimately¹⁵⁷. In other words, the objects were deposited by people, and these people were coming from somewhere. No matter what pattern is characteristic in a certain area, the reference point would have been always the centre of those people's life and activity: the settlement.

Different patterns of deposition seem to be present in the archaeological record even starting with the Neolithic and Copper Age. For the Balkan area, it is possible to distinguish three types of contexts in which objects have been deposited: houses, settlements and outside the settlement. House contexts require the location of the deposit to be unambiguously within a

¹⁵⁴ Bradley 1982, 111-112.

¹⁵⁵ Harding 2000, 362.

¹⁵⁶ Halstead 2005, 8.

¹⁵⁷ Halstead 2005, 9.

domestic structure. Settlement contexts betoken deposition inside settlement, in a pit or un-built space, but not localized within a structure. Contexts outside the settlement can vary from a location close to an occupation site to finds remote from coeval settlement. Although many deposits are found in well-populated areas, there is a tendency for the selection of liminal or remote locations for extra-mural hoards. The use of these three types of contexts enables an analysis which can differentiate gradations of exterior and interior relations between the depositor and the settlement. Although there are claims that Neolithic deposits are generally found in houses whereas Copper Age deposits are found in special places outside the settlement, the contextual evidence rather indicates that a similar proportion of both Neolithic and Copper Age deposits has extra-mural locations¹⁵⁸. With regard to the association between different types of objects and context during Copper Age in this area, there seems to be a tendency for the presence of deposits with non-metal and copper ornaments in settlements and houses, while deposits with gold ornaments and copper and stone tools are deposited outside the settlement more frequently¹⁵⁹.

These remote areas preferred for some categories of deposits were put in connection to the limits of the controlled territory and especially with the activities of men. The archaeological research revealed for instance that during the Copper Age in northern Italy the agriculture based on cereals and herding became usual practices, but a strong element of continuity with the former period still existed in the form of movement patterns with seasonal character into the mountain areas. There are good reasons to consider that groups of people from the valleys climbed in order to exploit the area (the periodical use of rock shelters, the presence of ritual sites with statues, the growing number of objects). Hunting must have been still important and had a prestige role; other activities would have been transhumance, plant-gathering, exploiting the stone and metal sources, placing of steles at altitudes of 800-900 meters (believed to be the material result of ceremonial activities including the seasonal meeting with ancestral spirits)¹⁶⁰.

A series of finds in the Balkan area could be seen in a similar light, as they represent signs of human activity at the boundaries of the territory controlled by communities. Most interesting are the depositions of one or two copper axe-adzes high in the Carpathians, situation which presents a contextual problem. While it is not inconceivable that single broken axes are the result of the activity of men making upland clearings for their flocks, it is less likely that fragments of such a high-status, valuable material would have been left indiscriminately in the wildwood. As such, it is more probable that these objects represent the result of an act of deposition, which places the emphasis on the spatial location out there, far from the settlement, and the links between the creators of the deposits, their travels and the landscape in which they dwell. In short, just as carved stones in Atlantic Europe are used to domesticate the wider landscape, so it is proposed that extra-mural deposits, especially those in remote sites, link those places to the settlement through the associations of the trader and the metallurgist rather than those of the villager. In periods before the seasonal (re-)settlement of the upland zone, deposits denoted the otherwise invisible links in a social network of pathways and narratives fundamental to the Copper Age people¹⁶¹.

¹⁵⁸ Chapman 2000, 112-113.

¹⁵⁹ Chapman 2000, 114-115.

¹⁶⁰ Keates 2002, 110-111.

¹⁶¹ Chapman 2000, 118.

The contrasts between settlement and extra-mural deposits are reinforced by the selection of types. In the Neolithic, there is a sharp difference between the location of types of objects in deposits: beads and rings occur inside the house, axes, bracelets and blades in extra-mural locations. For the Copper Age it is extremely interesting to notice that not even one type of copper ornaments is found in all three deposition contexts. For example, sub-types of bracelets are found in different contexts, with solid bracelets only in houses and settlements, twisted-wire bracelets only in settlements and spiral-wire bracelets only in extra-mural deposits. The same is true of sub-types of ornaments based upon spiral motifs, with spiral-headed pins confined to houses and settlements, and spirals, double-spiral appliqués and spiral rolls found in extra-mural locations. The stylized figural representations in sheet copper or copper wire are also confined to house and settlement deposits, as are beads, discs, tubes and sheet copper pendants. This kind of variability is strikingly similar to the local ways of using material culture shared across a region which can be found in the mortuary domain. A similar pattern of contextual differentiation occurs with copper tools. The only three types to occur in all three deposition contexts are copper tools – awls, flat axes and hammer-axes. No other types occurs in house deposits. Several types, notably chisels, axe-adzes and daggers, are found in both settlement and extra-mural deposits but both the later types of axe – the Banyabik and cruciform axes – only occur in extra-mural deposits, as does also the miniature axe. This situation is considered as indicating a differential ‘domestication’ of copper as an exotic material, with those types placed in the home more closely integrated into daily living than the types deposited at a distance¹⁶².

A detailed study conducted for Bronze Age Wales shows how the patterns of distribution in connection to the settlements change over time. During the EBA the deposits mark areas of contrasting land use, rather than recording the location of the settlement sites of the period. While the distribution seems rather ambiguous in terms of any geological preference, no metalwork was found in association with the EBA settlements recorded so far in the area. As a result, there is a strong possibility that the EBA metal objects were deposited in locations that were intentionally removed from the domestic, and also from the agricultural, sphere¹⁶³. During the MBA in the same area, single finds as well as deposits come from contexts close to, but above, river valleys and can be compared with the location of the recorded settlements. It can be argued that metalwork could be deposited in similar contexts to the known location of settlement sites. The situation also suggests a relationship between deposits and rivers: this may reflect activity close to water sources at higher altitudes, as well as the intentional deposition of metalwork away from more permanently settled locations. Also during this period a number of metal finds (weapons and ornaments) appear to have been deposited in wet locations, and some were deliberately broken. During the LBA, the deposits of weapons are frequently associated with enclosures or hilltop sites, while the deposits of tools show less of an association with this type of sites¹⁶⁴.

The association of deposits with a special category of sites like the hill forts is also known from other parts of Europe, such a correlation being taken into consideration for the

¹⁶² Chapman 2000, 119.

¹⁶³ Halstead 2005, 25-27.

¹⁶⁴ Halstead 2005, 43-44.

Lausitz culture¹⁶⁵. A connection has been suggested between deposits and hill fort construction in the Urnfield period in southern Germany, as at the Bleibeskopf in the Taunus, or the Bullenheimer Berg in northern Bavaria¹⁶⁶. In other areas such connections are not so clear. In former Czechoslovakia, for example, the best evidence for weaponry depositions is in periods without much sign of defensive architecture and both seem to alternate through time where one might have expected them to converge¹⁶⁷.

With regard to the deposition of objects inside the settlement, or even inside dwelling structures, there are some better documented examples also for the Bronze Age, not only for the previous periods.

At the LBA settlement from Cladh Hallan, Hebrides Islands, between other interesting features, the deposition of some metal artefacts was also noticed. The objects (chisels, bracelet), broken, had been purposely placed on the floors – in the NW quadrants – of the abandoned houses, and as such they were interpreted as ‘closing’ deposits¹⁶⁸.

For Switzerland, the LBA pile dwelling sites offered great quantities of bronze objects, a lot more than the contemporary settlements from dry land. There are reasons to believe that this accumulation of bronzes is not simply the result of loosing things or catastrophic floods. In this case, it is considered as very possible to have intentional depositions. For instance, the typological, statistical and comparative analysis of the finds at the village of Auvernier-Nord permitted the division of most of the finds in two categories: ‘grouped deposits’, containing mainly axes, sickles and bracelets; ‘dispersed finds’, consisting in pins, knives and spearheads. As the typological composition of the second category is very similar to that coming from lakes and rivers, the question can be asked if there is also a similarity in function between the two situations. Similar examples are known from other sites in the area. For the EBA a deposit of axes is known from the pile dwelling site of Arbon-Bleiche. Probably a similar situation is that from the site of Morges-les Roseaux, where 18-19 axes were found together. The settlement from Savognin-Padnal gave a deposit dated to MBA/LBA, containing 140 amber beads, as well as a mixed deposit. For the LBA, deposits are known from various littoral sites, usually being composed of discs, axes, sickles and annular ornaments. It is not easy to interpret this situation: the reasons proposed for finding these deposits inside settlements range from hiding to stocking. The ethnography offers parallels, with certain cultic activities practiced inside settlements, in which case a parallel interpretation could be that these deposits represented votive offerings¹⁶⁹.

¹⁶⁵ Harding, Ostoja-Zagorski 1993, 175.

¹⁶⁶ Harding 2000, 355.

¹⁶⁷ Bradley 1982, 117.

¹⁶⁸ Parker Pearson 2005, 109.

¹⁶⁹ Hochuli, Niffeler, Rychner 1998, 335.

The deposits and the necropolises. It has been quite a while since archaeologists began to notice that the shifting patterns of deposition seem to be most clearly related to changes in mortuary practice¹⁷⁰. However, the treatment of different types of objects and the decision to place them in one or the other of the two contexts seems, like in the case of the relation deposit-settlement, to be rather the result of local traditions, a whole range of situations being up to present known from different parts of Europe. A series of factors seems to have been at work here and some decisions were clearly taken, ending with the presence in the same area of specific types of graves and specific types of deposits or their mutual exclusion. As a result, such an observation needs to be placed in a context, because this relation between deposits and necropolises vary greatly in space and time, as a result being necessary for the analysis to be conducted inside a chronological as well as a spatial frame.

The variation in space of the distributional patterns could be observed in some areas as early as the beginning of the Bronze Age and it is present at various levels.

In some cases, when graves and deposits are found within the same areas the differences in content between the two contexts can be quite visible. For EBA Denmark, those graves from the area of main distribution of deposits may have an unusually low representation of bronze and gold items as grave goods. Similarly, the more varied the contents of the graves within each region, the less such deposits would be used¹⁷¹. However, this does not exclude the fact that certain types of objects, like for example weapons, are common in both graves and deposits¹⁷². For Bavaria, the problem of individual identity in the Bell Beaker culture and the EBA was discussed connecting the mortuary practice to the depositional activity in this area, because a pattern can be observed in the mortuary practice which includes between other characteristics a decrease in individual expression in the graves, which could be tentatively put in connection with the great number of bronze deposits present in the area at that time¹⁷³. There are more than 170 deposits compared to 59 burials. This indicates that deposition would be conducted as frequently as mortuary practice, or maybe more often. The quantity of bronze consumed in this process surpasses that used in mortuary practice. The individuals seem to express more concern about deposition at the individual or communal level rather than about body ornamentation of the dead, situation which shows a shift in the individual expression. Still, it is not clear whether deposition was replacing the mortuary practice entirely in terms of importance in social ritual or social category¹⁷⁴.

Although there is usually not sufficient evidence to compare the geographical relations of graves and single finds, some areas provided a certain degree of information. It was noticed for example that in those parts of the Rhineland where data are readily available there is little overlap between the kinds of material in these two categories¹⁷⁵. Some other areas equally show mutually exclusive patterns for the deposition of specific types of objects. The EBA Welsh axes are not generally associated with burials, being placed in deposits or as single finds¹⁷⁶. A similar pattern is known for the same period in Britain, with daggers frequently

¹⁷⁰ Bradley 1982, 117.

¹⁷¹ Bradley 1982, 114-115.

¹⁷² Randsborg 1999, 198.

¹⁷³ Kim 2005, 125.

¹⁷⁴ Kim 2005, 128.

¹⁷⁵ Bradley 1982, 114.

¹⁷⁶ Halstead 2005, 29.

found in graves, while the axes only very rarely, being usually single finds or parts of deposits¹⁷⁷. The LBA swords in Schleswig Holstein and Lower Saxony are found mainly in graves, and those in Pomerania, West Prussia and Poland in deposits¹⁷⁸. There may have been a number of prohibitions in different areas on burying swords with dead warriors, ranging from sheer pragmatism (the desire to retain them for further use) to beliefs involving magical powers, in which burial of a sword with a warrior would be profane or otherwise undesirable¹⁷⁹.

As a whole, it seems that during the Urnfield period the metalwork is invested in what could be interpreted as ritual deposits rather than burials¹⁸⁰, and for the Lausitz culture it is quite clear that the necropolises do not contain the standard bronze items known from the deposits of the Urnfield period¹⁸¹.

The relative distributions of graves and river finds have been also observed, in particular the occurrence of river metalwork in areas with no burial rite, like it would be the case for both Britain and Ireland. However, it should be emphasized that it is hard to document such exclusive distributions on a smaller scale, since the main patterns of avoidance in other parts of Europe seem to be between river finds and barrow burials, rather than burial sites of any kind¹⁸². In North Württemberg only the cremations in urns are found in the area with river finds, whilst the distribution of more elaborate graves avoids this region completely. Similarly in the Oberpfalz both deposits and river finds have a similar distribution to flat graves, but do not occur in the same areas as barrow burials¹⁸³.

Sometimes the deposits are found in direct connection to the necropolises, as it seems to be the case for the EBA Bavaria, where at Straubing Ziegelei Jungmeier a deposit with 61 ring bar ingots was found in connection with the cemetery¹⁸⁴, or with a deposit of more than 100 'casting cakes' and fragments found in a Hallstatt A cemetery near Degerndorf¹⁸⁵.

The variation in time of the patterns of distribution of metal types between necropolises and deposits was also taken into discussion for different areas.

The finds of swords in Bavaria between Reinecke C/D and Ha B3 seem to show successive periods in which they were used in graves and deposits, and a steadily diminishing number of river finds. But when the grave and deposit finds are combined, the number of swords buried on dry land almost precisely matches the changing number in the rivers. Similarly, the ratio of swords to gold work in the Danish Bronze Age remained unaltered in different regions, despite a gradual shift from the provision of grave goods to deposits¹⁸⁶.

More detailed analyses conducted for southern Scandinavia show that during the EBA, weapons are common in both graves and deposits. In the graves, usually in prominent burial mounds, differences in personal equipment, including exotic bronze and gold, reflect

¹⁷⁷ Parker Pearson 2005, 100.

¹⁷⁸ Bradley 1982, 113.

¹⁷⁹ Harding 1999, 169.

¹⁸⁰ Gillis, Olausson, Vandkilde 2004, 98.

¹⁸¹ Harding, Ostojca-Zagorski 1993, 165.

¹⁸² Bradley 1982, 113-114.

¹⁸³ Bradley 1982, 114-115.

¹⁸⁴ Kim 2005, 127.

¹⁸⁵ Shennan 1995, 264.

¹⁸⁶ Bradley 1982, 114-115.

competition among the elite. Towards the close of the EBA, cremation gradually became the dominant rite, the change being produced without affecting the amount of grave goods. After 1200 B.C., however, the aristocratic use of mounds and burial goods as a means of competition quickly disappeared. Instead, rich depositions (interpreted as sacrifices) of female jewelry, some weapons (including separate finds of shields and helmets), huge cult axes, bronze vessels, gold cups, gold rings and lurs dominated. This leads into the sequence of EIA sacrifices, equally divided into separate categories, among which Hjortspring is to be placed. By the LBA (around and after 1000 B.C.) sanctuaries and sacrifices had taken over from graves as the prime medium of investment, and no doubt served as important social foci as well¹⁸⁷.

It was also proposed for the area of the Lower Rhine Basin in the Urnfield period that social rank differences may have been expressed in other ways than in graves, and in this respect significant leads are provided by the bronze deposits and particularly the many bronze prestige objects found in watery contexts. They indicate that more complex social structures than the grave evidence (and also the settlement evidence) would suggest must be allowed for the communities from that area¹⁸⁸.

It was argued that the distribution of different deposits suggests that metal finds often supplemented, or even substituted for, the burials of one section of society. In some parts of the Rhineland it appears that they took on the role of the more elaborated graves, and in Britain it is possible that river finds supplemented the rather meager grave goods found in Deverel-Rimbury cemeteries. The same seems to apply to LBA deposits in Denmark. The most important aspects of such changes is the separation of this material from the grave. Deposits, river finds or 'votive finds' are considered as showing the clearest continuity with the content and structure of grave goods, and changes of this kind can occur both through time and between neighbouring areas; sometimes they can even involve the interplay of several different forms of deposit. It was proposed that all these can be regarded as local variations of a rather more general pattern which emphasizes the deposition of metalwork, probably along with other less durable commodities, and the substitution of deposits and river finds for the offerings previously left with the dead¹⁸⁹. The deposition of weapons during the British LBA in watery locations was seen long time as the residue of a funerary ritual, some sort of "river burial" of high status. A study on the human skulls found in the river Thames in the same dragging campaigns like the weapons and in the same locations was conducted with some interesting results. It was noticed that, interestingly enough, other body parts are missing, although animal bones are present. Approximately 600 skulls were registered and almost 300 survived: they present a restricted age group (no young ones) and about 60% of them are male. Two thirds were radiocarbon dated to LBA. It should be mentioned that no mandibles were recovered, so it can be safely stated that they ended in the river as skulls, not heads. Connecting these observations with the fact that in the settlements of that time small quantities of disarticulated human bones were found, the possibility is discussed that some selected individuals received a preliminary treatment in the domestic sphere, before being placed in the river, together with their weapons. Together with the connection between males and weapons, the attention is drawn on the problem of the ornaments, interpreted as feminine equipment because the same

¹⁸⁷ Randsborg 1999, 198-199.

¹⁸⁸ Roymans 1991, 19.

¹⁸⁹ Bradley 1982, 118.

types were found on the mainland associated with female graves. In the areas where the weapons changed their context from burials to water locations, the ornaments are found normally on dry land. Often they come in sets, suggesting individual equipment. In Britain the ornaments do not accompany the deceased in graves, but were found with small quantities of unburned bones. It seems possible that high quality bronze objects were deposited with defleshed human bones¹⁹⁰.

Dry land/wetland. One interesting aspect of the depositional pattern is the variation of context. Different kinds of deposits might be made in different places. The most basic distinction emphasized by the archaeologists was undoubtedly that between wet deposits and dry land deposits. This dichotomy was put in connection with the variation in content of the deposits, while it was noticed that there is a frequent association on one hand between deposits of weapons and wetland and on another hand between deposits of tools and dry land. Finds of ornaments show a less consistent pattern, and in different regions they tend to occur in either of these contexts. The important point is that in any particular area they exhibit a clear preference for only one of these locations¹⁹¹.

The difference in context had as result a difference in view regarding the reasons for the act of deposition. Placing objects in wet and non-retrievable contexts has been interpreted either in terms of votive offerings intended to placate supernatural powers, or as an act of deliberate consumption designed to enhance prestige¹⁹², while the deposition on dry land was rather seen as utilitarian in nature, based on economic factors. The association between wet places and religious practices, including the deposition of objects, is largely accepted as 'gifts to the gods', due to their special character and /or the lavishness of the many objects, their accumulation over long periods of time and the implication of the fact that they were deposited in order to never be retrieved¹⁹³.

An alternative approach should be constructed starting from the selective character of the depositional practice, which could very well manifest itself also in the choice of context, and even more, in the choice of desired associations between special types of objects and special locations. It is quite easy to be noticed that special patterns of deposition underlie also this aspect of the phenomenon. While in different areas there seem to be clear rules determining what should be placed where, it is also evident that the types of objects considered appropriate for each of two contexts vary from one region to another.

In many areas the geographical relationship of deposits on dry land and river finds is rather straightforward. During the LBA, the southern English and northern French show a mutually exclusive pattern, the distribution of swords, chapes and ferrules being divided between areas with deposits and areas with river finds. In the case of some types of LBA swords, this applies on both sides of the English Channel, but with other types, such as tubular ferrules, deposits are found in each area, while the river finds are mainly from the Thames. There is also the well known contrast between the Bronze Age swords in English rivers and those in Scottish deposits. In other areas deposits and river finds may have largely exclusive

¹⁹⁰ Bradley 1995, vii-viii.

¹⁹¹ Bradley 2000, 53.

¹⁹² Gillis, Olausson, Vandkilde 2004, 98; Halstead 2005, 9.

¹⁹³ Bridgford 1997, 108.

distributions. Examples include the Saarland and the Mosel in Ha A and B and during the same period the North Württemberg¹⁹⁴.

Anyway, an important observation should be made here: thanks to more detailed research conducted in the last years it was easy to notice that the reality is much more complex than it used to appear because of the inherent bias present in the archaeological record especially with regard to the wet finds.

Unfortunately, a lot of information has been lost during time because in many parts of Europe, until recently, little attention was paid by archaeologists to the find material dredged up from rivers. It was often referred to as eroded finds without context, and therefore of little scientific value. The result of this attitude is that much undocumented material has been lost. The change of vision during the last several decades brought a systematic interest in metal finds from river contexts dating from different periods. These contexts are often surprisingly rich in such finds, many of which are virtually unknown in settlements and necropolises. However, the spectrum of finds from rivers is broader than only metal finds, and often includes pottery, and also animal and human bones¹⁹⁵. So, for the interpretation of the local concentrations of metalwork from rivers, it is important to keep in mind that the bronzes known at present only make up a fraction of the find complexes originally present in the rivers, and that they give a distorted view of the original composition of these complexes. Larger objects such as swords are probably over-represented, and smaller objects underrepresented, especially if they are finds from modern dredging works like those at Roermond, Nijmegen/Millingen and Wesel, Netherlands. In contrast with such situations, the find complex from the bed of the Lesse in the cave of Han-sur-Lesse shows a more representative picture of the original size and composition of a local concentration of river finds. The difference consists in the fact that this find complex was not recovered during large scale dredging activities, but was brought together by means of small scale archaeological investigation under favorable circumstances. Among the finds there are more than 200 bronze needles and many knives, axes, swords and ornaments, including several gold objects. By far the most objects date from the Late Bronze Age, and within this period the later Urnfield period is best represented; finds from the Early Iron Age seem to be lacking. The wealth of smaller metal objects, which are largely lost in modern dredging operations, is remarkable¹⁹⁶, and it should serve as a warning.

Another aspect which very often was not taken into consideration is the long tradition that can be observed in the practice of deposition in wet places. For example, the river finds from the Meuse date from the Paleolithic up to and including the Middle Ages. This shows that we are dealing with a complex situation and with many contexts¹⁹⁷. Another pattern at work seems to be that throughout the Neolithic and the Bronze Age a certain proportion of the population were dumped in rivers, situation better observed and discussed for the British Isles¹⁹⁸.

It is quite possible that the real image of this phenomenon was blurred by the accent put in the archaeological literature on the deposition of weapons, and especially swords, in wet places. A lot of examples are known from the archaeological record all over Europe, and some of them are quite spectacular. The deposition of swords and other bronzes in rivers appears for instance to be a

¹⁹⁴ Bradley 1982, 113.

¹⁹⁵ ter Schegget 1999, 202.

¹⁹⁶ Roymans 1991, 25.

¹⁹⁷ ter Schegget 1999, 208.

¹⁹⁸ Parker Pearson 2005, 42.

wide spread phenomenon in the Late Bronze Age in large parts of Central, Atlantic and Northern Europe. It is a tradition which starts to develop in the Early Bronze Age, reaches a peak in the Late Bronze Age, and then stops or sharply declines in the Early Iron Age¹⁹⁹.

For north-western Europe, for instance, many shields were deposited in wet locations, like is the find from Fröslunda, central Sweden. Here fourteen bronze shields, whole or fragmentary, were recovered. They had been deposited in wet ground, or shallow water, in what was at the time a bay on the edge of the lake, and their number, variety, disposition and condition (at least some were apparently perfect when deposited) indicate that they were all deposited at one time, and intentionally. The shields are of the so-called Herzsprung type, and date typologically to the LBA. The Herzsprung and other shield types are distributed across much of Europe: where actual finds do not occur, depictions may do (as, for instance, with stelae in Iberia). Many group finds come from wet places, particularly in Ireland and Britain. In the former, the shields may be of leather or wood as well as bronze²⁰⁰.

Also almost all the helmets are deposited in wet locations during the Late Bronze Age in western Europe, coming from bogs and rivers, only very rarely from dry land deposits and none from graves²⁰¹.

Some truly famous archaeological finds enter the category of weapons deposition in wet places, one of them being the Iron Age huge military sacrifice from a tiny bog at Hjørtspring, on the island of Als (off south-eastern Jutland) in Denmark. It contains a magnificent boat or huge canoe with room for some twenty-two paddlers-cum-warriors, plus the weaponry and other equipment for a small fighting force substantially larger than the crew of the boat²⁰².

Many swords were recovered from wetland on a huge area from the British Isles to the Danube²⁰³. However, underneath this large cover a lot of local traditions seem to be at work, as it is proved by several more complete researches.

One of these researches was conducted on the Bronze Age Irish swords, which put the same general problems. Their provenance is often suspect, especially in the case of those found before World War I, and many of them were found during dredging activities. The well-dated contexts are virtually unknown and their dating is mainly based on typological analyses extrapolated from the few deposits with good associations and on comparisons with similar items from Britain and continental Europe²⁰⁴. The deposition of the swords presents problems regarding the context, because only large categories are usually mentioned, like 'wet' and 'others'. The number of swords found in deposits is rather low (less than 40), while the majority of them come from bogs. What is interesting in the case of the Irish swords is that a significant relation could be established between context and preservation degree. It was noticed that there are numbers higher than expected for the complete or almost complete swords coming from wet contexts, this situation being especially visible for swords coming from rivers. Over 70% of the swords recovered from rivers show very few signs of damage on the cutting-edges. Also the proportion of swords with ricasso in wet contexts is rather low, while the proportion of those without ricasso is quite high. These differences seem to indicate

¹⁹⁹ Roymans 1991, 24.

²⁰⁰ Harding 1999, 157.

²⁰¹ Hencken 1971, 7.

²⁰² Randsborg 1999, 192-193.

²⁰³ Harding 1999, 169.

²⁰⁴ Bridgford 1997, 95-96.

at least a tendency for the swords to have different histories of use before deposition. If the use was important, we could expect the level of damage to show some correlations with the context, and this is the case: a significant proportion of wetland swords are complete or almost complete and show minimal signs or no signs of damage. There can be noticed a low presence of swords from Class 4 and 6 in wet contexts, significant from the statistical point of view. This can have chronological reasons, but it could be, at least partially, connected to their clearly utilitarian design. In general, it seems that the swords deposited in wet places were less used, and it is a higher probability to look 'different' (like in the case of Class 5). For these, the tendency is to be over medium quality, but with less attention for possible mistakes in design, manufacture or finish, that would have affected the use in battle but not the aspect. This effect is even easier to be noticed if we take into account only the deposition in rivers as a demarcation line. The conclusion would be that some swords were especially deposited in rivers and the nature of this deposition was different from that on dry land and, probably, from deposition in other wet places²⁰⁵.

Also the Lower Rhine Basin provided a number of swords large enough for several patterns to be distinguished in their distribution and archaeological context. As far as the latter is concerned, it is interesting that almost all items were found during dredging operations in the valley of large rivers – especially the Rhine, Meuse and Scheldt – and some in peat moors. The scarce occurrence of swords in grave contexts in the Lower Rhine Basin is also in keeping with the general pattern of deposition of swords in Atlantic and Central Europe. In contrast, a phenomenon belonging specifically to the Lower Rhine is the scarce occurrence of weapons in bronze deposits of Late Urnfield date. Both in Britain and Northern France as well as in the Middle Rhine area there is a richer tradition of depositing bronzes on dry land, and these deposits frequently contain swords and other weapons. It seems that in the Lower Rhine Basin the deposition of swords in rivers was the equivalent for the more advanced depositional tradition in other regions. Anyway, it must be kept in mind that the distribution pattern of bronze swords within the study area could be to a considerable degree determined by regional variation in the intensity of dredging activities, which are the major sword productive economic activity in the Lower Rhine Basin. Other factors also play a part, especially the degree of active interest on the part of archaeologists for metal finds from rivers²⁰⁶.

An example in this sense could be Switzerland, where archaeological research in wet locations brought to the surface very numerous finds, consisting mainly in pins and axes, while the bracelets, ankle-rings and other types of objects are less represented. The rather rare swords known so far come from small rivers or marshes. During the LBA, there are also knives and spearheads. Thus, the range of the represented types is very specific while, in the same time, similar finds are almost unknown during Hallstatt period. This situation is seen as supporting the hypothesis that the objects were voluntarily submerged. Another interesting observation made in some cases is that the deposition of isolated objects took place over a long period of time. In this sense, it was proposed for these locations a role as sanctuary of waters, like it is the case for the deposit or source sanctuary from St. Moritz²⁰⁷.

²⁰⁵ Bridgford 1997, 108-113.

²⁰⁶ Roymans 1991, 24.

²⁰⁷ Hochuli, Niffeler, Rychner 1998, 334.

This interpretation matches the main opinion that the wetland depositions are a reflection of ritual practices. As argument is brought the fact that the large number of metal objects from rivers and their often high prestige value make an alternative interpretation of most objects as eroded grave goods or settlement finds, or objects lost accidentally, highly improbable. Many river finds, including swords, were often deposited in the water whole and in perfect condition. The concentration of river finds point to the existence of more or less fixed locations which were frequently used for ritual depositions over long periods. In the case of Han-sur-Lesse, Netherlands, which is better documented archaeologically, one could even speak of a cult site. This opinion could be sustained by the fact that, apart from an enormous wealth of bronze objects, the bed of the Lesse has also yielded great quantities of sherds of Urnfield pottery which may indicate the importance of ritual feasting on this site²⁰⁸.

An argument to support this connection between wet locations and ritual practices could come from Ireland, where at the site of 'The King's Stables', Co. Armagh, the metallurgical material in the form of clay moulds was deposited in an artificially created wet environment (ritual pool). This suggests the possibility that refractory ceramics used in metalworking might also have been deposited in rivers and bogs. Of course, such a practice would be extremely difficult to identify in the archaeological record and indicators of metalworking activity are, unsurprisingly, absent from the river record in Ireland. It may be of relevance here that the clay mould fragments for casting swords recovered at Bohevny, Co. Fermanagh, were reported as being recovered from under a depth of peat. Such practices could speak of the ritual character of the metallurgical activities²⁰⁹.

As also mentioned above, the deposition in rivers of great numbers of bronze objects, and especially weapons in the Bronze Age Europe, was put in connection also with possible conflicts between neighbouring communities which would have taken place along such rivers, which may well have served as boundaries with fords providing contact points. Thus, rivers may have constituted important routes, on land as well as water. Controlling the rivers would have provided a means of establishing economic supremacy over specific areas. Certain sections of these rivers would have been particularly highly sought after, whether they served as natural boundaries or as essential routes. This competition for the control of river routes is considered similar to that which occurred during the time of the Mesolithic hunters. It was also emphasized that it is important not to overlook the part played by symbolism: riverbanks may have been a prime location for holding ceremonies that possibly involved the victorious warriors offering their swords to the divinities of the water²¹⁰.

It is quite clear that the distribution of particular types of objects might change from one location to another over time, and all the river finds cannot be treated in the same way. In the north of Hesse, weapons are associated with the major rivers, but pins were deposited in shallow water. Here the main distinction seems to have been one of access. The weapons may have been dropped from boats, whilst small ornaments could have entered the water from the riverbank. Even within the major rivers, certain places seem to have been specially favoured for making offerings, and the finds of archaeological material are not uniformly distributed. Detailed studies even show that different stretches of these rivers may have been associated with different kinds of deposit.

²⁰⁸ Roymans 1991, 27-28.

²⁰⁹ Ó Faoláin 2004, 117.

²¹⁰ Guilaine, Zammit 2005, 204.

Although the Thames contains one of the highest densities of LBA weaponry in Europe, the main groups of material are found in separate lengths of the river from one period to the next. Moreover, there is a distinctive series of deposits from which metalwork is entirely absent. Instead, there were groups of human and animal bones, principally skulls. Some of these were accompanied by ceramics, and their positions were marked by posts. It seems likely that certain stretches of the river were treated in quite specific ways²¹¹.

A similar image seems to arise from the Lower Rhine Basin. Although the picture of the distribution of river finds in the area is in many ways distorted and incomplete, it may be assumed that local concentrations known up to present do not reflect the normal situation, but are exceptions. In contrast to these local concentrations there are long stretches of large rivers which have been intensively dredged at various times, but which have yielded only a few stray finds from the Urnfield period. In addition, many smaller rivers have been canalized or normalized in the study area, and many bogs lost to peat cutting in the recent past; the general pattern is that bronze objects were frequently found during these activities (especially axes and spearheads), but never in large concentrations, and with surprisingly few swords among them²¹². Again it looks like some stretches of the rivers or some punctual locations received a special treatment.

2. Time

There is no doubt that time is an important factor in humans' life and it is equally possible to have been perceived as such also for the life of the objects during the prehistory. People relate in the first place to these two main coordinates of their lives: space and time. From this point of view it is really important to discuss the depositional phenomenon taking into consideration both these elements. In the case of deposits their relation can be considered under two aspects: on one hand, the change of depositional patterns in time in a given area; on the other hand, the persistence in time of people's interest in performing depositional activities in the same locations.

In discussing the first aspect, it was emphasized one advantage which archaeology has over the ethnographic record – its long time-scale, which allows the observation of the fact that the patterns of deposition clearly change through time and vary from one area to another. This longer perspective shows more clearly that different forms of deposit are interrelated and that three basic principles seem to be at work. First, different forms of deposition may alternate through time within the same region; secondly, different forms of deposition may alternate between different areas; and thirdly, certain categories may sometimes be complementary²¹³.

The change in time inside a specific area could be noticed starting with the transition from Neolithic to Copper Age. For the Balkan area, as an example, the deposition is a relatively rare but important social practice during the Copper Age yet was much more rare in the Neolithic. In the Copper Age, there emerges a dichotomy between on the one hand diverse

²¹¹ Bradley 2000, 53-54.

²¹² Roymans 1991, 25-26.

²¹³ Bradley 1982, 112.

ornament deposits placed in houses and settlements and on the other hand small and simple tool deposits in liminal or remote places²¹⁴.

It is also considered that following temporal patterns can be particularly helpful since they are usually easy to recognize. One of the clearest relationships is, at least in some areas, that between *deposits* and *river finds*. For example, the Paris region during Bronze Age presents an inverse relationship between the number of bronzes found in deposits and those in rivers²¹⁵.

The relationship between *graves* and *river finds* shows a rather similar pattern. In southern England the transition between the earlier and later Bronze Ages is notable for the way in which large weapons change from graves to rivers, a contrast immediately apparent in the find-spots of the Wessex daggers and their chronological successors, the rapiers (while the daggers are usually grave goods, rapiers are single finds or part of deposits). Rather similar patterns can be seen in Hesse, but over a longer time-scale. In other areas grave finds alternate with the contents of deposits. In the Main region the deposition of swords in rivers and flat graves ran in parallel through Ha A and B1. In Ha B3 and C, however, finds from deposits and rivers take over this pattern and are inversely related to those from burial mounds²¹⁶. For Central Europe the information about wagons and horse-gear in the Early Urnfield period (Ha A) comes mainly from graves, and in the Late Urnfield period (Ha B) mainly from deposits²¹⁷.

In Denmark changes in burial practice seem to affect other *deposits*, and ornaments were placed in deposits or 'votive sites' rather than graves once cremation burial was adopted²¹⁸. It appears that the depositions in this area from the transition between the Late Neolithic period and the Bronze Age and from the first period of the Bronze Age almost only yield objects from the male sphere. In the later part of Period I and throughout Period II a marked increase occurs in the deposition of bronze objects, just as a large amount of bronze was buried in the wealthy inhumation graves of the period. In Period III, which extends over the 13th and 12th centuries at least, there was a marked drop in the amount of the deposited bronze. This is exactly the period when discontinuity can clearly be noted in the rest of Europe, in large parts of the Mediterranean area there was a cultural collapse. It was in the course of Period III that the practice of cremation became prevalent in Scandinavia. In Period IV the number of depositions once again rises sharply, reaching a maximum in Period V, only to decrease in Period VI. It was precisely in Period V of the Bronze Age that the very largest number of depositions of valuable bronze objects was made. This is at the same time the period from which we have the largest number of bronze objects from the graves, often bearing complicated religious motifs. This period would also seem to be the period in which supra-regional centres could be recognized most clearly in the archaeological find-material, with remarkable concentrations of finds around particularly rich graves. The depositions culminate around 800 B.C. In fact, three-quarters of all the depositions derive from the LBA, a period when the amount of bronze in the graves was reduced. These graves are no longer inhumation graves but more modest cremation graves. Still, although the amount of bronze in the graves decreased significantly, this should not be taken as an expression of a more even stratification of society. Prestige is now simply expressed in the graves in a more subtle manner. The so-called toilet articles now assume a

²¹⁴ Chapman 2000, 120.

²¹⁵ Bradley 1982, 113.

²¹⁶ Bradley 1982, 112.

²¹⁷ Roymans 1991, 59.

²¹⁸ Bradley 1982, 113.

decisively prestigious significance and status in the religious world is now clearly indicated by these objects, particularly by the razors, on which religious symbols such as ships occur in large numbers. With the arrival of the LBA, it seems that 'ordinary' prestige has been combined with the right to bear religious symbols with mythological motifs²¹⁹.

In the Lower Rhine Basin the examination of the context in which the Hallstatt swords were found shows that 17 specimens come from the rivers or bogs and 44 from cremation graves, while the origin of four items is unknown. A remarkable difference compared with the sword deposition in the Late Bronze Age is the decreased river deposition as against a sharply increased placement in graves. The same trend can be observed in Central Europe, where it is even more distinct. Here, the tradition of depositing swords in rivers is abruptly halted after Ha B2/3, and in the Early Iron Age swords are almost exclusively found in graves. In the Lower Rhine Basin the old custom of river deposition continues for some time, and this trend can be seen in other regions in Atlantic and Northern Europe. The Lower Rhine Basin is, however, the only region in Atlantic Europe where swords are regularly found in graves²²⁰.

In central Germany, the great hoards are largely restricted to a period around 2000 B.C., and then decrease during the Tumulus Culture and cease until a resurgence takes place in the Urnfield period²²¹. For the Tumulus Culture, especially weaponry is rather similar over vast distances, and everywhere there is a marked emphasis on funerary rituals and consumption of wealth in burials, whereas the depositional activity is much less common²²². The increase in the number of deposits during the Urnfield period is associated with a change in their content from similar and very often unused objects to collections of 'scrap', objects usually used, old or fragmented, sometimes placed together with moulds and ingots²²³.

In Switzerland, the habit of depositing bronze objects is well-known for the EBA. It diminishes during the last part of this period, reaching again a peak during MBA and until the end of LBA. It can be observed that the total weight of the deposited objects tends to rise at the limit between MBA and LBA. The deposits containing only one type of objects (for example, only axes) are attested during the entire Bronze Age, while deposits combining miscast objects (axes, sickles, spearheads), objects that still could be used and ingots are characteristic for MBA and LBA. During the latter period, the axes and sickles are frequently found in deposits, while the bracelets and spearheads are a lot rarer²²⁴.

Less can be said about the chronological relationship between *single finds* and other types of deposit, since these are less often treated as units of study. But certain patterns do stand out again. In the Paris region, for example, the number of single finds in each phase is reflected by the number of items deposited in rivers. There is a similar relationship between the number of ornaments in deposits belonging to each period and the number discovered as single finds. In Denmark it was observed an increase in single finds of ornaments as their frequency

²¹⁹ Kaul 1998, 39.

²²⁰ Roymans 1991, 36.

²²¹ Kim 2005, 128.

²²² Gillis, Olausson, Vandkilde 2004, 90.

²²³ Champion *et alii* 1984, 287-289.

²²⁴ Hochuli, Niffeler, Rychner 1998, 332.

in deposits diminishes²²⁵. In the Grisons area, Switzerland, it can be noticed that the deposits are a characteristic of the EBA, while the single finds appear during the entire Bronze Age²²⁶.

In discussing the second aspect – the persistence in time of the use of certain locations – there are unfortunately not so many well-studied examples, for a variety of reasons including in the first place the conditions in which the discoveries have been made. Still, there are some finds which could provide a better understanding of this characteristic of the depositional phenomenon, usually associated with wetland.

In Britain, where numerous LBA wooden structures are associated with wetland deposition, the dendrochronological analyses for some of them gave very interesting results: almost all nine cutting groups of trees taken into consideration coincide with total moon eclipses at midwinter, phenomenon with a regular and predictable cycle, visible at every 18 years²²⁷. If the cutting of trees was connected, as it seems logical, to the moments when depositions were made in the water, it means that the deposition itself was related to very special astronomical events, possibly with great importance for the life of those communities.

Also from Britain is the remarkable site of Flag Fen, on the Fen edge in eastern part of the country. Flag Fen itself was a substantial wooden platform attached to a timber roadway leading across shallow water between two densely occupied areas of dry land. Although the platform was associated with a number of structured deposits, including pottery, metalwork and animal remains, it was the post alignment that was associated with the widest variety of finds. At its eastern limit, it meets the water's edge close to the Bronze Age field ditches at Fengate; indeed, its alignment follows the same axis as those land divisions. The site was in use over a long period. The wooden posts date between about 1350 and 950 B.C., whilst the metalwork suggests that items were being deposited here over 1,200 years. This practice came to an end only during the Iron Age. There were important changes in how the area was used, and it seems as if offerings of weapons were especially important in the earlier part of the sequence, whilst ornaments such as brooches and pins played a more prominent role in later years. The natural environment also changed over that period as the fen basin was invaded by water²²⁸.

For the Lower Rhine Basin, the distribution map of swords shows two clear clusters, the first in the Belgian Scheldt valley, and the second in the Lower Meuse valley and the adjacent Lower Rhine area (in the strict sense). Within these two regional clusters a distribution pattern is revealed: in addition to a more regular distribution of stray bronze finds from waterways, concentrations of finds occur in certain locations. The best-documented find complex is that of the Wesel-‘Aue’ in the German Lower Rhine area. At the spot where the Lippe joins the Rhine 38 bronzes and two stone objects were found in about 1970 and relatively well documented. Some bronzes had been previously been found in the same location in the 1930s, bringing the total to 46 objects. These include fifteen bronze axes, ten spearheads, six swords, a dagger, six discs, six bracelets and two stone hammer axes. The dating of the objects cover the period from the EBA to the beginning of the Iron Age, but the peak lies in the later Urnfield period. A second important complex consists of the river finds from the Waal and the Rhine/Waal fork between Nijmegen and Millingen. Spread over a stretch of c. 10 km some dozens of bronzes were dredged up, including eleven swords. This complex of bronzes, however, is badly

²²⁵ Bradley 1982, 113.

²²⁶ Hochuli, Niffeler, Rychner 1998, 332.

²²⁷ Parker Pearson 2005, 110.

²²⁸ Bradley 2000, 51.

documented and has not been investigated more closely. A third concentration of metalwork is known from the Roermond area. During the past decades some dozens of bronzes have been found here over an area of c. 10 km during dredge activities in the Meuse, but the material has not yet been studied coherently. Both in the case of Roermond and Nijmegen/Millingen there were weapons and tools from the Middle and Late Bronze Ages²²⁹. Even in the case of less well documented find-spots it is clear that the depositional practice took place at some locations for a long period of time.

3. People

The human agents are at the core of the depositional practice and the main element involved. People are those who act, choosing the objects, the location and the moment for the creation of a deposit, those who establish what is appropriate to be deposited or not, and in what circumstances.

The relation between people and objects can be seen as acting both ways. On one hand, people operate with objects. In the case of deposition, the object is literally taken away from a group of people. It can no longer be used, seen or circulate anymore. The relevance of the notion of object removal is even clearer when objects are destroyed before deposition, or receive other forms of special treatment. On another hand, in a way, objects can make people, since they have meaning and represent an expression of their owners. Although these aspects are hard to be recognized archaeologically, something can be inferred from the selection of objects that were apparently considered appropriate to the act. Not only the objects themselves, but also their associations are relevant, as they may evoke associations with other fields of practice. For this aspect of deposition, archaeology focuses on the object in the first place. Less can be said on the selection of the people involved, but the nature of the objects is considered as offering sometimes a clue²³⁰.

Starting from the objects which form deposits and especially from their associations inside deposits, several categories of persons were taken into consideration as possible actors of the depositional practice. These categories are defined by *gender* (male depositors and female depositors), *type of activity* (craftsmen, merchants, warriors, persons with cultic attributions), *number of persons involved* (individuals and communities), *social status* (various kinds of social differentiation, like for instance a separation between persons or groups of high rank and low-rank individuals or groups), and even the *type of community*.

The fact that quite a lot of deposits are thought to be *gender* associated was already partially discussed in a chapter above, from the point of view of the *content* of the deposits. But here another aspect could play a role, since particular *locations* seem to be associated with either men or women. Rivers are certainly closer associated with weapons, and similar items are generally found in male graves in other regions. At the same time, some of the metalwork found in the Thames was apparently associated with human skulls of the same period, young male adults men being the main category. There are very few skulls of adolescents and children, and old people are hardly represented at all. It is not possible to show that the human remains come from the part of the population who deposited this material, but one plausible

²²⁹ Roymans 1991, 25.

²³⁰ Fontijn 2002, 34.

explanation is that this was a kind of 'river burial' that came into fashion as the single grave tradition lapsed towards the end of the EBA²³¹.

Another area which could be also taken into consideration from this point of view is southern Scandinavia, where sets of personal ornaments as deposits were found that are also known from female graves from the same period in Germany. The ornament deposition may thus have been primarily a female enterprise, or alternatively, one which focused on the paraphernalia of female identities²³². However, exactly the fact that gender associations of different objects must be extrapolated from the evidence of burials in other parts of Europe comports some risks. Even more, there is no way of demonstrating that the supposedly 'male' types were actually *deposited* by men or the 'female' associations by women, although this is a plausible hypothesis. Nor should these patterns be treated in isolation, for the decreasing representation of weaponry in southern Scandinavian deposits has to be viewed in a wider context. The number of supposedly female deposits certainly seems to rise during the later part of the Bronze Age, but this is just the time when the rock art of the same region includes numerous drawings of weapons, which are conventionally associated with men. Such drawings are mainly found in the eastern part of Sweden. It was noticed that the main groups of petroglyphs are found towards the edges of regions with metal finds, and it was suggested that some of these images may have been regarded as another form of 'deposit'. In the west of Sweden and in south-west Norway, there are fewer carvings of weaponry but in this area the rock carvings contain a significant proportion of phallic humans. Again it seems as if the rock art may have been associated mainly with men. Taking these observations together, it is not too much to suggest that over time 'hoarding' may have become a largely female domain, whilst the imagery in the rock art of the same period had a predominantly masculine aspect. If so, the features of the natural landscape may have assumed their own gender associations. During the LBA, the bogs in southern Scandinavia became female locations, whilst rock outcrops were regarded as male²³³. The change in accent between the deposition of male associated objects to female associated objects (without being possible to talk about a preference for the last category) in this area led to some discussions. The many objects of female adornment were seen as a reflection of changed ideological and religious conceptions. There are, however, many other possibilities for interpreting these variations in the composition of the finds. While it might be thought that the increase in the number of female objects was an expression of a clearer delineation of female status, this, in fact, is a difficult question to determine, since the power and status of women in a given society need not necessarily be related to the number of ornaments that are hung upon them. As such, another explanation was proposed, considering the increase in the number of female ornaments in the deposits as a possible reflection of the growing role played by women in political alliances in the Bronze Age. It is possible that in the LBA marriage alliances were made over greater or lesser distances in order to gain access to, and control over, the supply of metal. It has not been unknown in later periods of European history for marriage alliances to be determined by political and economic considerations. Political alliances of the type that may be reflected by the female ornaments in the deposits would not necessarily have endowed women with any greater influence in society. Nor do the

²³¹ Bradley 2000, 56.

²³² Fontijn 2002, 34.

²³³ Bradley 2000, 59-60.

finds necessarily point to the development of particularly powerful goddesses. The bronze finds in the LBA graves show that the most complicated iconographic representations involving ships are all found on objects that were undoubtedly associated with men, namely the razors, while the pictures of ships on the neck-rings are almost always markedly stereotypic. The slightly varying approaches to the understanding of the variations between male and female objects provide an excellent example of how difficult it is to unite an understanding of the find material in an 'operational' way with an ideological interpretation²³⁴.

As already mentioned in a previous chapter, the content of the deposits was often put in connection with different *types of activity* of the human agents, as distinctions of occupation may have been also important, with the result that some categories were created, like for example 'merchants' hoards', containing freshly cast artefacts deposited together before they were ready for use, or 'founders' hoards' including a mixture of different artefact types that seem to have been broken up for use as scrap metal, and also casting waste, slag, ingots or even moulds, making the association with smiths especially plausible. The same applies in those cases where. A notable feature of these types of deposit is that they are usually associated with dry land²³⁵.

In some cases it is considered that the dimensions or content of the deposits may reflect the *number* of the individuals involved in the process. For the EBA Bavaria such an explanation was proposed, by taking into account the dimensions (number of objects) of different depositions. It is considered that the deposition was probably conducted at various levels, from the individual to the communal level. Deposits with less than 10 objects constitute the majority, including the axe deposits and for these it is assumed that would have been executed at the individual level. In the same way, several deposits with hundreds of bronze objects were possibly deposited by a community as a communal ritual²³⁶. At Flag Fen hundreds of bronze weapons were dumped into the water, and it is considered possible that some depositions had been made for each landholding or family²³⁷.

With regard to the *social status* it is discussed the expansion of the social networks that connect the elites during LBA and EIA as reflected in deposits, in the form of prestige objects found at considerable distance from their point of origin. The deposition is seen as coinciding with the successful integration in the social networks, the quantity and quality of the deposited objects being able to offer a good indication on the patterns of status changing²³⁸. This fact is visible even in areas which, like in the case of northern Europe, are at a great distance from the sources of raw material. It is interesting not only the fact that they manage to obtain the metal, but also the fact that they too take the bronze out of circulation, placing it in graves and deposits and using it for symbolizing the hierarchical social relations that develop more and more during this period²³⁹.

Many times the reflection of social status is discussed in connection with the types of activity, especially the military ones, and implicitly gender of the people involved in deposition. For example, the shields from Fröslunda, Sweden, are seen as reflecting a set of

²³⁴ Kaul 1998, 41.

²³⁵ Bradley 2000, 58.

²³⁶ Kim 2005, 127-128.

²³⁷ Parker Pearson 2005, 109.

²³⁸ Champion *et alii* 1984, 293-294.

²³⁹ Champion *et alii* 1984, 218.

processes and conditions that led to their deposition. They reflect the society that placed them in the ground, their form and function referring to a set of social conflicts that had to be resolved, their placement referring to one of the ways in which that resolution was to be achieved: not necessarily by use in battle, but by symbolic deposition in wet ground. Weapons and the real or imagined combat they reflect were just one of the ways in which life was structured, society was reproduced, and individuals learnt and expressed their place within that life and that society²⁴⁰.

In the same way, the deposition of swords and other bronzes in rivers is considered a phenomenon which also has a social dimension. With the reference to ethnographic literature, the ritual deposition of metalwork in rivers was interpreted as a form of public display of wealth, which might have been employed by elites in building up and consolidating social status positions. The ritual display of wealth, whether or not associated with relations between the living and the dead, is considered to be closely connected with elite competition, and consequently, the areas where the ritual deposition in waters was concentrated may represent zones in which elite competition was most intensive. For a better understanding of the regional variability in the deposition of metalwork in rivers within a specific area, and related elite competition, it is necessary to consider the economic power basis of the elites. Within the Lower Rhine Basin, for example, the regions in which the deposition of fine metalwork is concentrated – the Scheldt valley and the Lower Meuse/Rhine valley – can be referred to as economically superior regions. These areas had a high agrarian productivity, based on agriculture, sheep-raising (especially on the higher sandy soils) and cattle-raising (especially in the river valleys). From the distribution of urnfields in one of these regions, it appears that the higher sandy soils along the large river valleys were densely populated. In these core areas elites developed who participated in the interregional change. They may have maintained direct political and economic relations with the elites in the core areas of the Thames valley, the Paris Basin and the Middle Rhine district. The highly uneven distribution pattern of Ha B 2/3 swords in the study area point in this direction; these prestige goods seem to have been imported directly from other core areas without any intermediate steps²⁴¹.

It is quite clear that archaeological associations suggest that 'wet finds' enjoyed a special status. The evidence from Britain and Ireland provides two arguments in favour of this idea. The main groups of LBA weapons in the rivers are the direct successors of the types in the most complex burials of the EBA. At the same time, those associated with ordinary settlements are less elaborate. Taken together, such arguments suggest that some material enjoyed a special status. The same is surely true of the gold ornaments found in Irish bogs, for recent work has shown that these deposits were located near a series of massive hill forts dating from the same period. Such sites seem to have been at the top of the settlement hierarchy. Perhaps the places where those offerings were made were associated with people who enjoyed a special position in society. It is impossible to tell whether others were allowed to attend these ceremonies²⁴².

An association between the *type of community* and the depositional practice was made, two types of community being proposed: settled agrarian societies, characterized by stable

²⁴⁰ Harding 1999, 172.

²⁴¹ Roymans 1991, 28.

²⁴² Bradley 2000, 56.

wealth, in-marriage, dowry, rich female burials, hoarding; warrior, expansionist societies characterized by mobile wealth, out-marriage, bride-wealth, rich male burials, prestige goods in burials, no hoarding²⁴³. Although very interesting, it is very possible that such a dichotomy would prove to be too strict and rigid, especially if it is to look at the great variety of the characteristic features presented by the ethnographical research for the traditional societies.

The *individual* or *communal* aspect of the depositional activity was also quite often discussed. For the Balkan area during Copper Age the ornament deposits found in settlements are seen as reflecting the communal aspect of this activity²⁴⁴. In the case of the deposits from EBA Bavaria, the deposition is seen as a communal ritual which offers an impetus for the growth of individuals. It would even be possible to argue that dominant groups of individuals may have placed objects into the ground in order to legitimize the existence of a hierarchy and to mystify the contradictions between the symmetry of kinship relations and the asymmetry of power/political relations. Hoarding and the consumption of a massive amount of bronze objects within it would have been a medium to neutralize a conflict between members of a kin group originating from social differences and to justify and naturalize their power and superiority with the emphasis on communality. Following this line of argumentation, the decrease in individual expression and, probably, an emergence of communality would become prominent with the emphasis on the sameness in both deposition and mortuary practice. However, unless there is any evidence to prove the conflict between the powerful and the powerless in other contexts, this hypothesis should remain only as a hypothesis²⁴⁵.

For southern Scandinavia at the beginning of the Bronze Age the accent shifted from deposits to rich burials, doubling a change in the social structure. In this context, the continuation of depositing rich weaponry in lakes is seen as clearly supporting the old order, since these rituals were traditionally symbolizing the corporate group as an indivisible entity. However, it is equally possible that the offerings were continued as an ideology of denial in this new individualized context of social power²⁴⁶.

For a much later period, the Migration Period in Scandinavia, the changes in the composition of the deposits are also described as more likely to be emblematic of a change in social format. The weapon deposits throw emphasis onto the achievements of a group in terms of battles won. Those groups, however, probably constituted a military elite, displaying differential ranking within themselves, and the material should not encourage exaggerated notions of egalitarianism. In the later period, changes include an apparent shift from emphasis on achievement to emphasis on status; the offering may cease to be plunder from enemies but selected finery of their own military equipment. Across the 5th to the 7th centuries there is a very clear move from items or collections associable with the group towards items or collections associable with the individual, both men and women, in individual deposits. The 'activity' reflected by the later deposits is the possession of wealth rather than fighting of battles. There is an intensification of deposition in that the individuals are represented at a greater number of sites, but one may balk at expressing an opinion as to whether the activities

²⁴³ Kristiansen 1999, 185.

²⁴⁴ Chapman 2000, 121.

²⁴⁵ Kim 2005, 127-128.

²⁴⁶ Vandkilde 2000, 41.

of a greater number of individuals, or a greater expenditure of individual effort of whatever form, is found in the later period compared with the earlier²⁴⁷.

III. INTERPRETATIONS

Various explanations were sought for this variation in time and space of the depositional patterns, and some will be briefly presented here.

One of the main theories is that *political unrest* led to the practice of burying metal in the ground, based exactly on the observation that deposits concentrate in particular periods. In Hungary, for instance, there is a clearly defined phase (Koszider) coinciding with the end of many EBA tell settlements, when depositions of a particular character were made. Throughout central and eastern Europe, the phase coeval with Ha A1 saw the presence of many more deposits than any other period. By contrast, in the north and west of Europe there is a marked concentration on the last period of the Bronze Age²⁴⁸. It was also noticed that in the case of British Bronze Age multiple deposits have a discontinuous history on dry land, whereas water finds are a regular feature of the archaeological sequence. The majority of the dry land finds belong to the later stages of both the Middle and Late Bronze Ages. It would be quite inappropriate to regard these as periods of crisis or conflict just because so many deposits remained in the ground, but it is considered as extremely striking that groups of material should have been deposited in both these contexts at times when there is evidence for the building of fortifications²⁴⁹. Still, it is quite hard to accept that so much material was deposited in response to social unrest. This would mean that in many areas the conflict was never-ending, and in explaining so much by a single factor one may be explaining nothing. The case of weapon deposits is brought as a counterargument to this theory, since it has no sense to hide weapons in times of conflict, and, even more, to throw them in rivers. Here the destruction of enemy goods could be proposed as a possible explanation, as long as it is also known from ethno-historical sources. Still, this interpretation cannot be extended too far, since in many cases the situation seems to be more complex, the destruction of wealth in rivers and similar locations being rather related to the placing of other material in graves²⁵⁰.

Another explanation offered is the variation of the *metal supply* in time, but there is no real evidence from the metal production areas that this was the case. The only evidence for dating the main mining areas comes from isolated finds of pottery, which say nothing about the intensity of usage of the mines. In the British Isles, there is barely any dating evidence other than radiocarbon dates, which by their nature pinpoint individual episodes rather than occurrences of long duration. The other way that might measure metal circulation directly would be a study of the quantities and circulation times of metal items. In graves and settlements, it is not possible to see Ha A1 reflected as a phase that was more prolific than those that followed it, either in overall total of sites or in number of artefacts represented. In fact, as is evident from the demographic indicators for the LBA, there are good reasons to suppose that the total human population, and therefore the amount of activity generally, increased throughout the period, not that it reached a maximum in Ha A1 and declined thereafter. Measuring circulation times has been taken as an

²⁴⁷ Hines 1989, 201.

²⁴⁸ Harding 2000, 355.

²⁴⁹ Bradley 1998, 21-23.

²⁵⁰ Bradley 1982, 116.

indicator of the abundance or otherwise of metal. According to this view, the more worn objects are, the longer they have been in circulation and therefore the less new metal there is around to replace them. This argument has been applied both to swords and to hanging bowls (ornaments worn on the belt), and in a British context to ornaments, tools, weapons and other objects. Unfortunately, in the case of swords it is not evident that extra wear really does indicate lack of fresh supplies rather than exceptional usage resulting from local political conditions. To achieve wear on a sword, one would have to use it a great deal in practice, perhaps combined with real fencing with enemies, and then re-sharpen it. Nor is it necessarily evident that wear on hanging bowls indicates a shortage of metal with which to replace old pieces. This situation could be rather connected to the predisposition of some items to become worn²⁵¹ or being kept longer in circulation for reasons which have nothing to do with the lack of metal. Such an example could be that of the disc-headed axes from north-western Romania and Hungary. It can be presumed that this kind of display weapons, which also had the function of representing the social status of the owner, would have been often in use for a long time, maybe even for generations, before deposition. As a result, the chronological succession of different types of axes contributes very little or not at all to the attempt of establishing the date of a deposit. For the Apa – Hajdúsámson type deposits, this concept could be valid for more than one century and for this reason the term ‘hoards horizon’ and the so-called ‘unity’ of these deposits were challenged²⁵². Unfortunately, in dating different bronze or gold object considered to belong to the ‘hoards horizon’, the chronology and typology of the decorated axes and swords were very often used as a reference point, leading to a circular approach, because any of these display weapons could have been in use several centuries, starting with the beginning of the 2nd millennium B.C.²⁵³.

For Britain, the large number of hoards of the Ewart Park phase, and in particular of Carp’s Tongue material, led to the suggestion that the introduction of large-scale iron-working was the reason. Though this argument has its attractions, it is rendered weaker by applying only to a single period. Even in Britain, the theory would not account for the large number of hoards of the preceding Wilburton-Wallington phase, let alone the admittedly much smaller numbers of earlier hoards; but more significantly, in central Europe the high point of bronze deposition was represented by Ha A1 and equivalent phases in areas further east. There can hardly be any question of iron replacing bronze at this stage of the Bronze Age: bronze continued as a major metal, and iron was still extremely scarce, even in Ha A2. So, the explanation for these massive quantities of deposited metal must be sought elsewhere²⁵⁴.

Again, because the deposition of metalwork is found so widely and over such a long period, limited explanations such as attempts to *control overproduction* or to *preserve the character of special purpose items* cannot apply very often, whatever their attraction in certain situations²⁵⁵. The suggestion which has often been made that bronze objects were deposited as a means of combating inflation as copper became increasingly available seems unconvincing. On the one hand, the amounts of metal known from deposits are minute in comparison with the suggested quantities being produced each year and could hardly have made any perceptible difference. On the other hand, it presupposes a monopoly situation, or at least a cartel. Otherwise,

²⁵¹ Harding 2000, 358- 360.

²⁵² Vulpe, Lazăr 2003, 47-48.

²⁵³ Vulpe, Lazăr 2003, 50.

²⁵⁴ Harding 2000, 356.

²⁵⁵ Bradley 1982, 116.

if some groups were holding back their copper to increase its exchange value, it would always pay a neighbouring group to take advantage of the situation by exchanging theirs, so the situation would automatically break down as each group pursued its own interests²⁵⁶.

It was also considered that the fluctuations in deposition could be the result of the characteristics of the *smithing operations*. The main difficulty in accepting this explanation is the lack of any apparent technical rationale for it. Even if the level of smithing activity was significantly higher in Ha A1 than in Br D or Ha A2/B1/B3, smiths must have been extremely active in the latter periods to account for the large number of prestige bronzes that survive from contexts other than deposits. Scrap and raw metal may therefore not have been deposited in holes in the ground, instead staying above ground in structures such as workshops and storerooms where they were at hand for ready use. The implication of this might be, paradoxically, that the level of metallurgical activity was actually higher in periods when there is less metal in evidence in the form of deposits²⁵⁷, if the function of the so-called 'founder's hoards' is to be seen in economic terms.

The idea that the variation in the depositional patterns reflects a variation in the *recovery rates* during time is difficult to be accepted, unless there was an intentional element about the loss of metal. Where there are grounds for thinking that deposition was somehow 'ritual', the intention cannot be doubted; with founders' or scrap hoards, it is generally assumed that the intention was to recover. But it is not necessarily to have been so: if one can view the throwing of a collection of swords or bracelets into a river or bog as rational in the terms in which it was done by the thrower, there seems little in principle to distinguish this from the deposition of imperfect objects²⁵⁸, being those miscast, fragmented or 'scrap' metal.

And last but not least *votive explanations* were also advanced in order to explain such variations in time and space for the content and context of the deposits. This aspect will be discussed a little more detailed in the next chapter.

Utilitarian deposits/votive offerings. Probably the most problematic aspect, and in the same time the one which raised the most discussions, of the depositional phenomenon is the dichotomy between 'utilitarian' and 'ritual' deposits. This kind of distinction is based on the presupposition that different processes and ideas stood at the basis of creation of each of the two categories.

The weakest point of this kind of separation is that the material is often considered in categories which are a feature of the modern division of experience. As a result, such a classification is based on a quite specific interpretation of how metal production was organized, fact that can lead to the danger of a circular demonstration²⁵⁹.

As already mentioned, the 'utilitarian' deposits are themselves divided into separate categories, conventionally related to the production and the use of bronze items, the most important of these groups being 'founders' hoards' and 'merchants' hoards'. In these cases the material is grouped according to an intuitive understanding of bronze production. The 'ritual' deposits were not traditionally defined in many parts of Europe by any particular conception of ritual activity, but are a largely residual category composed of material which for various

²⁵⁶ Shennan 1995, 306.

²⁵⁷ Harding 2000, 360.

²⁵⁸ Harding 2000, 360.

²⁵⁹ Bradley 1985, 692.

reasons cannot be accommodated by more utilitarian schemes. In practice, the categories of 'utilitarian' and 'ritual' deposits are defined according to quite unrelated criteria. The main difficulty with this view is that in reality there seems little doubt that these broad groups of material *were* related to one another chronologically and spatially. As it can be seen from the previous chapters, the same types of material may be found in 'votive' deposits in one period and in 'utilitarian' ones in the next, just as they may appear in both contexts at the same time but in neighbouring regions. Such patterns are found extremely widely in prehistoric Europe and mean that the division between specialized and mundane deposits may be too schematic, since the same objects seem to have entered each of these classes at different times and places²⁶⁰. Usually, in the attempt of better delimiting the categories, not only the *content* but also the *context* is taken into consideration, with the main result that finds which are considered irretrievable under normal circumstances are described as 'ritual', while the others have better chances to be 'utilitarian' in nature. As a consequence of this situation, many times the wetland deposits are considered 'ritual' and the deposits from dry land locations 'utilitarian', in the last case with some amendments brought by the fact that there are also some dry land deposits which are described as very hard or impossible to retrieve (caves, rock fissures, mountain passes and so on), or which suggest through their composition or arrangement ritual intentions.

What is in fact clear is that the archaeologists' subjectivity plays a great role in the distinctions that are made between different groups of deposits. There are also trends which appear in the archaeological literature treating this subject, observable in space and time. Certain views were dominant in different parts of Europe, like the tendency to consider the depositional phenomenon as a result of social or political unrest in central and eastern Europe (with the consequence that terms like 'hoards horizons' were and still are in use), the result of the economic activities in western Europe, or the result of religious activities in northern Europe. Even so, the opinions expressed by archaeologists during time cover a much larger range than it would result from a superficial look, and certainly showed some changes during the last decades.

In France, Britain and Ireland some authors are more willing to accept that votive reasons were the principal ones involved, while others are reluctant to commit themselves to such a hypothesis. There has been general agreement in recent years that wet finds, such as weaponry and prestige bronzes from rivers and bogs, were votive in nature, but the idea that all deposits might be ritual in nature has been little considered in these countries²⁶¹. During the last years German scholars were those who have led the way in propounding a votive explanation for almost all deposits, including many of those that might on the face of it appear utilitarian²⁶².

At the other end of Europe, the situation presents striking similarities. While most of the deposits are seen as signs of external or internal conflict or as reserves for craftsmen, some deposits, based on their composition, internal arrangement or location are described as offerings²⁶³.

Although it is quite obvious that in time the balance between the views based on economic or political arguments and the views based on ritual or religious aspects changed, and more than once, in the advantage of one side or the other, there is still no common shared opinion regarding

²⁶⁰ Bradley 1985, 692-693.

²⁶¹ Harding 2000, 364.

²⁶² Harding 2000, 361.

²⁶³ Alexandrescu 1968, 22-23, 25.

the reasons for which the depositions were made. The most stable situation seems to be so far that from northern Europe, where the dominant view is that the depositions are of religious character. Here, as early as the last decades of the 19th century, it was emphasized that what links the deposits in the Bronze Age with each other is the fact that the deposited objects are of great value, and not their context. The votive offerings seem to have been of the same nature whether they were deposited on dry land or in water, and there is not any difference between the finds from the dry land and those from bogs. The determining factor with these deposits would only seem to have been that something was to be renounced and deposited and that this was not done for personal advantage but for the benefit of divinities or spirits²⁶⁴.

There are many aspects which trouble the archaeologists in their search for the reasons underlying the practice of deposition, and the saddest part is that for each argument in favour of one of the two explanations – ritual or utilitarian – usually a counterargument can and will be brought. Thus, the situation arrived to a point where there are so many opinions, so many categories and subcategories of finds, so many statistics, so many characteristics to be taken into consideration that the whole picture gets out of control. Not to mention the fact that, no matter how hard it is tried, some deposits will always escape any attempt of placing them in a strict category.

One aspect which usually gives a hard time to the archaeologists is deciding what could be described as purely 'utilitarian' and what could have been an appropriate gift to a god when it comes to the various categories of objects. Here the deposition of ingots or objects considered to represent 'commodities', with standard value, could be a good example.

Ingots like the neck-ring ingots or rib bar ingots, of quite standard weight (around 200 g) are found in many deposits, sometimes in great numbers (246 in Oberpfalzheim²⁶⁵, 500 in Luitpold Park, München). For central Germany, these deposits, based on their content, have been considered as utilitarian, differing in this respect from deposits of ritual character from the same region, which contain a large number of bronze axes – thought to be symbolic or prestige goods – , with relatively few ingots. Leaving aside the fact that the meaning of 'prestige goods' is not clear²⁶⁶, it would be interesting in this case to mention that in western Germany ingots were buried in the graves of a limited section of society²⁶⁷. More finished versions of the ring ingots occur also in graves, as personal ornaments in the form of neck-rings, which seem likely to have had a symbolic significance. The use of this form for ingots seems unlikely to have been fortuitous. The late EBA ingot form, the rib ingot, appears to lack this dimension, since it does not correspond to any recognized item in this way. It was proposed that maybe the commodity significance of ingots, as unit quantities of metal, came increasingly to the foreground, so that by the later EBA, as production expanded in Central Europe, copper and bronze came to take on some of the properties of a proto-currency – as a store of value, a unit of account and a medium of exchange²⁶⁸.

So the roles of such objects could have been more complex than expected. It was proposed that the prestige or symbolic goods could be used in utilitarian deposits for trading or other reason, while the opposite could be also equally possible: the deposits with bronze ingots

²⁶⁴ Kaul 1998, 37.

²⁶⁵ Tylecote 1987, 18.

²⁶⁶ Kim 2005, 126.

²⁶⁷ Bradley 2000, 58.

²⁶⁸ Shennan 1995, 305.

could have their own symbolic meanings. Furthermore, deposition itself could be a symbolic social action regardless of the kind or the amount of bronze objects used in hoarding²⁶⁹. An argument in favour of this way of presenting the changing roles of objects could be the observation that the neck-ring ingots, which concentrate in the production region of the Eastern Alps, also reached remote regions like central Germany and southern Scandinavia. Probably intended as a standardized commodity, their actual functions may have differed considerably from the original intention, especially outside the Danubian region²⁷⁰. In their case arguments were brought pro and contra their votive character. Some opinions in the favour of the ritual aspect of their deposition: they are unlikely to be metal stores because there is no evidence for on-site metalworking on Bavarian EBA settlements, and by definition a metal store ought to lie close to the place of its working; the quantities of ore produced by the Alpine sources were very great and the potential demand for metal throughout the Bronze Age was enormous, so that there would be no point in burying it so close to source, especially in the Alpine foothills where metal was abundant; if they were simply deposits that their owner had failed to retrieve, one would expect a more or less even distribution in the hinterland of the sources, whereas there are more hoards in the Salzach valley than in other southern tributaries of the Danube; and if the hoards were deposited not by individuals but by communities, the failure to retrieve them would indicate depopulation, which is certainly not credible on other grounds in, for instance, the Straubing area of Bavaria. The apparent patterning of hoards, with a number of defined sets of objects present in them, suggests careful selection prior to deposition, and careful deposition in some cases. Against attributing a votive character to this category of deposits, it was considered that taking the distribution of ring ingots as a whole, the traditional explanation as raw material moving out from its place of extraction seems overall much more convincing. The absence of metalworking places on settlements is hardly an argument against this theory; such installations might well have been located away from domestic buildings, and in any case would often have left only fugitive traces²⁷¹. In other cases, the poor quality of the ring bar ingots and rib bar ingots deposited is considered as not being appropriate for gifts to a god²⁷². Another aspect which, at the first impression, would stand against a votive explanation for this type of deposits is that they show that considerable pains were taken to achieve a standardized weight for the ingots (like in the case of Obereching deposits). It has recently been argued that apparently standardized ingot weights are simply a result of the repeated use of the same or similar moulds, and that no particular concern with weight is implied, the suggestion that weights were standardized arising from a tendency to project modern 'industrial' values onto Bronze Age communities for whom they are completely inappropriate. However, the Obereching deposit contains examples of ingots where an extra lump of metal has clearly been cast on to make up the weight and others where an end has been cut off to reduce it. This would appear to show a considerable concern for standardization, and correspondingly for exchange values²⁷³.

One other problem often discussed is the fact that a huge quantity of metal was taken out of circulation through deposition. From here two questions arise: on one hand, if the deposits were utilitarian in nature, how could the societies involved afford to lose so much

²⁶⁹ Kim 2005, 127.

²⁷⁰ Gillis, Olausson, Vandkilde 2004, 80.

²⁷¹ Harding 2000, 363.

²⁷² Kim 2005, 127.

²⁷³ Shennan 1995, 305.

material; on another hand, if they were votive, why were they deposited on such a large scale²⁷⁴. In the case of the first question, it is possible that the reality was slightly different from the traditional view, since researches conducted especially during last years seem to lead to the conclusion that the amounts of metal known from deposits are minute in comparison with the suggested quantities being produced each year and could hardly have made any perceptible difference²⁷⁵. The second question could be easily answered, taking into account the religious aspects. It may be considered that, in dealing with the gods, people were surrendering to the powers above their most precious possessions and those that were most difficult to acquire. It is only from a very narrow, western, extreme rationalist point of view that the valuable depositions can be considered as being a waste of resources or meaningless. The depositions are an expression of the knowledge of which Bronze Age man believed himself to be in possession, knowledge that what was being done was correct and useful. It might be said that the depositions were rational, practical investments in a divine market, made in order to receive a dividend from them²⁷⁶.

The Near Eastern example.

At this point of the discussion it would be interesting, and maybe useful, to look at the image offered by another area for the period of the LBA: the Near East. Although many aspects of the Near Eastern societies are different from the contemporary European ones, it is highly possible that some characteristics were shared by both. One of these is the existence of the gift exchange, known for the Near East from various written sources, especially letters, as well as from the archeological record, and proposed by the archaeologists as an activity deeply rooted also in the life of the Bronze Age European communities. Or, in the case of the Near East, it is extremely clear that the movement of goods takes place at more than one level, and between different players. In other words, there is an exchange of goods between equals and an exchange of goods between players with a different status. And, as it will soon be seen, in this last category enters also the gift exchange between humans and gods.

There are certain rules applying, which need to be respected by the partners. The gift exchange between equals shows a reciprocal pattern. The beginning of a completely new partnership is rarely recorded, usually the partnership being inherited: the traditional friendship must be confirmed, at least at the same level of intensity, and preferably at a higher one. In contrast to the supplies delivered by a tributary king, which increase the prestige of the receiver, the supplies provided in a gift-exchange partnership should increase the prestige of the sender²⁷⁷. The utilitarian aspects of such a partnership are often extremely visible²⁷⁸, and still these relations do not imply in any way the barter. While the model of pure barter certainly exists in the Near Eastern societies of the time, it cannot serve the purposes of political interaction: there is no prestige in giving or in receiving, and no struggle for prestige takes place. The gift-exchange model is much more suitable because it enshrines the contradiction between the real and the moral worlds: the real concern is for one's own interest, but the rule is to be anxious for the partner's interest. The real concern is to obtain goods but the rule is to

²⁷⁴ Harding 2000, p. 352.

²⁷⁵ Shennan 1995, 306.

²⁷⁶ Kaul 1998, 37-38.

²⁷⁷ Liverani 2001, 146-147.

²⁷⁸ Moran 1992 (especially EA 33-40 letters for the case of Alashyia).

give them. This contradiction generates an endless process of bargaining in the guise of a competition in generosity. The negotiations continue for the entire life span of the partners and are even inherited by their sons; under the opposing pressures of hostility and friendship, they are always teetering between being concluded and breaking up. The economic value of the gifts was probably ‘not even worth the trip’, as the partners sometimes emphasize in their letters, and the messengers who had brought them were detained for years just to prove who was more powerful or less interested. But the political relevance of these apparently useless negotiations is considerable. By preserving contact between the great kings, they allowed for a continuous yet moderate discharge of aggression to take place, a ‘sublimation’ of potential military encounters. This means that gift exchanges which are unbalanced in the short term and thus generate the need for continuing contact are much better suited to the preservation of political relationships than barter exchanges, which are perfectly balanced by definition. Exchanges of gifts that are unequal in value are also better than refusals to exchange at all. If this relations, which could be described as a sort of ‘homeopathic’ treatment of war, were interrupted it would have been a serious matter: it would have meant real war²⁷⁹.

Still, the ideal of reciprocity is in no way an ideal of balance; instead, it demands generosity in giving while encouraging no interest at all in receiving. As a result, the only moral act is that of giving; receiving will follow automatically, whether the partners implicated in exchange care about it or not. In the competition for prestige, rivals as well as partners must be outstripped in generosity. In the evaluation of generosity, the relative wealth of the partners has to be taken into account: peers have to compete at an equal level. An important consequence is that when partners with different status are engaged in such a gift exchange the higher the status and wealth of a person, the greater the gifts must be. For example, a Hittite ritual was establishing that the king has to reciprocate ten times the value of the annual offerings made to him by his officials²⁸⁰.

The same rules underlie the relations between humans and gods. In societies which place great emphasis on circulation of goods, as well as on accumulation – both being solutions to the scarcity of goods and the threat of famine –, the only wastage idealized as positive and necessary is that entailed in cult offerings. However, it must be strongly underlined that these are not really ‘wasted’ assets but ‘productive investments’; as such, they are in line with the anticipated increase in return on goods distributed which is typical of interpersonal circulation. And the expected return is proportional to the immense difference in rank and power that separates humans and gods. In return for humans’ offerings, the gods, from their elevated positions, must reciprocate in multiples of ten, a hundred or a thousand²⁸¹.

As it can be seen from the Near Eastern case, the model of gift exchange between humans and gods – and as such an explanation in ritual terms of the depositional practice – could constitute an answer to the question of why it can be seen as logical such an expenditure of valuables expressed in quantity, quality and number of depositions.

But, taking into consideration all the discussions held on the subject ‘utilitarian’ vs. ‘votive’, it is a certain aspect which could make the latter more appealing than the first. While the utilitarian theories fail to include all the finds under the same cover, the explanation of the

²⁷⁹ Liverani 2001, 149-150.

²⁸⁰ Liverani 2001, 152.

²⁸¹ Liverani 2001, 154.

depositional practice in religious terms has the advantage of offering an unitary view on the phenomenon. The economic or political reasons invoked as staying at the root of the depositional activity always leave residues, that is a number of finds which cannot match into the scheme, because of their content, context, or both. That this does not happen (or at least that chances are much higher not to happen) in the case of seeing the deposits as a result of religious activities – in other words, that it can be an explanation for any possible situation encountered – could receive support if another example is considered, and this would be ancient Greece. It is no doubt obvious that such a way of tackling this problem is opened to serious critics, still it could prove itself useful based on some grounds. The main problem would be that this means dealing with a different area, a different chronological span and a different social and also economic organization. While the information regarding the votive offerings is much ampler and there is more than one category of sources, this information is never the less quite scattered, presenting spatial and chronological blanks. Even more, the information stretches on a rather large period of time and covers several regions, so it is more than probable that trends in the depositional practice were present also in this case, with the result that there were variations in time and space. With regard to the last aspect, the differences in the type of economy could be seen as a strong argument for *not* using such an approach. What connection could possibly be between the Bronze Age societies and the classical world, with societies based on production, money, price and the idea of profit, in other words on commercial transactions. Any object can be labelled with a price, everything can be sold and bought, there are merchandises, measures and standard weights. And still: how much is reflected this type of economy in the religious domain, knowing the fact that this is usually the most conservative? Is the 'religious economy' submitting to the same rules or are we dealing with something different? As hopefully it will be seen, what could be called the economy of cult submits to its own set of rules, and as a consequence such an approach could prove itself useful. Also, it should be strongly emphasized the fact that using this example the objective is not to propose a transplantation of the ancient Greek beliefs and actions over the Bronze Age European realities, in order to fill the gaps, no matter if they fit or not. The idea is only to draw attention on what aspects could have played a role in a religious way of thinking, how people expressed their relation with the divinities in a material form, and especially to emphasize the huge variety of situations that could be met. And, although the archaeological as well as literary sources offer rather punctual information, it is possible to determine some patterns at work in the case of ancient Greece.

The ancient Greece example

An essential aspect on which this discussion should focus is that of *consecration*: many things can be consecrated to the gods, the objects forming only a part of a vaster domain.

From the ancient writers it is possible to find out the importance of the *land* features in connection to the depositional practice. Not only the physical aspects of the land were important, but also the association between specific locations and special events. In what could be called the 'sacred geography' of Greece, perhaps the commonest feature to be ascribed a sacred character was the spring, although in most cases the spring itself might provide the focus for a group of buildings. Much the same significance was attached to three other locations: mountains, caves and trees; many of the latter were found in groves, although individual examples could assume a sacred identity in their own right. Some of the groves were associated with stone buildings, similar structures could be erected on sacred mountains, and

some of the caves were associated with other groups of monuments, yet in each case it seems as if the natural features of these places were their most important characteristic. Other sites include gorges, rocks, rivers, lakes and waterfalls. On the coast, a similar significance extended to capes and small islands²⁸². The motives for consecration could be quite diverse: the cave on the mount Ida was the place where Zeus spent his childhood²⁸³; a plane tree was so beautiful that Xerxes offered a gold ornament to it and consecrated it to a god²⁸⁴; a territory was consecrated at the successful fulfilling of a task, like it was said that the Argonauts did²⁸⁵, or after escaping a great danger, like in the case of Samothrake²⁸⁶; the unshaped stones were cult images of gods²⁸⁷. Springs, rivers and lakes are consecrated to the nymphs or minor deities; the caves are consecrated also to nymphs, as well as to gods and heroes connected with the underworld; places struck by lightning are consecrated to Zeus; the case of Delos, the island consecrated to Apollo as his birthplace is also well-known. The boundaries enter the same category, here sacrifices being made at different moments of the year.

What entered the gods' sphere was *hieron* (term attested in Mycenaean) defining what belongs to the divinity and represents the subject of its influence. The part of land 'left' to the divinity was *temenos*. The sanctuary was normally including a tree, a stone, and a water source. What belonged to the god had not to be stolen (*asylon*)²⁸⁸, and as such all that became the property of a god through consecration was safe from ulterior removal through human action²⁸⁹.

The consecration of *objects* is the best attested and can be structured after the place of deposition. The most depositions are those in temples and other cult structures, but there are also quite numerous the depositions in watery locations.

As to what can be offered, almost everything can be considered a 'gift to the gods' and dedicated. Sometimes it is very difficult to understand the meaning of the votive objects, especially if they are unusual. Some categories seem easy to explain at first sight (for example agricultural implements): this is not always the case²⁹⁰.

A big category is formed by artworks of various kinds: statues, statuettes, paintings, architectural pieces, tripods, vessels, gold wreaths, clothes, ornaments, and even the tools used for creating these categories.

As for the consecration of tools, the situation from Greece should bring some warnings with respect to a too straightforward interpretation of tool deposits for the Bronze Age Europe. The treatment of sickles is particularly interesting, because in this area being clearly agricultural implements, their role should be also clear. The literary sources on one hand and the archaeological record on another hand come both to challenge this impression. The sickle plays a role in Greek myths as a magical weapon, an image which is shared by other information from the Mediterranean (in Hittite myths the sickle is a magical instrument and a weapon, the sky is separated from the earth with a copper sickle, the king had the sickle and the

²⁸² Bradley 2000, 22-23.

²⁸³ Diod. Sic. 5.70.4.

²⁸⁴ Her. 7.31.

²⁸⁵ Diod. Sic. 4.49.2.

²⁸⁶ Diod. Sic. 5.47.5.

²⁸⁷ Paus. 7.22.3; 9.24.3; 9.27.1.

²⁸⁸ Burkert 1996, 22-23.

²⁸⁹ Diod. Sic. 5.53.2.

²⁹⁰ Kron 1998, 188.

sharpening stone as attributes – the guarantee of the bread; in Egypt there are ceremonial sickles and sickle-swords). The archaeological record presents also an image which has striking similarities with the situation known from the Bronze Age: the sickles are rarely found in settlements, sometimes in graves, and most often in sanctuaries²⁹¹, as offerings to the gods.

In many cases coins or gold and silver ingots are offered to the gods. A lot of weapons also, taken from the enemies killed in battles, or belonging to the victorious warriors. Many objects are made especially for the act of consecration. The consecrators can be individuals (men and women, and also of different ages) or communities as a whole (the polis). The reasons are multiple: victory in battle, successful enterprises, unexpected richness, health, prophetic dreams, first fruits, rites of passage. It should be also emphasized the frequent mention that an individual or a community consecrated the tenth part of a gain, being this the result of an economic activity or of a victorious battle. This is an interesting aspect because it implies on one hand the attention for the quantities implicated, the relation with the god being treated like a deal, and on the other hand the conscience of what would be described as a debt towards the divinity.

The consecrations in aquatic locations are usually for the rivers seen as gods, for nymphs who live in those waters, or for divinities to whom the waters are consecrated. It could be interesting here to notice that as a rule rivers are seen as *male* deities, and, with no intention to go too far with such a hypothesis, this would rise some questions regarding the often strong association between rivers and male equipment known for many parts of the Bronze Age Europe.

Some observations are perhaps needed here. Sometimes there is a clear connection between the object and the person consecrating, but much more often there is not (the type of object does not reflect directly the person). The same is true for the relation between the object and the reason beyond the act of offering, in the sense that the original connection cannot be observed only based on the archaeological record. Then, in the case of coins, once consecrated they lose their economic value. Even in time of crisis, these coins are not placed again in circulation, but remain in the temples. The written sources come to support this observation, the existing inventories showing very clear that the temples do not use the offerings in economic purposes, not even when the objects are affected by age or accidents. They are remelted only after an official decision was made, weighed before handled to the craftsmen and verified after they were reworked. If coins were consecrated in the temple they were not used to pay the craftsmen, who were paid by the polis. It is clear thus that the consecrated objects had no further functionality outside the sanctuary. Fact which explains the law of the silver coin from Athens (375/4 B.C.), when the false coins are dedicated at the altar of the Mother of Gods, this being the safest way to take them out of circulation²⁹².

Which can be the explanations for people acting like this, offering lavishing gifts to the gods? At a first impression the 'gifts to the gods' could appear as simple and natural, a token of respect for superior powers, an expression of thanks for life and all the good things received by humans. The ancient Greeks were calling their gods as 'givers of good things', and in return it was only normal to give them proper gifts²⁹³. But there are also other aspects involved. One motive could have been the partial sacrifice in order to avoid a major danger, with the result that some offerings will be made in cases of disease, famine, war, travels, in these cases the

²⁹¹ Kron 1998, 195.

²⁹² Linders 1987, 116.

²⁹³ Burkert 1987, 43.

gifts playing the role of bait. In the same time, the conspicuous gifts offer an element of demonstration and exaggeration, a form of setting up a monument of one's own action, thus perpetuating a claim to special relations with higher powers, the sanctuaries being used as places of competition²⁹⁴.

In which way the case of the votive offerings from the Greek world could be useful for the study of the depositional practice known from the Bronze Age Europe? Some conclusions can be drawn. First of all, it is very possible that the type of the economy which characterizes a society, as well as the social structure, at a specific moment in time, to have no influence (or at least not directly) on the 'economy of cult'. This means that the economic and social relations are not necessarily reflected in the different aspects of the votive offerings. Secondly, the location is of great importance, and also the moment. The variety expressed in the number, type, quality is huge, and so is the variety of reasons for which the gifts are made; the same, the connections between the person who offers and the gift on one hand, and between the gift and the receiving divinity are sometimes direct, but also quite often are not a direct reflection of either the consecrator, or the god. And finally, practically everything can constitute a suitable gift for the gods. With all these in mind, maybe it is time to look again at the Bronze Age deposits. At least at a superficial look there are striking similarities; but in fact, it does not even matter if the example considered above can be paralleled in the realities of the Bronze Age societies or not. It would be enough if it draws attention on the importance of treating with equal care all the factors involved in the act of selective deposition. Only then it will be possible to determine whether the votive explanation is an appropriate one for the situation known for the Bronze Age Europe, or something else would be better fitted.

²⁹⁴ Burkert 1987, 45, 49.

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