The Rise of Bronze Age Society

Beginning with state formation and urbanisation in the Near East c.3000 BC and ending in central and northern Europe c.1000–500 BC, the Bronze Age marks a heroic age of travels and transformations throughout Europe. In this book, Kristian Kristiansen and Thomas Larsson reconstruct the travel and transmission of knowledge that took place between the Near East, the Mediterranean and Europe. They explore how religious, political and social conceptions of Bronze Age people were informed by long-distance connections and alliances between local elites. The book integrates the hitherto separate research fields of European and Mediterranean (classical) archaeology and provides the reader with an alternative to the traditional approach of diffusionism. Examining data from across the region, the book presents an important new interpretation of social change in the Bronze Age, making it essential reading for students of archaeology, of anthropology and of the development of early European society.

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The Rise of Bronze Age Society
Travels, Transmissions and Transformations

KRISTIAN KRISTIANSEN
and
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Contents

List of illustrations vi
Preface xiii

Prologue: between Scylla and Charybdis 1
1 A theoretical strategy for studying interaction 4
2 Odysseus: a Bronze Age archetype 32
3 Rulership in the Near East and the eastern Mediterranean during the Bronze Age 62
4 Europe in the Early Bronze Age: an archaeological background 108
5 Symbolic transmission and social transformation in Bronze Age Europe 142
6 The cosmological structure of Bronze Age society 251
7 Among gods and mortals, animals and humans 320
8 Cosmos and culture in the Bronze Age 357
Epilogue: towards a new Culture History 369

References 373
Index 425
Illustrations

1. Chart of the dynamic relationship between hierarchy and heterarchy. page 9
2. Model of intercontextual strategies of interpretation. 12
3. Model of the structured transmission of a symbolic package of objects between different cultures. 14
4. Centre–periphery structure reflecting the traditional disciplinary boundaries between archaeology and history. 21
5. Diagram showing the relationship between the period and the locality of writing down texts and their true historical origin. 23
6. Diffusion patterns through time during the period preceding the Bronze Age. 26
7. Integrated interpretative model of the transmission and transformation of material culture. 30
8. Basic archaeological categories and their interpretative relationship. 34
9. Horizontal and vertical processes of prestige goods models. 36
10. Model of interaction between two cultural systems. 38
11. Relationship between internal and external processes of hierarchisation. 41
12. Model for how an elite may link themselves to mythological origins in a Bronze Age context. 46
14. Interaction-model for the selective transmission and local adaptation of new institutions in Bronze Age Europe. 49
15. Model of processes of interaction and trade. 51
16. Congruence between time and space in long-distance travels. From Craft and the Kingly Ideal: Art, Trade, and Power by Mary W. Helms. Copyright © 1993. By permission of the author and the University of Texas Press. 54
17. Categories of outside specialists. From Craft and the Kingly Ideal: Art, Trade, and Power by Mary W. Helms. Copyright © 1993. By permission of the author and the University of Texas Press. 55
18. Model showing the inside–outside cycle of the accumulation and transformation of power and energies. 56
19. Rich chiefly burial with chisel for woodworking. 59
20. Naram-Sin’s victory stele. 64
21. The top of Hammurabi’s ‘Law Code Stele’. Detail from photo by Archives Photographiques, Louvre. 66
22. Seal showing the goddess Inanna (Ishtar). Detail from photo by the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago. 69
23. Akhenaton worshipping Aten, the solar disc. Detail from photo by the Egyptian Museum, Cairo. 74
24. Adorer on rock art from Bohuslän; Egyptian ka sign; Egyptian hai sign. 76
List of illustrations

25 Hattian bronze stags with silver inlays from Anatolia. 77
26 Scene from the battle of Kadesh. 82
27 Seals showing Minoan rulers (or priests) with symbolic axes carried as sceptres, and examples of such axe sceptres from Egypt and Anatolia from the eighteenth and seventeenth centuries BC. 85
28 Goddess smelling lilies. 87
29 Minoan and Mycenaean rhyta, showing the high degree of diffusion and ritual acculturation in the Aegean Bronze Age. 89
30 The major trade routes of the city-states of the Levant and Syria during the early second millennium. 91
31 Model of Old Assyrian trade system. 92
32 Similarities during the early second millennium BC (nineteenth–eighteenth centuries) in warrior prestige axes with ribbed shaft hole and personal dress pins with globular, ribbed and disc-shaped heads from Syria and Anatolia to central and northwestern Europe. 94
33 Two traditions of power: mainland Mycenaean monumental elite barrows and fortifications versus Minoan palaces and maritime trading colonies. 97
34 Scene from Egyptian tomb showing ‘Keftiu’. 100
35 The route of the Ulu Burun shipwreck. 102
36 Minoan ships from the Thera frescos. 103
37 Estimated copper production from the major mining areas during the third and second millennia BC and system of mining shafts in Kargaly. 110
38 Theoretical model of the relationship between commodity production and its economic implications for measuring and the creation of new forms of exchange values, its political implications for creating new social values and a new organisation of exchange. 113
39 Map showing the distribution of ring ingot hoards in Europe. 114
40 Mixed Unetice hoard with ring ingots, halberds and armring ingots from zone II. Photo: Landesamt für archäologische Denkmalpflege, Sachsen-Anhalt, Halle. 115
41 Chart showing the use of tin in metal-using regions in the early second millennium BC and the areas with tin available. 115
42 Personal contacts between central Europe and the eastern Mediterranean as evidenced by the distribution of so-called Schleifennaudeln-type toggle pins from around 2000 BC. 119
43 Rich chiefly burials of the Wessex-Brittany Culture and amber necklace from the golden barrow in Upton Lowell in Wiltshire. 121
44 The tin content in Bronze Age Crete from the Pre-Palatial to the Post-Palatial period and the composition and origin of copper in Bronze Age Crete, showing the change between the Old Palace and the New Palace periods. 124
45 Map showing the cultural and political territories of the Hungarian-Carpathian Tell cultures from the seventeenth–sixteenth centuries BC. 126
46 Middle Bronze Age trade routes in the Carpathians linking the major tell settlements and the location of some important trade goods. 129
47 Chiefly or royal swords/daggers: comparison between the gold dagger from Pesinara and Minoan/Mycenaean daggers; warrior swords: comparison between Danish, French and Mycenaean flange-hilted swords. 130
List of illustrations

48 Differential treatment of people during the Early Bronze Age: chiefly burial from Leubingen and killed individuals in pit from Nizná Mysla. 134
49 Graph of metal depositions in Denmark 2300–1500 BC, and diagram showing the use of tin in bronzes between 2300 and 1500 BC in the Nordic region and in central Europe. 136
50 The ‘Lily Prince’ from Knossos. 143
51 Women picking lilies. Fresco from Thera. 144
52 The ‘Captain’s Cabin’ fresco from Thera and central European metal forms. 146
53 Hoards from Hungary with heart-shaped and lily-shaped pendants arranged in personal sets. 147
54 Carpathian clay figurines with decorated clothing and Minoan Snake Goddess from Crete. Published by permission from The Trustees of the British Museum. 148
55 Interpretation of some Carpathian bronze pendants as bodily symbols. 151
56 Fresco from Thera showing earring, and similar earrings from Crete, Hyksos settlement and the Tufalau hoard. 152
57 International similarities in female hairstyles linked to age and social roles. 153
58 Richly decorated pendants with chariot and sun symbolism from the early Urnfield period. 154
59 Two unique, and badly executed wheel-headed pins from Mycenae (B-circle) and Bohemia (female burial), testifying to personal contacts. 155
60 Map of metal (and wooden) cups from the Middle Bronze Age in Europe. 156
61 Minoan bronze cups from Akrotiri, the Aegean and Dehnen, northern Germany. 157
62 Shared stylistic tradition in drinking cups of the sixteenth to early fourteenth centuries BC in northwestern Europe: shale cup from Wessex, metal and wooden cups from Denmark, and northern Germany. 157
63 Early spiral band decoration from the Mycenaean and Carpathian cultures. 159
64 Spiral band decoration on the circular disc on Carpathian axes and on Minoan seals from the Old Palace period. 160
65 Wall decorations from tell settlement at Feudvar and columns and wall decorations from Aegean and Carpathian sanctuaries and houses. 163
66 Ritual hearths decorated with spirals, from the Carpathians and from the palace in Pylos. 164
67 Libation tables with circular cupmark pattern from early and late Minoan culture, Crete, and similar patterns on libation tables and rock art from Bronze Age Scandinavia. Photo Thomas B. Larsson. 165
68 Model and enlarged entrance section of complex fortified settlement with drystone architecture, in Monkodonja, Istria. 166
69 The script of the Lipari Islands. 167
70 Hittite hieroglyphs found at Hattusha. 168
71 Rock art from Oppeby and a frame-figure from Himmelstalund, Östergötland. 169
72 Ground plan structure of the fortified settlement at Arkaim, compared with the smaller ground plan structure of the fortified settlement Dimirchuyuk in Anatolia. 174
73 Reconstruction of the fortification of Arkaim, smelting activity where well and furnaces are linked by the air supply tube, and part of a house made of wood and earthen bricks. 175
List of illustrations

74 Horses were buried along with two-wheeled chariots. Detail from chariot burial, showing the use of disc-shaped cheek pieces, and sacrifice of horse skulls.

Selection of chariot scenes from the Andronovo Culture and related cultures from central Asia, Kazakhstan, Pamir and northwestern India.

Examples of elaborate chiefly burials in shaft graves, covered by tholos or tumulus, and surrounded by a grave circle and ditch.

Distribution of the specialised wavy band decoration on antler, bone and ivory, as presented in Fig. 77, here mostly on handles for whips.

Distribution of the three major types of bits in the chariot complex in Eurasia and the east Mediterranean during the early to mid second millennium BC.

Historical eighteenth-century drawing of the Kivik cairn and the pictorial stones, and a modern documentation of the pictorial stones.

Kivik pictorial stone with ritual axes, pointed hat and ship and its comparative context of antithetical, heraldic compositions from Minoan Crete to Hittite royal emblems.

Signet ring from Tiryns from the fifteenth century BC and a scene from one of the cist stones of the Kivik burial.

Axe and spiral motives from Kivik and some parallels from Europe and Mycenaean shaft graves.

Ritual axes with hats and knobs from Hungary, and south Scandinavia.


Wheel amulets from Hungary, wheel figures from the Wismar lir and rock art figures from western Sweden.

Horse images from Sagaholm and bronze horse from Tågaborg.

Imitations of the twin ship motif from Kivik on cist-stones from southern Norway (Jaeren) and southern Sweden (Jarrestad).

Selection of Hittite symbols from period 1 and 2 cult axes from Scandinavia, and their Hittite and Carpathian parallels.

Ship with central European twin axes above it from Simris and the central European prototype from Austria also found in Scania.


The distribution of personal ornaments of Hungarian type and their spread northwards to the Baltic coast.

Shared traditions in picturing ships during 1700–1500 BC. Minoan/Aegean prototype on Late MH pottery from Aegina and early Scandinavian ship images on metalwork and rock art.

Founder’s hoard from Djursland, Denmark, with eight identical and newly cast ‘Hungarian’ swords of type Apa. Photo: Søren Harboe.

The distribution of Aegean rapiers and gold crowns, central European battle axes and early solid-hilted swords, and Mycenaean/central European gold cups.

Lifetime cycle of travelling chief, converting travel in cosmological space to travel in cosmological time upon his return, death and heroic burial.
List of illustrations

96 Summary map of the two dominant interaction zones of the earlier second millennium BC: the steppe corridor and the Mediterranean corridor. 211
97 The Hajdúsámson hoard. 214
98 Rare warrior burial in the Carpathian region. 215
99 Distribution map of Mycenaean type A swords and flange-hilted swords and lances testifying to connections between the east Mediterranean, central Europe and northern Europe. 216
100 Resharpened sword blades from Nordic swords and flange-hilted swords. 219
101 The chariot group lined up at Frännap, Sweden. 221
102 Photo taken (by Ulf Erik Hagberg) at the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest, of two Middle Bronze Age bronze chariot wheels from Arcalia, Romania. 222
103 Three chariots and charioteers as rock art: rock carving in Bohuslän, Sweden. 223
104 Monumental Bronze Age barrows from northern Jutland. Photo: John Jedbo. 226
105 Hittite, Mycenaean and Nordic male hairstyles. 228
106 Acrobat, dancers, bull-jumpers and rope swingers. Rock art images of feats and a bronze figurine from the south Scandinavian Bronze Age. 230
107 Distribution of octagonally hilted swords from Montelius period 2 against local groups/polities and intermarriage patterns of foreign women in graves. 233
108 Tholos grave of Mycenaean type from Istria in the northern Adriatic Sea. 236
109 Reconstructions of Middle Bronze Age female costumes and headdresses. 239
110 Two illustrations of the early phase of the construction of a tumulus. 243
111 Sun symbolism in the circular layout of stone constructions found under Early Bronze Age barrows. 244
112 The relationship between material culture and oral, written culture. 257
113 Minoan young ‘god’ with staff and the ‘Master Impression’. 260
114 Kneeling goddess and horned snake. Bronze figurines from Faardal, Denmark. 261
115 Twin goddesses riding in their chariot, from the Hagia Triada sarcophagi, c.1400 BC. 262
116 Examples of twin depositions from the period 1700–1400 BC. 266
117 Two of the decorated cist-stones from the Kivik burial in Scania. Photo: T. B. Larsson. 268
118 Hittite round cap on a king with long robe/cloak and Nordic chiefly dress of cloak and tunic with round cap and a scimitar. 272
119 Tall simple cap from Guldhøj and complex round cap from Trindhøj, and Cypriotic bronze statue from Enkomi. 273
120 Scandinavian axe with ‘hat’ and twin figurines with hats from the Stockhult hoard, hat-shaped tutuli from burials and a bronze statuette of a Levantine storm-god with hat found in Schernen, Poland. 274
121 Twin axe bearers in Scandinavian rock art (Simris, Scania) from Montelius period 1. 275
122 A double burial of ‘twin rulers’ from Jutland. 276
123 Chiefly farm hall with two identical living quarters and stalling for cattle in the central part and a farm hall of identical size and construction lying parallel. 277
124 The twin rulers in Scandinavia – a summary of the interpretative structure. 278
125 Large chiefly farm hall from Bruatorp, near the town of Kalmar in Sweden. 279
### List of illustrations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Illustration</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>126</td>
<td>Frescos from Knossos and Pylos showing two persons sitting on campstools drinking together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>127</td>
<td>Hittite king worshipping the weather-god in his bull-shaped form.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>128</td>
<td>The god of 'the open lands' standing on his stag.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>129</td>
<td>Rock art showing a stag and a sun-wagon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>130</td>
<td>The 'God of War' at the King's Gate at Boghazköy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>131</td>
<td>Three rock art panels from Yazilikaya.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>132</td>
<td>Hittite seals with a winged sun-cross.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>134</td>
<td>Cosmology of Bronze Age Scandinavia expressed by the find from Trundholm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>135</td>
<td>The Egtved woman's dress. Danish press photo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>136</td>
<td>The Hesselagergård woman with belt plate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>137</td>
<td>The woman from Tobol, with a bronze wheel at her belly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>138</td>
<td>Campstool and cups from Guldhøj.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>139</td>
<td>Models of the sun journey during Montelius periods 1 and 2 and during the later Bronze Age.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>140</td>
<td>The sun journey and its accompanying transport animals during the Late Bronze Age.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>141</td>
<td>Early Hittite bronze figurines from the seventeenth–sixteenth centuries BC and kneeling female figurine from Faardal in Denmark.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>142</td>
<td>Distribution of bronze figurines from Scandinavia and northern central Europe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>143</td>
<td>The two bronze figurines from the Stockhult hoard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>144</td>
<td>Scheme for some Nordic artefacts and their counterparts in the Near East and eastern Mediterranean area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>145</td>
<td>Hittite statuette from Dövlek.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>146</td>
<td>Central material attributes of the Divine Twins in the Early and Late Bronze Age compared.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>147</td>
<td>Egyptian representation of the god Athum with a scarab as head.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>148</td>
<td>Rock art showing a horned snake from Vitylcyke. After Arkeologisk rapport fra Vitylckemuseet 1. Photo: Torsten Högberg.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>149</td>
<td>Bronze statuette of stallion–human relationship from Anatolia and a Scandinavian rock art depiction of a similar relationship (photo: T. B. Larsson).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150</td>
<td>Horse pulling the sun-disc. Rock art image from Balken in Bohuslän, Sweden.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>152</td>
<td>Scenes from the Sagaholm pictorial slabs depicting the myth of the birth of the Ashvinau.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>153</td>
<td>Minoan ox head with horns and a double axe between the horns. Similar image from Late Bronze Age head from Fogtdarp in southern Sweden.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>154</td>
<td>Rock art from Bohuslän, Sweden, showing horned divinities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>155</td>
<td>Representations of horned divinities from the Near East, Cyprus and Europe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>156</td>
<td>The location of rock art in a Swedish landscape of today. Photo: T. B. Larsson.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>157</td>
<td>Plan of the Kivik area with cult buildings, and ground plans for Sandagergård and Kivik.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The list of illustrations is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Illustration</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>158</td>
<td>Rock art figure with phallus and raised arm gesture. Photo: T. B. Larsson.</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>159</td>
<td>Ritual axes from Viby and Bredebaekgård, and decorated bottom on belt box worn by sun priests.</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>160</td>
<td>The ‘goddess’ from Fossum – rock carving from Bohuslän, Sweden. Photo: T. B. Larsson.</td>
<td>342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>161</td>
<td>The ‘sun-discs’ from Fossum and Aspeberget.</td>
<td>343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>162</td>
<td>Warrior depictions and a hunting scene with bow and arrow from Fossum, Bohuslän. Photo: T. B Larsson.</td>
<td>345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>163</td>
<td>Hieros Gamos scenes from Vitlycke and Jörlov.</td>
<td>346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>164</td>
<td>Depiction of stag hunt from Massleberg.</td>
<td>347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>165</td>
<td>A scene with a boar hunt from Himmelstalund.</td>
<td>347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>166</td>
<td>Two antithetically arranged goats. Rock art from Himmelstalund, Östergötland.</td>
<td>348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>167</td>
<td>Cosmological model of Bronze Age landscape.</td>
<td>354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>168</td>
<td>Model of overlapping cultural distributions and gender identities in Bronze Age Europe.</td>
<td>362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>169</td>
<td>Simulated socio-seismographic curve of the realisation of agency over time.</td>
<td>370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>170</td>
<td>Theoretical model of the dynamic relationship between long-term tradition and short-term transformation and their internal articulation.</td>
<td>370</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preface

This book wanted to be written. That is the only way to explain its birth. It emerged unexpectedly during a dinner between the two authors in late August 1998, pushed aside other publishing plans, and before the evening had come to an end we had sketched the content and agreed on a timetable. Both were to be modified several times in the course of writing, but the inspiration remained intact.

The historical background to this joint venture was based upon the convergence of our research interests during recent years. In 1997 Thomas B. Larsson published an interpretative essay about relations between the Near East and the Nordic Bronze Age (Materiell kultur och religiösa symboler), based upon Near Eastern/Hittite texts and material evidence from Scandinavia. At the same time Kristian Kristiansen had completed Europe before History (1998), where space did not allow the second millennium much room. The unfulfilled scope of both our works on this period made it obvious to join forces in a new book spanning the Bronze Age world in its entirety, from Mesopotamia to Scandinavia. We wished to approach the Bronze Age as historical epoch, going beyond a world system approach, by reconstructing the travels and the transmission of knowledge that took place between the Near East, the Mediterranean and Europe. In doing so, we are aware that western Europe has been somewhat neglected in our case studies. However, that would have demanded yet another book. We were therefore happy to realise that Richard Harrison had worked on such a manuscript, titled ‘Symbols and warriors: images of the European Bronze Age’ (although mainly covering the Late Bronze Age), that went to the publishers about the time we finished our manuscript.

In selecting relevant evidence and avoiding the worst academic pitfalls we have benefited from the advice of Professor Folke Josephsson (on Hittite and Vedic texts) and Professor Robin Hägg (Minoan/Mycenaean religion), both of Göteborg University. We also held an integrated research seminar in the fall of 1999 between the prehistoric and classical departments of archaeology in Göteborg. We thank all participants for lively and inspirational discussions. In March 2000 we ended the seminar with a small symposium, to which we invited a few scholars with whom we shared a yearlong academic co-operation and interest in the role of travels and trade in later prehistory. The discussions emanating from this meeting added the last touch to the manuscript and some important additional literature. Here we would like
to thank Professor Mary W. Helms, North Carolina, Professor Mogens Trolle Larsen, Copenhagen, and Professor Andrew Sherratt, Oxford, in particular, for their comments and valuable contributions to the symposium discussion, but also to a later draft version of the manuscript. For productive and critical comments on the manuscript we also thank Inga Ullén, Stockholm, Volker Heyd, Bristol, and Timothy Earle, Northwestern University. Per Persson skilfully transformed many sketchy hand-drawings into beautiful figures and did most of the artwork for illustrations. The following figures have been produced by Thomas B. Larsson: 12, 14, 24a, 67d, 90b, 103, 106, 117, 125, 134, 142, 143, 144, 150, 151, 154, 155, 156, 158, 160. One of us (KK) had the opportunity to spend the fall of 2003 in Cambridge lecturing on the book, and giving lectures in other British universities and in Berlin, which helped to clarify points of uncertainty in the final editing before submitting the manuscript to the Press. Finally, we wish to thank our friends and colleagues throughout Europe and North America for maintaining an exchange network of offprints and books. Even the best library cannot compete with the personal dynamic of academic networks.

After little more than five years with our project we are now ready – and happy – to leave the final result in the hands of colleagues and students. We learned a lot in the process and hopefully readers will share some of our excitement during the Odyssey.