Prologue: between Scylla and Charybdis

In this book we set out on a risky academic Odyssey, crossing between several research cultures and theoretical paradigms, with the danger of either hitting unknown rocks and getting stranded or calling down upon us the wrath of paradigmatic rulers for being theoretically incorrect. However, we resisted the alluring temptation of settling in one of the safe paradigms and insisted stubbornly upon trying out an interdisciplinary, interpretative journey based upon the identification of social institutions in the archaeological record, and their transmission and transformation in different cultural and social environments. More precisely: in the Bronze Age. We propose that the Age of Bronze represents a historical epoch that was qualitatively different from both the preceding Neolithic and the subsequent Iron Age. Beginning with state formation and urbanisation in the Near East around 3000 BC and ending in central and northern Europe between 1000 and 500 BC, it marks the heroic age of travels, cultural transmissions and social transformations throughout the whole region. It was accompanied by the rise of new forms of cultural and social identity, but also by a new political economy (Earle 2002).

In chapters 1 and 2 we outline the theoretical and ethnohistorical background for our interpretative enterprise, and in chapters 3 and 4 we give an outline of rulership, trade and interaction in the Near East and in Europe. In chapter 5 we employ this framework in an analysis of cultural relations between the Near East, the Mediterranean world and Europe during the early and mid second millennium BC. In chapters 6 and 7 we demonstrate the organising role of religion and shared cosmologies, before drawing conclusions about the historical role of the Bronze Age in chapter 8.

When adopting such a framework it became painfully clear to us that present research cultures are unable to cope with the geographical and temporal scope of Bronze Age civilisations. With few exceptions they take on the perspective of local cultures and do not see far beyond local or regional borders (Kristiansen 2001b; Smith 2003). It is a point we wish to make that Bronze Age research is thereby missing an essential aspect of this epoch – the importance of travel and journeys, of trade and interactions. This led to a widespread transmission and transformation of social institutions with a Near Eastern/Mediterranean background in large parts of Bronze Age Europe – it is perhaps the most characteristic element of that epoch. But the influences went both ways. This makes it easier to understand why

and how the 'centres and peripheries' communicated, and why and how the 'peripheries' in some periods would run down or dominate the centres. They were less peripheral than we have hitherto assumed, and they shared some of the basic technological, military and ritual 'equipage' of the centre, though locally adopted and transformed.

It was Oscar Montelius who in a masterly synthesis *Die älteren Kulturperioden im Orient und in Europa* in 1903 for the first time established the typological/diffusionist context for linking the Copper and Bronze Ages in Europe with the Mediterranean and the Near East (Montelius 1903). Later Gordon Childe in several books added a social and economic explanation to this historical relationship, notably in *The Bronze Age* (Childe, 1930). However, after the Second World War Bronze Age research became increasingly regional and local in scope, with a few exceptions (Müller-Karpe 1980).

We believe these constraints in present research cultures have precluded archaeologists from grasping the otherness – or the unfamiliarity – of the Bronze Age. As one of us concluded in the book *Europe before History*: 'But the Bronze Age may also teach us about our own foreignness – the peoples of the Bronze Age lived in a world that we will never fully understand without understanding its otherness' (Kristiansen 1998a: 419).

To familiarise ourselves with the unfamiliar we applied the ethnohistorical knowledge of travels and skilled crafting and their cosmological role in premodern societies (presented in chapter 2). Here we relied especially on the pioneering works of Mary Helms (Helms 1988, 1993 and 1998). In addition we employed the contemporary written evidence from the Near East and the east Mediterranean, in order to reconstruct the full complexity of Bronze Age societies (presented in chapter 3). We further applied some of the relevant songs and epics, and we reclaim the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* and the Irish myths and sagas as representing what is essentially a Late Bronze Age cosmology and ethos. We have reached this conclusion from an archaeological position and perspective, simply by demonstrating on archaeological grounds that this is their proper historical context. In doing so we situate the Bronze Age in protohistory (Bietti Sestieri 1996), if not in historical archaeology (Andrén 1998) or in cultural history (Morris 2000).

We were also encouraged by the innovative Aegean research environment that has developed since the 1980s, not least the many seminar and conference proceedings on such central issues as 'The Minoan Thalassocracy', 'Celebrations of Death and Divinity' or 'The Role of the Ruler', to mention but a few. In combination with a number of incredible new archaeological discoveries, such as the fully loaded Ulu Burun shipwreck from the fourteenth century BC, or the bronze disc from Nebra in Germany with sun, moon and stars, it made our task much easier (Meller 2004). We recognise that central European and north European Bronze Age research still

has a long way to go in terms of interpretations. Instead we have profited from the often very systematic and well-published evidence, such as *Prähistorische Bronzefunde*, or the wonderfully illustrated catalogue on the Bronze Age by Herman Müller-Karpe in his impressive series *Handbuch der Vorgeschichte* (Müller-Karpe 1980).

The working title of our book was for several years 'The Long Journey'. It carried a double meaning. On the one hand it refers to the main theme of the book – the overarching role of travels in the Bronze Age. But it also alludes to the long journey it took archaeology, before it could approach this subject again.

Our Odyssey is of course doomed to be insufficient in numerous aspects of empirical knowledge. We are experts on neither ethnohistory, Hittite texts, Minoan rituals nor Indo-European religion. We hope, however, that our interpretations will command enough interest to make any factual omissions of less importance. And we further hope to have demonstrated the relevance of an interdisciplinary, culture-historical approach to the study of the Bronze Age. The reason being very simple and straightforward: to match the forces of history as they unfolded during the Bronze Age it is necessary to mobilise the collective forces of historical knowledge.

1 A theoretical strategy for studying interaction

Progress normally has a hidden underside, which will often not be recognised until much later. Our own time is full of such examples. The unforeseen side of industrialisation was environmental pollution. In science we may observe similar effects. The rise of a new paradigm to dominance often leads to the complete abandonment of the old, with the unforeseen effect that certain phenomena are left unexplained even in the new paradigm, which over time leads to increasing imbalances. Such was the case when processual and later postprocessual archaeology abandoned the old cultural historical framework of diffusion to account for cultural change. As a consequence explanations in archaeology have become increasingly local and historically unbalanced. The dominant paradigms have not developed the necessary theoretical and interpretative tools to deal with cultural interaction in all its variety, from travels to population movements, and the impact this may have on local and regional developments.[1]

This book attempts to remedy some of these theoretical flaws in current archaeological thinking, by proposing a new theoretical and interpretative framework for understanding cultural interaction and its effects. We like to think of the present stage in archaeology as more mature and less one-sided and paradigmatic (postparadigmatic perhaps) than earlier stages, and 'pluralism' has become a popular buzz-word to account for that. We hope that this is more than rhetoric, and that reality allows the reintroduction, not of a past, obsolete paradigm but of theoretical and interpretative concepts that account for real historical phenomena and therefore belong to the interpretative repertoire of archaeology.

1.1 Limitations in present theoretical frameworks

In this chapter we propose to develop an explicit theoretical strategy for the interpretation and explanation of interregional interaction. We consider such processes as having played a major role in later European prehistory, more precisely during the Bronze Age and Early Iron Age. 'During the

1 We note, however, that recent developments in strontium isotope analysis of teeth and bone are producing new compelling evidence of the movement of individuals in prehistory (Ezzo, Johnson and Price 1997; Grupe *et al.* 1997; Price, Grupe and Schröter 1998; Montgomery, Budd and Evans 2000; Price, Manzilla and Middleton 2000). This is now beginning to have an impact also on interpretative frameworks (e.g. Shennan 2000). So, sooner or later archaeology will have to come to grips with these new realities.

Bronze Age there emerged a truly international network of metal trade and exchange, making all regions dependent upon each other, despite their different cultural traditions. The question of external versus internal factors in promoting change therefore became crucial' (Kristiansen 1998a: 1). We shall exemplify this in subsequent chapters by analysing the structure and processes of interaction between the Mediterranean and central and northern Europe during the second millennium BC. Our ambition is to go beyond a macro-historical framework of centre–periphery, world system theory by dissolving specific historical processes of interregional interaction into their various symbolic, economic and social components to trace their selective, local impact in the process. As argued by John Barrett (1998), we should further situate our interpretations in the lived experience and human motivations to enter and participate in such networks, a point to be demonstrated at length in subsequent chapters.

Before we proceed, however, we need to point out briefly some constraints in present theoretical frameworks for the development of interaction studies.

The processual and postprocessual archaeologies of the last generation have one thing in common: an autonomous perspective. The local or regional unit is their favourite frame of theoretical and interpretative reference, and academic references consequently rarely transcend national or regional borders. This has led to an unintended but dangerous autonomy of learning, which is confined behind national borders and language borders (Cornell, Fahlander and Kristiansen 1998; Kristiansen 2002a). Since history is not constrained by present traditions of learning, major processes of prehistoric interaction and change are being relegated from serious study in the present archaeological frameworks of theory and interpretation. We propose that this situation needs to be changed, if theoretical and historical knowledge is to proceed.

Research traditions tend to oscillate between oppositions, like a historical pendulum (Kristiansen 1996a: Fig. 4; Sherratt 1996a: Fig. 1). In an academic context the autonomous framework of processual and postprocessual archaeology may be understood as a necessary reaction against an overt diffusionism of the first half of the twentieth century, which became obsolete after the decline and partial collapse of its interpretative and chronological framework after the Second World War. Colin Renfrew was the first to link these two processes together as a historical background for promoting a new autonomous perspective on European prehistory (Renfrew 1973 and 1984). The methodological and theoretical reorganisation of archaeology that followed has during the last generation produced a completely new historical picture of the social and economic foundations of prehistoric communities, summarised in several introductions to archaeology in recent years.

Ian Hodder and postprocessual archaeology enlarged this framework by adding to it a new understanding of symbolic meaning and the role of culture and human agency in social strategies, whether in the household or at local cultural boundaries (Hodder 1982a, 1982b, 1986) – but rarely beyond. Instead attention has been focused on the cultural construction of the surrounding landscape (Bender 1993; Tilley 1994) and its monuments (Barrett 1989 and 1994; Bradley 1993 and 2002).

If processual and postprocessual archaeology may be said to have provided archaeology with the theoretical and methodological tools for understanding prehistoric social organisation and cosmology at local and regional levels, they have failed in extending this beyond local and regional borders. Although interesting attempts have been made (Renfrew and Cherry 1986) they have not been persuasive beyond the regional polity. It was developments in social anthropology (Wolf), history (Braudel, Wallerstein) and sociology (Mann) which were integrated into a new theoretical and interpretative framework of centre–periphery and world systems by Jonathan Friedman and Mike Rowlands that provided such a perspective. This new framework was applied to archaeology to account for the interaction between local, regional and global or macro-historical changes in later prehistory (Rowlands, Larsen and Kristiansen 1987; Bintliff 1991; Sherratt 1997b; Kristiansen 1998a; Kristiansen and Rowlands 1998; Kardulias 1999; Denemark, Friedman, Gills and Modelski 2000; Chew 2001).

Limitations in this theoretical framework are rather linked to its macro-historical perspective and its general assumption of dominance (Stein 1999: ch. 2), although one of us has recently made an attempt to add to it theoretical concepts at a middle-range level of interpretation (Kristiansen 1998a: ch. 3). From this study emerged an understanding of the specific historical conditions that characterised the Bronze Age world system and made it different from the modern world system: 'What makes the Bronze Age so special is linked to the nature of centre–periphery relations that characterized the first and second millennia BC. By adopting the mastery of metallurgy, the rituals of status and the innovations of warfare from the east Mediterranean, but not the political and economic framework sustaining it, new social and economic dynamics were introduced to the societies of temperate Europe' (Kristiansen 1998a: 418). Following Edens and Kohl, the most characteristic differences between the ancient and the modern world systems are: 'the existence of multiple centres; logistical constraints impeding movements of materials, especially staples, along overland routes; the omnipresent military option to raid rather than trade; and technologies common to both peripheries and centres. These differences suggest that dependencies in the modern sense only rarely characterised centre–periphery relations in the ancient world' (Edens and Kohl 1993: 31).

We wish to explore in more detail these generalisations, and their proposed nature of interregional interaction.

What is needed, to do that, is a more explicit theoretical and interpretative strategy allowing us to trace and dissolve processes of interaction at a more fine-grained level of analysis. This was formulated quite precisely in a recent contribution to interaction studies: 'The ultimate goal of interaction research is to write "total histories" (Kohl 1987: 29) of ancient societies, histories which place local developments within the rich network of connections any one society maintained. In order to meet this objective, we need to construct a paradigm which, among other steps, identifies analytical units and the conditions under which intersocietal contacts are likely to have particular sociopolitical effects' (Shortman and Urban 1992b: 248).

We share this goal, and we consequently consider it obsolete to discuss the complexity of interaction research in traditional terms of 'falling into either an autonomist or a diffusionist trap'. Arafat and Morgan recently exemplified this problematic in a discussion of the Hallstat D residences. They argue that any investigation of material culture taking its stance in exchange and trade 'impedes understanding of local material behaviour and social development' (Arafat and Morgan 1994: 130). We do not share this standpoint, and a critique of their position has been delivered by Andrew Sherratt (1995) (see also Sherratt and Sherratt 1998).[2]

In this book we wish to abandon the whole terminology dealing with concepts of either autonomy or diffusion, and develop a new conceptual framework that accounts for the complexity of prehistoric interaction. Such studies are now beginning to appear, e.g. Stein (1999), proposing and testing two models of interaction in the early state system of Uruk: the 'distance-parity' and the 'trade-diaspora' models. It suggests that there exists a whole range of interregional relations that need to be developed, theoretically based on particular case studies. However, the theoretical traditions described above were developed in a specific academic context to address certain types of problems, and therefore to some extent were also developed in opposition to each other. It will therefore be necessary to do some critical conceptual 'cleaning' in order to redefine a new theoretical position that is neither diffusionism nor functionalism: a perspective that takes as its point of departure the interpretation and explanation of symbolic transmission and social transformation as a complex and selective process that took place and affected simultaneously both interregional and local conditions.

2 The internal/external approach was also played out in two papers by Patrice Brun and Michael Dietler in the *Journal of European Archaeology* (Brun 1995; Dietler 1995). In the debate different levels of explanation are taken to represent different theoretical approaches, leading to a polemic which tends to obscure the legitimacy of both perspectives. It reflects the need to develop a more complex theoretical framework that is able to integrate world system analysis with local and regional studies.

We propose therefore as a first step in our theoretical strategy to examine critically the concepts that in the past have been used to address such phenomena from different theoretical positions, and then to recontextualise and redefine their meaning within a new interpretative framework.

1.2 From social typology to social complexity: the role of institutionalisation

Institutionalisation and its role in the development of social complexity have become a growing concern in recent years (Stein 1998; Earle 2001; Runciman 2001). A series of conference reports and books published during the 1990s marks this research trend, which derives from the basic question: how does a minority of people achieve control over a majority of people, and how are they able to maintain their power (Price and Feinman 1995; Earle 1997)? While the answer seems simple – through institutionalisation (one of the primary criteria of power in chiefdoms and ranked societies)[3] – the process itself is poorly understood and it has become increasingly clear that even institutions themselves are complex and deserve further study. We shall take up two main areas of research relevant to our inquiry: resistance to social hierarchy and the derived concept of heterarchy.

While the nature of power was a main focus of research during the 1980s in an attempt to move beyond the social typologies of the 1970s, the interest shifted during the 1990s towards the failure of – or the difficulties in establishing – stable power relations. This can be seen as a natural outcome of the increasing knowledge of power relations acquired during the 1980s. Resistance to state formation was taken on to the research agenda in the late eighties (Patterson and Gailey 1987; Miller, Rowlands and Tilley 1989), together with a growing interest in the formation of political institutions and social complexity in non-state societies (Brumfiel and Earle 1987; Upham 1990; Earle 1991). As a result there appeared during the 1990s several major works on the evolutionary significance of resistance to state formation and colonisation in a macro- and micro-historical perspective (Dietler 1995; Kristiansen 1998a; Morris 1999b). These were followed up by studies in the processes of establishing and maintaining power in individual historical cases and in comparative contexts (Hedeager 1992; Helms 1993; Kolb 1994; Pauketat 1994 and 2000; Blanton *et al.* 1996; Earle 1997; Ruby 1999; Arnold 2000; Smith 2003). One aspect of this new research is an increasing knowledge and realisation of the complexity of the process (Feinman 1995; Hayden 1995; Morris 1999; Adams 2001) and the resulting variability in

3 We recognise the more universal role of institutions in the evolution and formation of social life, as demonstrated by Foley (2001) and Richerson and Boyd (2001).

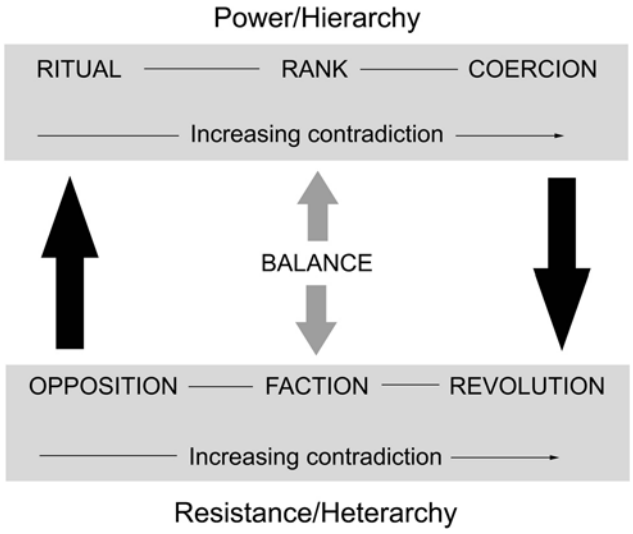

Fig. 1 Chart of the dynamic relationship between hierarchy and heterarchy.

the organisation of society (Feinman 2000; Renfrew 2001a, 2001b; Chapman 2003).

These insights have been accompanied by research into the complexity of social institutions and groupings. Especially, Elizabeth Brumfiel has drawn attention to the diversity of organisational properties in prestate societies, which are linked to different interests. Factionalism is the concept she employed to account for the constant tendency of splitting up existing groupings and institutions into competing factions (Brumfiel and Fox 1994). Carole Crumley further developed the theoretical understanding of the instability of hierarchies and the formation of alternative non-rigorous power relations by coining the concept of heterarchy, as opposed to hierarchy (Crumley 1987 and 2001; Ehrenreich, Crumley and Levy 1995). It takes as its point of departure that hierarchies are rarely fixed and one-dimensional, and stresses the flexibility of power relations and the potential for flexibility and fluctuations (Fig. 1). As stated by Crumley: 'While hierarchy undoubtedly characterizes power relations in some societies, it is equally true that coalitions, federations, and other examples of shared or counterpoised power abound. The addition of the term heterarchy to the vocabulary of power relations reminds us that forms of order exist that are not exclusively hierarchical and that interactive elements in complex systems need not be permanently ranked relative to each other' (Crumley 1995: 5). This would seem to represent an important additional property of hierarchy, with a potential for widening our understanding of the concept (McIntosh 1999). Although the basic realities of hierarchy in chiefdom societies are rarely changed (such

as that between elites and commoners), they may oscillate around a number of variants (Helms 1998: ch. 9).[4]

Thus we may conclude that although institutionalisation represents an essential ingredient in the formation of more complex and ranked societies, it does not automatically lead to further institutional formalisation. Institutions are flexible and adaptive as they are integrated in networks of alliances and exchange, which are the basic instruments for gaining access to and maintaining power, to be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. Another consequence of the adaptive capacity of institutions is their long-term persistence, which will be demonstrated in chapter 5.

The implications of this brief survey are that we need to study institutions in order to build up an understanding of the organisational properties of society from the ground, so to speak. Such studies should further be culturally and historically specific. We are not proposing to revert back to a general study of institutions in chiefdoms or states. Chiefly institutions existed universally, but they cover a wide variety of organisational forms and therefore need to be dissolved into institutional properties that are historically specific, in order to understand the conditions and causes of complexity (Earle 1997; Haas 2001). How was rulership institutionalised, what institutional forms did warrior retinues or religious institutions, etc. take, and how were they interlinked vertically and horizontally? Warriors may be part of an institution of chiefly retinues (a vertical relationship), but they may also be part of an institutionalised horizontal relationship of warrior sodalities that allowed them to move geographically. It may further be sustained by kinship systems, as we shall later demonstrate in chapter 4. Such an approach has significant theoretical and methodological implications, which we shall now develop.

1.3 Towards an intercontextual archaeology: material culture and social institutions

In this section we wish to propose a new, theoretically more profitable approach to the study of institutions and interaction in the Bronze Age, and

4 In much recent postprocessual interpretative theorising these conditions have been described in terms of negotiations, stressing the role of human agency. We find these concepts too ideologically loaded with liberal, western connotations, as if chiefs and commoners, men and women in the Bronze Age were autonomous individuals sitting around a table negotiating, ending up signing a contract, a terminology sometimes employed (Derevenski and Sørensen 2002). While such concepts may help us to redirect and focus interest on new problems, they are in our opinion counterproductive for a deeper understanding of the nature of such processes in prehistoric societies. It demands the development of concepts based upon the study of real situations in real societies in the ethnographic past or in ancient myth and literature. We are here in agreement with Julian Thomas, that individuals are not autonomous (Thomas 2002: 38ff.)