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# Ritual in Late Bronze Age Ireland

Material Culture, Practices,  
Landscape Setting and Social Context

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## **Abstract**

This thesis develops a new perspective on Late Bronze Age (LBA) Ireland by identifying and analysing patterns of ritual practice in the archaeological record, as well as determining how distinct ritual practices relate to each other, their immediate environment and wider landscape, and the social contexts within which they were carried out. Ritual practices find expression in a range of contexts which can be studied separately; however, they belong in, and thus require, an over-arching, integrated ritual system to contextualise and attempt to understand their broader purpose. Consequently, this project centres on the question: Can an investigation of the practices of ritual feasting, death ritual, ritual deposition and fertility ritual, as situated within their broader socio-cultural contexts, yield fresh perspectives on the Irish LBA socio-cultural system? A more nuanced understanding of the social context of LBA ritual practice in Ireland is thus developed, thereby putting a human face on a body of scholarship previously dominated by studies of monument and artefact types. By applying anthropological analysis and a contextually focused theoretical framework to the large body of data this thesis examines aspects of LBA ritual practice and society not consistently engaged with by previous studies.

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## **Introduction**

This thesis is organised into five main sections under the following subjects: 1) Theory, 2) Ritual Practices, 3) Landscape, 4) Social Context, and 5) Summary. A brief introduction to the Chapters is provided below, followed by an outline of the aims, objectives and methodology of the research conducted.

The text begins with an overview of the current state of Irish archaeological research and how the current study relates to prior research. Chapter 1.1 more specifically addresses the archaeological investigation of ritual by considering the mechanisms used by a number of theoretical perspectives. Chapter 1.2 provides a theoretical overview of archaeological investigations of identity which is more directly applied to the Irish Late Bronze Age (LBA) in Chapters 4.1 and 4.2. Similarly, Chapter 1.3 provides a theoretical overview of the archaeological investigation of materiality which provides the theoretical foundation for the analysis of LBA Irish ritual practice developed throughout the thesis.

The data on which much of the investigative analysis presented in this thesis is built is the material culture of the Irish LBA, and therefore an understanding of the study of materiality and material culture from the perspective of the interaction of people and 'things' is of benefit to fully appreciate the complexities presented by the Irish LBA archaeological record. This is especially evident in Chapter 4.1 where material culture is used as an indicator of the formation and transformation of identities in LBA Ireland. In Chapter 4.2 the focus of discussion is the presence of exotic items in the context of Irish LBA ritual practice, which not only indicates Ireland's involvement in the movement of objects throughout Europe in the Bronze Age, but also the transference of knowledge and ideas across regions.

Chapters 2.1-2.4 provide a contextualised analysis of the four categories of ritual practice focused on in this thesis: feasting, deposition, death and fertility. These categories of ritual practice are investigated from the perspective of their physical enactment. Chapters 3.0 and 3.1 develop upon the previous chapters by shifting the focus of discussion to the physical enactment of ritual in the landscape. In particular the close associations between certain ritual practices and certain types of locations in the landscape is investigated, as is the relationships between locations of ritual practice as situated within a wide landscape context. Chapter 5.0 acts a concluding discussion to the archaeological interpretations presented in the thesis. Particular themes which are consistent throughout a number of categories of ritual practice are discussed and avenues of future research are put forward.

## **Aims**

Current Bronze Age research in Ireland is mainly focused on the earlier part of the period with few studies investigating the Late Bronze Age (LBA) specifically. When it has been the focus of research the Irish LBA archaeological data is often communicated as a descriptive narrative with few traces of theoretical argument or comparative interpretation. Studies of LBA Ireland have as a result been heavily dominated by catalogues, classifications and typologies, and are often missing a human element. This project aims to develop upon the current state of scholarship by investigating performance of LBA ritual practices within their social and landscape contexts, as well as applying an anthropological analysis and a contextually focused theoretical framework to the existing body of data.

This thesis thus develops a more nuanced understanding of the social context of LBA ritual practice in Ireland, thereby putting a human face on a body of scholarship previously dominated by studies of monument and artefact types. The project's central research question is: 'Can an investigation of the practices of ritual feasting, mortuary ritual, ritual deposition, and fertility ritual as situated within their broader socio-cultural contexts yield fresh perspectives on the Irish LBA ritual system?' Ritual practices find expression in a range of contexts which can be studied separately; however, they belong in, and thus require, an over-arching, integrated ritual system to 'explain' their broader purpose. Therefore, in this study LBA ritual practices and their contexts will first be investigated as distinct research objectives in separate chapters and subsequently analysed together as a more holistic ritual system to address the central research question.

## **Objectives**

The main objectives of this thesis were to investigate the practices and contexts of ritual feasting, ritual deposition, death ritual and fertility ritual in Late Bronze Age (LBA) Ireland. The achievement of these objectives focuses on investigating patterns of ritual practice in LBA Ireland in order to develop a clearer understanding of how they were enacted. To facilitate the analysis of these sub-categories, ritual practice is conceptualised as an integrated system (as influenced by the main theoretical framework applied, practice theory). Another main objective involves the investigation of the social contexts within which ritual activities and concerns were addressed at various levels of LBA society in Ireland. This is conducted through critical analysis of past and current interpretations and models of LBA social organisation and by considering if these interpretations/models are suitable for and/or applicable to an Irish context.

## **Methodology**

Ritual practices create patterns which can be observed and analysed. Although the underlying ‘meaning’ may never be fully realised, by noting these patterns archaeologists can gather data pertaining to scale, temporality, and socio-cultural characteristics and therefore develop a better understanding of ritual practices in their broader socio-cultural context and natural environment. Ritual is a social construct; to be fully understood it must be considered within its wider context. It is therefore important to conceptualize and define ritual practice both in general and as a component of an Irish Late Bronze Age (LBA) socio-cultural structure.

In the context of this thesis Irish LBA ritual practices are initially investigated separately, then analysed together as a ritual system integrated within a larger cultural system. To achieve this the theoretical framework of ‘*Practice theory*’ is employed to explore how LBA rituals may have been physically performed and what possible socio-cultural motivations may lie behind the performance of these actions. The research methodology builds upon the author’s anthropological background and applies it to a detailed analysis of Irish material to examine aspects of ritual practice overlooked by other researchers and to push the theoretical debate further.

The archaeology of LBA Ireland includes evidence for a variety of ritual practices. However, the available data needs to be synthesised and communicated to the archaeological community within and outside of Ireland to make a contribution to current scholarship. Therefore, this thesis not only considers LBA ritual practice across the whole island of Ireland, but will consider how these practices and identified trends relate to a broader European context. Accordingly, the research conducted for this thesis can help to situate Irish archaeology more firmly within current European academic debates.

## **The Irish Late Bronze Age**

The application of scientific dating to the Irish archaeological record has revolutionised our understanding of the Bronze Age (BA) which previously was largely characterised by the distribution of metal artefacts (Brindley 1995, 11). Of course, as some indications of societal change are only observable through the introduction and development of new technologies and artefact types, the artefactual record continues to influence our comprehension of Irish prehistory. The bookends of this study are thus the introduction of the bronze slashing sword to Ireland at around 1200 BC and the introduction and proliferation of iron technology beginning around 600 BC. Therefore, although chronological parameters have been put on the study for the purpose of providing structure it is societal change related to the introduction of new technology (and its associated social practices) which defines the period discussed as the Irish Late Bronze Age (LBA) in this thesis.

Some authors would place a distinct Irish Chalcolithic period between 2500 and 2000 BC based on the introduction of copper artefacts (O'Brien 2012a), while others have stressed that although copper working was a significant development, similarities in pottery and monuments indicate a continuity from the Late Neolithic into the Early Bronze Age (EBA) (Carlin and Brück 2012). Similarly, some begin the BA at roughly 2500 BC, when metalworking first arises in the form of copper axeheads and blades, as well as sheet gold objects (Waddell 2010; O'Brien 2004), while others would not consider the BA proper to begin until the production of bronze artefacts at around 2000 BC (Brindley 2007).

The LBA in Ireland is traditionally subdivided into three phases: the Bishopsland Phase, Roscommon Phase and Dowris Phase, all named for hoards which typify a range of artefacts associated with each period. Like the EBA the chronology of the Middle Bronze Age (MBA) is largely delimited by artefact types. Grogan suggest that this period begins at c. 1600 BC with the introduction of two-piece stone moulds and the first socketed artefacts and ends at c. 1200 BC, although he stresses continuity with both the preceding and succeeding periods and does not provide artefactual evidence for a change from the MBA to LBA (Grogan 2004, 61). In Ireland the shift from the MBA to LBA is most clearly seen in changes in artefact types, for instance from Cordoned Urns to Coarse Pots between 1350 and 1200 BC (Grogan et al. 2007a, 23, Fig. 2.4) and from rapier to slashing sword at around 1200 BC (Waddell 2010, 213). Although, the MBA is defined by Waddell (2010) as the period from 1600-1000 BC and the LBA from 1000-600 BC, the dates which will be adhered to in this study are based on the introduction of new technologies (and their associated practices, in particular ritual practice) and so the LBA is thus considered here to encompass the period from c. 1200 – 600 BC.

The end of the LBA is difficult to pin-point as the gradual introduction of iron working is a complicating factor, as is the long radiocarbon plateau at 2400 BP (roughly 450 BC) representing 400 calendar years, which interrupts the more precise results usually available through C<sup>14</sup> dating (Brindley 1995, 11). Bradley suggests that the social organisation of the BA began to 'collapse' in the ninth century BC and, based on a

gradual reduction in hoarding practices and the slow integration of iron artefacts, places the beginning of the Iron Age at 600 BC (2007, 230). Waddell (2010) also suggests 600 BC for the end of the BA in Ireland and this date will be observed here. Although these temporal classifications are debatable and vague, they are necessary in order to clearly discuss the monumental socio-cultural and political changes taking place during the BA.

## 1.0 Addressing ritual in archaeology

Since Cooney's 1995 paper *Theory and Practice in Irish Archaeology* there has not been much explicit discussion of the nature of theoretical debate in Irish archaeology. Waddell (2007) has recently addressed the ever-present issue of excavation not being followed by in-depth interpretation, perhaps indicating a continued lack of theoretical engagement within Irish archaeology (although the very real time and budget constraints of developer-led archaeology cannot and should not be ignored). Cooney suggests that the fundamental reason for theory being overlooked by Irish archaeologists is an abundance of data and an underlying perception that a better understanding of the past is a direct result of amassing information:

“But the most basic reason is that archaeologists in Ireland feel that their practice of the discipline is successful, constantly coming up with new information. Ireland has a rich archaeological record capable of throwing new light on all prehistoric and historic periods. [...] the more data, the less concern there is with theory.” (Cooney 1995, 269)

The perception is thus that if enough data is amassed then ‘correct’ interpretation will automatically follow, a ‘common sense approach’ to archaeology (see also Woodman 1992; Cooney and Woodman 1993). Although an empirically based stance is still prevalent in Ireland and globally (Cooney 2009a) there is an equally strong theoretical voice present in current Irish archaeological discourse (including Brück 2012 among others; Becker 2009; Cleary 2007), perceptible in the more focused theoretical topics discussed in subsequent chapters of this thesis. Clearly, Irish archaeologists from across the ‘periods’ are acknowledging that even if the foundation of archaeology is the amassing of empirical data, it is structured by interpretation which is built from theory.

A fundamental feature of the investigation of prehistoric ritual practice within this thesis is the application of an anthropological perspective to the Irish LBA archaeological record. The intention behind adopting this perspective is to ask new questions of the large body of available data. Ritual actions and practices are sometimes overlooked (or even disregarded) by archaeologists as an aspect of the past which is impenetrable (cf. Hawkes 1954). However, ritual and ritualised actions/activities are pervasive and therefore culture cannot be understood without taking into account this most fundamental social practice.

“Studying cult and religion in pre- and protohistoric times is as ambitious as it is ambiguous. It means mixing archaeology, ethnology, socio-cultural anthropology, religious studies and psychology in an attempt to reconstruct belief systems surrounding artifacts, sites and what are often only traces of material culture. As many before us have pointed out, this is a delicate field.” (Bertemes and Biehl 2001, 11)

The concept of ritual is “a category or tool of analysis built up from a sampling of ethnographic descriptions and the elevation of many untested assumptions”, a human manufactured creation which is challenging to grasp or analyse (Bell 1997, 21). In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the term ritual began to be used to categorise types of activity which led to the compilation of data and development of various theories, however, the starting point was usually, at best, a precise theory or, at worst, implicit conjecture then supported with available data (Bell 1997, 1). Early researchers of ritual and religion were also theorising within a socio-cultural milieu dominated by ‘formal’ religions (e.g. Christianity), and the values or structures of formal religions may not correspond to the ritual/religious practices of non ‘Western’ and/or past cultures (Bowie 2006, 3). Currently, theoretical perspectives are varied, and debates have moved beyond questioning the origins of ritual and religion, with some theorists even questioning the relevance, certainty, or necessity of ‘belief’: “Enacting ritual requires participants who know the right moves, possess the props, and can make the expected noises at the right moments: regardless of what they may believe” (Lee 2005, 6).

The purpose of this study is not to reconstruct a belief system (i.e. a religion or cosmology), but to investigate the actions and interactions evidenced in the Irish archaeological record which reflect LBA ritual practice. According to Bertemes and Biehl there are three main approaches undertaken by archaeologists who encounter evidence of past ritual actions: a “descriptive enumeration of the material culture”, an attempt to uncover embedded information/messages, and/or an investigation of how ritual acts to “support and stabilize the social structure” (2001, 14). However, they suggest that these approaches omit the necessary first step of asking “How do I know this artifact or feature had a cultic or religious significance?” and “How can we discuss the functions and meanings of cult and religion within a society before we have any clear criteria for recognizing it at all or for documenting it archaeologically?” (Bertemes and Biehl 2001, 14). There is no straightforward response to these questions and perhaps there is no possibility of uncovering a clear answer. Nevertheless, in this thesis an attempt is made to address these issues by considering how past ritual practices can be identified through analysing the use of material culture, how rituals were enacted within the landscape (‘domestic’ and ‘natural’) and what these practices may signify regarding the socio-cultural/political context of LBA Ireland.



## 1.1 Theorising ritual

That ritual is a fundamental component of human culture is evidenced by its multi-disciplinary investigation and the vastness of the literature available on the subject. To develop a better understanding of socio-cultural processes (i.e. why humans do what we do) the enactment of ritual is analysed within ritual studies, sociology, anthropology, archaeology, economics, etc. Each discipline may investigate/interpret ritual from a different perspective and it is thus essential to not make assumptions regarding the motivation, execution and/or meaning of a ritual, especially where there are no living practitioners. When investigating ritual in prehistory, patterns in the archaeological record can be used to conceptualise the actions undertaken, thus developing a more informed view of what ritual practice entailed in its social, cultural, and physical contexts. Some authors have taken the study of prehistoric European ritual further, in terms of searching for cosmologies and mythical narratives by investigating ritual iconography and possible depictions of ritual events (e.g. Kristiansen 2010; Kaul 1998). However, there are no known visual representations of Irish LBA ritual practice; in fact, with the exception of the flesh-hook from Dunaverney, Co. Antrim (Fig. 5 below), there are only abstract motifs on the extant material culture. Thus, while developing an understanding of the predominant worldview of LBA Ireland through analysis of ritual practice is an aim of this study, translating this into a cosmology or religion is not. The interpretation of ritual practice in this period must be focused on the artefacts used in ritual practices and the locations where they were enacted.

Much of the study of past ritual is couched under the heading ‘archaeology of religion’ however the aim of this thesis is not to ascertain the religious structure of LBA Ireland, it is to archaeologically identify the enactment of ritual practice to develop our understanding of the socio-cultural context in which it was situated. This is distinct from a search for religion (cf. Klass 1995; Aldenderfer 2011) although the terms ritual and religion are often conflated. According to Klass:

“[...] a religion constitutes the total set of beliefs, practices, associated symbols, and interactions (among and between humans, and between humans and other entities those humans recognize as being capable of such interaction) that are concerned with the following:

Explanation, understanding, coherence; relief from psychological stress; release and channeling of emotions; social cohesiveness; sense of effectiveness and ability to cope with death, illness, and misfortune in general; maintenance of a sense of order by continual counteraction of powerlessness, randomness, meaninglessness, chaos.” (Klass 1995, 38)

Thus religion is a system of which ritual practice is a component. In this study ritual is understood as:

- the expression of abstract thought and mental processes (cognitive archaeology)
- a means of communicating implicit/embedded as well as explicit/overt meaning to an audience (performance theory)

- a contextualised physical/experiential practice which can only be understood by framing the actions of past actors (phenomenology)
- an expression of a cultural system (functionalism)
- one aspect of an integrated social system/structure (structuralism)
- a way of doing things: a process which can be reproduced by any number of actors executing discrete actions (practice theory)

The following provides a brief overview of those theoretical frameworks which have influenced this study of ritual practice in an Irish archaeological context. The chapter is not comprehensive, instead it focuses on the study of ritual through the application of these frameworks. Although many were introduced decades ago, various approaches to these theoretical frameworks are still at play in the discipline of archaeology, existing as a spectrum of proponents and critics. Accordingly, the text below is organised categorically, not strictly chronologically, to facilitate a discursive flow and to set up the discussion of practice theory which is the theoretical framework applied most directly to the material presented in the thesis.

### **Cognitive archaeology**

“Cognitive archaeology is the study of all those aspects of ancient culture that are the product of the human mind: the perception, description, and classification of the universe (cosmology); the nature of the supernatural (religion); the principles, philosophies, ethics, and values by which human societies are governed (ideology); the ways in which aspects of the world, the supernatural, or human values are conveyed in art (iconography); and all other forms of human intellectual and symbolic behaviour that survive in the archaeological record.” (Flannery and Marcus 1996, 351)

Cognitive archaeology, or cognitive-processualism, developed as a result of advances in the cognitive neurosciences, and dismisses the Freudian and Jungian methods of psychoanalysis (Whitley 2008, 88; Johnson 2010, 99). The two major concerns of cognitive archaeology are how the human cognitive system is materially expressed in the archaeological record, and how the cognitive processes of the archaeologists themselves influence the practice of archaeology (Zubrow 1994, 187). It is the former which is of concern to this thesis, as the material remains of LBA Irish ritual practices are analysed in order to gain a better understanding of the socio-cultural/political motivations which influenced agents to perform these actions. Cognitive archaeology became widespread in the 1970s in spite of critics who did not think it possible to study past ‘ideas’ scientifically/archaeologically and did not consider an understanding of abstract cognitive processes to be an archaeological aim (Flannery and Marcus 1996, 350). The continued application of many of the tenets of cognitive archaeology demonstrate that conceptualising such abstract processes of the human mind is a fundamental component of understanding past peoples.

Cognitive archaeologists investigate the origins and development of memory and knowledge representation (Zubrow 1994, 190) by adopting the theoretical and

methodological foundations of the cognitive sciences to gain access to the core psychological and cognitive limitations which shape human ritual action (McCauley and Lawson 2007, 211). When applying cognitive archaeology to the study of ritual McCauley and Lawson provide three foundational concepts: a) that there are universal human representations of ritual actions, b) that there are cognitive explanations for these universal representations, and c) that cognitive theories have the ability to clarify the features of ritual systems (2007, 213). Cognitive archaeology aims to provide explanations for these universal representations, or ritual symbols, but does not suggest the specific meaning(s) behind them, instead focusing on the creation and use of the symbols themselves (Fogelin 2007, 64). Therefore, while the cognitive approach has advanced the study of ritual in archaeology, some criticise that this has been accomplished at the expense of investigating the meaning behind ritual actions and symbols (Fogelin 2007, 65).

Cognitive archaeologists today frame prehistoric religion as a system of ordering reality through cognitive processes, the products of which should be observable in the archaeological record (Cully 2008, 67). As a result, cognitive archaeologists focus on the importance of external expressions of cognition, “their objects of study, after all, are the cognitive accessories that are outside of human heads” (McCauley and Lawson 2007, 215). For instance, material culture can provide insights into the motivations of producers as well as the context(s) of production (e.g. of objects used in ritual). While it is not possible to concretely interpret the thoughts of past peoples, it may be feasible to interpret the archaeological evidence and infer from it what their thoughts may have been (Hill 1994, 83). Of course, it is acknowledged that human behaviour does not always reflect the underlying train of thought (Hill 1994, 90) and we can see today that many people participate in ritual or religions without an understanding of their action or even without belief.

### **Performance theory**

Performance theory, as applied to ritual, was initially developed in the 1970s from a variety of approaches, including Turner’s ‘social drama’ and Goffman’s examination of social interaction (Bell 1997, 73). The basic tenets of performance theory are a stress on the significance of material culture, the development of personal and group identity, and bodily expressions and communication (Johnson 2010, 140-141). The ability to communicate implicit meaning to an audience through public use of particular objects (perhaps by particular individuals) is of significance to an interpretation of LBA Irish ritual practice since ostentatious objects were produced for ritual use and often were dramatically deposited at ritualised locations in the landscape. Performance theory views culture as a dynamic and perhaps undefinable entity, with ritual participants active agents in the communication and adaption of cultural symbolism (Bell 1997, 73-74). The main focus of the performance approach in relation to ritual activity is to demonstrate that ritual is pervasive due to its dynamic and diachronic physicality, in contrast to other approaches which see ritual as the outward expression of cognition or

tradition (Bell 1997, 75). Consequently, performance theorists may identify ritual in a variety of activities often not considered, such as theatre, sport or play (Bell 1997, 75).

Performance theorists emphasise the physicality of ritual, considered to be foremost an event which communicates cultural values and symbolism to influence the audience's and performer's worldview, act as a medium for social interaction and perhaps operate as a vehicle for social change (Bell 1997, 73-74). This may be achieved by allowing a certain degree of creativity to exist while maintaining tradition in practice (Tambiah 1981). Essentially, performance theorists consider ritual to transmit or communicate beyond explicitly stated words, as rituals are events which frame an experience loaded with subtle meaning. For instance, ritual architecture frames and enhances the performative aspects of ritual, such as the idea of the stage, lines of sight or the placement of individuals in a space, which can be interpreted through the archaeological record and lend additional insight to the ritual itself beyond its performative elements (Briault 2007, 295).

For Rappaport (1979) performance and formality form the base of ritual, to the point that without performance there is no ritual. The combination of formality and performance lend weight to the information communicated through the ritual act. An interesting aspect of ritual noted by Rappaport is that the performer is also part of the audience: the transmitters and receivers are one and the same, the transmitter is also part of the message and therefore part of the ritual itself. In other words the enactor of the ritual transcends the everyday and becomes an aspect of what the ritual represents, while simultaneously solidifying their adherence through participation. The combination of word and action noted by Tambiah (1981) corresponds with Rappaport's (1979) suggestion that physical enactment may communicate a number of things simultaneously, giving depth to the meaning of an experience. Therefore, to communicate a message adequately it is sometimes necessary to use various media or to choose to communicate in a certain way. Rappaport's understanding of ritual is thus congruent with that of practice theory, with an emphasis on action.

Bell criticises performance theory, particularly that the analogy made between the ritual and the performance as an extended metaphor is disadvantaged and inadequate (1992, 42). Garwood also cautions an over-emphasis on the performative elements of ritual, stressing that this is only one aspect of the overall ritual and although some aspects can be explicit in the material record that does not mean that the ritual itself was more than just the performance (1989, 11). In contrast, Mitchell advocates the adoption of a performative approach as an alternative to searching for the meaning behind ritual. He considers the agency transmitted to objects and people through the enactment of ritual to be present in the archaeological record as "traces of performative space" (Mitchell 2007, 338). In the context of this thesis the performative aspects of ritual practice are of great importance as it is the communicative potential of the ritual action/event which may express underlying socio-cultural processes and structures, to both past audiences and archaeological investigators.

## **Phenomenology**

Phenomenology as utilised by archaeologists focuses on describing the past through direct observation of human sensory experiences with archaeological sites, landscapes and to a lesser degree artefacts (Brück 2005a, 46; Hamilton et al. 2006, 32).

Phenomenological studies stress physical experience and thus highlight the divide which can exist between archaeologists and their study areas. In particular it is argued that a clear understanding of an archaeological environment cannot be gained by studying a map (Brück 2005a, 50; Hamilton et al. 2006, 37). The majority of phenomenological investigations conducted by archaeologists have focused on visual perception; however, more recent studies are expanding their consideration of other senses, for instance by incorporating auditory studies into phenomenological explorations of a site. While phenomenology as a metaphysical paradigm (as used in philosophy) suggested an element of universality in human experience and perception of the environment, the archaeological adaptation of phenomenology has led to an acknowledgement that there are subjective determinants which inform human experience (Fogelin 2006, 74).

“It is argued that embodied engagement with the material world is constitutive of existence. In other words, it is through the performance of actions that have an effect in the world that we realize our being. Things make us, just as we make things. For a discipline which argues for the social, cultural and ontological centrality of objects to the human species, phenomenological approaches clearly provide an antidote to abstract models which prioritize the role of the mind in human cognition.” (Brück 2005a, 46)

Nevertheless, consistent criticisms of the archaeological application of phenomenology include an often implicit assumption of the universality of what the human body experiences and a dearth of empirical methodology and documentation (Brück 2005a, 57; Bowie 2006, 5; Hamilton et al. 2006, 31-35; Fogelin 2006, 75). However, acknowledging a degree of subjectivity and taking this into account during interpretation can allow an investigator to consider sites and objects from innovative perspectives. Considering the archaeological record in a new light is an important aspect of this thesis as many of the sites, materials and objects which may have been used in the context of ritual practice were traditionally interpreted in terms of their ‘functional’ characteristics. Nevertheless, while most archaeologists would agree that physically encountering archaeology is a valuable process and that attempting to envisage how a landscape, site or object was experienced in the past a useful endeavour, as Fogelin contends: “It is possible to think yourself into the past; you just cannot have too much faith in your conclusions. Imagination must be tempered with rigorous investigation” (2006, 75).

## **Functionalism/ Structural-Functionalism**

Functionalism is a broad theoretical category which arose in the latter part of the nineteenth century, at the same time as other human sciences, and under the title

structural-functionalism it remained popular until the early 1960s (especially in Britain) (Johnson 2010, 80; Barrett 2009, 62). Functionalists view culture synchronically and equate cultures to biological organisms, where each element is an essential part of a whole (Johnson 2010, 80). This view continues to influence current theoretical frameworks as cultural practices and institutions (including those in LBA Ireland) are often understood as interconnected and contextually contingent. The basic characteristics of functionalism include: an organic analogy; a natural science orientation; a narrow conceptual territory; functional unity, indispensability, and universality; anti-reductionism; the significance of kinship and the family; equilibrium; static analysis; an anti-historical outlook; and, a fieldwork orientation (Barrett 2009, 62-64).

The main advocates of structural-functionalism, Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski, working in the early 1900s, considered culture to be “a closed system of social relations powered by an internal dynamism” and advocated the value of direct ethnographic fieldwork to identify the practical functions of social institutions within society and as a support for socio-political organisation (Bell 1997, 23, 28). Radcliffe-Brown developed a functional approach to ritual out of Durkheim’s sociological explanation, with a concentration on the influence ritual had on social structure (Bell 1997, 27). Moving beyond Durkheim’s view of ritual, Bell contends Radcliffe-Brown’s suggestion that “belief is the effect of rite, that action determines belief” was closer to the social unity focus proposed by his antecedent Robertson Smith. However, Radcliffe-Brown’s emphasis on the social organisation and functional drives behind ritual action was criticised as discounting the importance of the historical contexts of social development (Bell 1997, 27).

Unlike Radcliffe-Brown who highlighted rules which order social structure and relations, Malinowski promoted the mental processes of individuals (Bell 1997, 28). “Malinowski placed the emphasis more on function than structure – what institutions actually contributed to a society – and was less sensitive than Radcliffe-Brown to the potential flaws in structural functionalism, such as the assumptions of functional unity, universality, and indispensability” (Barrett 2009, 67). He questioned the fact that Radcliffe-Brown had not concretely established connections between social systems and cultural beliefs or symbolic systems: “if such symbols, beliefs and patterns of ritual activity do not serve simply to maintain the patterns of social relationships, then what do they mean to the people who use them?” (Bell 1997, 34). Malinowski discarded the Durkheimian view of ritual as a social phenomenon, instead advocating for the perspective that ritual was based in individual experience (Bell 1997, 28).

Functionalism focuses on what ritual achieves within a society and its influence on the structure and mechanism of society, while structural-functionalism considers ritual to be a mechanism for stabilising the social system as a whole and attuning interactions within the system by supporting the ethos of the group and reinstating harmony after disorder (Bell 1997, 23, 29).

“The functional-structuralists explored what appeared to be the “social” work of ritual activities: the formation and maintenance of the social bonds that establish human community, the socialisation of the individual through an unconscious appropriation of common values and common categories of knowledge and experience, the channelling and resolution of social conflict, and the periodic renewal or transformation of the social and conceptual structures underlying community life.” (Bell 1997, 59)

A main criticism of functionalism and structural-functionalism is that they do not adequately explain *why* or *how* cultural systems change (Johnson 2010, 82). For (structural-) functionalists to understand the structural patterns of social organisation the social system had to be conceived of as static, and thus there was no focus on change (Bell 1997, 66; Barrett 2009, 68).

### **Structuralism**

Structuralism developed in the 1950s and 60s as a reaction to functionalism’s perceived lack of explanation regarding the structural organisation of ritual activities and symbols as well as of society in general (Bell 1997, 42, 46). Archaeologists working in a structuralist framework consider culture to be ‘fundamentally expressive’ and view artefacts as reflective of the underlying meanings or rules of the given culture (Johnson 2010, 94-95). For structuralists ritual is understood to form and maintain social ties, to proliferate cultural ideologies, and facilitate conflict resolution, thus to ensure and facilitate the maintenance of the status quo and/or the functioning of society generally (Bell 1997, 59). The use of ritual as a mechanism for social manoeuvring is a central feature of LBA Irish ritual practice as is discussed throughout the following chapters. Religion is thus considered by structuralists to be stable and enduring, and since rituals are interpreted within a structuralist framework as the expression of religious ideology they are also considered to be a stable and ‘anachronistic’ cultural phenomena which can preserve socio-cultural knowledge over long periods of time (Fogelin 2007, 57). Structuralists, then, tend to recognise abstract aspects of culture, such as symbolism or ideology (and their associated ‘meaning’), as culturally contingent and reflective of social organisation (Bell 1997, 44, 46).

According to Ortner, Lévi-Strauss is the originator of the mode of structuralism that emerged during the 1960s, whereby cultures were conceived of as ‘systems of classification’ understood by recognising binary oppositions which act as structural mechanisms for complex cultural phenomenon (i.e. religious institutions, marriage systems, etc.):

“Drawing on linguistics and communication theory, and considering himself influenced by both Marx and Freud, Lévi-Strauss argued that the seemingly bewildering variety of social and cultural phenomena could be rendered intelligible by demonstrating the shared relationships of those phenomena to a few simple underlying principles.” (Ortner 1984, 135)

Lévi-Strauss' structuralist development, in turn influenced other theoretical frameworks including structural Marxism whereby "culture was converted to 'ideology' and considered from the point of view of its role in social reproduction: legitimating the existing order, mediating contradictions in the base, and mystifying the sources of exploitation and inequality in the system" (Ortner 1984, 140). Structural Marxism has been criticised for a variety of reasons most of which concerned the "narrowing of the culture concept to 'ideology'" which often resulted in the mystification of culture/ideology and its characterisation as a mechanism for supporting the status quo (Ortner 1984, 140-141).

In the 1970s structuralism was criticised for "the denial of the relevance of an intentional subject in the social and cultural process" (i.e. self-reflexivity, agency) as well as "the denial of any significant impact of history or 'event' upon structure" (Ortner 1984, 137-138). Structuralism, then, "is a quest for law-like systemic or relational properties – binary oppositions, for example – rather than an attempt to understand social properties over time" (Jenkins 1992, 16) a criticism which was also levelled at its predecessor, functionalism. The structuralist approach is also criticized for its focus on the use of ritual to maintain the social status quo, which Boivin states creates an uni-dimensional view which does not consider the other functions ritual may have for human experience or how human activities operate within a larger system (2009, 274, 283). As will be seen in the discussion below, practice theory, the theoretical framework which is most directly applied to the archaeological material investigated in this thesis, attempts to address these criticisms. In particular, the work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1977; 1990), who originated in a structuralist framework, has been used as a foundation for many later practice theorists:

"While rejecting both the reification or over-ordering of culture produced by structuralism and the objectification of social reality which results from the epistemological naivety of conventional ethnography, Bourdieu recognises that there is order and pattern in the system of dispositions and schemes which he refers to as the habitus." (Jenkins 1992, 19)

### **Practice Theory**

The practice approach is considered by some to be a seminal social theory of recent decades and is still prevalent in current debates. Among various influential theorists who have considered ritual from a practice approach, such as Turner and Geertz, is Sahlins who argued that ritual facilitates the maintenance of socio-cultural symbolic and organisational systems and allows these sometimes conceptual practices to be related to the human experience of everyday life (Bell 1997, 77). In the late 1970s Bourdieu proposed a formal 'theory of practice' which portrays rituals as potential tools for implicitly bending idealistic cultural rules to suit reality (Bourdieu 1977; 1990). A systematic framework for analysing 'ritual as practice' was more recently proposed by Bell (1992) who specifically adopts Bourdieu's theory of practice to investigate ritual and the concept of ritualization, described as "a way of acting that tends to promote the authority of forces deemed to derive from beyond the immediate situation" (Bell 1997,



82). Practice theory explores the nature of society by investigating the mechanisms/processes of ‘the system’, in particular power/asymmetrical social relations, action and embodied experience, and the active agency of individuals. Therefore, by applying practice theory to the investigation of ritual in LBA Ireland it is possible to identify the social processes which underlie and motivate these practices.

### ***Structure / System***

Practice theory focuses on the ways in which all actions, from formal to banal, are mechanisms for maintaining and moulding the human socio-cultural environment (Bell 1997, 76). An essential point is that the *context* of the ritual action, in relation to other activities, is significant and that ritual cannot be understood in isolation (Bell 1992, 90). Practice theorists therefore acknowledge the power which ‘the system’ has on human action and shaping events, and as a result recognise the need to understand how social systems are generated. Therefore, in order to understand the system it is imperative to place it in its socio-historical context, to outline how the system “is produced and reproduced, and how it may have changed in the past or be changed in the future” (Ortner 1984, 146). But what is the system? According to Ortner, it is a seamless whole with different aspects working together and although not necessarily equal in analytical significance, not dominating each other (1984, 148-149). Society and history are ‘governed by organizational and evaluative schemes’ which make up the system as it is manifested in ‘institutional, symbolic and material forms’.

Ritual practice is one example of how the ‘institutional, symbolic and material forms’ of the system are manifested and, as it is often formalised and repetitive, ritual can facilitate the understanding of past socio-cultural/political systems (with or without written records). Practice theory therefore does not separate ritual and non-ritual actions as they exist within the same dynamic structure/system. Consequently, ritual is understood as an action conducted in relation to everyday activities, not as privileged and delimited from other actions but one that “must be viewed in its context within structure and in relation to other practices in society” (Nilsson Stutz 2006, 96). For instance, some Irish LBA ritual depositions include objects and materials with strong links to fertility, a potential motivating factor which can only be identified by considering the deposit in its’ wider context. By analysing ritual in relation to its total socio-cultural context and as a mechanism for constructing cultural patterns and values (not simply reflecting them), practice theory may note varying degrees of effectiveness, diversity, and ritualization (Bell 1997, 82).

“*Practice* can briefly be described as action considered in relation to *structure*. While practice emerges from the structure (i.e. a structure of social relations and of embodied memories of patterns of practice) it also simultaneously reshapes it. This means that practice is not only situated *within* the structure; it also has the capacity to *transform* it.” (Nilsson Stutz 2006, 95)

Therefore, the system (or social structure) is viewed by practice theorists as a seamless whole composed of social practices, institutions and organisational schemes, one of which may be ritual actions and practices. However, this situation is not static, but rather highly dynamic with practices actively working within the system/structure to maintain and/or transform it, and the system equally affecting the form and enactment of practices. The agent and the structure/system are thus constantly influencing each other (Dobres and Hoffman 1994, 222; Nilsson Stutz 2006, 95). Cultural trajectory is as a result seen as potentially unpredictable and highly contingent on the socio-historical context of the actors, practices and system in question. It is this *active* dialectic, dynamic and socio-historically contextualised relationships between actors, practices and system/structure which separates practice theory from other forms of structuralism (see Fogelin 2006, 64) and which makes it particularly applicable to archaeological investigations of past ritual practice which may note both longevity and change in practice over time.

In terms of ritual practice Habbe has suggested that the formalisation of actions implies “a stipulated form consisting of constitutive rules and a stipulated purpose” (2006, 93). It is this stipulated purpose, or commitment, which integrates the ritual practice into the wider system/social structure, not necessarily any abstract meaning which may be attached to the ritual action. Therefore the important factor is the social implication of ritual practice, the commitment made by the actor with an intended purpose known to other actors in the system. The actors participating in rituals thus do not have to share in belief, however by participating they demonstrate commitment to the system (i.e. social solidarity) and are able to negotiate the system fully (Bell 2007, 287; Habbe 2006, 93).

### ***Power / asymmetrical social relations***

Action and interaction between actors who do not hold the same status/roles is a major feature of how practice theorists understand the shaping of ‘the system’ over time, and reveals the Marxist influence on the general framework of practice theory (Ortner 1984, 149). This aspect of practice theory has received criticism as it is suggested that by focusing on asymmetrical social relations other equally important social relations are ignored (i.e. cooperation, reciprocity, etc.). In the context of LBA Ireland society was hierarchical, but this structure was possibly fluid and thus intra- and inter-group status differentiation and status seeking activities were possibly fundamental social processes. Furthermore, an understanding of the system as a ‘seamless whole’ implies that the actors are not necessarily conscious of how their actions relate to the system and/or their dominance by it or by certain segments of it. This is what Bell suggests is manifested in ‘ritualised agents’ those who have an embedded or ‘instinctive knowledge’ of the system and their place within it (1992, 221; see also Bourdieu 1977, 8-10).

The focus on power and domination is present in the work of Bourdieu (1977; 1990) as can be seen in the following summary of his forms of capital:

“*Economic capital* involves ownership of objects, but property ownership entails claims that others may not interfere with your property without your

permission, and exclusive ownership may be used to induce others to act in particular ways (such as hiring them or bribing them). *Cultural capital* is a claim to having the ability to engage in certain types of practices, and in the strongest forms it accords a monopoly over such practices (for instance, medical doctors or accountants). *Symbolic capital* involves claims by the possessor that he or she be treated in particular ways by classes of others. *Social capital* consists of claims to reciprocation and solidarity from particular others. What is fundamental to social capital, however, is that explicit claims are normally excluded from the performances within which they are made, so that power over the actions of others is radically distinct from exercises of power utilizing the discourse and apparatus of command.” (Smart 1993, 394; emphasis added)

Smart’s investigation of the Chinese *Guanxi* system demonstrates how an understanding of the socio-historical/cultural context of interactions allows actors to negotiate the system through the enactment of particular social rituals. The actors may not necessarily believe or fully understand the meaning behind some of the ritualised actions taken, however they are aware that these actions are necessary to produce/secure a particular social outcome. The actors must participate in the system (i.e. follow social convention) in order to benefit and to facilitate social interaction with other actors. As can also be seen in Smart’s summary, above, these social interactions are driven by asymmetrical social relations and the power to direct the actions of other actors.

For practice theorists, power is a consistent theme both in terms of the power of one actor over another, the power of the system over the actors within it and the power of actors to affect the system. The system constrains practice through the cultural and psychological mechanisms defining the actors worldview: “Culture becomes part of the self” (Ortner 1984, 153). Therefore the motivations of the actors cannot be separated from the motivations of those/that dominating the actors. Practice theory can thus be described as a top to bottom approach leading practice theorists to ask “why the system has a certain configuration, and of why and how it excludes alternative possible configuration” (Ortner 1984, 153). Although, Ortner contends that the focus on power is constrained:

“At the same time, however, those authors who emphasize cultural domination also place important limits on the scope and depth of cultural controls. The extreme case is never reached, and often never even approached. Thus while accepting the view of culture as powerfully constraining, they argue that hegemony is always more fragile than it appears, and never as total as it (or as traditional cultural anthropology) would claim.” (Ortner 1984, 153-154)

### ***Action / embodied experience***

Practice theorists generally oppose a view of action as the enactment of rules and norms or action as the result of unrestricted agency. Instead, action is understood “largely in

terms of pragmatic choice and decision making, and/or active calculating and strategizing”, therefore focusing on the rationality and activeness of actors and perhaps underplaying the role of conservatism and traditionalism (Ortner 1984, 150). Some theorists (i.e. Bourdieu) focus on ‘ad hoc decision making’, while others are more concerned with how human actions are situated within longer range ‘plans or programs’, either culturally constituted or created by actors themselves (Ortner 1984, 150). Both of these approaches are directly related to how actions and actors operate within and in relation to the system: “Actors know something of the rules by which they are supposed to live, and they use that knowledge (*connaissance*) in day-to-day social interaction” (Dobres and Hoffman 1994, 223). Practice theory’s focus on the rationality of actors’ behaviour suggests that the actors choose to perform certain actions, but said actions are not necessarily performed with the intention of generating social change (Ortner 1984, 157). As a result, practice theory has been criticised for characterising social change as largely a ‘by-product’ or ‘unintended consequence’ of action. It is difficult to establish the degree to which ritual practice effected/affected social change in LBA Ireland. Change over time can be identified in the objects used and practices executed as part of LBA Irish ritual activities and these are generally congruent with wider societal/cultural change, but attempts to identify the direction of this change quickly develop into ‘the chicken or the egg’ circular analysis. Correspondingly, in a potentially contradictory stance, practice theorists consider both ‘highly intentionalised moments of practice’ and ‘practices of ordinary living’ to be of consequence to the maintenance and/or possible changes to/within the system: “In enacting these routines, actors not only continue to be shaped by the underlying organizational principles involved, but continually re-endorse those principles in the world of public observation and discourse” (Ortner 1984, 154).

According to practice theory, no actions and all actions can be ritualised actions, implying that one cannot assume a certain type of action is ritualistic; instead the starting point should be the experience of effecting the action (Berggren and Stutz 2010, 192). “People do religion as much as they think about religion” (Fogelin 2008, 132). The practice approach thus emphasises the experiential aspects of ritual as opposed to the underlying meaning (Fogelin 2007, 58), thus allowing for a concentration on what ritual practices are and how humans *perform* them. It is appreciated that ritual may be conceived of differently in different cultural contexts (Bell 1997, 82), however archaeology as a discipline generally concedes that there is an element of universality to human undertakings, and the degree of universality affects how specific practices, like rituals, are interpreted (Berggren and Stutz 2010, 174). The universal features of human practice may include the fact that it is situational and tactical, motivated by a perceived personal benefit, and can misinterpret the connection between means and ends which results in the overemphasis of the effectiveness of the practice (Bell 1997, 81).

The identification of routine behaviour (i.e. the activeness of actors) is of course what archaeologists strive to do and what is particularly attractive about investigating past ritual actions through a practice theory framework. As Bradley has stated: “Once it is

accepted that ritual is a kind of performance – a performance which is defined by its own conventions – it becomes easier to understand how it can occur in so many settings and why it may be attached to so many concerns” (2003, 12). The performative element of ritual practice further emphasises how it is not necessary to understand the meaning behind an action to perform it satisfactorily. This does not suggest that actions, ritual or otherwise, do not have meaning, but that etic comprehension comes from understanding how actions and actors are situated within broader socio-cultural/historical and systemic contexts:

“The multi-sensory experience is shared but not necessarily verbalised. The fact that there is no shared verbalised meaning that precedes the embodied experience only contributes to making the effectiveness of structuration even greater. However, it means that we have to change our focus on what we believe to be fundamental in the understanding of rituals and their role in society. Meaning might simply not be the most fruitful place, neither to start nor to end our analysis if we want to understand the role of ritual in the past. Instead of focusing on shared meanings as a fundamental aspect of ritual, our focus should shift to shared, mutually structured embodied experience.” (Nilsson Stutz 2006, 96)

### ***Focus on individuality***

As may be apparent from the above discussion, practice theory in general tends to concentrate on individuals or individual social roles: actors acting and being active. This can be seen in the role(s) actors play within and in relation to the system, in asymmetrical power relations and concepts of dominance, and in the focus on action and the embodied experience. In terms of ritual actions “[it] is always a person that performs the ritual act and it is the performance of the actor that establishes the ritual” (Habbe 2006, 93). This focus on individuality is also apparent in practice theory’s underplaying of the search for meaning in ritual action. For archaeologists, then, identifying ritual action in the archaeological record also potentially reveals information pertaining to individual actions and/or actors within the wider system: “In archaeology, with its focus on the material aspects of social life, practice theory elevates material remains from mere reflections of past culture, to former participants in a complex dialectical relationship between material, human action, and the complex ideological concepts of human experience” (Fogelin 2006, 64-65).

### **Practice theory and Late Bronze Age ritual in Ireland**

Ritual is a social construct; to be fully understood it must be considered within its wider context. It is therefore important to conceptualise and define ritual practice both in general and as a component of an Irish LBA socio-cultural structure. In order to push theoretical debate within Irish archaeology further this thesis employs practice theory to explore how LBA ritual practices may have been physically performed and what possible socio-cultural motivations may lay behind these actions. Prehistoric archaeology does not have the benefit of first-hand accounts, but does have the material remains of ritual practice. Thus, an analysis of the practice of actively carrying out a

ritual seems an appropriate place to begin: the ‘what, when, where, and how’ of ritual will be the focus of this research as opposed to a search for any possible ‘meaning’.

Rituals attempt to achieve an abstract purpose outside of those conducting the ritual and in most instances these actions involve some type of implicit or explicit communication with ‘otherworldly’ entities, be they ancestors, deities, spirits, etc. Through an analysis of ritual in relation to its total socio-cultural context practice theory can also note diversity within categories of ritual practice and between specific instances of ritual action. For instance, practice theory will facilitate an investigation of depositions in wetland landscapes by considering differences between these locations, how these locations may have been accessed, and patterns of depositional activity, without getting stuck in the potentially investigative dead-end that may result from seeking the specific meaning behind the deposition. Therefore, the application of practice theory to the archaeological record of LBA Ireland will allow for data to be examined and interpreted from a new perspective. Also, the totality of the ritual practice will be considered, as opposed to focusing on one aspect of it and ignoring others. In other words, Irish LBA ritual practices are understood as a series of actions, or stages, in a long process.

Before continuing on to investigate the actual enactment of rituals in LBA Ireland a further clarification of the use of various terms which describe ritual is necessarily, in particular a distinction between ritual action and ritual practice. The term action in the context of practice theory is generally understood in a Parsonian or Saussurian sense, “as sheer en-actment or execution of rules and norms” (Ortner 1984, 150). The term practice as used in relation to ritual encompasses more than the physical act:

“A ‘practice’ (*Praktik*) is a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other [*sic*]: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, ‘things’ and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge. A practice – a way of cooking, of consuming, of working, of investigating, of taking care of oneself or of others, etc. – forms so to speak a ‘block’ whose existence necessarily depends on the existence and specific interconnectedness of these elements, and which cannot be reduced to any one of these single elements. Likewise, a practice represents a pattern which can be filled out by a multitude of single and often unique actions reproducing the practice (a certain way of consuming goods can be filled out by plenty of actual acts of consumption).” (Reckwitz 2002, 249-250)

Throughout the thesis practice theory is used as the guiding theoretical framework to grasp what ritual practice in LBA Ireland consisted of, what general trends and activities can be observed, and if current understanding of BA lifeways and worldviews can be expanded upon through a more detailed investigation of all steps/stages of ritual practice. What my research demonstrates is that in the LBA similar rituals were consistently enacted in similar locations across the island of Ireland. This establishes

that during the LBA there was some shared understanding of the way that certain rituals should be conducted and what would be achieved by conducting them properly.

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## **1.2 Relationships of identity, social roles and ritual practice**

As was made apparent in Chapter 1.1 above, the actions and interactions of actors is of particular importance to the application of practice theory to a study of past ritual practices. In turn, the social roles and identities held by said actors will affect the way in which they negotiate the system and interact with other actors and practices within it. Thus it is important to conceptualise possible characteristics of these social roles and identities in a LBA Irish context. This chapter will provide an outline of the study of identity and consider how ‘individual’ and ‘group’ identities may be investigated in archaeology. Chapter 4.1 will build upon the concepts presented here to examine identity as expressed through Irish LBA ritual practice and to discuss more specific categorical identities which may have been expressed or underscored through or during their enactment. While the apperception and discussion of identity in LBA Ireland may in some instances appear to be presented as categorical and straightforward in later chapters, it is acknowledged that individual and group identity at any time and in any socio-cultural context is complex and dynamic.

### **Archaeologically investigating identity**

Investigations into prehistoric identity have tended to focus on ‘single-issue questions of identity’, like gender or ethnicity, and have often applied modern Western conceptions of identity to past groups (i.e. binary oppositions like hetero/homosexual or elite/non-elite) (Meskell 2001, 187). More recent investigations into prehistoric identity have stressed that identity is not static, but that both individual and group identities are in fact multi-faceted and dynamic (Meskell 2001; Gosselain 2000). Discussions now generally centre on the understanding that identity in its various guises and compositions is formed from the relationships and interactions had with an ‘other’ (individuals and groups).

“The modern concept of identity has its roots in 17<sup>th</sup> century epistemology, especially in psychoanalytic theory. Identity can be defined as awareness of oneself and of the characteristics shared with others in a group whose structure makes up a social world in which individual identities are, in turn, created. Postmodern emphasis on difference has fragmented this model of a unified identity into multiple, fluid identities with different facets: gender, age, ethnicity, class, religious beliefs, which indeed are reflected simultaneously through the body.” (Romero 2011, 15)

Identity can be variously defined; a business, a crowd, you while playing a sport, could all be identities. This moves beyond the common understanding of personal identity and self-awareness, instead generalising identity to: “any source of action, any entity to which observers can attribute meaning not explicable from biophysical regularities [which] are subsidiary to social context as environment, and persons will appear as bundles of identities” (White 2008, 2). The main concern is therefore how different identities interact and react to these interactions, behind which is an innate human need to feel as if social interactions are controlled and predictable (White 2008, 10). Society is therefore composed of different levels of identity, from the bundle of identities you



perceive as ‘you’ to the combination of bundles of identities you perceive as your community, nation, etc.

A different, but not necessarily contrary, understanding of identity comes from Morris who proposes that personal identity can be understood to be a conflated concept actually composed of the person as a material, conscious and social *human being*, the person as a *cultural being* who exists as part of a community, the person as an *individual being* situated in a unique social context and, finally, the person as a *spiritual being* in terms of “a social collectivity of which the person is simply a part, or it may have a metaphysical significance, as in the Hindu concept of ‘Atman’ or the Christian notion of ‘soul’” (1995, 10-12, 196; emphasis added). Morris therefore, like White, moves beyond the conventional understanding of identity and suggests that in fact our perception of identity is the result of a combination of factors. For White however, the main point is that these identities are all connected as networks within networks, resulting in society (2008, 17) or perhaps in the ‘system’ as it understood in practice theory.

Three archaeologists who have recently dealt with the issue of identity in prehistoric Europe are Brück, Damm and Sørensen. All have developed upon the concept that personal and group identities are bundles of identities constantly being (trans)formed through interactions with the environment and with other identities and are thus never static. Sørensen defines identity as “the characteristics of an individual or group that are assigned and assumed by the group and others as a result of perceived differences from and similarities to others” (1997, 94). This definition focuses on socially constructed categorical identity: how individuals may have been categorised in the past according to a generally relevant social code, perhaps in spite of the various other identities an individual may possess. For Sørensen material culture linked to personal appearance can be used as a direct indication of past identities, as dress and personal ornamentation may act as visual cues, outwardly expressing categorical identity.

Brück (2005b) has suggested a ‘relational conception of personhood’, whereby self-identity emerges from the relationships individuals have with others and with their environment. Relational personhood also suggests that self-identity is composed of multiple parts/aspects which are constantly being added to, reformed and replaced (i.e. Strathern’s (1988) concept of the ‘dividual’). “Part of the self originates in other people: the series of interchanges engaged in over the course of a lifetime links one with different people in changing and fluid ways. Self-identity is also bound up in and constructed through the various significant places and events encountered over a person’s lifespan” (Brück 2005b, 142). Instead of relational identity, Damm (2012) advocates for the concept of collective identities which overlap through interaction to create complex social patterning:

“No society or community is an enclosed or bounded entity. If we portray and analyse prehistoric groups as such, we will not be able to approach the dynamic entanglement of collective identities based on a multitude of criss-

crossing networks. An alternative approach better designed to investigate complexity is to look for numerous networks built on economic, social and cultural practices, including learning patterns, religious practices and language. These will produce a multitude of partly latent, partly active collective identities at many different levels and scales.” (Damm 2012, 18)

Damm’s recognition of ‘partly latent, partly active’ identities is particularly relevant to explorations of prehistoric identity as it highlights how an archaeologist may utilise categories of identity (e.g. smith or seafarer) which may not have been often active, particularly meaningful or even recognised in the past. As Damm suggests: “We are all embedded in a number of collective identities, but their relevance depends on the situation or context” (2012, 4).

Brück, Damm and Sørensen may agree that ‘identity’ is multi-dimensional, relational and non-static, but also consider very different ways in which identity may be expressed or perceived, which underscores the impossibility of understanding identity as a simple concept. All three authors have chosen to focus on particular aspects of identity in their discussions; highlighting the fact that such a complex issue must be broken down in order to enable a productive discussion. Prehistoric identities viewed in this way are multi-layered and complex, which forces us to move beyond simple categorisations such as chief, potter, male/female and recognise that people in the past were multi-faceted beings. This is not to say that categorisation as an analytical tool should be discarded, simply that its use be contextualised.

### **Individual identity**

A major archaeological research focus has been the significance of the physical human body in the past, often in relation to discussions of mortuary treatment and death ritual. According to Treherne (1995) the ‘grafting’ of social meaning onto the physical human body is a perspective prevalent in current anthropological and archaeological thought. However, Treherne criticises viewing the body as completely a social construct, as he suggests this results in ignoring the issue of subjectivity, in particular the subjective interpretation of representations of the individual body by ‘others’ (1995, 117). Meskell makes a similar observation: “Although there is social malleability, evident in the construction of bodily identity, there is also a material fixity which frames the individual, as there is with most strands of identity” (2001, 193). She proposes that instead of focusing on social signifiers of identity, archaeologists should consider identity in terms of its continuous transformation throughout the human lifecycle (Meskell 2001, 200). Various authors have suggested that individual identity is and was composite: comprised of various facets of identity that develop as the person develops, interacts with other individuals and experiences new situations and challenges (see above: Brück 2005b; Damm 2012). In some cultures these facets of identity may be linked to particular objects or relationships and therefore may only remain with an individual for a limited amount of time:

“I argue that while past deposits can be interpreted as citations of identity, each citation should be understood as a transformation of existing identities at a community level. These can be seen as attempts to temporarily accentuate particular features of identity, rather than to simply reflect a fixed individual identity of a deceased person. Since identities are never truly fixed, it would also be unreasonable to expect archaeological identification of such identities.” (Fowler 2005, 110)

Fowler suggests that analysis of prehistoric, in particular European Neolithic and EBA, funerary remains and gift exchange indicates that past identities were quite heterogeneous. Nevertheless, he goes on to suggest that the identification of fragmentary human remains or fragmentary objects is not a prerequisite for the identification of fractal or partible personhood in the past. Instead: “fractal personhood may rely as heavily on flows of substances as on the separation of distinct parts from wholes” (Fowler 2005, 123). This conception of identity is expanded upon in Chapters 2.2, 4.1 and 4.2 where issues of individual/‘dividual’ identity as well as fractal and enchainment relationships are considered in the context of the prevalence of fragmentation and destruction of Irish LBA objects prior to ritual deposition.

Brück’s recent writing has argued against the identification of individual identity in the past, especially for the EBA in Britain and Ireland, instead advocating a focus on interpersonal relationships in the construction of past identities over lifetimes. For example, traditional interpretations of grave goods have stressed personal ‘ownership’ of objects and their representation of the personal identity of the deceased, which Brück suggests may alternatively represent gifts to the deceased or even symbolically significant objects used in funerary rituals. Moving outside of the individual grave, Brück points out that burials are usually grouped which she suggests indicate “the continuing importance of interpersonal relationships in the construction of identity” (2004, 310). Thus, like Fowler, Brück proposes that identity may not be confined to the human body but may also be inherent in certain objects, locations and the relationships a person has with others (see also Chapman 2000; Chapman et al. 2007).

A consistent theme in the recent literature, as seen in the examples above, is a concern with personhood or individual identity as expressed through relational as opposed to categorical identity. The archaeological record provides us with firm evidence that people had personal and heterogeneous life and death experiences in prehistory. However, instead of taking the archaeological evidence, especially from burial contexts, and assuming that this is a direct reflection of social typology (e.g. chief, potter, warrior, and/or woman), archaeologists are more and more suggesting that this evidence reflects and highlights aspects of identity which were not static or in some cases even individual.

### ***Gendered identity***

One of the most discussed aspects of past identity is gender. Conkey’s (1991) examination of material culture and gender in the Magdalenian highlighted how modern

Western perceptions of gender and engendered identity had been applied to the prehistoric past, and over recent decades many authors have addressed these imposed perceptions. As Fahlander has recently stated:

“Gender is not simply ideology added to a biological base. Identities, including gendered ones, are rather constituted by ideology (discourse, norms, culture) in intersection with the body (genetics, hormones, stature [*sic*], appearance) and the material (technology, material culture, nature). No single aspect can satisfactorily be given dominant status here.” (Fahlander 2012, 141)

Nevertheless, generalisations regarding gender still persist in archaeological discourse. For instance, while placing BA Iberian rock art in its broader European context Harrison suggests that women “enjoyed high status throughout the Hungarian, north Alpine and Nordic zones as shown by their dress fittings and cult objects, but these are missing from the Atlantic tradition, implying that women’s status was lower” (2004, 165-166). This statement could be true. However, it is also a generalisation over a wide geographic area focusing on only one aspect of the archaeological record, the final death ritual of a select few. Female status and/or social roles may have been expressed through the wearing of elite material culture in certain regions of Europe at this time, but conceivably could have been expressed differently in the Atlantic zone. There are many examples of LBA high status personal ornaments from Ireland but the dominant death ritual did not generally involve grave goods and often there is no possibility to sex the remains. Therefore directly associating gender with material culture is problematic in this context.

The lack of gendered human remains from LBA Ireland is the primary reason why gender will not be a focus of discussion. The main archaeological evidence used to discuss identity in LBA Ireland is artefact based, yet as the dominant death ritual of the period is deposition of ‘token’ amounts of highly crushed cremated bone with no ‘gravegoods’ there are no clear associations to be made between certain genders and certain types of objects. While evidence from outside Ireland may be employed to illuminate some aspects of gendered identity (e.g. the male warrior), assumptions relating to gender will generally be avoided in favour of attempting to identify those aspects of LBA identity more clearly expressed in the Irish archaeological record.

### **Group identity**

Even when considering individual identity the relationships one has with ‘others’ is generally seen as fundamental. These relationships are what form the other basic category of identity studied in archaeology, that of the group. Traditional archaeological approaches to discerning group identity(ies) have tended to focus on bounded material culture distributions. In contrast, Damm (2010) has suggested the identification of ‘collective identities’, as outlined above. These may be primordial or situational and may be associated with material elements which aid in their archaeological identification. However, the important factor in her interpretation is how individuals are

embedded in “hierarchies of collective identities” which, combined with other types of social classification (i.e. gender, religion, status), result in a “very complex and multilayered pattern” (Damm 2010, 18). Considering prehistoric group identity as a series of overlapping and intertwined identities moves away from binary oppositions and allows archaeologists to investigate group similarities and differences at both a local and regional level, perhaps then revealing “diversity, negotiation of cultural contents and of open boundaries” (Damm 2010, 21).

According to MacSweeney, group identity is “a form of social identity that emphasises a sense of togetherness just as much as a sense of distinction, that relies on a feeling of ‘us’ just as much as a feeling of ‘them’” (2009, 105). Like Damm, MacSweeney uses the phrase ‘collective identity’ stressing that this can be dynamic and flexible, becoming historically salient for social reasons. The suggestion is therefore that as it is active social practice which generates group identity, collective identity can be discerned archaeologically through material traces. Group identity is considered to be the ‘ideology of shared belonging’ which, to endure, must be promoted through social practices that highlight commonality between group members (MacSweeney 2009, 105). By focusing on social practices as opposed to material culture to recognise group identity, archaeologists may be able to move beyond “the current problem where group identities are unthinkingly ascribed to patterns in material culture” and instead begin to consider “the social rationale that underpinned this identity” (MacSweeney 2009, 106).

Another important theme in archaeological investigations of group identity is the issue of ethnicity. Ethnic identity is a basic example of categorical identity, an ‘us-and-them’ binary which often overrides other aspects of personal identity such as status, gender, occupation, etc. However, MacSweeney cautions against archaeologists assigning ethnic identity to past groups, suggesting that despite the use of theoretically sensitive models to identify past ethnicity, the flexibility and dynamism of modern ethnic groups calls the validity of these classifications into question (2009, 101-102). Instead, the important consideration is seen to be the formation of group identity, which can take place within or without ethnic categories. In contrast, Damm (2010) considers ethnic identity to be a ‘collective identity’ related to the identification of cultural differences and the underscoring of descent and culture communities. Damm acknowledges the critique of archaeological investigations of ethnicity that suggest ethnicity is a recent concept which cannot be applied to prehistoric groups. However, she suggests that since personal identities are situational the recognition of ethnic difference in the past may have been relevant in certain circumstances and/or interactions (Damm 2010, 15-16), perhaps like encounters between geographically distant groups via the extensive networks of interaction existent in BA Europe.

### **Ritual as the expressions of identity in Late Bronze Age Ireland**

In archaeological discourse, identity is now generally acknowledged as developing out of the experiences, interactions and relations a person or group has with their environment and other persons/groups. Although this inevitably leads to a degree of subjectivity in the perception of identity, identity is more and more being accepted as a

dynamic and multi-faceted phenomenon both in our ‘modern’ world and in the past. Where perhaps it was traditionally presented in archaeological dialogues as static, possibly due to it being (until relatively recently) under-theorised in archaeology, identity is now perceived as fluid and changeable. This shift in perception has also led to the acceptance that we must move beyond imposing single categorical identities onto past individuals and groups, instead discussing past identity in relation to concepts like relational personhood, socially constructed relational identity (i.e. the place of identity within the social system), and composite identity of which only some facets may be active at any one time.

Identity is now comprehended as multiple components which together form a whole (both for individuals and groups) and within that whole one aspect of identity may be expressed more dominantly depending on the context. As will be discussed in more detail in Chapters 4.0 to 4.3, the often public and performative character of ritual practice is the ideal mechanism through which to express and (re)negotiate social status and identity. Ritual events are also often venues used to highlighting life-stage transitions which may comprise a change in perceived identity (e.g. initiations, marriages, death). The above overview of the current conceptualisations of identity in archaeological (and more broadly anthropological) dialogues is thus built upon in Chapter 4.1 in order to explore possible social roles and identities (e.g. seafarer, warrior, ritual specialist) which likely existed in the Irish LBA and may, explicitly or implicitly, be discerned through the evidence of ritual practice.

### 1.3 The materiality of ritual objects

This chapter will provide a brief overview of materiality and how it may be identified in the Irish archaeological record, as it is a concept which pervades many of the subsequent chapters in relation to the use of particular objects and materials by actors in LBA ritual practice. A number of archaeological interpretations of this concept are outlined as well as how materiality relates to material culture. The discussion will also consider how objects broadly reflect the society(ies) and culture(s) in which they are produced, used and ‘discarded’. Some seminal concepts related to the archaeological investigation of objects are then presented before considering how objects have been, and are, linked to identity by representing aspects of a person through actions they may have taken and social roles they may have inhabited. Towards the end of the chapter Irish LBA ceramic technology and production is briefly used to illustrate that some of the concepts presented below are integral to our understanding of past peoples within their socio-cultural milieu.

#### Archaeology and materiality

Although it clearly underpins our study of past peoples, the physicality of material culture can sometimes overshadow the human element in its creation. Material culture is studied archaeologically under two wide-ranging frameworks: *materiality* and *material culture studies*. It is clear from even a cursory review of the available literature that understandings of *materiality* and *material culture* vary. For instance, Meskell defines the study of *materiality* as “the exploration of the situated experiences of material life, the constitution of the object world and concomitantly its shaping of human experience” while describing the study of *material culture* as “oscillating between empirical studies and more theoretical evocations of cultural analysis” (2004, 249). For Meskell materiality is culturally situated and tied in with social relationships because people create ‘things’ from ‘non-things’ while simultaneously people are created by interacting with and creating ‘things’ (2004, 249). Materiality is therefore utilised as a mechanism for understanding how past peoples were culturally constituted (Meskell 2004, 250). This concept is further examined in Chapter 4.1 where the development and expression of likely LBA Irish identities and social roles, often most visible in the context of ritual practice, through action and interaction is discussed.

Cornell and Fahlander define the *social study of materialities* as a “focus on the social significance of objects and other material matter in the constitution of social relations” (2007, 5). Materialities are quite broad in their definition: “from artefacts, the landscape, layout and material of buildings and settlements, trees and vegetation, animals, bodies and less evident material matters such as rain, ice and snow”, basically any ‘thing’ which affects the human body (2007, 6). They declare that *material culture* is not valuable as an operative concept because it is too vague, a ‘catch-all’ term, and while *materiality* “suffers the risk of becoming just a new word for material culture” when used correctly it emphasizes different concepts (Cornell and Fahlander 2007, 5). Like Meskell (2004), Cornell and Fahlander stress the importance materialities have for the structure of social life and thus the construction of the human self. However, they

advocate beginning with a microarchaeological approach, which identifies structuring practices (small scale repetitive actions) in the archaeological record, before exploring more 'general patterns' like ideology. By studying materiality first at a small-scale and then relating these particulars to the more general, they suggest that a better understanding of social practices will be gained (Cornell and Fahlander 2007, 7). This is a valid approach for archaeological contexts which contain a volume of material culture of similar types (i.e. evidence of ceramic or lithic production), but if there is not a large database of material culture to analyse (from one site or even from a number of broadly contemporary sites of a similar type), a microscalar approach may not be possible.

Interactions and relationships between people and materialities are visualized by Fahlander as a complicated rhizome network where the causes and effects of interactions are not even fully perceived by the active agents, let alone archaeologists (2007, 16). To articulate how both understandings and misunderstandings during social encounters can generate change Fahlander explores Bhabha's notion of the 'third space encounter' and its application to archaeology (2007, 37). In particular, Fahlander is keen to stress that instead of implying ethnicity or cultural diffusion/migration, 'foreign' materialities reflect more complex processes of social interaction. "An encounter with a previously unknown kind of tool, aesthetics or material substance may have as profound social impact as a meeting between individuals of different traditions and cosmologies" (Fahlander 2007, 16). This emphasis on interactions between people, and between people and things, is further explored in Chapter 4.2, for instance in terms of how 'profound social impacts' of foreign materialities are relevant to LBA Irish ritual practice since many of the high status objects and materials (e.g. swords, feasting equipment, amber, etc.) which are of particular ritual significance originated from outside of Ireland.

A new framework developed from cognitive archaeology proposed by Renfrew, termed *material engagement theory*, extends the archaeological consideration of material culture to properties other than the physical, for instance socially determined properties such as 'value' (2004, 26).

"Material engagement theory is concerned with the relationships between humans and the material world and focuses upon the use and status of material objects (mainly created objects or artefacts) which are employed to mediate in the interactions between human individuals, and between humans and their environment. Its purpose is to facilitate the analysis and understanding of culture change." (Renfrew 2004, 23)

Other important non-physical properties stressed are the original intended use of objects and the embedded histories and/or memories carried and evoked by material culture which are often perceivable only within a particular socio-cultural milieu (2004, 28-29). Nevertheless, Renfrew acknowledges the role that physical properties play in how materials are perceived by different cultures, for example jade in China or Mesoamerica (2004, 27). Thus, *material engagement theory* may simply conflate *material culture* and



*materiality*, while focusing more on the cognitive engagement with and perception of materials as opposed to bodily interaction with them.

In contrast, Hodder discusses both *materiality* and *material culture studies* as being more focused on things than people, “on how things come to have person-like qualities, how they act, have agency, personalities, spirits, powers. The emphasis remains on the constitution of the self and identity, but the focus shifts to how things act in the world” (2012, 30). For Hodder, *material culture studies* have now moved away from the ‘negative associations of objectification’ instead suggesting that the ways in which humans can transform and challenge produced objects plays a significant role in the ‘construction of the subject’ (2012, 32). Materiality is thus understood to be more concerned with ‘cultural relationships’ and the role of objects in their socio-cultural context, while the role of the human agent is minimized. However, it is evident that Hodder, like Fahlander as outlined above, believes both the *study of materiality* and *material culture studies* are important to generate a fuller understanding of how both people and things interact in the generation of society:

“All this work on material culture and materiality is of utmost importance in demonstrating the thorough extent to which person and society are dependent on things. Materials and things are seen as always relational, contextually embedded within specific networks and social contexts. Materials and things are seen as actively engaged in the social process, and as going through social biographies. After all such work it can no longer be argued that self and society can be separated from things, studied independently of materials and the object world.” (Hodder 2012, 33)

According to Tilley, one of the most fundamental shifts in archaeology occurred with the 1982 publication of Hodder’s *Symbolic and structural archaeology* because it revealed that “the conception of material culture as a signifying system in which the external physical attributes of artefacts and their relationships are not regarded as exhausting their meaning” (1989, 185; cf. Binford 1962). Even though this statement was made over two decades ago, Conneller recently suggested that materials continue to be viewed “as a formless substrate onto which human mental representations” are imposed, or “as composed of a series of natural, essential properties which constrain or enable human action” (2011, 1). She is critical of this stance, arguing that it leaves the role materials may play in shaping social action unseen, an issue of especial concern for archaeologists studying past cultures in which the ‘nature’ of materials may have been understood much differently from how they are today. In particular, the current (modern Western) understanding of materials as inert until directly affected by human action is not held by all present-day cultures and was likely not in the past (Conneller 2011, 14). Correspondingly, Tilley has stated that artefacts should not be viewed as a ‘mirror to society’ as they are instead representative of a complex web of relationships between people, objects and materials within a particular social context (1989, 188-189; see also Appadurai 1986). However, Tilley tempers this by stating that “the meaning of material culture can never be objectified or exactly pinned down” as embedded in objects are

multiple, possibly contradictory meanings, that are dependent on a range of social factors to enable expression (1989, 191). This concept is explored by Conneller through Holbraad's example of the *aché* powder used by Afro-Cuban diviners:

“Holbraad argues, however, that we need to take on board the statement of his informants that powder is not just powerful, but *is* power and that this insight has significant interpretive potential. This, for Holbraad, is the starting point for a methodology whereby the ‘things’ themselves may dictate the terms of their own analysis. [...] In his discussion of powerful powder, Holbraad, it seems, provides a way forward for thinking about materials. Rather than composed of what we would view as mechanical properties (permeability, motility), with an ‘extra’ of imposed cultural meaning or mistaken interpretation (power), powder is power and these different ‘types’ of properties are mutually implicated. Or, to be more accurate, both powder and power are a third thing entirely, ‘powerful-powder’, a thing which is neither co-terminus with western concepts of powder or power. The power of powder is part of a process that emerges through its physical properties, as its motility renders deities immanent. Our idea of physical object and mental representation are collapsed in this substance.” (Conneller 2011, 14-15)

As the messages and meanings embedded in material culture are culturally constituted, a shared cultural knowledge is required in order to ‘read’ and react appropriately to the transmission of information which takes place when encountering materiality. This is why the analysis of artefacts is effective in developing our understandings of past socio-cultural systems and the social institutions which comprise them, such as ritual practice in LBA Ireland. However, it is important to caution against “a simplistic model of signification in which things stand as representatives of some sort of social whole, for example, pots for people” (Joyce 2012, 122). Similarly, Kristiansen proposes that a better understanding of the structure of European BA society may be developed by identifying the relationships between objects and contexts “which formed a specific relationship defined by a set of symbolic meanings, actions and transactions that once linked them together in an institution” (2004, 179). According to DeMarrais the “materialization of culture may be defined as the transformation of ideas, values, stories, myths, and the like into a material, physical reality” (2004, 11). Here the emphasis is on the materiality of practice (with direct influence from Bourdieu), specifically the way in which ‘social realities’ are actively created and changed through the actions of agents working within a dynamic social structure:

“Shared understandings encompass both conscious and explicit forms of knowledge as well as the unconscious, embodied dispositions and routines of *habitus*. Importantly, to suggest that these shared understandings exist is not to argue that they are the same for any two individuals. Indeed, it is precisely the variability of these understandings and the material forms by

which they are materialized that makes reference to a broad, general concept such as *culture* essential [...]” (DeMarrais 2004, 12)

This stance allows DeMarrais to focus not on what material culture ‘stands-for’, but instead on how material culture can have multiple simultaneously embedded meanings which as a totality reflect the materialization of cultural knowledge (2004, 13, 20). Therefore, while both Kristiansen and DeMarrais are focused on using materiality to investigate past social processes and developments, Kristiansen advocates the interpretation of symbolic meaning while DeMarrais considers materiality from the perspective of object-agent interactions within a *habitus*.

Instead of considering finished objects in object-agent interactions, Dobres & Hoffman investigate the ‘key social dimensions of technology’ and the production of objects at micro and macro scales of social action (1994, 211). They suggest that a “microscalar perspective highlights the dynamic nature of prehistoric technological action within heterogeneous social communities and recognizes that prehistoric production was a meaningful and socially negotiated set of material-based *practices*, as well as a technical means by which to make things” (Dobres and Hoffman 1994, 213). Like DeMarrais, Dobres and Hoffman thus advocate the contextual analysis of materialities in order to better understand past societies and culture, the differences between the two approaches only serve to underscore how much can be gleaned from investigating objects in all states. Clearly, current understandings of past *materiality* and *material culture* are disparate, in particular regarding the connotations of these terms and what they can reveal about past social practices. These perspectives are applied to Irish LBA materiality to delve more deeply into how objects and materials associated with ritual practice can inform our understanding of the wider socio-cultural context. In particular, a focus on interaction and embedded meaning is apparent in the following discussions.

### **Object biographies, itineraries and the life history approach**

Perhaps because of the lack of highly visible monumental construction, as opposed to earlier periods (i.e. megalithic tombs, etc.), objects largely provide the context for the activities of those who inhabited Ireland during the LBA. The high level of craftsmanship and ornate character of much of the gold and bronze objects, as well as the variety and volume produced, contribute to the centrality of objects within discussions of the Irish LBA. Therefore, although precise examinations of individual objects is not a component of this study, objects more generally are an important feature of the archaeological investigations presented in this thesis; particularly in the traces of socio-cultural actions, interactions and processes (i.e. indications of actors within the system) as evidenced through their use in ritual practice.

Many approaches to the investigation of objects and materiality in the past adhere to the notion that “as people and objects gather time, movement and change, they are constantly transformed, and these transformations of person and object are tied up with each other” (Gosden and Marshall 1999, 169). The concept of the object biography is that objects have ‘lives’ which can be traced: they are born/produced, as they live/are

used they acquire a personal narrative and have relationships and then die/are discarded or re/decommissioned (Joy 2009, 540 after Kopytoff 1986). “At the heart of the notion of biography are questions about the links between people and things; about the ways meanings and values are accumulated and transformed. There are many ways of understanding these links and many ways of conceptualizing the objects which lie at the heart of these links” (Gosden and Marshall 1999, 172). However, Joy identifies three methods of creating object biographies which do not take into account the full ‘life’ of the object in question: the taphonomic approach, the chaîne opératoire and the use-life approach (2009, 542). These approaches have been criticized for discussing objects as ‘passive’ and ‘inert’ and not fully acknowledging the importance of socio-cultural context and processes in object creation and use (Gosden and Marshall 1999, 169). In contrast, the more anthropological and macro-scale ‘life-history’ and the more archaeological and micro-scale ‘object biography’ approaches attempt to create a complete and contextual narrative of the ‘artefact life-cycle’ (Joy 2009, 542). Nevertheless, the creation of a complete narrative can be very difficult in the context of prehistoric archaeology:

“The life of an object does not necessarily follow a linear pattern. After its creation an object can die a number of times as it becomes a part of and leaves different spheres of relationships. It can also have a number of different simultaneous lives which can run concurrently as it acts in different relationship webs. In addition, as has been aptly demonstrated by biographies of long-lived monuments, the biography of some objects is further complicated because they extend over a series of human lifetimes.” (Joy 2009, 543)

Many of the archaeological studies which use object biography are centred on objects as they are exchanged between people or as they are used in a specific context, like ceremonial performance, therefore focusing on one or only a few stages in the object life-cycle (Joy 2009, 544). In contrast, Joy advocates the creation of ‘relational biographies’ of individual artefacts, “piecing together evidence from artefacts and archaeology to examine the role of objects in social relations”, without having to create a linear narrative (2009, 545).

The alternative ‘life history’ approach to the analysis of objects suggests that “the functions of artifacts are inferred from the paths they follow through societies regardless of their form” (Walker 1998, 246). Referring specifically to ritual objects, Walker criticizes analyses that are focused on the ‘formal design’ of artefacts, suggesting that this type of approach has advocated the search for meaning over identifying how objects were actually used (whether deemed ritual objects or otherwise by the researchers).

“In a world without differential distributions of social power, where every object possessed the same material properties and underwent the same sequence of events from manufacture through discard, all life histories and archaeological records would be the same. However, because artifacts are

different and people manipulate them in various activities, the lives of objects vary as do their endpoints in the archaeological record. The study of ritual prehistory [*sic*] is in part the study of how ritual activities have manipulated such object aggregates - particularly at the discard stage.” (Walker 1998, 294)

Such an approach can facilitate overcoming assumptions sometimes made about the ‘function’ of artefacts, for instance the ambiguous utilization of the BA Atlantic flesh-hook (see Chapter 2.1). Using different terminology, Joyce (2012) advocates a perspective very much in line with Walker’s (1998) in which she acknowledges that archaeological practice does not only consider finished objects but in fact examines objects from before production to after discard/transformation. What archaeologists “bring to an understanding of life with things is a sense of material in constant motion, in transit from hand to hand and place to place, blurring the boundaries of person, place and thing” (Joyce 2012, 129). Joyce refers to this archaeological methodology as tracing the ‘itinerary of things’ through the reassembly of the interactions and connections between objects and objects, and people and objects (2012, 124-128). This approach moves away from a perceived tendency to conflate ‘whole classes of things’ within discussions of specific objects in the investigation of object biographies (Joyce 2012, 122).

### **Materiality to investigate identity**

“We need to be aware of how easily we impose our own categories on to the past, dividing up ‘clothing’, ‘furniture’, ‘weaponry’ and ‘jewellery’ out of assemblages whose totality relates to the entire representation of the deceased’s appearance or ‘dress’. The clothing of the dead thus constitutes a hall of mirrors, representations of representations, in which things may not be entirely what they seem at first glance.” (Parker Pearson 1999, 9)

It is the ‘hall of mirrors’ which often sparks a person’s initial interest in archaeology (or anthropology (Ortner 1984, note 3)), the implied promise for insight into past peoples (i.e. the ‘other’) which is embodied in ancient objects and materials. Observing or handling an object can generate a sense of connection to the past and to those individuals who crafted and used the object. However, the complexity of the symbols, representations, narratives and actions which are combined in material culture does truly result in a ‘hall of mirrors’ with a variety of possible interpretations. Parker Pearson’s caution (above) is thus necessary and valid, and could further be extended to all material associated with the remains of the dead, including fragmented objects or food remains like the pottery, grain and/or animal bone sometimes found mixed with cremated human bone and pyre material in Irish LBA death ritual deposits (see Chapter 2.3). As Parker Pearson states, like whole objects and/or grave-goods these materials should also be viewed as “complex symbols which express the various values, aims and attitudes of the mourners in the face of death” (1999, 10).

Objects directly associated with the deceased human body (i.e. grave-goods) are, according to Fahlander and Oestigaard (2008), potentially reflective of two non-mutually exclusive categories: body items such as clothes and personal ornaments, and grave-gifts which may not have ‘belonged’ to the deceased. In either case the objects reflect the social relationships which existed between the deceased and those participating in the death ritual; relationships which may not be explicit archaeologically. Other objects associated with preparation or handling of the body during the death ritual(s) may or may not be included in the deposition of corpse or bone (Fahlander and Oestigaard 2008, 7), and if they are, can be included in the overarching category of grave-goods. The materiality of death may therefore be closely linked to the identity of the deceased and the mourners. For example, individual, group and cultural identity may have been outwardly expressed during the Irish LBA through the display and wearing of metal and other objects during group assemblies and/or ritual events:

“We should recognize that identities forged through funerary rites are composed not of roles but of cultural practices. For example, grave goods are not just elements of an identity kit but are the culmination of a series of actions by the mourners to express something of their relationship to the deceased as well as to portray the identity of the deceased. Status is thus not so much a role to be reflected in mode of burial and associated grave goods but a panoply of practices which are historically situated and open to manipulation. Secondly, concepts of honour and sacredness may be far more important than wealth and ownership in organizing society’s values.”  
(Parker Pearson 1999, 84)

It has been proposed that the deposition of metalwork in Ireland, which increased exponentially between the earlier and later BA, was in some way connected to death rituals, especially considering that a decrease in the deposition of grave-goods paralleled the increase of wet deposits of objects (see Chapter 2.2). Any firm connection between these depositional trends is for now unproven, however the link between metal objects and metalworking with the human body and human bone is more concrete. Cooney suggests that as Irish prehistoric metalwork was often worn and carried on the body as ornaments and weapons it may have been conceived of as an extension of that body, in turn related to an understanding of identity and social relationships and perhaps “indicating some metaphoric resonances between places that were seen as ‘good’ and ‘right’ for the deposition of both human remains and metalwork” (2009b, 385). If metal objects were in fact so connected to, and representative of, the identity of the individual who used and wore them, then perhaps Parker Pearson is correct in considering the possibility that the deposition of artefacts could be analogous to the deposition of human bone (1999, 3). If this were the case it would be reflective of a past understanding of human beings as ‘dividual’ entities in that different components/representations of the deceased could be deposited separately (see Chapter 4.1).

As was introduced in Chapter 1.2 and will be discussed further in Chapter 4.1, the exploration of past identities has begun to engage with how materiality (e.g. objects, structures, environments, etc.) exists in a reciprocal relationship with human individuals and groups (see Brück 2005a, 65). It is the non-verbal communication materiality elicits which is particularly thought-provoking as “with the right attentiveness and the right experience, we can to some degree participate in some of the non-verbal knowledge of this kind that was held by the ancient people we study” (Cowgill 2004, 276-277). Therefore, what underlies much of the above discussion is the concept of embedded meaning: that objects (and fragments of objects) carry with them messages, meanings and the signs of deliberately taken actions, all of which are culturally constituted and therefore only truly decipherable within the relevant culture/community/group: “When we look at the artifact, we must see it as the result of a system of making. That is, we must assume that it did not come about by random, but that somehow it was thought about and considered useful within a set structure” (Bertemes and Biehl 2001, 17). In other words, objects cannot be interpreted without an understanding of how they are situated within their total socio-historical/cultural/geographical context (i.e. the system).

### **Case study: Irish Late Bronze Age ceramics**

Pottery production has long been the focus of discussions regarding the formation and expression of individual and group identity(ies), for instance in the notable studies of pottery in Pueblo settlements which suggested that women moved upon marriage but continued to make pottery in the style of their matrilineal kin group (Duff and Nauman 2010, 13). Similarly, Irish LBA pottery can be used to illustrate how the materiality of one class of object can provide a number of insights into past social structure. Unlike earlier BA pottery which is often finely made and highly decorated, the pottery found in LBA contexts is usually described as having ‘degenerated’ into undecorated coarse-ware:

“Pottery seems to have become a much more bland item of material culture as we do not find the range of forms and the decoration seen in the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age, but it does show a direct continuity with the Middle Bronze Age. It seems likely that the emphasis had shifted away from ceramics as a medium for the display of information. Indeed, the prevalence of large vessel forms on Late Bronze Age sites and the use of the same type of ceramics in burial practice suggest that the pottery may have had a limited functional range.” (Cooney and Grogan 1994, 153)

LBA pottery continues to be used symbolically and ritually in similar contexts to the earlier BA, for instance in structured depositions or included in token deposits of cremated human bone, therefore suggesting that although its production may not have been as technically complex or sophisticated as in earlier periods, pottery continued to be a socially significant object/material. Pottery sherds have been found on almost all types of LBA sites, but are most common in settlement and death ritual contexts. Sites which exhibit a lower-status habitation character generally have undecorated utilitarian coarse-ware pottery. In contrast, higher status sites are more likely to have pottery

which was treated prior to firing and/or made more finely. Interestingly, the pottery sherds found in ritual contexts is consistently similar to the sherds found on settlements. This indicates that there was no differentiation in domestic and ceremonial pottery, as similar pottery was used in a variety of contexts both ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’ (viz. Durkheim). In other words, the pottery which was important for the enactment of certain rituals was the same as that used for day to day cooking and storing of food; thus revealing the pervasiveness of ritual practice in all aspects of LBA life in Ireland.

Most of the LBA pottery analysed has been coil-built flat-based ‘tubby-jars’ or ‘bucket-shaped’ pots of various sizes, appropriate for use as cooking or container vessels (Cleary 2000, 129; 2012, 24-25). In some instances the pottery has internally bevelled rims which suggest the use of some sort of lid (Hencken 1942, 10; Cleary 2000, 130). Analysis of charred organic deposits on pottery sherds from Haughey’s Fort, Co. Armagh, revealed that some pots had contained cellulose deposits derived from tree-bark, and lipid-testing resulted in the identification of bovine meat/skins, therefore suggesting that the pottery in this context was being used to hold or cook food (Mallory 1995, 82). It has also been suggested that pottery (or its contents) may have been involved in some sort of exchange during the LBA. For instance, around 5% of the pottery found at Ballyveelish, Co. Tipperary, was made from a non-local clay (Cleary 2000, 128). However, the presence of non-local clay does not necessarily point to ‘trade’ in ceramic types, it may have been the contained material which was exchanged, some individuals may have travelled into the Ballyveelish area and brought ceramics with them, or there may have been a non-local source of clay that was ritually significant to pottery production. More secure evidence comes from testing on pottery sherds from Dún Aonghasa which revealed that pig fat or meat had been stored in or consumed from ceramic vessels (Evershed et al. 2012); this has interesting implications as it is very unlikely that pigs could have been raised on Inís Mór due to lack of fodder (McCormick and Murphy 2012), therefore implying that either pigs or pork products were transported from the mainland, perhaps in ceramic vessels (see Chapter 2.1 for a further discussion of the potential ritual importance of pork in a LBA Irish context).

The LBA coarseware pottery found in Ireland was likely the product of local domestic (i.e. non-specialist) activities and therefore it follows that being a ‘potter’ may not have been particularly important for identity formation. Nevertheless, the pottery produced was still used in socially significant ways, and the manner of its deposition may even suggest a metaphorical link to the human life-cycle and the production of personal identity (see Brück 2006 and Chapters 2.4 and 4.1 below). Furthermore, there are many steps that go into the production of viable pots, from sourcing clay to firing, and many individuals may have been involved in this process, perhaps contributing to the solidification of community/group identity through collective action as suggested by MacSweeney (2009). Of course, pots were not the only important objects created from clay. Moulds for casting metallic objects were also ceramic, often of a very fine and intricate construction, thus demonstrating that the ability/knowledge of fine ceramic production was present in LBA Ireland. The full technical process of producing



adequate moulds is unclear, however it has been suggested that the entire procedure from procuring the proper clay to actually casting an object may have taken weeks or months (Ó Faoláin and Northover 1998, 85). Clay mould production therefore also indicates the hand of a specialist, especially for more intricate and delicate moulds like those of swords (Ó Faoláin and Northover 1998, 70). It is unclear whether bronze-workers would have produced the moulds, but it does seem likely that these processes went hand-in-hand thus demonstrating the breadth of knowledge required by prehistoric metalworkers as well as the essential connections which existed between different categories of crafting in BA Ireland.

This brief case study illustrates that object production in LBA Ireland was not simply a matter of function, even in regards to one of the most basic (and often coarsely constructed) object, the domestic pot. The skill and knowledge required to produce clay moulds for bronze casting indicate that the ability to generate highly refined ceramics was present but was not considered a necessary component of vessel production. Interestingly, both pottery and ceramic moulds were ritually deposited in LBA Ireland, often in a fragmentary state, suggesting that although these two object types were manufactured using different techniques and degrees of craftsmanship, they were both considered ritually significant in certain contexts. Pottery and pottery fragments therefore have the potential to reveal much about the importance of material culture and materiality in LBA Irish ritual practice.

### **Ritualised materiality in Late Bronze Age Ireland**

Materiality is one of the hallmarks of archaeology: the tangible remains of the past which can be used as evidence of past peoples and practices. It is often the case (as it is in LBA Ireland) that instead of the remains of individual humans, the objects they created, exchanged and discarded provide much of the information regarding past socio-cultural/political organisation and the mechanisms which shaped it, such as ritual practice. However, material culture has come to be viewed as even more significant to our understanding of the past:

“Many archaeologists have come to the view that human material culture is more than a passive reflection of (what have been taken to be) more important (than material culture) aspects of human life, such as a reflection of social structure, a reflection or expression of cosmology or attitudes towards death. Rather, they take the idea that material culture is an active, constitutive feature of human life, that humans are symbolists and materialists simultaneously, that the production of human culture and the production of meaning is actively effected with material culture – material culture that both constructs and is constructed by cultural and social action.”  
(Conkey 1991, 71)

Many archaeologists have pursued the investigation of past identities through materiality, especially in context of death ritual where the social roles and identities of both the deceased and mourners may be perceptible archaeologically. More broadly,

culture may be materialized in objects, structures and landscapes and expressed through practice. Materiality is thus often considered as reflective of non-verbal communication of culturally constituted embedded meaning as well as being representative of past interactions and relationships between people and things. Methods used to investigate past materiality often focus on the life-cycle of objects and generally acknowledge how they may be intertwined with the life-cycles of humans in a dynamic and mutually transformative way. This is illustrated in the brief case-study above, which demonstrates how a potentially mundane and ‘coarse’ object-type can in fact highlight many facets of past socio-cultural processes, not least of all (in the context of the present discussion) ritual practice.

## **2.0 Ritual practice in Late Bronze Age Ireland**

The main categories of ritual practice discussed in this thesis are dynamic and fluid in the sense that the ritual practices contained therein are protean and intertwined; it is almost impossible to find an example of a ritual action which does not (or may not) display characteristics of more than one of the categories in use here. However, for the purposes of conducting a focused study it was necessary to provide a framework within which to work and through which to investigate archaeologically observable ritual practices. The process of categorisation is also an important tool for comparing and contrasting different instances of ritual action, not only to note the differences which exist in the various categories but also the general trends which are prevalent throughout all ritual practice in LBA Ireland.

## 2.1 Ritual feasting

The communal element of feasting is often highlighted as an important factor in distinguishing it archaeologically from general domestic food consumption practices (Dietler 2001; Dietler and Hayden 2001). Everyday domestic meals are sometimes communal (and perhaps also ritualised, semi-formal and socially structured) but the detailed planning and investment of time, effort and resources necessary to organise a formal feasting event sets it apart (Dietler 2001, 80). Producing a formal feast is also often a strategic and public act while domestic meals are more unstructured and private (Dietler 2001, 70). Furthermore, by providing food for a large number of people, or a whole community, with or without a social or ritual motivation, hosts broadcast their social status and perceived wealth. The public nature of ritual feasting therefore enables community members to act upon underlying social power struggles in a controlled and culturally constituted manner, thus engaging in commensal politics: socio-political interactions which use food consumption events as their arena (Dietler 2001).

Consuming food is a basic human necessity and can be a mechanism for facilitating a variety of socio-political objectives such as building alliances, affecting competitiveness, creating indebtedness, organising a workforce, and generating exclusiveness or inclusiveness (deFrance 2009, 141). Dietler goes so far as to suggest that feasts are innately political, simultaneously as the vehicle and venue for political manoeuvring (2001, 66) as feasts assert and maintain existing hierarchies, both social and ontological. The formality of an established feast can facilitate the creation and maintenance of exchange partners (goods, bride-wealth, etc.), provide a venue for societal control (dispute settlement, exercising laws and public sanctions, etc.), offer a sense of connection (to the past, gods, ancestors, etc.), and (re-)establish the social positions of group members (Dietler 2001, 69). The political, and therefore potentially competitive, character of feasting is linked to reciprocal obligation and thus asymmetrical power relations as discussed in Chapter 1.1. By holding a feast the host is not simply providing food for a gathering of people, they are entering into a reciprocal obligation whereby the guests are provided with the feast and are therefore indebted to the host and in some manner inferior to the host until the debt is paid (Dietler 1990, 363; Hayden 2001, 35). To procure symbolic capital by organising feasts a host must make potential guests feel that attending the feast is worth the reciprocal obligation incurred, either due to the networking potential of a large gathering, by providing luxurious foods or by employing ritual and/or venerative displays (Hayden 2001, 30).

A custom which can often extend beyond the relatively formal reciprocal obligation of host and guest is hospitality. In Bronze Age Greece and Iron Age Gaul it was obligatory to provide hospitality (food, accommodation) even to unannounced outsiders, without receiving anything in return except perhaps information (Craven 2007, 38). In Medieval Ireland the institution of *coe* obliged vassals to host their lord and his retinue, usually between New Year's and Shrovetide (*Máirt Inide*) when excess livestock was slaughtered (McCormick 2002, 26). The occurrence and/or format of hospitality in LBA Ireland is unknown, however its formality in contemporary Europe and later Ireland

hints at the importance of such customs. In later prehistoric Ireland the volume of meat generated from even a single slaughtered animal would have been too much for a domestic unit to consume before it went rancid. The lack of a market economy would have necessitated either methods for preserving meat (smoking or salting) or a social system for redistribution/consumption (like the *coe* system or religious feasting) (McCormick 2009; 2002). Regardless of the motivation, as Dietler states: the “critical point to retain is that commensal hospitality centring on food and drink distribution and consumption is a practice, which, like the exchange of gifts, serves to establish and reproduce social relations” (2001, 74).

Feasts with the purpose of strengthening inter-group alliances, cultural affinity, or reaffirming the unity of a community can exhibit distinctive features such as ritualised objects or architecture which work to demonstrate a common understanding of the customs and expectations associated with participation in the feast (Hayden 2001, 57). In a discussion of transegalitarian societies Hayden suggests that the drive to strengthen and preserve such inter- and intra-group connections through feasting often compels hosts to deliver a more elaborate and ‘expensive’ event each time one is held (2009, 600). Mechanisms for public symbolic exchange, like feasts, will quickly reveal those in a community who are willing and able to participate and those who are taking advantage of the generosity of others (Hayden 2009, 600). Thus to maintain one’s position in society, let alone enhance it, it is essential to participate and in turn reciprocate (Bourdieu 1977, 4-8).

Public events like feasts can also be used as a method of upholding the social status quo in favour of the élite strata of society. The preparation of a large-scale feast is not a casual undertaking, it requires long-term planning and the intensification or augmentation of subsistence activities for the accumulation of surpluses (Spielmann 2002, 197). Although the use of surplus food in order to avoid waste is possibly one aspect of the development of feasting activity, a purely economic motivation for instituting a formal feasting event seems overly simplistic. There are a variety of socio-cultural motivations for feasting. Even if these appear outwardly to be driven by economics, for instance the redistribution of agricultural produce, there is often also a closely related (underlying or dominant) social influence. Furthermore, preparing a communal feast, especially one with a ritual element, often involves the production of unusual specialist items such as ceremonial clothing or serving-ware which create demand for skilled labour and can lead to craft specialisation and patronage, therefore involving the efforts of the whole community (Spielmann 2002, 197).

A frequent motivation for hosting a feast in pre-state societies is to mobilise labour. Prior to the development of a labour market human employment could not be merchandised and therefore one mechanism used to mobilise labour was feasting provided before and/or after the ventures’ completion (Dietler 1990, 365; 2001, 80). Work-party feasts may also be used to highlight social status, as only individuals with enough wealth to be able to host a feast can arrange for large-scale work projects to be undertaken (Dietler 1990, 367; Jones et al. 2010, 56). Although the labourers benefit

from being provided with food, drink and entertainment, the host benefits both from the accumulated symbolic capital acquired (due to having the ability to host the feast in the first place) and from the result of the work provided. The work-party feast is a very successful mechanism and echoes of this practice can still be seen today, although for monetary as opposed to culinary compensation as the present author observed taking place during rural road repair in Lesotho, Africa. Work-party feasting is often closely connected to traditional forms of alcohol, excepting wine (Jones et al. 2010, 52). The production of traditional alcohols is a labour intensive domestic activity (Dietler 2006, 238) and without the use of hops or techniques of distilling, alcoholic drinks will quickly spoil and therefore are not a tradable commodity. Consequently, a cyclical situation may develop where household labour is required to produce alcoholic beverages in order to deliver an attractive enough work-party feast to construct outbuildings, dig a well, harvest grain (with which to make the beverages), and so on. This is not to say that labour mobilisation is ‘driven by drink’, simply that this type of hosted feast becomes a societal institution embedded in the customs of reciprocal obligation and hospitality (Dietler 1990, 367). In Irish later prehistory the consumption of alcohol during ritual feasting may also have facilitated bonding between warrior retinues, a point which will be discussed in later chapters.

### **Archaeologically identifying ritual feasts**

Patterns of large-scale feasting can be evidenced by special purpose architecture and the use of luxurious objects for serving and adorning its participants (Hayden 2001, 25; McCormick 2009, 406). Evidence of such ceremonial display can be identified in the archaeological record as distinct from everyday subsistence, especially when various types of feasting evidence overlap in the same ritualistic context (Dietler and Hayden 2001, 9). Accordingly, one argument for the classification of feasting as a ritual practice is its public and performative character. However, Dietler contends that for feasts to be considered ritual events they need not be highly elaborate or even considered sacred, instead he stresses the identification of differentiation between everyday meals and formalised feasting events regardless of scale (2001, 67). Nevertheless, in current archaeological discourse feasting activities are often seen to centre on the consumption of food and drink in large quantities or the consumption of cuisine perceived as luxurious or unusual in type or method of preparation (deFrance 2009, 123).

In non-stratified societies feasts are often a medium for establishing or maintaining inter- or intra-group relationships, while in stratified societies feasts underscore or affect the social positions of group members (van der Veen 2003, 405). Correspondingly, in non-stratified societies feasting often involves the consumption of a greater quantity of common foods, while in societies with more formal social stratification feasting includes the consumption of foods perceived as high quality or luxurious (van der Veen 2003, 405). Luxury foods are distinguished from everyday foods by their relative scarcity or by qualities such as taste, texture or effect (van der Veen 2003, 405; Hayden 2001; Anton et al. 2003). However, such factors are culturally contingent and the perception of luxury can be affected by factors such as increased availability or

enforced consumption taboos (deFrance 2009, 127). Therefore, the inclusion of luxury foodstuffs in a feast can be related to the socio-political power struggles mentioned above and the social motivation behind the feasting activity. Van der Veen asserts that foods associated with ritual or religious events are in fact 'instrumental needs' since they have a purpose other than basic sustenance or the display of social status (2003, 407 after Berry 1994). This distinction may be possible in the context of living cultures where finer details of food procurement and use are known, but for prehistoric cultures it can be very difficult to separate sustenance, political jostling and ritual observances.

For a rare or luxurious food to be identified it must be placed in its wider context. If the common staples are not known then there will be no possibility of comparison with more unusual faunal or palaeobotanical evidence. A wider consideration of the archaeological record can also provide an idea of what consumption strategies can be considered elite, ceremonial and/or domestic. For example, in a domestic context all parts of an animal are generally consumed, while in a ritual or ceremonial context often select cuts will be eaten or the animal may be distributed hierarchically according to status within the assembled group (Anton et al. 2003; McCormick 2009). Another indication of luxury food consumption is if animals are consumed before they reach their prime meat bearing age (Anton et al. 2003, 433). To support an animal only to slaughter it before it can provide a maximum food yield seems counterintuitive unless there are additional socio-cultural factors involved. An example is pre-modern veal consumption where the removal of a calf from its mother would cause milk production to cease, therefore not only causing the loss of the prospective adult meat potential of the slaughtered calf but also the potential milk yield from the cow (Crabtree 2004, 63).

A luxury good which is almost ubiquitously considered to be indicative of feasting is the alcoholic beverage. As discussed above the production of alcoholic beverages is labour intensive; the beverages themselves must also be consumed relatively quickly which can increase their value above the combined 'worth' of the components required to produce it and therefore elevate it to the status of a luxury good. Dietler suggests that for many cultures its' inebriating effects and the possibility of entering into an altered state of consciousness closely connects the act of consuming alcohol with ritual practices (2006, 232-241). The highly symbolic nature of alcoholic beverages, and the potential danger associated with over-indulgence, often stimulates the formalisation of its consumption in terms of methods of preparation, the manner and order of serving, the location of consumption, the etiquette of inebriation, and the inclusion or exclusion of community members in its consumption (Dietler 2006, 232), all of which may be discerned in the spread of formalised/ritualised feasting and drinking equipment across prehistoric Europe in both the Beaker and LBA periods as discussed below. Of course, it could be argued that the characteristics listed above may simultaneously indicate commensal politics, therefore demonstrating the close links between socio-political actions and ritual practices.

There is some contention over whether the identification of luxury or special foods in the archaeological record can indicate if feasting has taken place. For instance, Grant

suggests that the high incidence of bovine remains from British Neolithic and Bronze Age ritual sites illustrates the symbolic significance of the consumption of beef which may have raised its economic worth during this period (1989, 111). Of course, the faunal evidence Grant is considering could have built up over a substantial amount of time as a result of isolated small scale consumption and thus does not directly demonstrate feasting as opposed to general food consumption: the significant factor is thus the location of consumption. Alternative evidence for ritualistic feasting may be observed in the processing of animal remains. DeFrance suggests that methods of butchering, condition of bone in terms of its completeness and the presence or absence of worked pieces, the pattern of its disposal or deposition, and the degree and type of burning present can all indicate possible ritual treatment (2009, 135). In a discussion of ritual feasting in Iron Age Ireland McCormick proposes that meat from sacrificial animals would have most likely been boiled before consumption since ‘tough, freshly killed meat [...] is barely edible if not boiled’ (2009, 408 after Durard 1989). However, identifying the process of boiling, or any method of food preparation without associated artefactual evidence, may not be straightforward or even a component of the analyses conducted on a faunal assemblage (see Subias 2002). Essentially, it is not enough to simply rely on the identification of luxury or unusual food consumption to indicate that feasting has taken place (deFrance 2009, 144; 2010, 79). The overall context must be taken into account when attempting to identify ritual practice through the archaeological record.

### **Equipment for feasts**

In addition to the consumption of high status or luxury foods, the use and display of special equipment for the preparation and consumption of foods may be indicative of ritual feasting (Appadurai 1986, 38-40; Hayden 2001; van der Veen 2003, 409). McCormick suggests that the highly elaborate and lavish nature of Irish ritual feasting paraphernalia reveals that food consumption had far surpassed a purely functional procedure by the LBA (2009, 406). Two broad categories of artefacts have been considered characteristic of LBA European feasting activity: metallic vessels and metallic meat cooking implements. LBA metallic vessels include cauldrons, buckets, cups or bowls and are sometimes associated with strainers. The meat cooking implements are specifically flesh-hooks (or flesh-forks) and spits which are associated with boiling and roasting respectively.

It is the cauldron in particular which seems to have embodied many symbolic associations and ideals in the more westerly areas of later prehistoric Europe. For instance, Posidonius mentions meat being cooked in cauldrons in Gaul, and in Irish mythology the narrative often centres on the cauldron’s magico-religious restorative properties and as a symbol of abundance (Craven 2007; Fitzpatrick 2009). It is not suggested here that a direct analogy be made between LBA Ireland and Iron Age Europe, the Classical world, and/or Early Medieval Europe/Ireland. However, it is useful to consider these sources in relation to the Irish LBA material as a means of widening our interpretive horizons. This may especially be the case with material



culture utilised or contextualised differently than similar modern objects (i.e. cauldrons) where manner of use in recent history may inadvertently influence interpretation. Therefore, while it is tempting to make direct connections between the way that similar objects/materials were understood and used in different socio-cultural and temporal contexts, the interpretations presented here of the Irish material firmly rests on the evidence available from the LBA archaeological record.

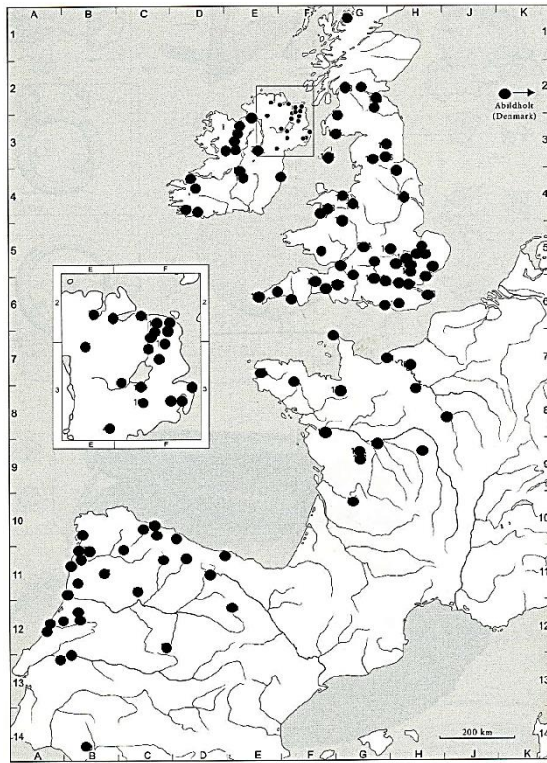


Fig.1 Distribution of BA Atlantic Buckets and Cauldrons (Gerloff 2010 Plate 144)

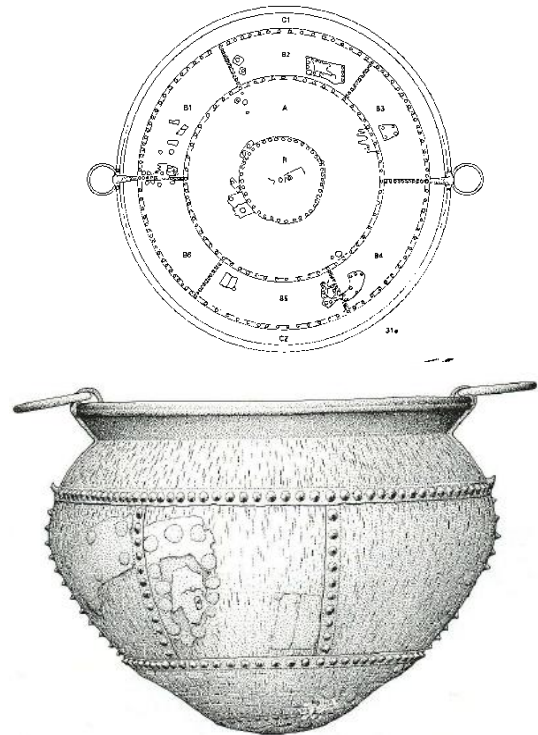


Fig.2 Class B0 Type Cloonta Cauldron, from above and side (Gerloff 2010 Plates 48 and 49)

It seems that once introduced to the Atlantic regions of Europe, cauldron development became insular (Gerloff 1986, 107). However, though Class A cauldrons have been considered an Irish type by some authors (see Almagro-Gorbea 1995) Gerloff is more cautious, stating that although the majority of intact examples come from Ireland this may reflect depositional practices: Ireland was not the ‘home’ of the earliest types and may not even have been a main production centre at this time (Gerloff 2004, 126). Both Classes A and B Atlantic cauldrons have similar distribution patterns and are found in Ireland, Britain, Western France and the Iberian Peninsula (with one from Denmark) (Fig.1). Interestingly, the majority of late 10<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> century BC cauldrons come from Ireland (Fig.2) a pattern which suggests to Gerloff that cauldron production, and perhaps use, may have been limited to Ireland at this time (1986, 100). Although structural elements of the cauldrons, such as number of body plates and types of rivets used, changes from Class A to Class B there is no reason to assume that their function within LBA society changed as their depositional settings remain very similar (Gerloff 2010, 340).

The traditional understanding of cauldron function is that they were élite cooking vessels used over a fire, evidenced by damage and/or repairs to basal sheets, as well as indications of burning in the same area (Gerloff 2010, 336). It is mentioned in Posidonius' *History* that meat from 'steaming cauldrons' is consumed by 'Celts', a statement which has informed this traditional interpretation of LBA cauldrons (Craven 2007, 56). Cauldron fragments were recently found in the context of immense later prehistoric middens in Llanmaes, Wales, which closely links their use to large-scale communal feasting (Madgwick et al. 2012b, 127). The ring handles, and the interior of the handle attachments, of many cauldrons do have wear marks from being suspended over a fire or from being carried (Gerloff 1986, 87). There are also wear marks on the upper surfaces of the staples, which reveals that the cauldrons were stored in an inverted position when not in use (Gerloff 2010, 336).

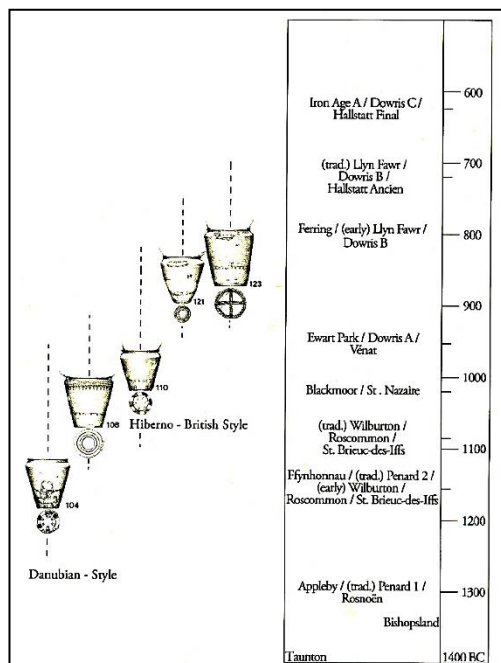


Fig.3 Developmental timeline of BA Atlantic Buckets (Gerloff 2010 Plate 167)



Fig.4 Atlantic BA bucket Downhill, Co. Derry c. 900-700 BC (The Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery 2013)

Like the Atlantic series cauldrons, the ancestors of Atlantic buckets can be found in the Aegean during the Mycenaean Bronze Age and were introduced to Britain and Ireland at the beginning of the LBA via the Hosszúpályi type buckets (Gerloff 1986, 104; 2004, 147; 2010, 348). However, without comparative metal analysis it is impossible to say whether or not the buckets from Ireland were of insular manufacture or transported from the Continent (Gerloff 2010, 347). Both Atlantic and Hosszúpályi type buckets have similar distributions and have been found complete from wet locations in the more northern extent of their distribution (Ireland, Wales, northern Britain) and in fragmentary form from 'founders' hoards in the southern regions (France, southern Britain) (Gerloff 2010, 343; 2004, 128) (Fig.1,3,4). However, buckets from continental Europe have been found in association with bronze cups and strainers while the LBA examples from Ireland have not (Gerloff 1986, 103) which may indicate different

etiquettes of use. The dominant interpretation of later prehistoric bronze buckets is that they were used in drinking rituals, perhaps as a central vessel from which alcoholic beverages were distributed:

“Grave assemblages of the middle Bronze Age include a rich variety of ceramic (in Scandinavia wooden) vessels for serving, pouring, and drinking liquids. In the developed Urnfield period beaten bronze pails, cups, cauldrons, early *situlae*, and even gold drinking cups were in wide circulation. By this time, male drinking rituals may have been a key social mechanism by which the paramount élite could gather a following of warrior companions; the creation and representation of an armed body of supporters through warrior feasting and hospitality (e.g. Hrothgar’s hall in *Beowulf*).” (Treherne 1995, 110)



Fig.5 LBA flesh-hook from Dunaverney, Co. Armagh (©British Museum AN0003293\_001)

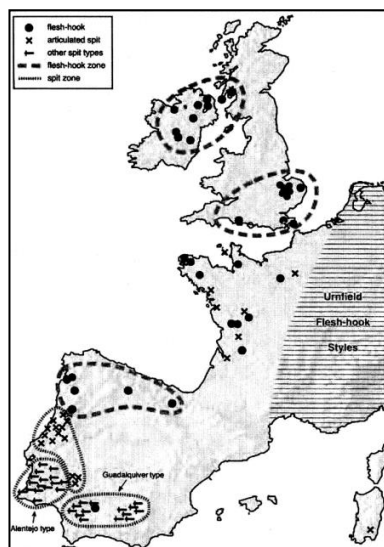


Fig.6 Distribution of Atlantic flesh-hooks and spits (Needham and Bowman 2005, 125)

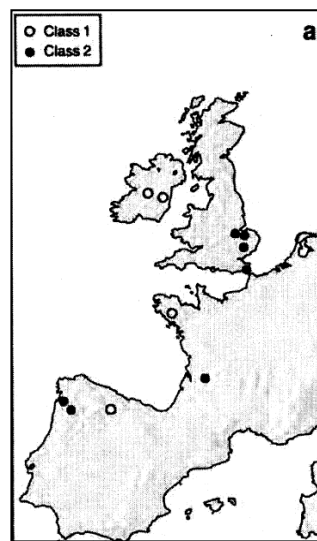


Fig.7 Class 1 and 2 Atlantic flesh-hooks (Needham and Bowman 2005, 112)

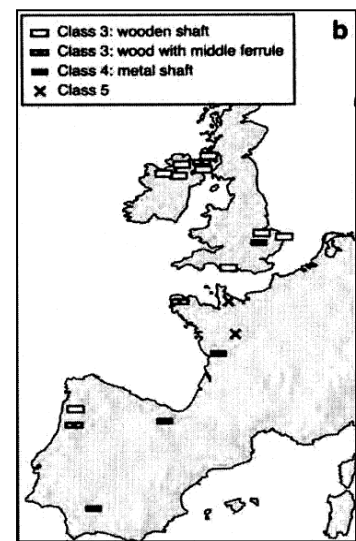


Fig.8 Class 3-5 Atlantic flesh-hooks (Needham and Bowman 2005, 112)

Unlike the cauldrons and buckets, the function of Atlantic series flesh-hooks is more uncertain, although the traditional understanding is that they were used to extract food from cauldrons, with which they are often conceptually connected, as part of feasting rituals. Implements with hook-prongs can be found across Bronze Age and Iron Age Europe, however the form they take can vary widely and they never occur in high numbers (Bowman and Needham 2007, 53; 2005, 94). Atlantic series flesh-hooks occur in Ireland, Britain, France and the Iberian Peninsula (Figs.6-8). As the flesh-hooks are manufactured primarily from bronze, and other than a very few cases there are no

organic components remaining, their dating has mostly relied on associations in hoards or settlements (Needham and Bowman 2005, 108). The seven secure examples of flesh-hooks from Ireland include two Class 1 examples from counties Kildare and Offaly and five Class 3 examples all from north of the drumlin belt. Although the sample size is very small it is interesting to note that outside of Ireland Class 3 flesh-hooks occur in the same regions where Class 1 flesh-hooks had previously occurred, and that the same re-occurring patterns can be seen in Classes 2 and 4 which do not occur in Ireland (Figs.7 and 8). These distributions may signal regional preferences for certain styles of flesh-hook.

The metallurgical techniques used in the production of flesh-hooks were highly developed (beyond the majority of contemporary metal ornaments and weapons), indicating that they were made by highly skilled metal-workers (Needham and Bowman 2005, 123-124). In some instances the flesh-hooks were even made in a more complex fashion than was necessary (e.g. Little Thetford flesh-hook from Cambridgeshire (Bowman and Needham 2007, 91)). Furthermore, the elaboration seen in Classes 3 and 4, in contrast to the simpler Classes 1 and 2, may indicate that their symbolic role had begun to overshadow their practical role: “the whole process of elaboration speaks of social elevation of the kind that often leads to the creation of symbolic regalia, the objects still understood by society in terms of their original utilitarian function, but now serving it in an obscure or token way at celebratory festivals or in propitiation to the gods” (Bowman and Needham 2007, 98). However, there is no reason to suggest that they did not continue to be used on the occasions that demanded it (Needham and Bowman 2005, 127). The elaboration of feasting paraphernalia is not limited to flesh-hooks but can also be seen in the associated emergence, and development, of Atlantic series cauldrons and buckets (Bowman and Needham 2007, 98) as well as in most LBA high status objects, especially warrior accoutrements.

An interesting item of Atlantic BA feasting equipment which does not occur in Ireland is the metallic spit. Rotary spits occur in regions where no flesh-hooks are found, but where cauldrons and buckets do occur, predominantly in the Iberian Peninsula (Fig.9). This mutual exclusivity may imply that the rotary spits are not a component of the ‘Atlantic heroic society’, but represent a completely separate social development (Burgess and O'Connor 2004, 190). Alternatively, this may indicate a regional preference for one type of ritual food preparation over another, therefore a difference in ritual practice is implied without necessitating major differences in underlying cosmology or symbolism (Needham and Bowman 2005, 95,126). The two types of feasting equipment do overlap in western France, however as they most often occur as fragments in scrap hoards their depositional distribution may not necessarily correspond to the distribution of their use in feasts (Needham and Bowman 2005, 124). This also suggests that neither flesh-hooks nor rotary spits were fundamentally necessary for the use of cauldrons which occur in the same regions as both (though cauldron distribution overlaps more consistently with flesh-hooks).

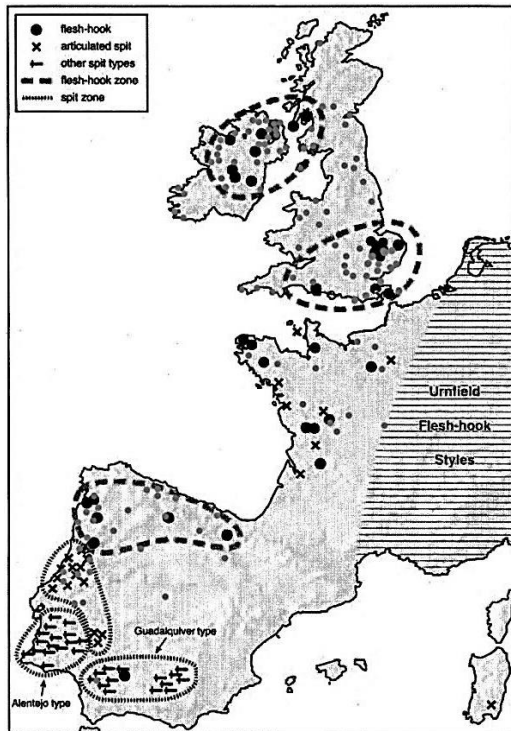


Fig.9 Spit and flesh-hook distribution (Needham and Bowman 2005, 125) with cauldron and bucket distribution in light grey (from Gerloff 2010, Plate 144)

Therefore, although both flesh-hooks and rotary spits occur in the same regions as cauldrons, and while they may have been connected in some way it is clear that the cauldrons could be used in association with either (or neither). It is interesting that the two categories of Atlantic feasting paraphernalia (meat implements and vessels) were ritually deposited in very similar ways and yet not usually together as you would expect if they were viewed as a unit. Gerloff (2010) cites only four instances where Atlantic flesh-hooks have been found in association with cauldrons, two from England, one from Spain and one from France. Of these the only concrete example of an intact Atlantic cauldron and flesh-hook found together is from Feltwell, Norfolk (Needham and Bowman 2005, 100). The Class 2 single-pronged socketed flesh-hook still retained a portion of its wooden handle which was radiocarbon dated to 1390-1120 cal. BC. When the site was investigated impressions of reeds were found in the copper impregnated clay which had surrounded the lower half of the cauldron. Gerloff suggests that the cauldron may have been placed in hollow which had been deliberately lined with reeds (2010, 50). This implies careful placement, and the peaty environment suggests a location which may have been bog or fen in the LBA, the type of location which has been traditionally been associated with ritual deposition. Nevertheless, the general pattern suggests that the two types of feasting equipment are not as inextricably linked as has been traditionally understood. Furthermore, although cauldrons and flesh-hooks were possibly introduced to Atlantic Europe at the same time, the use of cauldrons continues for centuries after flesh-hooks cease to be produced. There are also many more buckets and cauldrons known than flesh-hooks and rotary spits, perhaps indicating

that the vessels were the principal element of the feasting ritual and the meat implements were secondary.

A shared trend which can be observed in the meat implement and vessel types discussed above is the shift from a utilitarian role to a more symbolic role. For instance, the flesh-hooks change from simple undecorated pronged implements to highly elaborate objects of ostentatious display. The Atlantic bronze cauldrons possess decorative elements even in their initial forms, but they also become more ornamental over time and the introduced decorative elements are less directly linked to improved function than those on earlier cauldrons. There also seems to be some Class B cauldrons which may never have been used but were instead manufactured specifically for ritual deposition (Gerloff 2010, 337). Interestingly, as flesh-hooks become more intricately made there is a corresponding reduction in size of cauldrons, perhaps indicating greater exclusivity of those participating in feasting rituals (Needham and Bowman 2005, 127) or the preparation of a token meal alongside of, or in replacement of, a larger-scale communal feast. However, the reduction in cauldron size noted by Needham and Bowman (2005) is only evident from Class A0 to Class B0, the later Class B cauldrons progressively increase in size and capacity (Fig.10). This increase in the size of Class B cauldrons seems to take place when the production of Atlantic flesh-hooks ceases, perhaps another indication of change to feasting rituals during the mid-8<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> century BC.

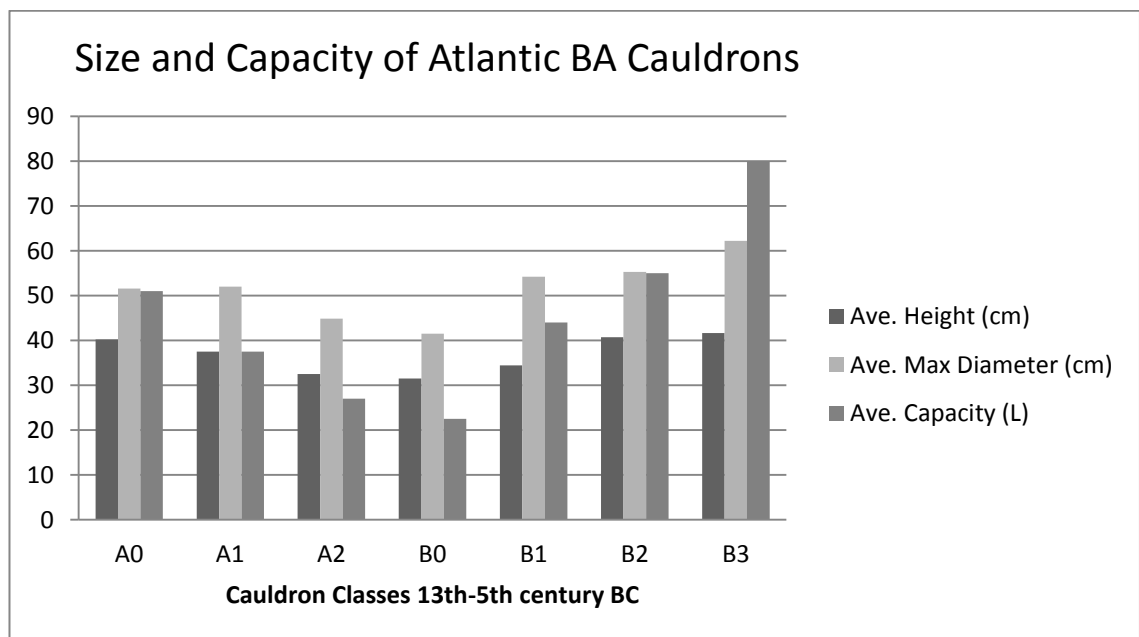


Fig.10 From measurements in Gerloff (2010)

So what do these trends suggest? The change of object production focus from function to form seems to have been taking place across Atlantic Europe, which suggests that it is linked to an underlying concurrent social change. The fact that Ireland, the northern half of the island in particular, is the location of the majority of ritually deposited intact cauldrons indicates that it was heavily involved in this pan-European development.

Gerloff goes so far as to suggest that the social and 'religious' customs surrounding the deposition of cauldrons may have accompanied the introduction of the vessel form into Western Europe from Central Europe at the beginning of the LBA (2010, 336). While the elaborate flesh-hooks are unique (no two share the same decorative elements) their underlying structure does conform to a general blueprint and the vessels seem to have been manufactured according to a similarly strict pattern, as can be seen in the change from the Class A three tier construction to Class B five tier construction. This suggests the practice of similar types of feasting across BA Europe: if an underlying model exists for the 'proper' way to construct a flesh-hook or cauldron then it is not unreasonable to assume that there was also an underlying model for how and when to 'properly' use this feasting equipment.

### **Feasting practice in prehistoric Ireland**

There is mention of feasting in Irish myth and legend as well as in pseudo-historical sources where the general tone of feasting is one of solidifying cohesion within groups while simultaneously reinforcing the existing social hierarchy. However, projecting later literary references back into the LBA is not a method utilised here (for a discussion of the application of these sources to Irish prehistory see Waddell 2011). Instead, excavated sites were reviewed to establish trends in faunal consumption. The most tantalising glimpses of the faunal remains of feasting activity come from 'high status' sites, though to be properly assessed these must be compared to faunal evidence from 'lower status' sites. Interestingly, there is often very little evidence of food refuse found on excavated LBA settlement sites and as a consequence very little evidence which could be interpreted as reflective of feasting activity in a domestic context. Instead the faunal assemblages from the majority of the sites reviewed seem to have accumulated over time in pits or ditches. Often small amounts of animal bone are found in the enclosing ditches of settlements and/or contained in post-holes within settlements, but very seldom in large amounts (LBA exceptions include Lagavooren, Co. Meath and Kilsharvan, Co. Meath (Cleary 2007)) or in contexts where their deposition could be described as structured or special (see Chapter 2.2 for exceptions). Nevertheless, the available evidence has facilitated the interpretation of broad patterns of consumption and in turn animal husbandry practices.

What can be surmised is that the majority of domesticated animals were butchered either at prime meat bearing age (cow, sheep/goat, pig) or at the end of their 'working' life (horse and dog). This trend of consuming mature animals is not always reflected at the higher status sites and therefore indicates that consumption patterns may have been connected to the type of site at which the consumption took place (or alternatively related to types of feasts conducted at different types of sites). Also, while it may be assumed that cereal grains were consumed as part of feasting and may have been in some contexts a ritually charged material (see Chapter 2.4) the paucity of evidence for their consumption and the general lack of differentiation between the evidence for cereals found on high and low status sites (Haughey's Fort, Co. Armagh, an exception which is examined below) precludes their inclusion in this discussion. Some high status



(and/or ceremonial) sites that revealed interesting faunal assemblages in their excavations will be briefly outlined below and then the overall evidence for Irish LBA feasting discussed more broadly.

A very intriguing site which displays possible evidence for feasting events is the double ring-ditch excavated at Raynestown, Co. Meath (Elder 2006). In the outer ditch was a concentration of cremated bone and charcoal (south-east quadrant), an antler handle/haft, a grooved piece of antler, and a number of fragments of well-fired LBA pottery (some of which had evidence for burning on the rims). In addition to the smaller fragments of pottery there was evidence for the use of coarser 'large immobile pots' on site. The sherds associated with these large vessels displayed fresh breaks, leading the excavator to suggest that the vessels had been broken on site before being deliberately deposited in the ditch (i.e. not accidental breakage or casual loss). There was also a large amount of animal bone recovered from both the inner and outer ditches, perhaps significantly including boar (see below). This unique assemblage of materials is highly suggestive of a number of ritual practices being enacted in the one location (death ritual, deliberate fragmentation, food consumption) and is indicative of how feasting is rarely a stand-alone ritual event.

Haughey's Fort, Co. Armagh, a trivallate enclosure with a primary period of usage between 1300 and 900 BC (Waddell 2010, 224), is another site which revealed a faunal assemblage arguably reflective of feasting events. Haughey's Fort was possibly a main tribal centre before the focus shifted to the adjacent Navan Fort in the Iron Age (Mallory 1995, 73). A strong emphasis on arable agriculture was evidenced by the large volume of uncontaminated barley in pits within the enclosure which may have been initially processed elsewhere before being transported to the site (Mallory 1995). LBA commensal activity on the site was also indicated by mixed deposits in pits (pottery sherds, metal artefacts, carbonised grain and hazelnut shell, burnt bone, and quern stone fragments) as well as residues from the interior of pottery fragments which indicated that plant and meat products had been cooked or stored in the coarse-ware vessels (Waddell 2010, 226).

The faunal evidence from the inner enclosing ditch (1220-940 cal. BC) indicated that cattle were the most preferred meat at Haughey's Fort during the LBA, followed by pig, with only minimal evidence for sheep/goat (McCormick 1991, 27). Dog, horse, red deer, and fox bones were also found, albeit in minimal amounts. The age-slaughter pattern for the cattle indicated that most were over three years of age and there was clear evidence of butchering and removal of the marrow from the long bones; pigs were between two and five years when slaughtered, and a perforated scapulae may point to the practice of smoking joints of meat; the horses were generally past their working life when slaughtered, indicating that they were not primarily raised for consumption (McCormick and Murphy 1996). There was also evidence for partial articulation indicating that the bones had not been disturbed since their original deposition in the ditch, in spite of a high occurrence of carnivore gnaw marks (McCormick 1991). The faunal assemblage therefore generally conforms to the age biases seen for lower status



sites, however, some of the animals from Haughey's Fort were highly above average in size, possibly indicating selective/competitive breeding and/or the transportation of especially large animals to this location. Recent isotope analysis at the British Iron Age hillfort site of Danebury may have revealed a similar situation. Both human and animal bone found on the site was analysed and it was demonstrated that the humans consumed food from a variety of areas while the animals did not, therefore supporting the long-standing hypothesis that these sites were 'central places' to which a variety of goods and foodstuffs were brought (Stevens et al. 2010).

The character of the faunal assemblage from the LBA trivallate hillfort at Mooghaun, Co. Clare, was much different from that seen at Haughey's Fort. The faunal assemblage from Mooghaun was described as relatively small and the bones recovered were very fragmented, therefore there was limited data available for analysis (McCormick and Murray 2005). Nevertheless, the existing data indicated that cattle predominated and were generally older at age of slaughter than at other sites analysed by McCormick, which he interprets as indicating beef production. Pigs were also slaughtered at a mature age, twenty-three months or over, and the presence of neonatal bones signifies that pigs were bred on site. The only other species present were sheep and goat however it was not possible to age the bone present (McCormick and Murray 2005, 304).

A site in the wider Mooghaun landscape which again has a very different character of feasting evidence is Knocknalappa, Co. Clare, a lakeshore platform originally excavated by Raftery in 1937. First interpreted as a temporary platform for hunting or fishing the site was later reinterpreted as a domestic occupation site (Grogan et al. 1999). The initial phase of occupation was in the early MBA with later more extensive occupation in the LBA, as evidenced by the artefactual assemblage and a radiocarbon date of 1033-848 cal. BC obtained from an 'accretion' on the interior wall of a vessel (Grogan et al. 1999, 117). There was a large amount of pottery recovered from Knocknalappa and, interestingly, it is fine in comparison to other LBA coarse-wares, with the surface smoothed before firing. Additionally, all the vessels appear to be necked jars, which is a very unusual type found only on a few other LBA sites including Moynagh Lough, Mooghaun and Ballinderry 2. The animal bone assemblage was recovered from across the site and was composed mainly of cattle with sheep, pig, hare and a single dog present. Bird bones were also noted and these included raven, cormorant, tufted duck and lapwing. Although the site was reinterpreted as domestic, the presence of high status artefacts (and uncertainty regarding purposeful ritual deposition of some of these artefacts) indicates that Knocknalappa must be regarded as something other than a common domestic site (see Chapter 3.1 for a discussion of how Knocknalappa relates to other sites in the adjacent landscape).

The cliff-edge fort of Dun Aonghasa, Inís Mór, Co. Galway, excavated as part of the Discovery Programme's Western Stone Forts Project (Cotter 2012), revealed a faunal assemblage that was again very different in character to both Haughey's Fort and Mooghaun. Evidence for LBA occupation of the area was uncovered, but the exact nature of this occupation and its relation to the later monumental enclosing walls is

uncertain. Barley, possibly wheat, and possibly oats and/or rye were all noted in the botanical assemblage which was limited to certain areas of the occupation layer (Collins 2012). Cattle and sheep dominate the faunal assemblage, however the bone was extremely fragmented which hampered further secure analysis. The available evidence suggested that about half the cattle bone came from calves under ten months of age. There were also a relatively high number of lambs present. Although this may represent a dairying economy (Crabtree 1990, 163), McCormick and Murphy instead suggest this reflects the constraints imposed by the environment, especially a lack of winter fodder (2012, 159-160). Other species present in lower numbers were pig, red deer, fox, grey seal, various types of bird, fish and shellfish (McCormick and Murphy 2012, 155). The presence of pigs is unusual due to the lack of tree cover on the island, as prehistoric domesticated pigs would have seasonally relied on a diet of oak mast (McCormick and Murphy 2012, 157-158, 166). That pig is present in the faunal assemblage, albeit in unusually low numbers in comparison to contemporary 'mainland' sites, therefore implies that animals were brought to Dun Aonghasa ready for slaughter, or as preserved meat products. Interestingly, pig was the dominant species found during residue analysis of the pottery fragments (Evershed et al. 2012) a potentially important factor in the interpretation of commensality on the site, as discussed below.

Ballinderry Crannóg No. 2, Co. Offaly, is one of three crannógs excavated by Hencken (1942), of the Harvard Archaeological Mission to Ireland, and more recently reinterpreted by Newman (1997a). The LBA activity took place on a parcel of land projecting into Ballinderry Lough, upon which was constructed two rectangular structures that may have been connected via a trackway (Newman 1997a). Newman suggests that these structures are actually the substructure of a raised wooden floor, and that the deposition of artefacts and human remains on the site indicates a ceremonial function. The LBA finds of tools and ornaments included fragments of flesh-hooks and sherds of pottery decorated with lightly incised cross-hatching (Newman 1997a, 97). From the sites' BA horizon approximately 620 pounds of animal bone was recovered, unfortunately it is now no longer possible to differentiate between those bones from LBA deposits and those from the Early Christian deposits from later reuse of the site (Newman 1997a, 98).

This small selection of sites illustrates the variability of faunal consumption at higher status and/or ritual locations in the Irish LBA landscape. For instance, at Haughey's Fort the large size of the animals is exceptional although all were at or beyond prime meat bearing age which conforms to the general trends. At Mooghaun the cattle were older than at most similar LBA sites which may indicate beef production, and the pigs were bred on site and were slaughtered when mature, which in both cases indicates the consumption of locally produced livestock. This may be contrasted to the evidence from Dun Aonghasa which could indicate the transportation of non-local foodstuffs. The food consumption evidence from the wetland sites outlined above is not necessarily remarkable, yet these sites also have all contained a number of high status artefacts which are not generally found on lower status sites (Chapter 2.2). What may be

surmised therefore is that some higher status sites display evidence of being locations where a variety of ritual practices were enacted, of which ritual feasting may have played a part. However, of all the evidence available, that which concerns the consumption of pork products in LBA Ireland is most indicative of ritualised feasting.

A recent article detailing stable isotope analysis ( $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  and  $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ ) of pig remains from two major LBA-EIA middens in Southern England revealed some interesting evidence of pig husbandry practices and individual contributions to communal feasts. The two middens which were the focus of the article, Llanmaes in South Wales and Potterne in Wiltshire, are monumental in size and interpreted as refuse dumps for periodic feasting involving large groups of people from a wide catchment area. Of particular interest at Llanmaes was the recovery of bronze bowl and cauldron fragments, a handled ladle and socketed axes in amongst the midden material (Madgwick et al. 2012b, 127). This artefactual evidence in combination with the faunal assemblage firmly links the commensal activity at this location to the use of high status LBA feasting equipment. At both sites the foddering strategy for pigs seems to have been mixed, in that the results fell between Neolithic values (where pigs would have relied on woodland fodder) and Iron Age values (where pigs would have been fed primarily on household waste) (Madgwick et al. 2012b, 136). “Results can therefore be interpreted as evidence for small-scale, household level raising of pigs, that is likely to have occurred not only in the immediate localities of the middens but throughout wider surrounding areas and perhaps beyond” (Madgwick et al. 2012b, 137). The results also demonstrate that live pigs and possibly pig products were transported to the feasting locations, in some cases over long distances (e.g. 45-60 km). As the faunal evidence from Potterne includes all elements of the animals it is likely that they were transported “on the hoof as livestock”, however, for Llanmaes the “exceptional element representation” may indicate that only the right forequarter of the animals was transported (Madgwick et al. 2012b, 137). This could indicate the preservation of certain cuts, by smoking or salting, in anticipation of participation in the feasting event.

The results from Potterne bolster the suggestion (above) that the exceptionally large animals consumed at Haughey’s Fort were transported from a wide catchment area as part of a commensality ritual. The transportation of prepared foodstuffs to Haughey’s Fort, as seen at Llanmaes, may also be evidenced by the perforated pig scapulae recovered, a possible indication of hanging joints of meat while smoking. Interestingly, the faunal assemblage from the adjacent Iron Age Navan Fort was also dominated by pig: “there were twice as many pigs as cattle and nine times as many pigs as sheep or goat” (Waddell 2010, 355). McCormick links pig consumption at Navan Fort to Irish mythology, specifically the *Scela Mucce Meic Dathó* in which pork is referred to as the favoured meat for consumption at royal feasts (2009, 409). A recent study which conducted isotopic analysis on a pig tooth from Navan Fort concluded that the pig from which the sample was taken “was not local to Navan” (Madgwick et al. 2012a, 739), which albeit later in date than Haughey’s Fort lends credence to the proposition that in later prehistory the Navan Complex was the locus of gatherings of groups from the

wider landscape for the purpose of feasting and other ritual practices. Furthermore, the selection of prime joints of pig meat for ritual deposition was noted in the LBA area of Glencurran Cave, Co. Clare (Dowd 2009b, 96). A number of the objects and materials ritually deposited at Glencurran Cave signal strong connections to fertility ritual (Chapters 2.4 and 3.1). It is possible that the pig may be representative of fertility as it would have been the only domesticated animal (other than dog) in a LBA Irish context which would have consistently produced multiple offspring at the one time. It is also interesting to relate the examples above to the presence of pork product on LBA pottery sherds found at Dun Aonghasa. If the isotope results from the tests conducted at Pottern and Llanmaes are correct in stating that pig husbandry practices in LBA England were mixed (Madgwick et al. 2012b), then they may support the assertion that pigs could not be kept on Inís Mór due to lack of woodland fodder. In turn, this points to intriguing possibilities regarding the importance of certain foods for consumption at specific ritual events and the preservation of these foods in anticipation of an individual's or a community's participation in the ritual feasting.

Evidence for pig consumption may also allow some insight into the practice of cyclical or seasonal ritual feasting. For instance, it was noted that the pigs consumed at Mooghaun hillfort were slaughtered around twenty-three months of age while at Haughey's Fort and the IA Navan Fort it appears that pigs were slaughtered a few months earlier (McCormick and Murray 2005, 304). Although Mooghaun is slightly later in date than Haughey's Fort, a possible interpretation of the different age slaughter patterns is as evidence of feasting at particular sites at particular times of the year. Of course the presence of neonatal pig bones at Mooghaun indicates that pigs may have also been reared on the site, while no such evidence exists for the sites in the Navan Complex (McCormick and Murray 2005, 304). Therefore, the nature of the site may have also affected the type and timing of the ritual feasting undertaken, or the groups and/or individuals participating.

Pig consumption has been noted on less monumental sites as well. For instance at Lagavooren, Co. Meath, a large ditch enclosing two possible structures (one round, one rectangular) contained large amounts of animal bone including cow, red deer, pig, sheep/goat, horse, and dog (listed in descending order according to number of fragments recovered) (Clarke and Murphy 2002; Cleary 2007). Just to the north of the eastern entrance to the enclosure a cluster of pig bones was revealed which represented roughly 60% of the total pig bone from the site. A concentrated cluster like this may either indicate the consumption of a large number of animals, roughly five, and the deposition of their remains in one event, or that this particular location in the ditch was designated as an appropriate place to deposit pig bone. In either case, this cluster of bone stood out amongst a larger assemblage of various animals, indicating that the pig remains were treated differently upon deposition and therefore were likely conceived of as special.

### **The social institution of feasting**

What seems to be underlying the activity of feasting is the way in which relationships between individuals and groups are built and maintained. The sharing of food does

seem to be one of the universal aspects of human culture, and may be utilised as a mechanism for facilitating social interaction, whether this is motivated by a desire to maintain the status quo, elevate one's own status, or subjugate another's. As a result of its more public nature and the amount of time and resources invested in preparation and execution, formal feasting heightens these social interactions and negotiations by providing a structured and socially accepted arena for the enactment of commensal politics. This can often be expressed through reciprocal obligation which may become highly competitive. It may be that competitive displays (perhaps enacted at formal feasting events) became so extreme in LBA Europe that eventually the objects used at such events were ritually deposited to end the cycle of competitive reciprocal obligation. Displays of 'wealth' at feasts are thus closely linked with social interactions and social status, since community events can highlight an individuals' relative status and thus compel them to participate. These types of social conventions do not need to be explicit to be powerful (see Chapter 1.1 above for an outline of the use of social conventions by agents in relation to the acquisition of social and symbolic capital).

The evidence for feasting may also provide a glimpse of other social processes indicative of the social hierarchy which was increasing in complexity in LBA Ireland. In particular the transportation of special foodstuffs to significant locations in the ritualised landscape suggests organisation of communal activities, perhaps by a select few, as well as shared understandings of the ritual events which take place at specific locations at specific times, two concepts which are expanded upon in Chapter 3.1. The artefacts associated with LBA feasting also demonstrate the production of ritual equipment beyond the functional. These objects may have taken months for a master-craftsperson(s) to produce, which would have necessitated the patronage of a leader and/or community. Thus feasting would not only have highlighted relative status in terms of foods eaten and public social manoeuvring, but the equipment used at feasts would have overtly demonstrated the strength/prosperity of those who controlled its use.

As was shown above, there are very few Irish LBA sites that display clear evidence of feasting in the faunal assemblage (and in almost no cases in terms of the artefactual assemblage). Nevertheless, in general the archaeological evidence suggests that feasts took place in later prehistoric Ireland, as well as a continuation of some food consumption customs from the LBA into the Iron Age (and perhaps beyond). However, much in the same way as luxury foods (e.g. pork), the artefacts themselves do not necessarily indicate that a feast has taken place and therefore must be considered in their broader cultural and temporal context. Yet, after considering all the various traces of feasting activity present from the archaeological record, situating them within their broader socio-cultural context and relating them to contemporary evidence from elsewhere in Europe it seems quite clear that feasting was an important social and ritual practice during the LBA in Ireland.

## 2.2 Ritual deposition

A *ritual deposition* occurs when an object is purposefully placed at a specific location in order to achieve an abstract intention which may be implicitly or explicitly communicated through the ritual action. The socio-cultural motivations behind the practice of ritual deposition are explored in Chapter 4.1, while this chapter provides an overview of the physical action of ritually depositing objects and materials in LBA Ireland. It is important to stress that the objects are *purposefully* placed: they are chosen specifically and deposited at a specific location in a specific manner. Even objects that to a modern eye may not seem to be in any way remarkable, and thus deserving of such specific depositional treatment, may have been carefully selected and deposited in a manner imbued with symbolic significance (Hill 1996, 27; Pollard 2001, 315; Becker 2008, 12).

Metalwork is the deposited material most often recovered and has traditionally been conceptualised as representative of functional artefacts involved in otherwise illogical prehistoric ritual activities (Bradley 1988, 249; Bell 1997, 46; Aldenderfer 2011, 28). Interpretation of metalwork depositions have often focused on perceived differences between objects ‘hidden for safekeeping’ and those which are ‘ritually sacrificed’. Relatedly, often the motivations behind the depositing of bronze and gold metalwork in the European BA are discussed in terms of the economics of supply and demand, viz. an ability to control the availability and use of metals. This method of analysis often considers whether deposits functioned as gifts (votive) or commodities (utilitarian/scrap hoards) (Bradley 1985, 692). Instead of this focus on ‘functional vs. ritual’ Needham suggests we consider deposits in terms of their “*expression, occasion, enactment, and the social conditions triggering recovery*” (2001, 275). This approach is reflected in recent research which concentrates on the degree of prestigious display and acquisition of social capital associated with the deposition of highly valuable objects (valuable in a modern western sense) and generally recognises that depositions result from a variety of socio-cultural motivations which may or may not be ritual or economic in nature.

By recognising recurring patterns of both multiple and single object deposition in LBA Ireland, as well as variations within general trends, we may uncover the motivations behind actions and ascertain the structure of the ritual. In order to identify possible socio-cultural motivations for the practice of ritual deposition we must look closely at its components: *objects* and *locations*. For example, the multiple object deposits consistently contain bronze objects (tools, weapons, ornaments) or gold objects (no weapons or tools). There thus seems to be a separation between materials (bronze and gold) as much as the function/type of artefacts deposited, as can specifically be seen in the BA multiple object depositions from Co. Clare (Gibbons et al. 1999). Interestingly, this insight may provide a clue as to the purpose of the ubiquitous LBA bronze ring, which is in Co. Clare is consistently deposited with weapons and tools, but rarely ornaments, suggesting that it categorically belongs with the former and not the latter. As well, the location of a deposition may limit the number of people able to observe/participate in the ritual, as a fording point in a river or the edge of a pool may

allow for a substantial group, while an underground cave may only accommodate a few. In the Irish LBA there would likely have also been social constraints invisible to archaeology which limited the number and categories of people allowed to participate in different types of depositional practice. Other sites and/or monuments in the landscape could also be a significant factor in the choice of one depositional location over another, as seen in the targeting of some Irish bogs for prehistoric deposition while others appear to have been passed over (Chapters 3.1). Furthermore, associations between certain types of deposited objects and certain types of locations may hint at the identity/social roles of the depositor(s) and the socio-cultural/political context of deposition.

### **Categories of ritual deposition**

Irish LBA ritual deposits may overlap with other classes of deposit such as those related to death ritual or even domestic refuse. Therefore the categories employed here facilitate interpretation of the data but are not absolute. Nevertheless, there are strong indications of general trends within ritual deposition in LBA Ireland, which are the focus of this chapter and include votive deposits, structured deposition, foundation and closing deposits, and hoards.

Ritual deposition is often associated with sacrificial acts as both may communicate a purpose to an otherworldly being as well as to an observing human audience. The terms sacrifice and votive have been used to explain the deposition of objects in ways or locations that defy a logical interpretation. However these terms are not necessarily interchangeable as sacrifice carries quite strong connotations of animal or human slaughter (Davis and Payne 1993, 12) “whilst artefacts can only be offerings” (Bradley 1990, 199). There is often a sequence of practices surrounding ritual slaughter, however, all that may remain archaeologically is bone with or without evidence of butchering.

“The sacrifice of an animal, for example, started long before the slaughter, when the animal was chosen and captured. Then the selected animal was perhaps adorned and dedicated to the gods. Slaughter followed – the proper sacrifice – and the body was quartered, the meat prepared for a ritual meal, the hide and cut-off parts like the skull could have been put on stakes, and eventually the bones remaining after the meal were deposited in a proper place. We have to consider this whole process and thus the biography of our find (Kopytoff 1986). We must not base our interpretation only on the final result, that is, the archaeological record. We must, for example, see the animal bones not primarily as an offering but perhaps as a deposition of matter too loaded to be thrown among the daily household refuse.” (Fabech 2006, 26)

It is unclear whether the ritual slaughter/sacrifice of animals was taking place in LBA Ireland although there are some indications that certain animals were of ritual significance, in particular pigs as proposed in Chapter 2.1. As Fabech asserts in the above quote relating to sacrifice in Old Norse ritual practice, there are many ancillary ritual actions surrounding animal sacrifice which may not leave a distinct archaeological

trace regardless of the period under consideration. In the archaeological record of LBA Ireland faunal assemblages may not clearly point to sacrifice, but the intriguing patterns of pork consumption indicate that special/luxurious foods were consumed and/or transported to ritually significant locations like Haughey's Fort, Co. Armagh, and Glencurran Cave, Co. Clare. There is evidence for specific joints of pork being selected at both of these sites and it is possible that the pigs were sacrificed, in that their butchering was likely 'loaded' with symbolic and ritual meaning.

Faunal assemblages represent the final stage of a likely extended ritual process as Fabech suggests, but it is unclear if this process was similar to that conducted for the ritual deposition of objects as the initial stages tend to be archaeologically invisible in both cases. Thus in the context of this research use of the term 'sacrifice' will be restricted to discussions of animal bone while 'votive deposition' will be used in relation to the ritual deposition of objects. The phrase 'gifts to the gods' is often used to characterise votive deposits as they are commonly understood as having been dedicated to a supernatural or otherworldly being, often in exchange or in thanks for an intercession. Therefore, a reciprocal relationship between a human petitioner and a supernatural being is considered to be an essential factor in a votive deposition. Votive objects are usually placed in some significant location (natural or architectural), and may or may not be representative of the motivation behind the deposition. For example, the object deposited may be quite commonplace and the manner in which, or the location where, the object is deposited may be the ritually significant factor.

A trend in ritual deposition possibly related to votive activity, observed for much of Irish prehistory, is the deposition of objects in structural elements of structures, either during their construction or abandonment. Closing or abandonment deposits can be identified through depositions within a structure, commonly in a pit dug into the occupation layer or in a structural feature, followed by immediate backfilling at the location of deposition (Cleary 2007, 255). Osborne suggests that a foundation deposit ensures a structure is ready for use by "establishing a privileged link between the structure involved and transcendent powers" (2004, 7-8). Foundation deposits are most often noted archaeologically when similar types of objects are deposited during the construction of similar types of structures. For example, when pottery or cremations are repeatedly found deposited in post-holes at the entrances to BA structures (prior to the erection of the post) (Cleary 2007).

The physical act of depositing is sometimes archaeologically discernible, demonstrating precision and care taken with certain depositions and hinting at the ceremony/performativity and embodied experience possibly essential to the practice (see Chapter 1.1 above and Needham 2001, 294). In order for a deposit to be considered special or structured it must be demonstrated that those conducting the deposition made intentional choices of what objects or materials to place together and in what manner. A distinction can be made between structured deposits and deposits that are not controlled in any archaeologically observable way. In a discussion of 'special animal deposits' on British Iron Age sites, Hill suggests that in order to identify a structured deposition



archaeologists must investigate the deposit in relation to its context (1996, 19, 26). Hill also argues that identifying a deposition as structured does not necessarily equate to it being ritualistic (1996, 20). Although Hill's contention that identifying a deposit as structured should not be used as a 'litmus test' for ritual is valid, if a structured deposit is identified and an interpretation made based on its context, a case may be made for interpreting certain deposits as examples of precise ritual practice.

One of the most notable categories of LBA ritual deposition is the hoard. A hoard is commonly defined as a group of valuable objects deposited for safekeeping with the intention of retrieval (thus on the opposite end of the spectrum to votive deposits). If thus understood, the existing corpus is composed of hoards that were never recovered while many more must have been retrieved in antiquity. This definition is often considered too narrow to apply to prehistoric hoards, which may have been deposited for a variety of reasons. Eogan defines hoards as "a collection of two or more artifacts the circumstances of discovery of which leads to the conclusion that all were deposited together at the same time", excluding habitation or death ritual deposits (1983, 1). This definition is useful as it applies the least common denominator to the various hoard types which are often disparate in character. However when examining prehistoric depositional activity it is often difficult to decide if an assemblage represents multiple and/or single deposits of artefacts. For instance, as Eogan notes, there are many instances of groups of objects found together and designated as hoards which in fact may have been deposited one at a time over a long period at a single location.

In line with the general functional/utilitarian interpretation of later prehistoric hoarding, hoards are often categorised according to object type in a way that assumes individual ownership of the items deposited (e.g. personal hoards, merchant's hoards, craftsperson's hoards, and scrap hoards). In a discussion of how metal would have *flowed* through the European BA exchange networks, Needham (2001) suggests that deposits labelled as 'founders' (metalworkers) hoards should not be associated with utilitarian explanations simply because they contain objects which were at one point in their usage linked to metalworking (e.g. Teernagloghane, Co. Clare (Eogan 1983, 73)). As Needham points out, stating that objects to do with metalworking were placed in the ground does not confront the question of *why* they were placed there, and *why* certain object associations exist. Like Needham, Budd and Taylor (1995) question the usefulness of discussing prehistoric metalworkers using terms related to the 'scientific method' and industrialised object production. They proposed that prehistoric metalworking should instead be understood as a practice associated with magic and ritual, developed over time through a process of trial and error, similar to other mediums and materials (cloth, pottery, leatherworking, tattooing, etc.), whereby the production of an object would be accompanied by social activities that may or may not be archaeologically discernible.

The social role of smith/metalworker would have been of great consequence in LBA Ireland, as is discussed in Chapter 4.1, not only in relation to their acquisition of specialist knowledge but also in terms of their integral role in the acquisition and

maintenance of the social status by élite members of society who were directing and controlling the movement and production of metal objects. Metalworking practice is also sometimes referenced within LBA Irish ritual deposition (below) and as components of death ritual (Chapter 2.3), associations which could reflect some of the accompanying social practices performed by metalworkers which may have developed alongside their potential magico-ritual significance as early as the beginning of metalworking in the Chalcolithic (see O'Brien 1999, 214-215).

The functional/ritual dichotomy associated with depositional practice has also been used to theorise BA economics. For example, in an early paper Kristiansen suggested:

“If one compares the annual quantity of bronze deposited by respectively hoarding and burial, it emerges that occasional ritual hoarding is a much cheaper way of ritual consumption than the regular employment of bronze in burials. Therefore, in the early sequence of bronze technology where a stock of bronze had to be built up, ritual hoarding was applied. Later, when bronze was more abundant, it could also be employed in burial deposition.”  
(Kristiansen 1989, 21)

Although Kristiansen goes on to suggest that “we should not reduce hoarding solely to a matter of economic maximization of scarce resources” (1989, 21), the use of words like ‘cheaper’, ‘consumption’ and ‘stock’ places the reader in a frame of mind where they associate prehistoric activities with the modern conception of a monetary economy. There is no evidence that the movement of metals within and between communities, and between spheres of use, was in any way directed by a need for wealth in a modern Western sense.

Alternative analogies relate prehistoric hoarding activity to ethnographic accounts of pot-latching, whereby large amounts of high-status goods and objects were accumulated for the purpose of ceremonial redistribution (and in some cases destruction) which increased the social standing and social capital of the individual and/or household. Although this analogy is overused, and in many cases its colonial context not taken into account, it is still a useful example of how different human communities understand and express value and the acquisition of status, and can therefore broaden our interpretive horizons regarding what social, cultural and political factors motivated ritual deposition in the LBA.

It is now widely accepted that there is no simple cause and effect relationship between the ‘health’ or workings of a prehistoric economy and the practice of deposition. As Barrett and Needham suggest, “we can now realise that a cycle of production and consumption may hardly register archaeologically, and that hoarding is itself a particular process which needs explaining” (1988, 129). Therefore when considering deposition all influencing factors, including the characteristics of prehistoric economies, must be considered:

“...the exchange of material objects for supernatural returns has, in many societies, been both socially and economically significant. To attempt to understand the role of gifts between men in a society accustomed to give gifts to transcendent beings while neglecting those gifts that are given to the gods is like attempting to understanding a hierarchical society while ignoring the top status group.” (Osborne 2004, 2)

### Depositional practice

The following is not an exhaustive or comprehensive survey, but is meant as an overview of the available material. The main sources of data used were Eogan’s *The Hoards of the Irish Later Bronze Age* (1983), Gerloff’s recent catalogue of Atlantic cauldrons and buckets (2010), preliminary reports accessed on the online database *Excavations.ie*, the catalogues compiled by Cleary for her MA (2002) and PhD (2007) theses, the catalogue created by Becker for her PhD (2006) thesis, the data included in Bourke’s *Crossing the Rubicon* (2001), and numerous publications detailing specific archaeological excavation schemes. Depositional patterns and trends observed for LBA Ireland included:

- Consistent associations between types of location targeted for deposition and types of artefacts deposited
- Utilising peripheral or liminal locations for deposition
- Fragmentation or damage of objects prior to or as part of ritual deposition
- Horizontal or vertical arrangements of objects during the depositional act
- Consistency in the deposit of types of objects singly or with other objects
- Differential deposition at natural and anthropic locations

While this is by no means an exhaustive overview it does illustrate patterning in LBA Irish depositional practice (Fig.11), many of which relate to where depositions took place in the landscape and thus are expanded upon in Chapter 3.1.

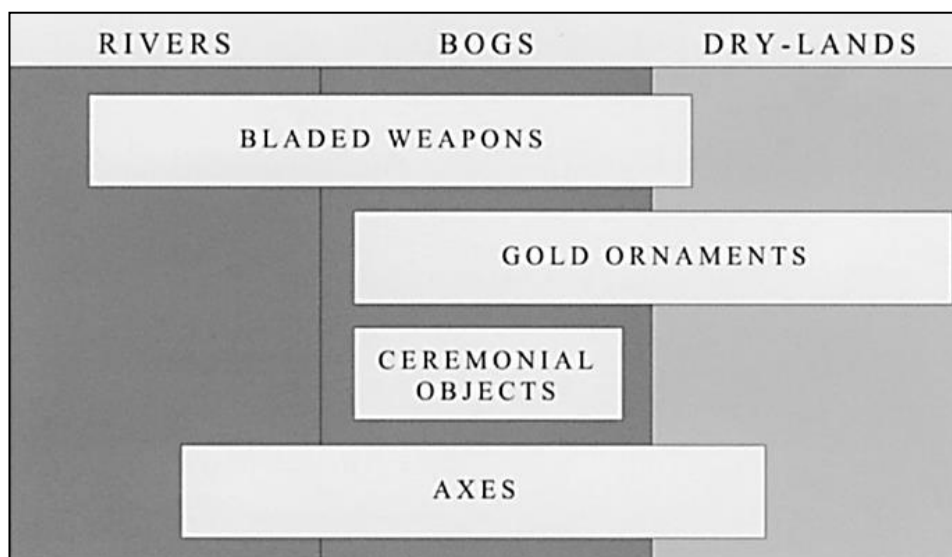


Fig.11 Simplified scheme of depositional patterns in the Irish BA (Becker 2008, 14, Fig. 3)

### ***Fragmentation, destruction and damage***

A commonly noted characteristic of LBA deposition in Ireland, and elsewhere in Europe, is the deliberate damage, destruction or fragmentation of objects prior to deposition. In Ireland deliberately damaged/fragmented objects have been recovered from wet locations, human settlements, and contexts related to death ritual. All categories of material culture appear to have been considered suitable for fragmentation and deliberate destruction, but ceramics, bone (animal and human) and metal objects are the most common. In many cases it cannot be definitively proven that the fragmentation/damage was executed as part of a deposition ritual or if it was the result of another process (i.e. the deposition of a previously damaged object). Regardless, it seems that fragmentary objects were often purposefully chosen for deposition.



Fig.12 Four-flanged bar-torc, Corrard, Co. Fermanagh (The History Blog 2012)

The practice of deliberately fragmenting objects and subsequently incorporating them into ritual depositions is therefore a pervasive aspect of LBA ritual practice in Ireland. Many of the damaged and/or fragmented Irish LBA depositions indicate careful and deliberate action. For example, the larger of the two hoards from Downpatrick, Co. Down (Proudfoot 1955), contained one half of a chisel-severed penannular gold bracelet, and one half of a chisel-severed penannular gold neck ring. There is nothing in the description of this deposition which suggests impulsive or uncontrolled actions, even the chisel cuts seem to be efficiently executed. Deliberate damage can also be seen in the systematic folding of LBA gold ornaments prior to deposition, like the gold ear-spools discovered at Ballinesker, Co. Wexford (Cahill 1994) which not only put the objects out of use but also transformed their appearance into something ‘other’ than what they originally represented which in this case is a ritually significant solar symbol (see Chapter 2.4). More recently, a LBA gold four-flanged twisted bar torc was discovered coiled like a spring in a bog near Corrard, Co. Fermanagh (The History Blog 2012; Ramsey 2013) (Fig.12). Like the ear-spools the torc is a socially, and possibly ritually, significant object which would have communicated particular messages pertaining to the social status and social roles held by the wearer. Therefore it is not only the objects which are transformed or ‘othered’ through their deliberate damage, it is likely that they are being disconnected from what they represent during their customary use. The ritual deposition of such deliberately damaged objects therefore

should not be viewed as a straightforward ‘gift’ from one plane of existence to another as the object being deposited is no longer the object which was previously in use. There are thus many underlying and embedded messages being communicated throughout the ritual process of damage and deposition.

Like the ornaments discussed above, across the various types of Irish LBA ritually deposited objects and materials there is a spectrum of degrees and types of deliberate damage and/or fragmentation from whole (sometime unused) objects, to highly fragmented objects, to single fragments. This variability and complexity within the practice of fragmentation is evident in the ritually deposited Irish BA swords. For instance in an examination conducted by Bridgford it was noted that the weapons were sometimes bent or broken, as if immediately before deposition they had been deliberately damaged.

“It has already been noted that a number of the swords examined were subjected to intense heat and/or quite deliberately destroyed. None is shown as having been found in a river, although one came from Lough Gur (no. 133) and one from Littleton Bog (no. 128). In some cases the deliberate damage would be in keeping with a motive such as the ritual destruction of the blades, perhaps on death or after capture. In others it could be consistent with the sword being with or near a body being cremated. The presence, at one of the very few known Late Bronze Age burial sites (within Rathgall hillfort, Co. Wicklow), of a portion of the blade of a leaf-shaped sword supports the theory that weapons could have been cremated along with bodies.” (Bridgford 1997, 109)



Fig.13 LBA bronze sword from Nooan td., Co. Clare (Clare County Library 2013b)

Correspondingly, almost half of the swords recovered from the Irish rivers included in Bourke’s (2001) study show little or no evidence of use-wear. Thus the swords deposited in rivers seem to have undergone different types of treatment and had different object biographies to swords deposited elsewhere in the landscape, perhaps indicating their use in a variety of ritual practices leading up to deposition or their association with different types of combat practice. For instance, a bronze sword was found in four pieces (possible deliberate fragmentation) in Nooan townland, Co. Clare (Fig. 13), which abuts the west bank of Lough Inchiquin, a location which seems to have been targeted for the ritual deposition of warrior equipment throughout the BA (Gibbons et al. 1999). The differences in sword use wear may also reflect on the status held by the particular warrior who was conducting the ritual deposition as sword-wielders who were of particularly high status may have organised combat situations but

had a retinue of warriors who actively participated in them (see Chapter 4.1). Alternatively the degree of damage and/or use wear observed on a deposited sword may be a reflection of the object biography and life-history of the sword (as discussed in Chapter 1.3). Swords which had been used in a number of successful battles may have been inherited as symbols of warrior status and honour and thus necessitated more complex modes of ritual decommissioning than swords which were rarely used, or even produced specifically for deposition.

Brück has suggested that the deliberate damage and fragmentation of objects, like the swords and ornaments discussed above, and in some cases structures, mirrors the action of breaking up of human bone after cremation and therefore the practice of fragmentation in general may have been linked to a cycle of birth, death and regeneration and used in ceremonies marking the passage of time (2001, 149; 2006, 310). This may have been what was noted in the LBA house structure at Carrigillihy, Co. Cork, where east of the central post hole an internal pit contained a stone disc, two broken sandstone hones and a number of coarseware pottery sherds. Following Brück, Cleary suggests that this represents a ritual associated with the abandonment of this structure, in which the stone and clay objects were deliberately broken and ‘returned to the earth’ from which they had been taken (Cleary 2007 after O’Kelly 1951, 82). It is also possible that in this case the concept of chthonic regeneration may be symbolically linked to the eventual decomposition of the structure.

Alternatively, Chapman suggests that the deliberate fragmentation of objects and their subsequent deposition may be linked to the social process of enchainment whereby “two people who wish to establish some form of social relationship or conclude some kind of transaction agree on a specific artefact appropriate to the interaction in question and break it in two or more parts, each keeping one or more parts as a token of the relationship” (2000, 6; see also Chapman et al. 2007, 9). Enchainment is therefore a potential mechanism for securing and maintaining interpersonal and intergroup relationships, even over long distances (Chapman 2000, 104). Nevertheless, Chapman also acknowledges that “fragmentation and enchainment are two different terms – the first relating to social action, the second to process” (2007, 6 after Gamble 2005, 89). In the Irish LBA many fragmented objects were ritually deposited and never meant to be retrieved. This could be interpreted as enchainment taking place between the human and supernatural realms, suggesting that a relationship or agreement is formed through the deposition of a fragment. On the other hand, the fragmented objects could be deposited upon the dissolving of an enchainment relationship, such as upon the death of one of the participants. A further focus of Chapman’s discussion is “the forging of identity through the complex interactions between persons, objects and places” which can be illustrated through processes of fragmentation and dissemination of parts of wholes (2000, 222). Thus, fragmentation may have been a feature of identity construction and the negotiation of social status and social capital in the LBA, a concept explored in Chapters 1.2 and 4.1.

### ***Structured deposition and hoarding***

To categorise a deposit as structured it must be demonstrated that those conducting the deposition made intentional choices regarding what objects or materials to place together, in what manner, and at what location. This implies association at a symbolic level between the deposited objects as well as a heightened significance (or symbolic importance) given to the location of deposition. It is important to consider if the deposit could have been formed through natural processes or indiscriminate human action, therefore, one of the clearest indications of a structured deposit would be the careful, controlled placement and arrangement of its components.

A repeated pattern that could be indicative of a structured deposit is the intentional layering or stacking of material as is seen with the two deposits found ten metres apart on Cathedral Hill, Downpatrick, Co. Down (Proudfoot 1955; Eogan 1983) (Fig. 14). The close proximity of two very similar deposits suggests parallels in the motivation behind the depositional act. Another comes from the LBA site of Corrstown, Portrush, Co. Derry, at the eastern end of an excavated ditch segment (6268:5) within the outer foundation trench of Structure 13 (Cleary 2007, 413-420 after Conway et al 2007, 167). A concentration of pottery fragments, deposited after the house wall had collapsed, contained three large body sherds stacked one on top of the other, demonstrating that the pottery was chosen and placed carefully at this location. The stacked pottery fragments are particularly significant as there are other concentrations of pottery in the same trench which do not demonstrate purposeful placement. These three sherds are therefore evidence of a particular episode of ritual practice within the lifecycle of the settlement, likely as a closing depositing after its abandonment.

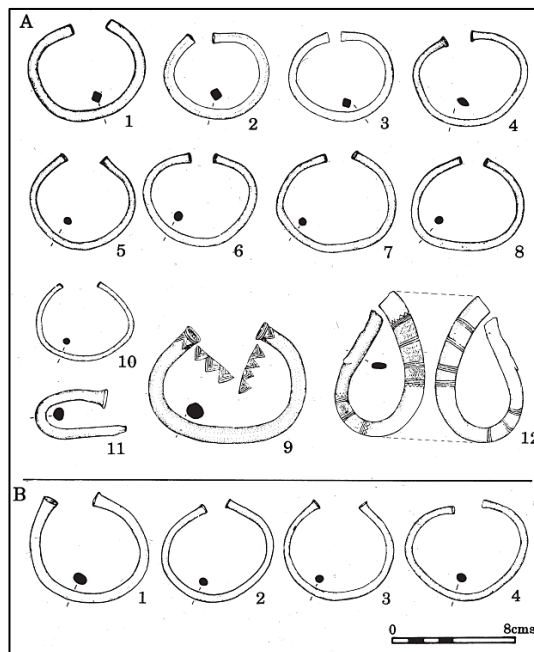


Fig. 14 The two hoards from Downpatrick, Co. Down (Waddell 1998, 199 Fig. 79)

In a discussion of the 'aesthetics of deposition' Pollard suggests that the arrangement and careful placement of objects has as much to do with underlying symbolic connections *between* objects as it does with the selection of individual objects (2001, 315). This may be the case in those instances where objects have been found placed within other objects, for example the fragmented and intact objects placed within a Class 2 end-blown horn found at the base of the bog at Boolybrien, Co. Clare (Eogan 1983, 65-67). In most instances of multiple object deposition recovered from bog contexts the objects seem to have been allowed to fall through the bog to their resting place (e.g. the Dowris Hoard (Eogan 1983)) whether they were deposited as a single group or individual during subsequent depositions at a location returned to over time, thus there are potential links between the location of deposition and the objects deposited. In contrast, while the location of deposition remains significant when objects are placed within other objects there is no doubt that they were conceived of as a group, which may or may not carry further symbolic connotations perhaps in association with the identity and social role of the user/wearer or perhaps manufacturer of the objects.

Deliberate grouping for ritual deposition can also be seen within some pits or ditches on settlement sites. For example, at Knockadoon, Lough Gur, Co. Limerick, a centrally located pit situated within Structure 1 contained animal bone, hazelnut fragments, charred grains and around 300 sherds of LBA pottery. While these materials may reflect general domestic activities, Cleary suggests the quantity of pottery in association with multiple grain types in a central location may represent a closing deposit and at the very least "a deliberate gathering of the material culture for inclusion" (2007 after R. Cleary 2003, 121). This type of mixed deposit was also noted in the inner enclosure of Haughey's Fort, Co. Armagh, where a number of pits appeared deliberately backfilled with metal artefacts, pottery fragments, carbonised grain, burnt hazelnut shell, burnt animal bone, and fragmentary or complete stone tools (Mallory 1995, 80-82), with some of the materials possibly 'layered' deliberately within the pits (Cleary 2007, 438-439 after Mallory 1991, 1995, Aitchison 1998). Perhaps like the deposition of sacrificial animal bone as outlined by Fabech (2006) in the quote above, the deliberate grouping and deposition of such seemingly ordinary debris actually reflects the formalised disposal of ritually 'loaded' material.

In contrast to the examples above are those structured deposits in which only a single material/object type is represented. For instance the site of Ward Upper, Co. Dublin, consisted of a group of features including a large circular pit containing fifteen distinct fills primarily composed of over 280 pottery fragments from six to ten vessels. The excavator suggested that these fills were deposited in 'relatively quick succession' and although initially seeming to represent domestic refuse the complete lack of animal bone or other domestic artefacts indicated otherwise (McGowan 2004). What this pit feature seems to represent is a structured deposit of pottery fragments taking place at one depositional event or at events closely spaced in time. That such a deposit contains only one material type is significant but does not necessarily indicate that it is a distinct type of ritual deposition from those mixed material deposits discussed above. In both



cases it seems that ritually imbued objects/materials are deliberately grouped and deposited in a formalised way, the difference may be in the types of ritual practices which preceded their deposition. Perhaps the mixed deposits from Lough Gur and Haughey's Fort (above) result from a number of ritual actions conducted as part of a broader ritual practice, while the pottery from Ward Upper reflects a more singular event like the decommissioning of pottery used in a distinct ritual event.

Another form of carefully controlled placement of objects indicating a structured deposit in Irish LBA contexts is the horizontal arrangement of objects in relation to each other. Such an arrangement was noted when the Derrinboy Hoard was found in Co. Offaly in 1959. The hoard was primarily composed of gold ornaments apparently encircled by a copper wire (Eogan 1983, 42-43). Similarly, in the Tamlaght Hoard, Co. Armagh, a sword was lying horizontally along the ground surface oriented with its tip to the north-north-west and with Fuchsstadt-Type and Jenišovice-Type vessels (one within the other) placed to the south-south-east of the sword's hilt (Queen's University Belfast 2004, 1; Warner 2006), perhaps aligned with the area of wetter ground at the edge of which the deposit was made. Another example comes from Blackhills, Co. Laois, where a Class 4 sword, a plain leaf-shaped spearhead and a looped socketed axehead were found laid out side-by-side in a north-east/south-west orientation (Eogan 1983, 98-99). There are various things to be taken from these three examples. Firstly, the objects deposited likely had symbolic associations as they were deliberately deposited as a group and arranged in relation to each other. The Derrinboy Hoard is composed of gold ornaments, objects which are linked through the fact that they overtly displayed status and perhaps also embedded meaning when they were worn, possibly as a group which could indicate that their object biographies were linked. Secondly, these object groupings are suggestive of particular social roles. For instance, in the case of the Blackhills and Tamlaght deposits there seems to be strong associations between the objects and a warrior identity and/or social role (Chapter 4.1) due to the presence of weapons and in the latter specialist drinking equipment. Thirdly, the locations at which these objects were carefully deposited is likely significant. For instance the Tamlaght Hoard was deposited on the interface between wet and dry ground within the ritually charged landscape of the Navan Complex. Lastly, the careful arrangement of these objects is evidence of the actions of an agent, feasibly a ritual practitioner who held the specialist knowledge of how to arrange the objects and at what location.

The controlled nature of carefully arranged deposits is an important factor in their interpretation. Thus a dichotomy may exist between carefully placed deposits and deposits whose spatial relationship was less controlled (i.e. Derrinboy Hoard vs. Dowris Hoard). This dichotomy infers the enactment of different ritual practices and thus must also reflect different motivations and intentions behind their enactment. Unlike repeated deposits at wet locations, carefully arranged deposits seem to be one-off events in which no patterns are discernible between separate examples. These carefully arranged deposits strongly hint at the involvement of a ritual specialist as the arrangement of the objects is purposeful and intentional, yet unique and therefore not adhering to a long-

standing ritual archetype existing in cultural memory. This does not rule out the involvement of a ritual specialist in other modes of ritual deposition, however the possibility of a ritual specialist playing an active role in ritual practice is more easily discussed in relation to the carefully arranged deposits than an activity like deposition at natural wet locations, due to the inimitable character of the former which implies specialist knowledge (Leonard Forthcoming).

The deliberate grouping of certain types of materials and objects for ritual deposition can also be perceived through artefact associations in hoards, as discussed in relation to structured deposition above. Over 200 hoards have been recorded from LBA Irish contexts (one fifth with details of provenance) and they include a variety of tools, ornaments and weapons manufactured from bronze, gold, amber and sometimes jet and tin (Cahill and O'Carroll 1994, 11). Like the example from Boolybrien, Co. Clare, above, in some instances there is evidence for grouping objects within a sealed unit like a bag, cloth wrapping, or wooden box such as those from Largatreany, Co. Donegal, Kilmoyly North, Co. Kerry, or Rathinaun, Co. Sligo (Eogan 1983, 33-34, 92-3, 151-2). A functional interpretation has been argued for contained or marked deposits, in that the objects may have been 'hidden for safekeeping' and protected from deterioration so they could be retrieved. However, as has been discussed, there are symbolic associations and embedded meanings/messages which can be discerned from an examination of purposefully grouped LBA objects that go beyond functional interpretations regardless of whether or not safekeeping was a motivation for deposition.

A potential insight provided by the presence of structured deposition(s) is the ritual significance of the location of deposition. These locations may be signposted in some way, either naturally (e.g. placed at the base of a tree) or with a human made marker. Marking a place of deposition with a large stone is seen throughout the Irish BA, particularly in association with LBA hoards and mixed deposits. For example, an EBA gold lunula was found beneath a large stone in Carrickmore (or Trillick), Co. Tyrone, as was a group of LBA ornaments, including two gorgets, found in Gorteenreagh townland, Co. Clare (Becker 2008, 14-15). This practice is especially evident on modern agricultural land where a variety of gold and/or bronze weapons, ornaments and/or tools have been found under large stones during field clearing, for example the hoard from Dreenan, Co. Fermanagh (Eogan 1983, 83-84). The marking of object depositions in this way is thus closely associated with the type of landscape in which the deposition takes place. Dryland deposits can be marked in a manner which may stand the test of time, like a boulder, while locations of wetland deposition (even those which are returned to again and again for conducting ritual practices) do not seem to have been marked in any archaeologically observable manner.

In addition to seemingly natural locations in the landscape boulders also marked deposits within the LBA enclosures at Haughey's Fort, Co. Armagh, and Rathgall, Co. Wicklow. At Haughey's Fort a fragment of a cup-and-ring marked stone (perhaps the only example of this early prehistoric Atlantic rock art found in Co. Armagh) was deposited in a pit in the centre of the enclosure (Aitchison 1998). At Rathgall the pit

(119) was located just north of centre within the structure and may have been initially lined with basketry (like the feasting equipment deposited at Feltwell, England, as mentioned in Chapter 2.1); a rectangular boulder was placed into the pit over a small, penannular gold ring and the cremated bone of a human infant, yellow soil with no inclusions was then packed around the boulder (Raftery 2004). The similarity of depositional activity at these sites is notable, especially taking into account further parallels such as the deposition of clay moulds in the ditch at Rathgall and in the King's Stables adjacent to Haughey's Fort. Thus, again, there are generally a number of factors which seem to have contributed to the manner in which, the place at which, and the objects which were grouped and deposited. While these factors may have been complex, the fact that there are similar complex depositions at various locations throughout Ireland indicates that there was shared knowledge of the way to conduct these ritual practices.

It is significant that some deposits were distinctly marked, some subtly marked and others not marked at all. Becker suggests that the marking of deposits indicates an intention of retrieval, for instance gold objects are often marked and placed in locations that would have facilitated retrieval, as opposed to bronze martial items generally deposited in bogs and rivers (2008, 15). The fact that unmarked natural locations in the landscape were returned to for the enactment of ritual depositions over generations (e.g. as may be the case with the Dowris Hoard) demonstrates that signposting was not necessary for locations to be understood and remembered as ritually significant. Therefore, marking a deposition with an enduring feature must speak to something beyond the action of deposition. Perhaps these depositional locations were marked in order to 'seal' the deposit or to mark a change in the types of ritual practice subsequently performed at the site (e.g. libations or organic sacrifice (see Äikäs et al. 2009)). The subsequent reuse of sites of death ritual are often considered as indicative of ancestor veneration (see Chapter 2.3) and it is conceivable that sites which were repeatedly visited over time to perform ritual depositions were understood in similar ways, as locations where 'the ancestors' had also performed similar ritual practices.

### ***Ritual deposition on settlements***

The Irish archaeological data regarding ritual deposition on BA Irish settlements discussed in this thesis is heavily reliant on the MA and PhD theses by K. Cleary (2002; 2007) who kindly gave me full access to her texts and catalogues. The sheer volume of data accumulated by Cleary for her theses demonstrates the immensity of the archaeological record of ritual deposition and its importance for understanding and interpreting Irish prehistory. There are many instances of material being recovered from post-holes, pits or ditches on Irish LBA settlements. Often these materials would seem to be intrusive, but there is sometimes evidence for careful placement, perhaps to mark out liminal spaces as Brück would advocate (2006, 303).

In the context of locations of ritual deposition the term liminal can be understood as between two states such as wet and dry (i.e. not one or the other viz. Van Gennep's *rites de passage* as outlined in Chapter 2.3), or as marking "points of transition in space and

time” (Brück 2006, 306). For example, three post-holes on the western side of the entrance to Structure B at Knocksaggart, Co. Clare, contained token cremation deposits (Cleary 2007 after Hanley 2001, 34). Another possible example was found at Ward Upper, Co. Dublin; in the enclosing ditch the lower fills to either side of the entrance (possibly deliberately backfilled) were noted as charcoal rich and containing fragments of LBA pottery (McLoughlin 2006). Just within the enclosing ditch was a pit which contained around 500 fragments of LBA pottery and some flint debitage, perhaps evidence of deliberate fragmentation and subsequent ritual deposition to mark a significant event in the lifecycle of the settlement. Similar characteristics can be noted with a probable example of a foundation deposit uncovered at Knocknalappa, Co. Clare, where clustered fragments of a single ceramic vessel were found in the crannóg’s foundation layer (Grogan et al. 1999, 114). Another interesting wetland example is Platform 1 of Clonfinlough, Co. Offaly, where a non-calcareous siltstone axehead was discovered at the base of the northern door-post of the eastern entrance (Moloney et al. 1993; Cleary 2007).

In a discussion of the English Middle and Late Bronze Age Brück suggests that ritual deposits at “significant points in space” within a settlement reflects the purposeful commemoration of important stages in the lifecycle(s) of the settlement and its occupants (2001, 150-151).

“Just as the birth, marriage or death of a human being would have been marked out through special ritual practices, so too the construction, repairing, remodelling and abandonment of buildings were celebrated by the placing of deposits that highlighted both temporal and spatial transformations (cf. Chapman 1997). Such practices are common where there is a close metaphorical relationship between the lifecycle of the settlement and that of its inhabitants (e.g. Blier 1987; Waterson 1990). We may suggest that, in the Middle and Late Bronze Age, houses were ‘born’ and ‘died’. Similarly, they could be remodelled or their function could change, just as their human occupants’ status could become transformed from childhood to adulthood or on marriage.” (Brück 2006, 299)

Evidence for ‘closing’ or ‘abandonment’ deposits on Irish LBA settlements seems to be more prevalent and concrete than for foundation deposits, perhaps due to the nature of the archaeological process: what we reveal through excavation is the final stage of the lifecycle of the settlement and therefore we are more likely to find evidence for ritual practices conducted immediately prior to or congruent with abandonment than construction. For example, at Danesfort, Co. Kilkenny, when the largest post on the site (located immediately to the north of Structure 2) was removed, two hammerstones were placed at the base of its post-pit and the pit was then filled with a mixed deposit containing animal bone, slag and charcoal (Devine 2007). Another ritual deposit at, or close to, the end of a settlement’s lifecycle was noted at Ballyprior Beg, Island Magee, Co. Antrim, where within House 1 the central portion of a Class A palstave axe was placed in a small pit dug through an artefact-rich occupation layer (Suddaby et al.

2003). Interestingly, the blade and butt of the axe had been deliberately and carefully sheared off in the LBA (Fig. 15). Thus, again, object fragmentation is present in a context related to the marking of significant events in the lifecycle of an Irish LBA settlement.

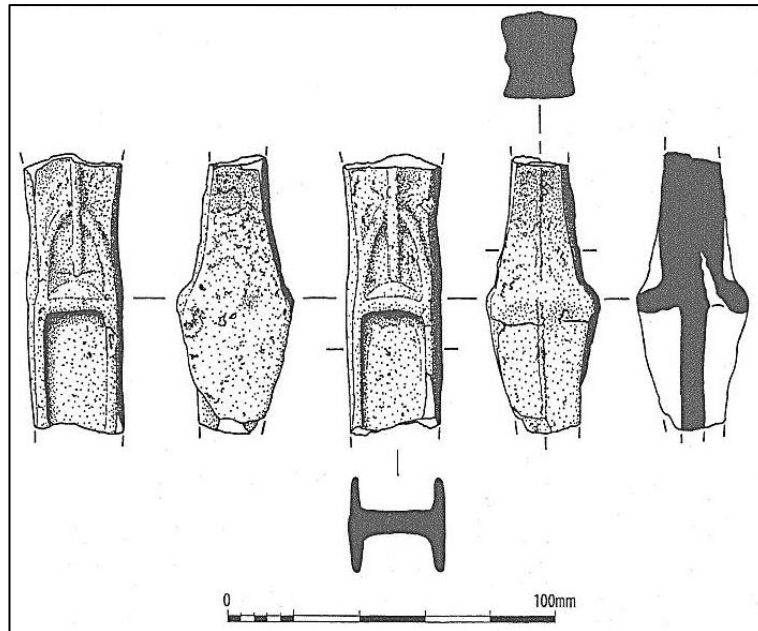


Fig. 15 Deliberately fragmented palstave axe from House 1, Ballyprior Beg, Co. Antrim (Suddaby et al. 2003, 77 Fig. 16)

Like the interpretation of mixed deposits as ‘rubbish’ deposits of animal bone in pits on Irish LBA settlement sites are often interpreted as refuse from the everyday activities of an agro-pastoral economy. This demonstrates that although animal bone is frequently deposited in similar ways to human bone or other significant objects/materials in prehistoric contexts, it continues to be interpreted from an economic perspective (Hill 1996, 18). While this may often be valid, the deposits may also be of ritual significance. For example, at Curraghatoor, Co. Tipperary, the deposits of animal bone, hazelnut shell and cereal grain placed within two pits adjacent to the south of Structure 1 were interpreted as deliberate when considered in relation to the limited amount of material culture and botanical remains from this large site (Cleary 2007; McCarthy 2007; McClatchie 2007). At Knockadoon Hill, Lough Gur, Co. Limerick, animal bone was found in the structural post-holes on the western sides of three structures (Cleary et al. 1995). A similar western emphasis was noted in the LBA structure at Grange Rath, Colp West, Co. Meath, where burnt animal bone was found in five structural post-holes and one unburnt shaft fragment was found in a post-hole on the western side of a structure (Cleary 2007 after O’Hara 2004, 6-8). In addition to the possible ritual significance of depositions placed to the west of structures (discussed in more detail in Chapters 2.4 and 3.1) it is likely that animal selected for such deposition was ritually imbued, perhaps a sacrificial or special/luxurious animal as examined in Chapter 2.1 and above. Therefore, these and other examples suggest that the disposal of animal bone may have

often been a ritually charged activity in LBA Ireland while also highlighting the (often overlooked) importance of non-metallic artefacts/materials to ritual practice generally.

### ***Wet deposits***

In the LBA across Europe there is increased deposition of materials (especially metalwork) at wet locations. Wet deposits in Ireland have in the past been interpreted as accidental losses or commonly viewed as ritual/votive as it was assumed the items were irretrievable. However, more of recent research has focused on examining patterns of ritual practice at particular types of wet locations (e.g. river, fen, lake, spring). For instance, recent literature on later prehistoric wet deposits in western Europe concentrates on how certain artefact types seem to be associated with certain types of wet locations, and in turn what these patterns can tell us about prehistoric ritual generally (Bradley and Yates 2010; Bradley 1990). It seems that the types of objects deposited in lakes and bogs are generally more similar to each other than to the objects deposited in rivers. In particular, throughout the Irish BA and Iron Age gold objects have been primarily recovered from dry land and bogs, while weapons are primarily recovered from rivers and bogs (Becker 2008, 14; Bourke 2001). This was also noted for the English fenland and it was suggested that the depositional pattern was linked to the contrast between still and moving water (Bradley and Yates 2010).

Why are watery places a focus for Irish ritual deposition from the Neolithic onwards? In a discussion of LBA ritual deposition in water from the Netherlands, Kamash (2008) suggests it is the ‘changeable’ and ‘secretive’ nature of water, as well as the duelling qualities of basic element of life and potentially life-threatening environment, which make wet (i.e. liminal in the context of being representative of two states of existence) locations so suitable for ritual deposition. Relatedly, Fontijn suggests that “[w]et places are not only boundaries between people: they may also have been regarded as boundaries between worlds” (2002, 266). Fontijn views some categories of wet deposition as “a final form of exchange” (2002, 267) and Kamash similarly postulates that if ritualised objects have agency/biographies “putting them into water may also have been seen as drowning and killing them, while also preserving them from further change (putting an end effectively to their life history)” (2008, 233). This suggestion is congruent with Brück’s (2001; 2006) argument outlined above which relates the practice of ritual deposition to marking lifecycle stages of individuals and communities (also see Chapter 2.4).

So strong was this preoccupation with deposition in water that we have several instances from LBA Ireland where pools or ‘wells’ were dug for the purpose. For example, an area of LBA activity at Clough East, Co. Limerick, was concentrated around a large deep pit at the base of which (below the water table) was found a crutch-headed copper alloy stick pin under layers of burnt mound material. The base of the feature may have been accessed via a set of ‘steps’ cut into the side and there was no observable effort made to keep this or other similar features in the vicinity open to access water (Grogan et al. 2007a, 95). The most well-known artificial LBA ritual pool is the King’s Stables, Co. Armagh (Lynn et al. 1977). Situated to the north-east of

Haughey's Fort, this pool received ritual depositions of faunal remains, a curated portion of a human skull, of (possibly) deliberately cut twigs and branches, and fragments of clay moulds for leaf-shaped swords. From the limited area excavated it would seem that the clay mould fragments were deposited only at the very edges of the pool, in a similar fashion to the pottery deposits found in the four corners of the ritual pool at the Romano-Celtic temple site of Springhead, Kent, England (Kamash 2008, 231).

This LBA preoccupation with the juxtaposition of wet and dryland may also be understood as the deliberate targeting of liminal locations in the landscape for ritual deposition. Cavers (2006) notes this in relation to the parallel increases in LBA depositional activity and the construction of lake settlements in Scotland and Ireland (i.e. proto-crannógs). One of the many examples of a crannóg site with evidence for ritual deposition is Moynagh Lough, Co. Meath. The excavation revealed pottery sherds and several areas of burnt bone in the LBA occupation layer (c.700 BC), but it is the sheer number of high status artefacts recovered from the site (including weaponry and thirty-two amber beads) that is highly suggestive of a location of ritual deposition (Bradley 1991, 12; 2004). Although Bradley suggests that this was primarily a location of periodic feasting (based on the layer of heat shattered stone found across the site), the crannóg seems to have served as a location for the enactment of various rituals.

Similarly, the later prehistoric lakeshore platform at Knocknalappa, Co. Clare, situated on the bank of Rosroe Lough, demonstrates evidence for a variety of ritual practices. In addition to the recovery of 'normal domestic debris' such as animal bone, charcoal and pottery fragments, high status artefacts have been recovered from Knocknalappa, including a sunflower pin, amber beads (Grogan et al. 1999, 117) and an unusually small Class 4 sword (which could suggest interesting parallels with Flag Fen in Lincolnshire, England (see Champion 1999, 107)). Grogan et al. characterise the recovered material from Knocknalappa as "undoubtedly a domestic assemblage deposited by loss and discard in the course of occupation of the artificial platform" (1999, 118). However, most of the artefacts recovered have not been found on other 'domestic' sites like roundhouses situated on dryland which were clearly utilised differently to wetland platforms like Knocknalappa. The amber is particularly significant, with other likely later prehistoric examples from Co. Clare found in boggy environments (e.g. Killaspuglonane/Carrowduff townland to the south-west of the Burren) and in caves containing other LBA deposits such as Glencurran Cave. Perhaps, as Dowd (2009b) suggests for Glencurran Cave, the amber is reflective of the important long-distance connections which were a likely factor in the increased prominence of Co. Clare as a distinct region in the LBA, in particular the zone around Mooghaun hillfort and the wider Shannon estuary region as is further discussed in Chapter 3.1. Amber is also a solar symbol, for which there is clear evidence from Scandinavia and more vague evidence in Ireland (as outlined in Chapter 2.4), and thus its deposition at locations both within main zones of LBA activity like Knocknalappa and outlying zones like wetlands

may indicate the integration of various expressions of ritual practice and symbolism in concepts of long-distance alliances and foreign materiality.

Ritual deposition within liminal wetland environments was also noted during the *Bord Gáis Éireann* Pipeline project at various *fulachta fiadh* sites, where bone or high status artefacts were found deposited in the burnt mounds (Grogan et al. 2007a, 95-96). It is likely that these sites were used for a variety of functions, and their sheer ubiquity in the Irish prehistoric landscape has been suggested to be indicative of later prehistoric settlement where house structures have not been located (Doody 1993; Grogan et al. 2007b, 88; Waddell 2010). An example of ritual deposition, potential sacrifice and evidence of fragmentation at a *fulachta fiadh* comes from Pollamore Near Townland, Co. Kilkenny (Channing and O Maolduin 2009). The hindquarters of a 1.5- 2.5 years old horse were found in a shallow pit adjacent to the burnt mound and the skull was found deposited within the burnt mound. Careful placement of the skull in a separate area, the complete removal (and absence) of the fore-quarters and the careful placement of the hind-quarters in a pit is highly suggestive of ritual practice.

There are also instances of objects found in the potentially liminal zones of higher/drier ground bordering bogs. For instance, gold flanged and ribbon torcs were found at Coolmamagh Upper, Co. Carlow, where a knoll projects into and is almost surrounded by marshy ground (Eogan 1983, 29). In the Tamlaght Hoard, Co. Armagh, (discussed above) types of Northern European drinking paraphernalia not found elsewhere in Ireland or Britain and may thus be considered 'special' and/or 'exotic' objects, were deposited into a wet area from drier ground at the western edge of the later prehistoric ritual landscape of the Navan Complex (O'Neill and MacDonald 2004). Depositions on zones between wet and dry may also be associated with those deposits found under or adjacent to trackways used to access/traverse bogs. For example, at Littleton Bog, Longford Pass North, Co. Tipperary, a Class 4 leaf-shaped sword was found to be deposited during the secondary rebuilding of a *togher* (Turrell 2008; Cherry et al. 1990). A deposit of this type, made during the repair of a trackway through a potentially unsafe and unstable environment, evokes a tone of giving thanks for safe-passage, perhaps reflecting the hazards of traversing through a liminal landscape. Such deposits may also be linked to the practice of moving through landscapes for the purpose of conducting ritual practices, a possibility explored in more detail in Chapter 3.1.

It seems that *all wet locations are not created equal* but must have socio-cultural significance in order for the local population to repeatedly return to conduct ritual practices. For example, Lough Kinale was the focus of a recent multivariate examination which revealed that it was Melkernagh bog (about 3.5km to the south-south-west) and not the lake, where prehistoric depositions were made (Frendengren et al. 2010, 250-252). In some bogs which have yielded a particularly large amount of material, concentrations of objects have been noted, perhaps indicating that particular areas within the bog may have been the focus of depositional activity. Even at sites of repeated ritual deposition there may have been types of location targeted. For instance, the number of Irish bog finds has decreased significantly, perhaps indicating that the



majority of deposits were made on the periphery of bogs (largely cut away by modern times) (Becker 2008, 13) which in prehistory were likely areas of open water in fenlands at the edge of more established bogs (a liminal area within a liminal area) subsequently overgrown with sphagnum. Such open water fenland deposition may be observed in the instances of objects found at the *base of the bog*. For example, the collection of gold objects from Latoon, Co. Cavan, were found three metres below the surface of the bog ‘where the ground was quite firm’ (Eogan 1983, 64-65). The group of bronze objects found deposited within a Class 2 end-blown horn at Boolybrien, Co. Clare, were discovered from a mud level below the peat which contained tree stumps (Eogan 1983, 65-67), perhaps indicating a flooded area. Interestingly, the mixed assemblages of objects recovered from the base of bogs seem to be primarily of a similar material (e.g. gold *or* bronze) which suggests that this particular type of location (i.e. open fenland with pools of still water) was associated with particular types of grouped objects.

A large number of objects are described as being found a depth below the surface of the bog, likely indicating that there was bog present both above and below the object when it was found. For example, the bronze objects from Ballykeaghra, Co. Galway, were found 3m below the surface and 1.5m from the bottom sand layer of the bog (Eogan 1983, 88). The majority of LBA objects recorded as being found ‘mid-way’ through the bog are intact, notably horns and feasting equipment, perhaps indicating an association between whole objects and this type of location. These objects were perhaps deposited when the bog was particularly wet or forming, therefore allowing the objects to sink into the sphagnum; alternatively they could have been placed in shallow pools within the bog landscape subsequently engulfed by sphagnum.

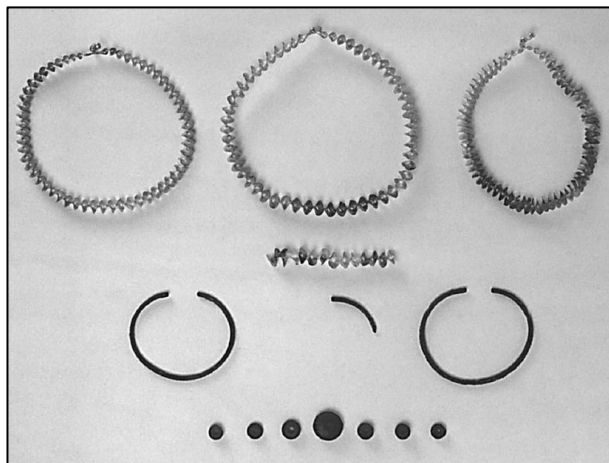


Fig. 16 The hoard from Dooyork, Co. Mayo (Cahill 2002, 120)

Interesting potential locations of ritual deposition which has not been much discussed in relation to the Irish material are coastal and maritime zones. The Irish coastline is an active environment and has changed over time (seen in the lidar survey of Galway Bay (INFOMAR 2013)) which may account for the very few deposits recovered. One interesting exception is the hoard from Dooyork, Co. Mayo, containing amber beads,

bronze bracelets and gold ribbon torcs, found under a stone on a beach in 2001 (Cahill 2002) (Fig. 16). As Cahill notes this beach is very dynamic, alternating between stone and sand due to the force of the waves, and therefore the exact location of the deposit or the environment in which the deposit took place cannot be ascertained. There are some instances of coastal depositions elsewhere in Europe (e.g. the Dutch Voorhout Hoard (Fontijn 2008)) and some BA ‘shipwrecks’ from the English Channel have been reinterpreted as potential sites of open water maritime deposition (Samson 2006) in contrast to their alternative interpretation as cargoes of metallic goods to be recycled at their destination (Bradley 1990, 126). Perhaps these maritime deposits are related to the types of deposits made at bog trackways or river fording points in Ireland, in that they are all reflective of the human ability to traverse landscapes (or waterscapes) that are liminal and therefore potentially dangerous.

There are two trends in Irish LBA object deposition at wet locations which deserve particular attention, that of weaponry and feasting equipment. Eogan’s (1983) catalogue reveals that the practice of depositing martial equipment was complex with a variety of depositional locations, both dryland and wetland sites, and a variable degree of object fragmentation, from whole objects to highly fragmented. As well, the propensity towards deposition of weaponry at wetland locations began to increase exponentially in Ireland during the MBA and continued into the Iron Age. Bourke’s (2001) study of the BA metal artefacts recovered from five Irish rivers (the Shannon, the lower Bann, the Ulster Blackwater, the Erne and the Barrow) demonstrated the predominance of weapon depositions in rivers during the Irish BA, with three sunflower pins from the river Shannon being the only ornaments recovered from the five study rivers. Even if ornaments are under-represented as Bourke suggests, tool types are also vastly outnumbered by weapons, clearly expressing the primacy of weapon deposition at these locations. Bourke also noted the tendency for weapons to be deposited at fording points in rivers, stating that “the association between archaeological material and fording points appears to be genuine rather than a bias in artefact distribution derived from recovery methods” (2001, 32).

The longevity of a particular depositional practice even when an artefact type is replaced (i.e. rapiers with swords) suggests that the ideas and social customs surrounding that artefact type and its use are stable. For example, a location of repeated deposition of weaponry is the River Scarriff in the vicinity of Scarriff town, Co. Clare. A bronze rapier, a bronze sword and a bronze looped spearhead were found (possibly) together, and to the south-west a small thin flat ‘celt’ was found on the river bed, depositions which correspond with the BA trend of martial equipment in the context of flowing water. The recovery of both a rapier and a sword in this riverine context indicates that this was a location returned to over time for the purpose of deposition. Potential importance of this location in terms of accessing the interior of Co. Clare from Scarriff Bay along the river westwards suggests that this may have been a ritualised and possibly controlled landscape in prehistory. Territorial control is an issue explored in more depth in Chapter 3.1 for instance in terms of how it may relate to a sense of

ancestral entitlement to a particular area. However, locations of concentrated and repeated deposition of particular types of objects, like those at the Scarriff River, are also suggestive of particular locations of ritual deposition being associated with particular social roles, in this case the warriors who were likely enforcing the control over routeways and landscapes seen in LBA Ireland.

Bradley (1990, 136; 2007, 203) and Kristiansen (2002) agree that in addition to the significance of blade damage as evidence of increased combat, an important aspect of the deposition of weapons at wet locations is the potential for performative public and competitive display. A possible motivation for this type of competitive display is ‘surrogate warfare’, which Osgood suggests may be manifested in the deposition of warrior related metalwork in some European regions (i.e. swords and shields in western and central Europe) and on rock art in others (i.e. Scandinavia and Iberia) (1998, 25,33). Such an interpretation could account for the (likely) pattern of sword-only deposits in Irish rivers, while the swords deposited in bogs were usually found with other types of objects. In terms of the Irish material Bridgford suggests that “the tendency of hoards to be found in bogs and the relatively few swords deposited in hoards, leads me to infer that certain swords were specially deposited in rivers and that the nature of this deposition differed from that on dry land and, probably, from deposition in other “wet” places” (1997, 112-113).

Another noteworthy LBA Irish depositional trend is that of high status feasting equipment in bogs. The Irish archaeological record has revealed more intact Atlantic feasting vessels than anywhere else in Europe, but this may be due to the prevalence of deposition in wet environments in Ireland, a practice perhaps not conducted as extensively elsewhere in Europe. Forty-two Atlantic bronze cauldrons have been found in Ireland, twenty-eight of which are largely intact, a pattern which in contrast to the find circumstances of buckets and cauldrons from other Atlantic regions which are generally found in a fragmentary condition in ‘scrap’ hoards (Gerloff 2010, 332). It seems that the Irish, and to a certain degree Northern British, cauldrons are predominantly complete due to their purposeful deposition at wet locations. The vast majority of Irish feasting equipment is found as isolated depositions and those with details of recovery have usually been found mid-way through the bog (average depth of two to three metres from the surface). As is seen with the deposition of weaponry, this consistency in depositional practice, from the late-MBA into the Iron Age, indicates that the ritual action is formal, repetitive and stable over a long period of time.

### **Patterns in the practice of ritual deposition**

The identification of Irish LBA depositional patterns is highly preliminary in the context of this thesis and there is potential for additional insights with further analysis. Even in the assessment of ritual deposition included in this text there is much interesting detail which has necessarily been glossed over (but deserved further investigation) as well as additional conceptual groupings which could be proposed, such as depositions related to fertility (see Chapter 2.4) or depositions related to the production of metalwork. An Irish LBA example of this type of deposit was found in 1949 during ploughing in

Ballycroghan, near Bangor, Co. Down, where three variously complete Class 4 swords (raw casting, casting trimmed with blade shaped, and finished) were found together in what had previously been a marshy area containing *fulachta fiadh* (Eogan 1983, 80-81).

Focusing on the physical activity of ritual deposition in LBA Ireland reveals how simple categorisations such as 'hoard' or 'votive' impose conceptual limitations on what is a spectrum of variable and complex ritual practice. Instead of strict categories there is a perceptible 'correctness' in the LBA practice of ritual deposition: a limited range of locations where certain types (and assemblages) of objects and materials could be deposited. Thus LBA ritual practice in general may as a result be conceived of as more flexible than dogmatic. Nevertheless, particular activities, such as fragmentation, have been highlighted to explore how certain practices associated with ritual deposition are consistent (geographically and temporally) and therefore imply lasting traditions and shared understandings within and between groups. Factors such as location, audience and participants, choice of objects/materials, and the activities surrounding the deposition all combine to create the final result of the depositional act which we find evidence of in the archaeological record. Some of these factors, for instance location of deposition, have only been introduced in this chapter and are discussed in further detail in subsequent chapters of the thesis

### **2.3 Death ritual**

There is variation and complexity in the treatment of the dead during the Irish LBA, not only in the process of cremation which is the dominant practice but also in other processes such as defleshing and removal of particularly significant parts of the corpse, ostensibly for additional ritual purposes. The following discussion outlines the various practices and their socio-cultural effects, widening the current understanding of what death ritual entails in a later prehistoric context in Ireland (from an archaeological perspective) by highlighting how death ritual may have been a long process culminating in an archaeologically observable event, the deposition.

Many changes in death ritual occurred over the course of the BA in Ireland and a variety of practices can be observed in each period. In the earlier BA the dominant death ritual involved inhumation of human remains in cists which shifted to cremation and deposition of cremated remains in ceramic vessels, and then by the LBA to the deposition of token amounts of cremations in whole vessels or more commonly with vessel sherds. Another modification to Irish BA death ritual is a decline in the deposition of gravegoods culminating with the veritable abandonment of the practice by the LBA. There is thus both continuity and change in Irish death ritual over the course of the BA. For instance, ceramic vessels are a consistent feature, yet the way they are used changes, as does the way in which the corpse is processed.

Death ritual also becomes more variable towards the end of the BA, for example while cremation is the dominant process deposition of unburnt human bone also takes place. Even within the category of cremation there are a number of identifiable modes of depositing the remains which range from placement at/within earlier monuments in the landscape or the construction of ring-ditches, to the digging of simple pits or deposition in structural elements within settlements. This trend of consistency from earlier periods juxtaposed with variability within ritual practice can be seen throughout the following chapter. As the archaeologically recovered evidence of death ritual for LBA Ireland generally consists of only the last-step in a long process of multiple practices, the following discussion will begin by focusing on the earlier (often archaeologically invisible) steps in order to contextualise the variability seen in this last-step, the ritual deposition of human remains.

#### **Death ritual as a process and practice**

The process of cremation is a transformation (from whole ‘person’ to ash) and the added process of crushing the cremated bone seen in LBA Ireland further transforms the deceased. These transformative actions may infer a conception of the deceased becoming ‘other’ and/or moving into another reality after death. Pseudo-historical sources and Irish myth & legend have often been used to provide glimpses of what prehistoric populations believed happened after death. However, in congruence with the methodology advocated here, it is important to first firmly establish what processes and actions occurred as part of the enactment of death rituals in the LBA.

Mortuary and funerary rituals take place during a liminal period between life and the afterlife and often these rituals are essential to ensure that the deceased effectively undertakes the final transformation / rite of passage from living to dead, individual to ancestor. The phrase 'rite of passage' was first made popular by the French ethnographer and folklorist Arnold van Gennep (*Les rites de passage*, 1909) who suggested the lifecycle transitions humans undertake from one social state to another consist of a tripartite process of preliminal rites, liminal/threshold rites, and post-liminal rites (Parker Pearson 1999, 22). Liminality, in this case the time between being alive and the completion of the death rituals, is often expressed through the physical separation of the dead from the living. This separation may be permanent (e.g. internment away from settlements), or temporary (e.g. during decomposition and/or processing of the corpse) after which the 'purified' remains are reinserted into the living sphere.

Cremation is an effective and sensational manner in which to mark this rite of passage. The building of the pyre, preparation of the corpse, lighting the fire and maintaining it while the corpse transforms from decaying flesh to clean bones, are high impact physical, visual, auditory and olfactory experiences. Brück suggests that the long and symbolically charged liminal phase of preparing a cremation may have affected the practices' rise to dominance in the BA, as it may have embodied a transformative understanding of death as opposed to an end of life or an extension of life in a 'parallel universe' (2006, 305). Alternatively, Grogan *et al.* propose that the process of transformation from cadaver to cremated bone so utterly changes the material trace of the living individual that the danger of the 'spirit' returning to the body is eliminated (2007a, 113), thus implying a belief in a spiritual otherworld which is not necessarily closed off from the real world. Regardless, as McKinley states: "There is no single answer as to why some groups of people elected to cremate their dead. Beliefs clearly varied/vary temporally and geographically, but the speedy transformation effected by burning the body – freeing the spirit to enter the 'otherworld' or another body (reincarnation), or for reasons of hygiene – is a recurrent theme throughout much of the use of the rite" (2006, 86). Therefore, in this, as with much of ritual practice, the practical/profane is intertwined with the exceptional/ritual.

Cremation essentially involves the dehydration and oxidation of the organic compounds of the body, which leaves behind the mineral components, or the skeleton (Grogan *et al.* 2007a, 107 after McKinley 2000).

“As the wood burned, the body would have collapsed into the pyre, slowing or stopping combustion, and therefore considerable maintenance of the pyre would have been necessary. Certainly a cremation would have taken much longer than it does today. Even the post-cremation process of retrieval of burnt bone must have been a long and painstaking task, and the fact that the pyre would have stayed hot for a considerable time means that a cremation would have taken days in prehistory. Compared to the relatively simple process of digging a grave for an inhumation, cremation entails a great deal

of time and community effort, which raises questions about the social position of those cremated.” (Buckley and Buckley 1999, 26)

McKinley would agree that the time and effort of preparing the cremation are the true indicators of social status, not necessarily high status grave goods or an ostentatious burial chamber (2006, 87).

As the pyre and the material(s) placed on it are consumed during the incineration and may leave little trace, prehistoric cremation is primarily identified archaeologically through the recovery of cremated bone (Marshall 2011, 8). For Irish prehistory, Buckley and Buckley suggest that the pyres may have either resembled a stage, allowing air to flow beneath, or constructed as a pit dug into the ground with flues to control the flow of air (1999, 25). In his experiments with possible BA pyres, Marshall constructed ‘box-pyres’ in which the fuel is stacked horizontally and ‘ring-pyres’, stacked conically, both of which may have had additional timber structures (often evidenced by post-holes at known pyre-sites) for displaying the corpse or stabilising the pyre (2011, 3, 6). Interestingly, experimental pyre incineration in Denmark has shown that “despite intense burning, the shielding effect and thermal inertia of the ground stops charring near the surface of the soil” (Marshall 2011, 11 after Henricksen pers. comm). Even when the pyre combusts completely and oxidizes the underlying soil it may dissipate over time through natural or agricultural processes, be generally disturbed during the process of removing the cremated bone, or deliberately cleared away (Marshall 2011, 4). Therefore although it is often assumed that Irish prehistoric pyres should be archaeologically identifiable through “at least a concentrated area of oxidized earth” (Grogan et al. 2007a, 108) such evidence may not be present in an intensively cultivated landscape. Alternatively, the pyre sites may be located away from the site of deposition, yet another example of liminality in Irish LBA death ritual.

One of the most important considerations for prehistoric cremation is that it is at the mercy of the weather: “light wind would have aided combustion, but too strong a wind may have caused the fuel to burn too quickly before the body had ignited” (Buckley and Buckley 1999, 25). The cremation could not have been undertaken during extended periods of wet weather as not only would the pyre not burn during heavy rain, but dry wood would have been necessary to ensure the incineration of the corpse, a factor which may have resulted in cremations being delayed until the conditions were correct (McKinley 2006, 81). Another significant factor is the high volume of wood required to ensure complete cremation of the corpse (Buckley and Buckley 1999, 25) the choice of which was likely influenced by local availability, suitability for maintaining the desired temperatures and possible social or ritual associations. Although various wood species have been identified as components of LBA cremation deposits (in particular pomaceous varieties), the majority are consistently comprised of oak, a trend which suggests deliberate selection not random acquisition of the nearest fuel source (O'Donnell 2007, 48-49, 64).

There are some instances where complexity within the cremation ritual is revealed such as at Dalystown, Co. Limerick, where two pits were found to hold bone which had not been fleshed when cremated (Grogan et al. 2007a, 111). When analysed, bone from other pits found on the site was clearly fleshed when cremated. The process(es) of removing the flesh are unknown as is whether the defleshed bones were curated for a period of time before cremation. Regardless, the cremation of both fleshed and unfleshed bone at Dalystown illustrates the complexity of death ritual during the LBA. Evidence for defleshing of bone was also present at the ritual site of Glencurran Cave, Co. Clare (see also Chapters 2.1, 2.4 and 3.1), where clavicles represented over a third of the unburnt human bone from the LBA area of the site. Dowd states that this “indicates the deliberate selection of particular disarticulated bones for deposition” (2009b, 94), but it may also indicate the decomposition of corpses prior to the selection of said bones. These deposits could be conceptually linked to unburnt human skull fragments which have been recovered from a variety of LBA Irish contexts. This is not a very common phenomenon and interestingly there are no clear patterns of human skull deposition, however the fact that in all cases the skulls appear to be unburnt possibly demonstrates that they were removed prior to cremation (if cremation took place), therefore adding to the myriad of ways in which the human body was treated after death in LBA Ireland.

The process of incinerating the body to leave only the bone would have taken several hours, and the bone could not have been collected for deposition until it had cooled enough to handle, the entire process could conceivably take several days (McKinley 2006, 85). While there may be pseudo-historical and mythological references to wine or water being poured on pyres to mark the end of the cremation process (McKinley 2006, 85) the pyre experiments Marshall conducted demonstrated that “effective retrieval of highly cremated bone, even as larger items and especially as comminuted fragments, from wet, glutinous ash is very difficult, and that bone separated in this way would certainly need further, time-consuming cleaning”, leading him to conclude that the pouring of liquid would have most likely been limited to libations (2011, 7). Buckley and Buckley suggest that if water was used in conjunction with BA Irish cremations it more likely would have involved placing the pyre material in water filled troughs and allowing the cremated bone to rise to the surface (1999, 26). However, there is no verified evidence for this practice.

In his experiments with reconstructed BA cremation pyres Marshall found that it only took approximately an hour and a half to collect by hand the equivalent of 95% of the bone resulting from an efficient cremation, a result which led him to firmly state that “cremated deposits which are obviously partial or token are not so because of any inherent practical difficulty in retrieval of bone, but for additional, deliberate reasons” (2011, 34). His experimental cremations demonstrated that after the pyre and corpse had been incinerated the bone lay in a ten cm thick layer in roughly the position of the body when initially laid on the pyre, therefore allowing those collecting the remains to easily identify fragments and separate them from pyre material by hand with no additional



equipment (Marshall 2011, 34). Nevertheless, in cultures temporally and geographically divergent it has been observed that depositions of cremated remains often only contain only 40-60% of the available skeletal material (Parker Pearson 1999, 7). The most consistent trend in BA cremation deposits noted during analysis of the identifiable human bone from the *Bord Gáis* Pipeline excavations in Ireland, was the low frequency of bones from the axial skeleton (i.e. vertebrae, ribs, pelvis) as well as hands and feet, which was directly contrasted by the higher frequency of bone from the lower limbs and head (Grogan et al. 2007a, 121). Grogan proposes that it was the ease of identification within and extraction from the pyre material which made the lower limbs and skull the focus of collection (2007a, 123), however the observations made by Marshall regarding the overall ease of collecting cremated bone highlights the significance of choosing *types* of bones for deposition and may indicate that the remaining bone was deposited elsewhere or used in other ritual practices. This is an interesting observation in relation to the selective deposition of particular types of bone at significant LBA ritual locations (e.g. Glencurran Cave, Co. Clare).

An adult cremation can be expected to result in 1500-3000g of bone (Buckley and Buckley 1999, 27). However, the Irish token cremation deposits of the LBA often yield under 100g, with a range between 100-400g representing a high volume of recovered bone on average from a single deposit (Grogan et al. 2007a, 109). Cremated bone usually preserves well in soils that would be adverse to the preservation of unburnt bone, suggesting that taphonomic processes are unlikely to account for the token deposits (Grogan et al. 2007a, 109). Furthermore, small volumes are present even in deposits which demonstrate careful separation of bone from pyre material (i.e. full representation of corpse) indicating that the selection *and* deposition of these small amounts was deliberate (Grogan et al. 2007a, 118). McKinley suggests that the token nature of these deposits highlights the “secondary nature of the burial within the overall rite” and questions its necessity (2006, 86). However, the fact that these depositions *were* performed clearly illustrates that they were not secondary to a primary aspect of the overall death ritual (i.e. the cremation). The action of choosing bone to deposit, the deliberate crushing of this bone, and the choice to include fragmented objects or materials in the deposition indicate that this process was inherent to the death ritual performed for some individuals. The remaining cremated bone may have been buried elsewhere, it may have been scattered, or it may have been distributed among those associated with the deceased for additional use. Perhaps relatedly, some unburnt human skull fragments from LBA Irish contexts appear to have been curated for a period of time prior to deposition, for example the skull fragment found at the King’s Stables, Co. Armagh (Newman 1997a, 99; Lynn 2003, 54). Unfortunately, however, there is no evidence (yet) of bone from a single individual recovered from multiple contexts or locations. Nevertheless, token deposition implies dispersal of the whole person to multiple locations after death, perhaps reflecting the existence of ‘dividual’ personhood, or fractal relations, in LBA Ireland (see Chapters 1.2 and 4.1).

Fragmentation of the human body after death through cremation, crushing of cremated bone, and depositing of the bone in different locations (or using it in different ways) was prevalent in LBA Ireland and must be understood in relation to other processes of fragmentation observed in the archaeological record. Although some post-incineration fragmentation will occur through the process of removing bone from the pyre, through compression from the overlying soil once it is deposited, and inevitably through the process of excavation, by comparing the size of fragments from separate sites it is possible to ascertain whether or not additional deliberate crushing of the bone took place post-cremation (Buckley and Buckley 1999). Materials deposited with the bone are also often fragmented. In particular, there is a notable change in the pottery included in the deposits from the earlier to later BA which is generally intact in the earlier and fragmented in the later deposits (although exceptions include a LBA cremation deposit found within an intact vessel at Kilgobbin, Co. Dublin (Hagen 2002)). Eogan and Roche go so far as to suggest that the ‘hastily’ fired LBA pottery found at the enclosure of Lugg, Co. Dublin, may have been made intentionally for fragmentation as part of the rituals enacted on the site (2007, 164). This deliberate destruction of material culture may reflect object agency/biography in that they must also be ‘killed’ in order to accompany, become transformed, or regenerate like the deceased individual (Parker Pearson 1999; Brück 2001; Hughes 2008). In Ireland, deliberate crushing of the bone post-cremation becomes more common over time from the Neolithic to the Iron Age, congruent with the increased occurrence of token deposition (Buckley and Buckley 1999, 28).

A phenomenon perhaps related to the deliberate destruction of human bone and material culture is a perceived shift from the deposition of artefacts with human burials to the deposition of artefact hoards in liminal locations in the natural and settled landscape in the European BA. The Irish evidence corresponds to this trend (Eogan 1983), as with the congruent development of hoards increasing in size, especially towards the end of the LBA when the amount of material available for deposition possibly allowed for more individuals to participate in the ritual. Bradley has suggested that some deposits outside of the ‘grave’ context may still have been linked to death ritual in that “votive deposits provided an ideal medium for flamboyant displays by the mourners” (1990, 197); the interpretive emphasis is thus on the social context in which the depositions took place. He does not suggest that this change was uniform across Europe, but that it was tied to local conventions and therefore varied in its development over time and across geographical space. In a later text focusing on Britain and Ireland, Bradley observes that the main death ritual of the LBA, token cremation burial with no (metal) grave-goods, is contrasted by the deposition of unburnt human bone (specifically skulls; see Bradley and Gordon (1988)) and high status metallic objects such as weapons at wet locations: “It must be more than a coincidence that as elaborate artefacts disappear from the funerary record, they occur with increasing frequency in other contexts” (Bradley 2007, 200).

In the archaeological record of LBA Ireland there are almost no instances of metal objects deposited with cremated human bone and there is a marked increase in the volume and number of ritually deposited metal goods as they disappear from contexts with explicit connections to death ritual. However, without contextual associations between human bone and objects it cannot be concretely stated that the metallic objects were deposited as part of death ritual practice. There are indications that other objects/materials (e.g. pottery fragments, cereal grain) may have been deliberately deposited with cremations. Therefore, parallel changes in death ritual and depositional practice took place during the LBA in Ireland. If some deposited objects are to be viewed as related to death ritual it may be more constructive to consider them as inalienable objects representative of the deceased individual and/or their social identity and consequently of the need to renegotiate socio-political relationships (see Chapters 1.2 and 4.1).

### **Locations of death ritual**

The primary evidence of death ritual available from LBA Ireland likely represents the last step in a long process from time of death to eventual deposition of remains. The complexity and variability of these processes is evident in the variety of monument types and locations associated with Irish LBA death ritual. The materiality of rituals can be observed in the construction of monuments and features in the landscape as they are formed through intentional action and leave an archaeological signature which can be analysed (Fahlander and Oestigaard 2008, 6). The construction of large monuments also indicates group activity and suggests a need to demarcate the area associated with the dead, perhaps to contain some abstract aspect of the deceased and/or to outwardly display veneration/respect.

Barrows (ring-, bowl-, and bowl-barrow with outer bank) and ring-ditches (with or without embankment) are the monument types most often associated with LBA death ritual in Ireland (Newman 1997b, 157-168 after Grinsell 1953) but their classification, and hence interpretation, is contested (Figs. 17 and 18). The National Monuments Service *Archaeological Survey of Ireland* online database distinguishes eight classifications, some of which overlap with Newman's five, thus demonstrating how the "few attempts to classify the wide variety of these monument forms have not met with universal acceptance" (Corlett 2005, 63). Complicating factors are the minimal number excavated as well as the fact that many individual monuments do not fit neatly into any one category. Furthermore, the excavations which have been conducted have shown that important features are often not visible on the surface and therefore would not be identified in a topographical survey (Newman 1997b, 160).

"This dearth of very basic archaeological information, such as how many different types of barrow exist in Ireland and whether or not different types of barrow are chronologically and culturally diagnostic, has overshadowed and forestalled the analysis of more anthropological questions concerned with how sociological and ideological concerns were catered for and

reflected in the architecture and siting of the barrows and associated ritual activity.” (Newman 1997b, 154)

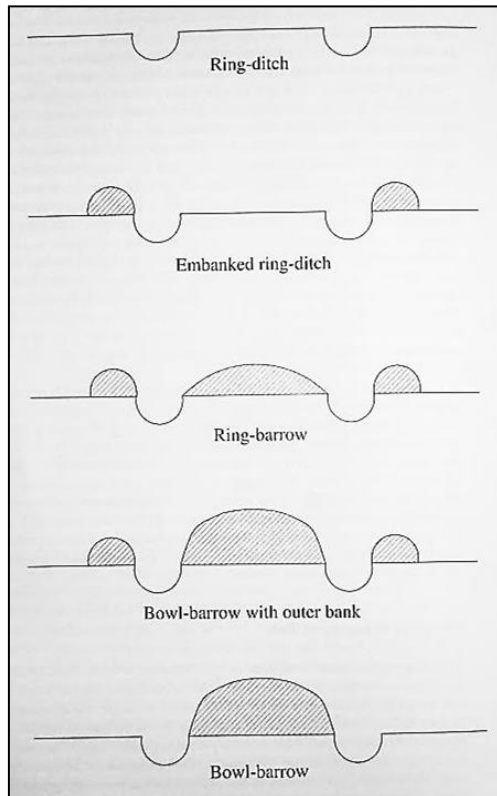


Fig.17 Barrow and Ring-Ditch classification (Newman 1997b, 156)



Fig.18 Water filled ring-barrow near Doolin, Co. Clare (SMR No. CL008-086)

What the excavated material does seem to indicate is that barrows generally decreased in size from the Early to Middle BA and (although still in use) are generally replaced by ring-ditches during the LBA and early IA (Newman 1997b, 154; cf. Corlett 2005). As the focus here is the LBA, barrows will generally be treated as sites potentially still in use in a dynamic ritual landscape and illustrative of trends in ritual practice, but not necessarily new constructions. The excavation record of LBA ring-ditches is more substantial than that of barrows, likely because they are often not visible prior to top-soil stripping and have therefore not been deliberately avoided during development planning as would an upstanding barrow.

The surface expression (i.e. banks and ditches) of Irish late prehistoric burial ring-ditches may have varied over time (McGarry 2009, 419) and therefore the terms ring-ditch and embanked ring-ditch may reflect a continuum of forms rather than distinct categories. Agricultural processes have contributed to the lack of surface expression of these site types and it may have adversely affected evidence for additional features such as structures or internal mounds. McGarry observed that “[o]ne-third of sites that had surface expression when excavated produced 50% more burials than those that did not, and this suggests that many burials have been destroyed since interment” (2009, 414). The suggestion is that some cremated human remains recovered from ring-ditches may

have originated in central features (mounds and pits) which are no longer discernible due to processes of erosion and disturbance, thus incorrectly indicating that enclosing ditches were deliberately chosen as a depositional location when in fact the enclosed area may have been the original focus (McGarry 2009, 418). However, there are some undeniable examples of the enclosing elements of ring-ditches being the focus of death ritual and other ritual depositions and so it is more likely that both the enclosed and enclosing elements of these sites were significant ritually. This is an important consideration as the choice to deposit cremated human remains in one location over another was deliberate and therefore must be understood as reflective of broader social processes as well as the identity of the deceased, the cremation depositors and/or the monument builders.

It is significant whether a community chooses to construct a new funerary monument or reuse/reference an existing one, as this may reflect how the group conceived of their own identity (McGarry 2009, 420). In particular, the choice to reference past monuments in death ritual practice could indicate the existence of an ancestor cult (Parker Pearson 1999, 158). It may be the existence of the monuments which is the important consideration, as opposed to the veneration of a particular individual or individuals. Although McGarry's study revealed only five or six sites where later prehistoric human remains had been placed *directly* within earlier monuments, "approximately one-fifth of the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age burial sites captured had been used for burial earlier in prehistory, with Neolithic-middle Bronze Age burials being within c.100m of those from the late Bronze Age and Iron Age" (2009, 420). This supports the possibility that throughout prehistory certain types of landscapes and/or locations were consistently deemed appropriate for death ritual (with their use in earlier centuries known or unknown). However, as some of these sites still have an existing surface expression McGarry seems correct in assuming that burial of human remains at these locations in later prehistory was deliberate.



Fig. 19 Two boulder burials and a standing stone located within a stone circle, Uragh townland, Co. Kerry (O'Sullivan and Downey 2003, 30 Fig. 2)

Perhaps another example is the close association seen between LBA boulder burials and earlier BA stone circles (Fig. 19), although the dating of these monument types is difficult even when excavated and therefore the nature of the association is uncertain. However, as Walsh states "the close proximity of these two different monuments must

have meant that the builders of one were undoubtedly aware of the existence and possibly the function of the other” (1993, 109). Boulder burials are an interesting LBA death ritual monument consisting of a large boulder usually resting on three stones, creating a monument visually similar to a portal tomb but on a much smaller and squatter scale (Walsh 1993, 105; O'Sullivan and Downey 2003). The monument type seems to have a distribution limited to southwest Ireland, with a coastal bias noted on the Beara peninsula (Walsh 1993, 105) and outliers present adjacent to Caherconnell Fort in Co. Clare. Some boulder burials are grouped, however like barrows and ring-ditches no pattern is discernible in the manner of grouping (Ó Nualláin 1978, 78). Nevertheless, the possibility exists that the association between boulder burials and stone circles and the grouping of boulder burials is a reference to ancestors.

Clustering of features within ritual complexes and of sites like barrows and, later, ring-ditches, may be indicative of relationships between the individuals interred and may have “demonstrated a marked concern with the past and the creation of a mnemonic pattern in which the monuments could be placed and related as social and ancestral history” (Cooney 2009b, 378). Relationships between individuals are difficult to discern in LBA death ritual and patterns like the deposition of cremated remains relative to an originating deposit have not been identified. Instead, what can perhaps be identified is a continuation of respect for lineage and ancestry, observed through the construction of monuments relative to each other. “This symbolic and material expression of social links may have been used to express claims of ancestry that were more fictional than real, as genealogies were reworked to provide for the acknowledgement and inclusion of the changing focus of status and rank among the living” (Cooney 2009b, 383).

The most common feature in which cremated LBA human bone was deposited was a shallow sub-circular pit. These pits, either single pits or clusters, are located in cremation ‘cemeteries’ (the term cemetery is used here to denote the clustering of archaeological features associated with the deposition of human bone) or on the periphery of them, on settlements, and (seemingly) isolated in the landscape. In other words, although LBA pit-burials have been uncovered in cemetery contexts they also occur “widely in organised landscapes, in the vicinity of or close to settlement sites and also close to what are likely to have been the well-known, habitually used areas that were at the core of everyday life” (Cooney 2009b, 384). They have most often been found as unmarked features with no indications of their presence prior to topsoil stripping, although some may have been originally marked with stones or stakes (e.g. Rathcannon, Co. Limerick) and it can be assumed that all, not only those situated within or adjacent to funerary monuments like ring-ditches, were located “within a wider collage of funerary and ritual activity landscapes” (Grogan et al. 2007a, 115).

Is the action of digging the pit also part of the ritual? And if so what does the digging of the pit signify (e.g. returning materials to the earth, chthonic deities, etc.)? There does not seem to be silting up of the pits containing cremated bone either in isolated examples or those located in LBA cremation cemeteries, which suggests that they were dug soon before the cremated bone and associated materials were deposited. In the case

of pit-burials located adjacent to or contained within ring-ditches the digging of the pit can be contrasted to the presence of another phase of ritual monument construction (the ditch) perhaps relating the actions of the pit diggers to those of the ditch diggers. Conceptions of lineage and ancestors can thus be perceived in relation to flat cemeteries as well.

There are also some LBA pits from Ireland which contain only pyre material and no cremated bone. This not only implies the precise removal of cremated bone from its associated pyre material, but also that the pyre material may have been ritually/symbolically charged and required 'correct' disposal (Grogan et al. 2007a, 118), similar to the faunal remains associated with ritual feasting as discussed above (Chapter 2.2). However, some pits do contain both pyre material and cremated human bone, suggesting that at the very least the pyre material was significant, but that a strict separation of these materials was not always necessary, although it may have been in some cases. McKinley suggests that the inclusion of pyre material in cremation deposits or the deposit of pyre material in separate pits indicates close proximity between the pyre and location of burial, stating that "bone for burial may be curated and transported, but it is unlikely that pyre debris would be too" (2006, 86). However, a small volume of deliberately selected cremated bone is deposited and often it is deliberately mixed with the pyre material, as well only a portion of the total pyre material is deposited in most cases. Thus the evidence does not rule out the possibility of elements of the pyre material also being curated and deposited when and where appropriate.

There are many further questions that need to be addressed regarding the widespread practice of depositing cremated human bone in pits during the Irish LBA, which extend beyond the restricted confines of the present study. In particular, it would be informative to investigate possible differences between the deposition of cremated human bone in pit cemeteries and in pits or structural features within settlements. For instance, does the amount of bone in these depositional locations differ? Is the bone more fragmentary in one type of deposit than another? And are additional materials more likely to be included in one type of deposit rather than the other? Another potential line of investigation is the deposition of single or multiple individuals in the same pits and whether changes in practice can be determined between the earlier and LBA. Expertise in human bone and isotope analysis would be required to adequately tackle these questions, but if such studies were to be undertaken it would shed light on many aspects of the Irish BA worldview and perhaps also the question of social hierarchy, as well as the conception of personhood.

As was intimated in the above there is diversity in the types of death ritual monuments as well as in their landscape setting, in general these monuments are located away from settlements (although relationships between the two are vague), but this should not imply a dichotomy between 'landscapes of death' and 'domestic landscapes'. Past research (in particular see Cleary 2002; 2007) has investigated how human bone deposition is contextually situated on settlements, but more work is needed to

understand the relationships between these deposits and those deposited elsewhere in the landscape.

“Pits with human remains that are located close to but not directly linked to settlements are too frequently interpreted as isolated burials because they have not been explored within their wider landscape. The people who lived on these sites must have recognised these 'pit burials' as important and perhaps deliberately placed them around the periphery of the area of occupation to establish symbolic boundaries. This idea would also link these pits to the concept of liminality.” (Cleary 2005, 26)

Human bone recovered from LBA settlement sites includes both token cremation deposits and deposits of unburnt bone, albeit usually as isolated bones or in a fragmentary condition (Cleary 2005, 26). The choice to deposit human bone within the sphere of the living community is significant, especially when the potential infrequency of this practice is considered. Cleary questions if these deposits actually represent death ritual in an Irish prehistoric context, suggesting instead that they may mark rites of passage for the entire community or settlement, or for a particular structure or individual and thus possibly linked to concepts of fertility and regeneration (2005, 34). Regardless of the validity of this suggestion, Cleary seems correct in her assertion that the deposition of human bone on settlement sites would have been a highly symbolic action that communicated significant meaning to those who witnessed or were aware of the deposits (2005, 26). Pits located within or close to domestic structures may be dug specifically for the deposition of human bone or pits which had a previous function may be reused. Although pits dug specifically for the deposition of human bone may not appear to be fundamentally different in dimension or even location within the settlement to pits used for another purpose (e.g. storage) symbolic associations would have been clear to the inhabitants.

LBA deposits of human bone on settlements seem to be predominantly situated liminally and, as Brück advocates for the British LBA, may serve to highlight zones of transition (between life and death, wet and dry, interior and exterior, etc.) (2006, 302). Cleary suggests that liminal positioning of deposits of human bone also applies to the Irish material and emphasises the symbolic strength of human bone and the significance of placing the remains of the dead within the living social sphere (2005, 23). The structural features of houses as well as pits positioned in the interior of houses were targeted for the deposition of human bone. As these deposits must have been made during the construction, or repairing, of the structure they are thus connected to the lifecycle of the structure and settlement. The post-holes at the entrances to round-houses seem to have been particularly consistent foci for the deposition of human bone. Cleary states the “number of sites uncovered where evidence for this practice existed surely indicates that thought went into these deposits and that they fulfilled an important social function”, such as counteracting malevolent forces which may try and enter the dwelling (2005, 29), like the crosses marked on the thresholds of Medieval houses to stop the entry of witches. While the placement of human bone in the structural features



can convincingly be interpreted as an action associated with construction or abandonment, the secondary use of features like pits may represent a different ritual practice, thus highlighting the importance of establishing when during the structures' lifecycle the deposit was made (Cleary 2005, 26).

As with the structural features of domestic buildings, deposition of human bone seems to have often been focused on the entrance features of the enclosing elements of settlements (liminal locations). Cleary suggests the possibility "that the use of boundaries and specific locations as areas of deposition was intended to reinforce community identity and to highlight differences between areas, between people, possibly even between different social groups, and between the human and supernatural worlds" (2005, 30) with human bone acting as the ideal agent through which the interaction between spheres of existence may take place. Interestingly, enclosing features of settlements were also often locations where domestic refuse was placed. Brück has interpreted this as reflecting perceived connections between human bone and refuse as representative of 'dead objects' which were characterised by their liminality and perhaps were by extension associated with ideas of regeneration and fertility, in other words the direct link between death and rebirth of humans as well as objects (2006, 304).

### **Conceptualising Irish Late Bronze Age death ritual practice**

Although the most archaeologically identifiable stage in the complete Irish LBA death ritual is the deposition of cremated bone after cremation had taken place, it may be assumed that for the mourners and additional ritual participants other stages in the process may have been considered primary. For example, Marshall reminds us that in Greek mythological accounts of funerary ceremony the activities conducted prior to and during the cremation, such as procession and feasting, seem to have been more of a focus of attention than the cremation itself (2011, 8). It would have taken several hours for the pyre and corpse to be reduced to ash and bone, and, as McKinley (2006) suggests, it is possible that the pyre was lit in the early evening to make full use of the effect of the raging fire upon the ceremonies surrounding the cremation event. However, such practices may leave no archaeological signature.

An important factor in analysing death ritual from the perspective of practice is the materiality of death not only in terms of material culture, but also the materiality of the decaying corpse. Fowler suggests that the body "is both a material thing and a conceptual media" (2008, 56) a fact which would have been underscored by the sensory onslaught produced by the decaying corpse, sharply contrasted with the active person the corpse represented. The perception of the corpse, and cremated bone, as materials to be used as material culture can be seen in the Irish LBA crushing and deposition of cremated bone in a variety of ways and with other types of material culture like pottery. This suggests that death rituals acted to make the remains less recognizably human, transforming them into material culture, perhaps to be used as/with other objects and materials. Interestingly, there are some instances where human bone is placed adjacent to or within areas associated with metalworking, perhaps reflecting the transformation

of both human bone and metal through fire: from cadaver to clean bone and from raw material to produced object. In both cases a material which is not always suitable, or safe, for the domestic/living sphere is transformed into a material which is incorporated (and perhaps necessary) for the status quo to be maintained on a physical/spiritual level. The scarce evidence for this connection in the LBA gives way to more substantial evidence in the Iron Age (e.g. the EIA complex excavated at Ballydavis, Co. Laois (Keeley 1995)) possibly indicating a change in ritual practice which more explicitly linked the transformative processes of metalworking, death and cremation.

It is proposed that LBA death ritual in Ireland was composed of five main stages (not necessarily performed in this order) each comprising a variety of possible practices (which may or may not be evidenced archaeologically):

**1. Preparation of the corpse**

- a. If the corpse was left to decompose prior to cremation was it placed in a particular location/structure, or defleshed more actively?
- b. Were purification rituals required (of the corpse, relatives, community, objects, structures, etc.)?
- c. Was the corpse prepared (washed, dressed, covered in fats/oils, shaved)?

**2. Building the pyre and cremating the corpse**

- a. Collection, chopping and transportation of wood to the pyre area
- b. Ensuring suitable weather conditions
- c. Transportation of the corpse to the place of cremation
- d. Arrangement of the corpse on the pyre with(out) accompanying materials
- e. Lighting of the pyre and maintenance to ensure complete cremation
- f. Auxiliary ritual activities during the several hours of incineration

**3. Collecting and crushing the cremated bone**

- a. Selection of fragments to be deposited
- b. Crushing the bone to the desired/required size
- c. Ritually 'disposing' of or otherwise using the remaining cremated bone and pyre material

**4. Choice and preparation of the depositional location**

- a. Digging of a pit and/or preparation of a structural feature on a settlement and/or 'cemetery' and/or ritual location

**5. Depositing the selected cremated bone and associated pyre material**

- a. Transportation from the pyre location to the location of deposition
- b. Mixing of the different elements for deposition
- c. Placing additional materials which were not on the pyre into the deposition
- d. Covering the deposit and possibly marking it

As can be seen from the above, this analysis of death ritual in LBA Ireland is focused on the socio-culturally contingent physical actions necessary to confront with death and a dead human body. Sørensen and Rebay also advocate a focus on the physical practice of

death ritual, which they suggest will illuminate the ‘set of routine and decisions’ (i.e. practices within a system) that would have gone into conducting the death ritual and in turn illuminate the realistic social context in which changes in social institutions took place (2008, 62). Thus, the *practice* of death ritual is the primary concern; the possible meaning of the ritual(s), or the social motivations of conducting the rituals in a specific manner, are revealed only through a clear understanding of what actions were physically taken to lay the dead to rest.

## 2.4 Fertility ritual

Fertility is a term which, like the ritual categories of the previous three chapters, can be interpreted in a variety of ways. In this chapter the use of the term fertility relates to a concern with ensuring, perpetuating and/or maintaining fruitfulness, fecundity and well-being. The term is thus used similarly to its application by Bloch and Parry in *Death and the regeneration of life*, who suggest that the link between fertility and death noted from prehistory to the present and across the globe is acutely associated with the maintenance of society: “If death is often associated with a renewal of fertility, that which is renewed may either be the fecundity of people, or of animals and crops, or of all three. In most cases what would seem to be revitalized in funerary practices is that resource which is *culturally conceived* to be most essential to the reproduction of the social order” (1982, 7). Fertility rituals are often enacted cyclically as a precaution against or perhaps more sporadically as a remedy for agricultural calamity or human sterility (Bolger 1992; MacLeod 2003). A consistent trend running through Irish LBA ritual practice is a connection between fertility and death, in particular the necessity of death to ensure the continued fertility of the community (people, land, livestock, and settlements).

Multivocality within Irish LBA ritual actions and expressions concerning fertility is evident throughout the following, perhaps most so in the discussion of fertility symbolism. Similarly, the multivocality of ritual practice in BA Scandinavia has previously been noted by Kaul:

“If we look at the depositions of the bronze objects against this background, we can then understand their “multivocal” evidence. On one level – exegetical meaning – rituals helped people to cope with concerns about fertility, crops and physical well-being. On another level – operational meaning – the system of rank and authority was laid out to public view (and to the spiritual world) during the ritual activities (Levy 1982, 108). What is important about the intertwined exegetical and operational meanings of the depositions is that these symbolic themes were being expressed at one and the same time in a religious setting.” (Kaul 1998, 38)

Fertility as a LBA Irish concern is a pervasive yet indefinite phenomenon situated within the spectrum of ritual activities. It can therefore be difficult to pinpoint ritual practices that deal specifically with fertility, as it is more often the case that the theme of ensuring fertility is only one aspect/motivation for the ritual action. Therefore, specific examples will be discussed which particularly highlight the expression of fertility as a facet of ritual feasting, ritual deposition and death ritual in LBA Ireland.

## Symbols of fertility

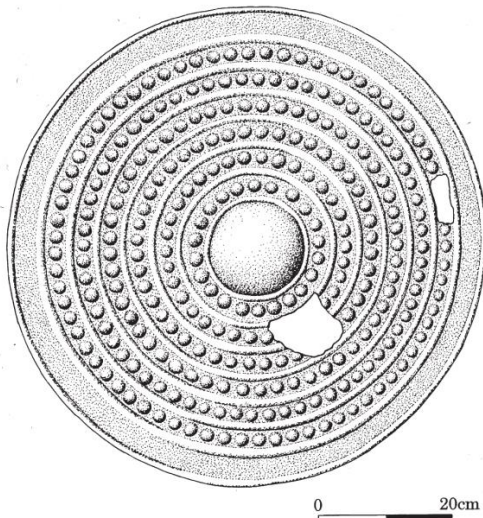


Fig. 20 Bronze shield, Lough Gur, Co. Limerick (Waddell 2010, 253, Fig. 7.15)



Fig. 21 Sunflower Pin Detail, Lahardan townland, Co. Clare (Clare County Library 2013a)

The importance of the sun in prehistoric Irish ritual is archaeologically discernible from the Neolithic (e.g. Newgrange (Waddell 2010, 68)) into the Medieval Period (e.g. Deschel movement). In the Irish LBA there is an expansion in use of a formalised and complex solar symbol with a number of concentric circles (composed of solid lines or of bosses) surrounding a dome- or cone-shaped central boss (Figs. 20 and 21). More simplistic possible solar symbols seen in later prehistoric Ireland (but in some cases likely dating to earlier periods) are cup-marks and simple circles. The formalised solar symbol occurs across much of Europe in the BA, appearing on high status metallic objects, in rock art, and in some areas pottery. Repetitive use of similar solar iconography in various regions of Europe is likely related to involvement in widespread networks of interaction (Chapter 4.2). Correspondingly, it has been proposed that this formalised style of solar iconography was introduced to Ireland from the Nordic zone during the LBA. This connection may be seen in the stylistic similarity between the decoration on the Irish gold disc from Lattoo, Co. Cavan, and on the Danish Trundholm sun-chariot (Waddell 2010, 272) (Figs. 22 and 23). Eogan (1995) advocates for close interactions between the two regions especially in terms of similarities noted between symbolic and ceremonial objects. However, others suggest that the evidence is either superficial and/or that the major source of influence for such symbols was elsewhere (Taylor 1980), such as Central Europe, France or the Iberian Peninsula (influenced by France and the Mediterranean (Armada 2011)).



Fig.22 Detail of Trunholm Sun Chariot disc  
(National Museum of Denmark 2013b)

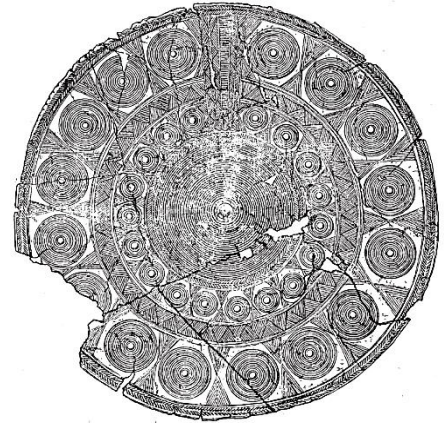


Fig.23 Gold Disc from Lattoo, Co.  
Cavan (Waddell 2010, 257, Fig. 7.19)

It is of note that this symbol is repeated on different categories of object with minimal variance from the archetype. In a discussion of this phenomenon in LBA Ireland, Cahill asks: “So is it the case that the goldsmiths were limited in their artistic abilities, or were they restrained by some cultural convention that did not permit them to move beyond an acceptable range of motifs and patterns?” and concludes that the smiths were likely working within a socio-cultural milieu which dictated the use of such significant and meaningful symbols (2005, 27). Comendador Rey suggests, for the Iberian Peninsula, that LBA goldsmiths may have been both responsible for craftworking as well as for communicating the symbolic message depicted on these objects: “We might suspect a possible sacralization of the process, not to mention of the person in possession or control of this type of knowledge” (2010, 106). Therefore, Cahill places stylistic control in the hands of the patrons, while Comendador Rey places control with the smith. Clearly, the socio-cultural context of the production of high status objects and the depiction of symbolic imagery in LBA Ireland is ambiguous. It is nevertheless revealing of the Irish LBA social structure since the consistent and repetitive use of such symbols signifies various levels of socio-political control and negotiation at play, as well as the importance of the outward display of known symbols.

If the use of this symbol was in fact ‘restrained’ in LBA Ireland as Cahill suggests, then perhaps we can glean some further understanding by considering where it is depicted: bronze or gold objects such as defensive equipment (e.g. shields) and ornaments (e.g. ear-spools, gorget terminals, bowl shaped ‘hats’). The archaeologically visible objects which depict the formalised solar symbol are meant to be seen by others, perhaps during significant and/or ceremonial occasions, There are some indications that this symbol may have also been less conspicuously incorporated into the design of other objects, for instance on cauldron bases, but the direct confrontation of the observer with the symbol when worn on the body and depicted on highly ostentatious materials like gold suggests that there was implicit yet unavoidable meaning being communicated, especially when they were used during ritual practice. It is therefore clear that this symbol expressed some meaning to those who wore it and those who observed it being worn (see Chapters

1.2 and 4.1). Unfortunately, there is a paucity of non-metallic objects from LBA Ireland and those that have been found do not display any decoration (e.g. wooden buckets, canoes, etc.). An exception can be seen in the leather and wooden shields which are decorated in a similar manner to metallic examples and therefore cannot be placed in a separate stylistic category. As there is no clear distinction between 'ritual' and 'everyday' objects in LBA Ireland the significance of the depiction of solar symbols on gold and bronze items as opposed to non-metallic objects is unknown. Nevertheless, it is highly significant that the symbol appears on object types that have an island-wide distribution (i.e. sunflower pins) and also on those which have a distinctly regional distribution (i.e. gorgets) suggesting that this significant symbol was used regardless of regional political groupings and is thus indicative of the presence of shared ritual symbolism across the island of Ireland and even more broadly across Europe in the LBA.

Such a geographically and culturally wide reaching symbol did not likely express or communicate precisely the same message to all people in all contexts. Even so, its repetitive and consistent character, in addition to its long-currency, does suggest the existence of a shared / primary understanding of the symbol throughout Western Europe in the LBA. Perhaps the symbol was 'multivocal' in that it expressed a number of symbolic ideas/narratives simultaneously and that different readings could be brought to the fore depending on the context of use. Kaul suggested such an interpretation of the famous Danish Viksø helmets:

“At all events, from a symbolic point of view the Viksø-helmets are more than just helmets. They are helmets with horns that are at the same time are masks that represent a bird of prey, and in addition the representation of the bird-boat can be seen circling the perimeter of the helmets. These helmets thus provide several different heavily symbolic utterances or statements.”  
(Kaul 1998, 28)

In a study of Sub-Saharan African rock painting Prins and Hall observe similar use of specific symbols to express a multitude of meanings both simultaneously and distinctly depending on the context and relationship(s) between depicted symbols:

“Given the different meanings attributed to similar motifs it appears that the symbolism underlying this rock art is multivocal. As a rule, traditional African world-views were unified: phenomena faded into one another so as to create a holistic structure of both the physical and conceptual worlds. Objects and associations tended to merge into a hazy, but rich, tapestry of events (Mbiti 1982). This concept is neatly illustrated with reference to the saurian motifs which may depict leguans, crocodiles or humans with emphasised sexual characteristics. On one level this motif may have been linked with the chiefly status afforded to crocodiles, on another level it may have been representative of rainmaking rituals, whilst at the same time it

could also symbolise the sexual potency of young men in initiation.” (Prins and Hall 1994, 188-189)

It may therefore be suggested that the repetitive and consistent use of a formalised solar symbol in LBA Ireland still likely communicated a number of overlapping and interweaving messages depending on the type of object on which it was displayed, the individual who was using/wearing it, and the socio-cultural context of use. In other words, a symbol could express certain messages when depicted on a bronze shield used during ceremonial combat and communicate different messages when depicted on a sunflower pin worn as part of high status everyday dress. These multiple messages/meanings would have been “knitted closely together to form what was surely understood in the Bronze Age as a complex internal and informed symbolic context” (Kaul 1998, 28).

### **Rites of passage**

Fertility related rituals were conducted at particular times of year in the traditional Irish calendar and many of these were also the venues to mark rites of passage for members of the relevant community and/or social group such as leadership inaugurations and marriage ceremonies. It may be of importance that such rites of passage (i.e. shifts in social identity) were associated with shifts in the seasons as the *óenach*'s (assemblies) of Teltown, Carman and Cruachan were traditionally held on Lughnasa, the autumnal festival, while the *óenach* of Uisneach was held on Bealtine which heralds the beginning of spring (Mallery 2011, 180). Mallery suggests that many of the assemblies/festivals which existed as market-fairs in recent times likely reflect a continuation of smaller regional *óenach*'s held on significant cyclical/seasonal festivals (2011, 179). In all cases the assembly of groups of people was politically important and accompanied by networking, marriage arrangements, alliances and both friendly and serious competition (Mallery 2011, 178-179).

“The Oenach once had pagan rites, holy fires, sacrifices, sometimes of men; it was a parliament and a conference, new laws were discussed and promulgated; there were games, athletics, horse races, musical competitions, mercantile transactions, sometimes spread over a couple of weeks. The church sometimes exhibited sacred relics or held synods at the venerated spots. The places of such gatherings were always of tribal, frequently of national importance.” (Westropp 1919, 3)

The locations where Medieval *oenach*'s were held were often also the sites of tribal leader inaugurations. For example, FitzPatrick (2004) identifies a number of such inauguration sites in Co. Clare specifically, including Carn Mic Táil, Tulach Commáin, Tulach Uí Dheaghaidh and Maigh Adair (Fig. 24). Of this list Maigh Adair, the inauguration site of the ‘realm of Thomond’, is located to the north-west of the concentrated zone of LBA activity around Mooghaun hillfort (see Chapter 3.1). Fitzpatrick suggests a possible later prehistoric origin for Maigh Adair, although the evidence for this (mounds and *fulacta fiadh*) could be of Medieval origin (2004, 57; cf.



Grogan and Condit 2000). Nevertheless, the area surrounding Maigh Adair had been occupied since at least later prehistory and has been suggested as an area of concentrated settlement/activity (Grogan 2005b). It is not uncommon to appropriate an earlier socio-culturally significant site for the purpose of claiming a territory, a process which seems to be the case with Maigh Adair:

“The reason they [the Dál Cais] chose Magh Adhair as their assembly place is undocumented. It may be the case that the prehistoric aspect of this site and its associations with the legendary hero, Adhar, provided the combination of ‘antique’ attributes requisite to a king-making site, into which they introduced their own modifications and additions. But the mound and its bile may also have had prior significance for the indigenous Corcu Modruad people who had been driven into the Burren county of north Clare by Dál Cais during their takeover. The adoption of the assembly place of a conquered people by the victors would have served to proclaim and consolidate the annexation of new territory.” (FitzPatrick 2004, 59)

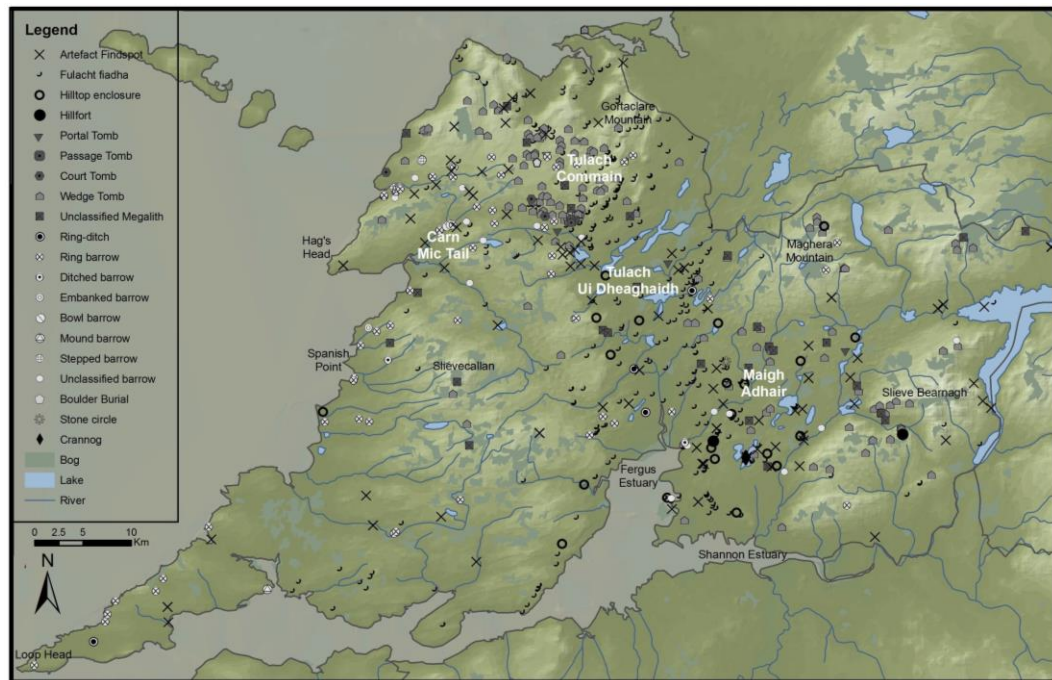


Fig. 24 Possible inauguration sites in Co. Clare (FitzPatrick 2004), with current SMR data and artefact find spots from Gibbons et al. (1999)

That legitimate kingship was associated with the fertility of the land and community is a widely accepted characteristic of late Iron Age and early Medieval Ireland. Essentially, the king symbolically wed the land (or its deified personification) in a formalised ceremony in order to ensure its continued fertility (Dalton 1974, 343-344). Although there is no evidence for such a formalised ceremony in LBA Ireland there is a perceivable preoccupation with territorial control, social status, and agro-pastoral fertility. Festivals containing elements celebrating and/or acting to appease a deity to ensure the fertility of the land and a good harvest continued in most regions of Europe,

even up to the present day (see Pasztor et al. 2000, 60). In Ireland a variety of agricultural fertility rituals connected to the cult of St Bridgit continued until very recently and these (and other) rituals and festivals may have their origins in prehistory. It is possible that cyclical ritual events could have been enacted in LBA Ireland as was proposed above in relation to the evidence for pig consumption at Mooghaun hillfort, Co. Clare, and Haughey's Fort, Co. Armagh, prior to the age of maturation (see Chapter 2.1). Relatedly, the evidence for exceptional foodstuffs at Haughey's Fort could conceivably reflect the celebration of this particularly fruitful territory and perhaps particular actions were required by the inhabitants of said territory to ensure continued abundance.

Perhaps some of the most important fertility related rituals are initiation/coming-of-age ceremonies, whereby children and/or adolescents become socially accepted adults and full members of their cultural community, thus signifying the individual's ability to marry, have children, and/or contribute economically to their group in an adult way. These ceremonies are culturally specific, not only in the rituals which take place but in the engendered and adult identities which are created as a result: "Puberty rites help to make successful adults, but they usually also make specific kinds of adults" (Hays-Gilpin 2004, 107). In an attempt to illuminate the potential complexity and diversity of initiations and puberty ceremonies in the past, Hays-Gilpin asks: "Is the concept of puberty the same everywhere, and is the three-stage model of puberty rites really universal?" (2004, 112). Kamp suggests that all cultures do not conceive of puberty in the same way and states that although modern western societies tend to stress chronological age, pre-literate societies are more likely to stress stages of maturation which include gaining skill sets and aptitudes as well as more individual characteristics like personality (2001, 4). The stages of maturation recognized may vary widely from community to community and even change over time within communities (Hays-Gilpin 2004, 108).

Age group initiations are very common and are known from ethno-historical and current ethnographic sources. For instance, the present author observed groups of young men leaving home to spend a period of time in the mountains of Lesotho. There were large celebratory gatherings at their departure and return, and while their relative status was not much changed in today's socio-economic environment there were strong bonds made with co-participants and they were considered to be men upon their return. The importance of the development of small group bonds is discussed in Chapter 4.1 in relation to long-distance travel in BA Europe, but in both the ethnographic and archaeological examples a common thread running through male initiations is the production of self-sufficient, brave/virile, and competent adult members of a community, all essential to the socio-political/economic success (and fertility) of the group.

Initiations are a quintessential rite of passage, often comprising a three-fold ritual whereby the initiate is celebrated, removed from the community, and after the required period of time re-introduced as a mature individual, like a re-birth as a full member of

the community. As a result these ceremonies may be integrated into the overall life-cycle(s) of the community and the activities enacted within it. For example, in a discussion of BA Britain, Brück has suggested that the human life cycle was metaphorically linked to technological production, both of which have certain stages that the human/object pass through in order to reach maturity/completion before death:

“The structural similarities between the treatment of the human body and contemporary technologies hint that the process of biological and social growth among humans was thought of as a series of cycles of death and rebirth mediated by rites of passage, such as initiation or marriage. In each case, the breaking and/or burning of bodies or objects facilitated the destruction of the old social persona and the birth of a new one. We may therefore suggest that technologies such as metallurgy and potting acted as metaphors for the production of the self. Similarly, they may have provided people with the resources to understand and conceptualize the formation and dissolution of social relations.” (Brück 2006, 307)

Although many authors stress the removal of the initiate from the community and their re-entry as the main focus of the initiation rituals, this process may in some cases have been very long and not nearly as formalized. During a recent ethnographic study of an African-American Lucumí/Santería community in Chicago, Pérez identified the kitchen in the house of worship as a female-centred locus for “transmitting somatic knowledge indispensable for the practice of this Afro-Cuban tradition” (2011, 655). The kitchen is the location for preparation of sacrificial meat and the conversation, banter, anecdotes, mythologies and narratives spoken between elders and initiates that goes on while basic labour is undertaken “served to prepare the uninitiated for the rigors of Lucumí priesthood, and proven necessary for the internalization of dispositions and sensibilities that lead to initiation” (Pérez 2011, 655, 674). The initiates are thus immersed in the religion and absorbing its dogma and doctrines without being fully aware that this is taking place. Therefore, although there may indeed be distinct initiation rituals and procedures which are observable archaeologically, it is possible that these were preceded by a long process (perhaps from the time of birth) of being exposed and immersed in the ritual-religious worldview of the Irish LBA community.

The Lacumí/Santería example of gradual immersion into ritual/religious practice does not necessarily oppose discrete initiation events: both signify a change in social role. Nevertheless, it is overt signals of change in relative social status which can be observed archaeologically. Although direct archaeological evidence for initiation ceremonies (or rites of passage outside of death ritual) is not available for LBA Ireland, objects like razors and tweezers are in use and it is likely that personal grooming techniques/styles were linked to the overt advertisement of social status (as can be seen in the later prehistoric bog bodies displayed in the National Museum of Ireland) as was the wearing of particular styles of personal ornament or other types of equipment like weaponry. As there are later prehistoric indications of certain objects denoting particular social roles possibly linked to age, gender, and social status such as the wearing of solar discs or use

of ornate razors in later prehistoric Scandinavia (Kaul 1998, 44; Kristiansen and Larsson 2005) it is likely that similar social conventions were in place in LBA Ireland.

While associations between particular object types and status, gender, and/or age does not equate to archaeological evidence of initiation/rite-of-passage ceremonies, for LBA Ireland there are indications of the expression of distinct social identities, not least of all that of the warrior. It is possible that rites-of-passage were necessary to achieve a LBA warrior identity, hints of which exist in Irish myth, legend and pseudo-historical sources which discuss the *Fianna* warrior-band. In order to become one of the *Fianna* the initiate cast off all familial ties, claims to land, money and titles. The initiate was also required to recite twelve books of poetry, run through the forest without leaving a trace of his passage (or messing his hair), remove a thorn from his foot while running, and to defend against nine spear throws while standing in a waist-deep pit wielding only a shield and hazel stick. If the initiate was unable to complete any of these requirements he would not progress to full status (Nagy 1986). Although such tests would not leave an archaeological signature, it does raise the possibility that some aspect of age-group initiations and/or the rigors of specialist warrior training remained in the collective Medieval memory from earlier times (see also Waddell 2011, 200). It is known that Medieval Irish bards (*filla*), and possibly the ‘druids’ at an earlier time, were required to undertake years of training in order to hold such distinct social statuses. Although these are specialist social roles within a highly structured Medieval social hierarchy which may not translate into a LBA socio-cultural context, aspects of this type of training may have originated in the BA when specialist craftworkers and perhaps also ritual specialists emerge as distinct social roles in an ever more stratified society (Chapters 1.2 and 4.1).

### **Fragmentation for regeneration**

Over the last decade Brück has written on the phenomena of object fragmentation and the socio-cultural implications of the deposition of fragments at significant locations. Focusing on the British BA, Brück has suggested that deliberate fragmentation prior to deposition was one stage in a process of regeneration after death and therefore linked to conceptions of fertility (2001, 153). As similar ritual practices have been noted in the Irish LBA Brück’s hypothesis could conceivably be applied. Essential to Brück’s hypothesis is not only that objects were considered in this way at the end of their use-life but also during their formation. She suggests that everyday domestic and craft activities (such as making pottery, cooking food, working metal) were linked to the overarching BA cyclical worldview of birth-death-regeneration, as the materials used in these activities are all transformed through fire and fragmentation before emerging as new objects or materials (Brück 2001, 157; 2006, 304). Brück goes on to propose that the human body was also situated within this cycle:

“Humans, like other materials, underwent rites of passage at critical stages in their lives which required the destruction of the old social persona and the relationships this sustained, and the creation of a new identity. At death, this was achieved through the fragmentation and burning of the body itself,

although at other points in the lifecycle, the breaking and deposition of artefacts that stood in a metaphorical relationship with the human body (for example pots) would have achieved the same purpose.” (Brück 2001, 157)

Therefore, according to Brück, objects/materials and human bone were decommissioned similarly during the British BA. For instance she draws a connection between the cooking of food and the cremation of corpses in that both cooked foods and human cremated remains were placed in ceramic containers (Brück 2006, 304). As well, the stages of processing grain to make it edible would have been very similar to the activities conducted as part of cremation rituals, which supports her hypothetical link between the growing, processing and replanting of cereal grains and the birth, life, death and rebirth of members of the community (Brück 2006, 304). This close connection between humans and cereal grain may also be evidenced through the inclusion of burnt cereal grains in deposits of cremated human bone: “Indeed, the very fact that burnt human bone was treated like grain (itself an essential and symbolically potent element of life in agricultural societies) is surely also significant, reminding us again that the remains of the dead could be understood as a source of fertility.” (Brück 2001, 155). Cereal grain is increasingly identified as an inclusion in LBA cremation deposits from Ireland, as is discussed below.

Brück stresses that the fragmentation of objects and materials would have taken place not only as part of death rituals but also to underscore the passage of time and to mark significant events in the lifecycle of the community and individuals within it (2006, 297), like the rite of passage ceremonies discussed above. As such, these fragments (not only of objects but also of cremated human bodies) may have been circulated within and between communities in order to facilitate “social, material and biological reproduction through the maintenance of inter-group relationships” (Brück 2009, 1). This relates to Chapman’s proposal that the fragmentation and circulation of objects (and materials, including human remains) is related to an understanding of a fractal or ‘dividual’ self as “a self at the same time individual and collective” manifested in the process of enchainment in which “parts of people move with objects to others in exchange in extended fashion” and where “each part of a fragmented object stands for not only the rest of the artefact but both persons concerned with the exchange” (2001, 92-93). Although still contending that it is a likely hypothesis Chapman accepts that whole objects are as commonly exchanged in this way as fragments of objects, as well as that there is no concrete evidence for this type of exchange taking place in prehistory. Likewise, Brück suggests that in the BA people may have been conceived of as “carrying traces of events, places and people distant in spatial and/or temporal terms”, some of which may have been passed on to descendants or other associated individuals after death (2006, 310). This is similar to Fowler’s discussion of fractal relations in archaeology, which he suggests facilitates an understanding of past humans as composed of a multitude of relationships between people, objects, locations and events (2008, 49).

“The body may be seen as a vessel through which essences flow. In cases where flows are usually stressed over partibility the vessel of the body may be fragmented, but usually only after the death of the person in order to allow absolute dispersal of personal essences. While fragmentation occurs somewhere in the mortuary process in many communities – of Melanesian persons through bringing together and re-dispersing the media of their lives in mortuary exchanges, of Ga’anda hlefenda vessels by smashing them, of Hindu bodies by cremation – it does not always indicate the same understanding of fractal relations as enchainment via objects or fragments with specific biographies. Fragmentation may play a different role in the holistic scheme of relations here.” (Fowler 2008, 52)

Thus the deliberate fragmentation of human bodies and objects, and the subsequent isolation of certain parts may reflect a worldview which included fractal relations: “the fractal body is open to transformation – for instance, by removing and replacing its parts, by altering the ratio of substances within it, by pursuing one relationship over another, and by changing its form” (Fowler 2008, 49).

In Chapman’s recent study of fragmentation in the prehistoric Balkans it was demonstrated through experimentation that in many cases the fragments of pottery found on archaeological sites were deliberately broken: “There were very few vessels broken on grass or on the wooden floor. Deliberate fragmentation proved successful with all types of ceramics” (Chapman et al. 2007, 8). This observation led the researchers to suggest that interpretations of ‘rubbish’ found on prehistoric sites should be questioned and perhaps even more importantly they strongly stress the need to ask ‘where are the missing pieces’? (Chapman et al. 2007, 8, 87). The observations made and questions posed as part of this study are particularly relevant for a discussion of Irish LBA fragmentation practice as it has generally been assumed that fragments of ceramic vessels found in settlement contexts were the result of accidental breakage. However, as has been suggested by Cleary (2007), the gathering together of fragments of objects for the purpose of deposition on Irish BA settlements may in fact reflect deliberate choices regarding what objects are included, and this in turn may speak to enchainment relations, fractal relations, and ‘dividual’ personhood as advocated by Chapman (2001; Chapman et al. 2007), Fowler (2008) and Brück (2009; 2006).

Fragmentation is a process present in many LBA ritual practices in Ireland, perhaps most observable in death ritual and in depositions. For instance the ritually deposited LBA pottery sherds recovered during the excavations at Moneen Cave, Co. Clare, had been fragmented prior to deposition and particular sherds deliberately selected for deposition as evidenced by differential weathering on sherds from the same vessel (Dowd 2012). It is important to keep in mind that fragmentation is a physical action that may have been conducted as part of a larger ritual. The physical, and perhaps performative, action of fragmenting an object prior to its deposition may further have been conceptually linked to the fragmentation of the corpse during cremation and subsequent processing of the cremated bone. Thus, regeneration after death (or end of

object use-life) and/or processes of enchainment may be archaeologically evidenced through ritualised fragmentation practices. These two concepts are connected via a concern with transformation, something/someone changing from one state to another through the action of fragmentation, and therefore rites of passage and cyclicity. Like the inclusion of cereal grain in ritual practices, fragmentation may therefore have been yet another metaphor for ensuring and celebrating fertility in an agro-pastoral socio-cultural context.

### **A cyclical worldview**

If the hypothesis that objects and materials were fragmented in order to ensure the regeneration/rebirth of said objects/materials (and people) is assumed to be an accurate reflection of the socio-cultural norm of LBA Ireland this may in turn indicate a cyclical worldview. This is different from a linear temporal understanding with the past behind and the future stretching out before us, instead the worldview will be centred upon the continuation of cycles such as the seasons (linked to agriculture), artefact production (harvesting, shaping, fragmentation, discard/deposition/reuse), as well as with human and animal birth, growth, and death. MacLeod (2003) suggests that the cyclical worldview present in ‘early’ Ireland is tied in with ‘pagan’ mythology and a concern with agricultural productivity and fertility as well as reflecting traditional divisions of agricultural labour (by age and gender) and social stratification.

“We can see that the annual cycle of work activities, folk traditions and legends point to the distinct possibility that the summer half of the year (*Beltaine* to *Samain*) was associated with male concerns and the winter half (*Samain* to *Beltaine*) with female concerns. The original two-fold division of the year was marked by great festivals with a pronounced liminal character, overseen by (and perhaps dedicated to) the great father and tribal-god of the Tuatha Dé Danann (The Dagda) and the Sovereignty Goddess and female namesake of the gods (The Mórrigan, epithet of the great Irish goddess also known as Danu or Anu). The further division of the yearly cycle resulted in the great celebrations of the harvest (instituted by Lug, a newcomer to the Tuatha Dé) and the late winter/ early spring traditions (probably enacted locally or in the home) associated with Bridget and Imbolc.” (MacLeod 2003, 283)

The early Irish yearly cycle can be divided into two spheres: Male / *sam* / summer / light – Female / *gam* / winter / dark (Lyle 2003; MacLeod 2003). The two major festivals of this cycle, Bealtaine and Samhain, the start of the summer and the start of the winter, are both associated with bonfires, at dawn and dusk, respectively. At so north a latitude this bi-partite division of the year is directly reflective of a time of sun and a time of darkness (the lengthening then shortening of daylight hours), the change from one to the other traditionally marked in Ireland by the lighting of fire. As outlined above, the four traditional Irish seasonal festivals were associated with particular locations, they are now often linked to a local patron saint and involve Catholic ritual practices such as performing the stations of the cross, however in the past they were

likely associated with local ‘pagan’ deities (MacLeod 2003; Mallery 2011). As Westropp has stated: “It mattered not that Lug the sun god had established the Assembly of Tailltiu, the priests of the neighbouring church brought their relics to be shown to the multitude in the intervals of the solar games” (1919, 2). The quarterly division of the year in early Ireland directly corresponds to agricultural activities and practices, which in turn are associated with particular mythological narratives in many cases related to ensuring agricultural and human fertility (MacLeod 2003). Although it is unclear if the agricultural cycle followed such a pattern in the LBA, as similar agricultural products were produced and social stratification was present, it is not unreasonable to suggest that similar ritual practices may have been enacted or that the motivations behind them were congruent.

In northern regions of Europe (like Ireland) the gradual shortening of the days during the winter must have been of the utmost importance to communities reliant on horticulture/agriculture and pastoralism (Kaul 1998, 270). On this basis a cyclical worldview has been proposed for the Scandinavian BA: “This cyclic idea of the course of the day was presumably also transferred to the cyclus of the seasons, thus also involving concepts such as life, death and rebirth, reflecting the daily “death” and “rebirth” of the sun” (Kaul 1998, 53, 269). Morley suggests that this type of cyclical worldview works by giving natural phenomena ‘human-like agency’ in order to explain events through cosmological narratives: “The point where the reckoning of time and its relationship with ritual really meets with the spiritual are in the narratives that seek to explain these relationships between the cosmological and terrestrial – in other words, where the natural and super-natural meet in explanations of the world” (2007, 208). However, unlike Kaul who focuses on a cosmological narrative, Morley proposes that ritual activity is driven by perceived cause-and-effect relationships (i.e. rain dances result in rain) as well as by sequential events which are marked, recreated and influenced by ritual practice. Morley proposes that the two are interrelated as “there can be no awareness of cause-and-effect without a recognition of the sequential” (2007, 206).

It has been suggested that objects (or fragments of objects) are deposited in order to perpetuate their source (Brück 2006). It may be that many materials used to create objects were viewed as cyclical in nature, in that they were taken from the earth (as agricultural products, mineral ores, clay, etc.) and that some portion had to be returned to the earth to ensure continued productivity. “Doubtless, similar ideas lay behind the deposition of objects or materials such as pottery, grain and animal carcasses. It was the earth that produced and nourished; hence gifts had to be given to the earth to sustain the productivity of land and livestock ” (Brück 2001, 157 after Cunliffe 1992).

Irish LBA ritual deposition at watery locations may also have been related to conceptions of death, rebirth, and by extension fertility: a liminal location in the landscape linked to liminal stages in the lifecycle. A potentially overt example was uncovered in 2002 by the Irish Archaeological Wetland Unit which found four unusual carved MBA roundwoods associated with one or two brushwood platforms in



Cloncreen Bog, Co. Offaly (Corcoran 2003), artefacts which are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.1. The shape of these roundwoods seems to be phallic and all have ten or eleven notches cut down one or two sides (Fig.25). Perhaps these notches reflect the roughly ten months of human gestation? Although the purpose of the creation, use and eventual deposition of these figures is unclear, the prominent phallus shape and its associations with concepts of fertility to the present author seem undeniable. Furthermore, these objects seem to have been deliberately deposited on their sides even though they were fashioned to stand upright. Conceivably these figures were symbolically 'killed' thus firmly linking the overt expression of fertility symbolism with the cyclical worldview.

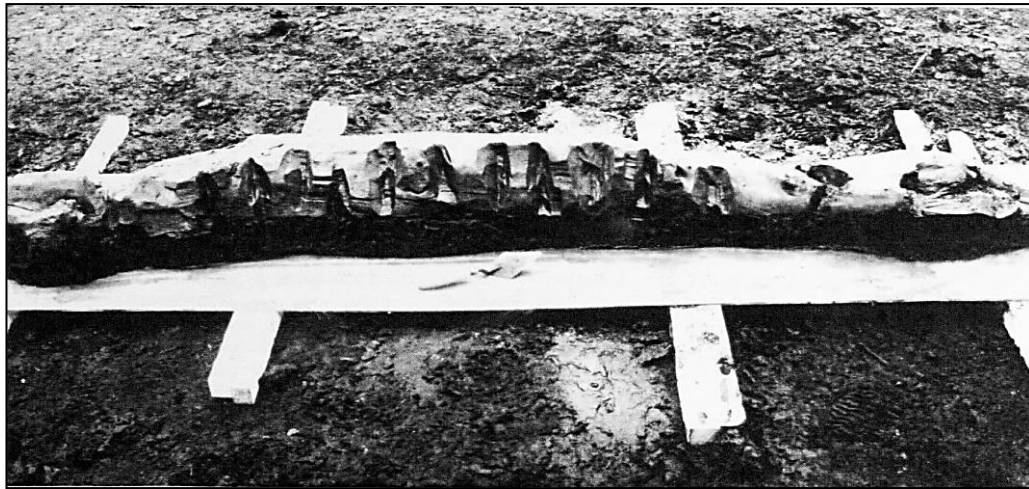


Fig.25 Cloncreen Bog, artefact 1 (Corcoran 2003, 13)

The Cloncreen Bog figures as representative of fertility expressed through phallic symbolism can perhaps be compared, if not contrasted, to the depositions from Glencurran Cave, Co. Clare, which display a concern with female fertility as well as the cycle of birth and death (see Chapter 3.1). Glencurran Cave is seemingly a significant BA ritual location which was not only important in relation to fertility but also to the importance of community networks established and maintained over sea routes. The depositions seem to have taken place in the spring which may be an indication that this was the appropriate time of year to conduct fertility related rituals. Death and fertility seem to have been closely linked during this period and Glencurran Cave as well as the neighbouring Moneen Cave, Co. Clare, which contemporaneously received similar deposits (Dowd 2012), are locations where the expression of this link can be archaeologically discerned. Perhaps similar deposits were made at other locations which have not been as well preserved, are unexcavated, or interpreted differently.

Bloch and Parry stress that “[n]either that which is regenerated nor the symbolic means by which the regeneration occurs can therefore be taken as self-evident. This must be examined in each case, and the answers must be seen in relation to the wider social and cultural context” (1982, 9). When present, they suggest that generally a cyclical understanding of life (life, death and rebirth) works to uphold the dominant form of

social organisation by presenting it as eternal. In their hypothesis death ritual not only highlights and celebrates the renewal of the individual through rebirth, but also the renewal and strengthening of the existing social order (1982, 15). It is probable that such mechanisms were present in the European BA, for instance in what Treherne terms a ‘beautiful death’ (1995, 123). Likewise, in the Iliad a substantial amount of the narrative is concerned with claiming corpses, particularly those who have had an ‘ideal’ death in the prime of their life. Bloch suggests that if the corpse is cremated closely following the death, before any putrefaction and decay can occur to mar the body, the “image of the uncorrupted youth continues and maintains the undiminished life of the ideal society” (1982, 228). The suggestion is therefore that in the Greek BA this focus on the perfect youthful body is a manifestation of a concern with maintaining the social status quo and strong martial order. Accordingly, if the corpse is not properly processed the mourners “are unable to ensure that it will continue uncorrupted in memory for ever, as they wish their state will remain. Without the corpse, the women can mourn but the regeneration cannot occur” (Bloch 1982, 228).

It is therefore conceivable that in the Irish LBA time was envisioned as cyclical as was life, celestial movements and the seasons, a worldview perhaps reflected in the east-west arrangement of ring-ditches and other features related to death ritual. This is an important phenomenon within LBA Irish ritual practice likely related to the cyclical movement of the sun which is discussed more fully in Chapter 3.1. The extended length of time and complicated process of Irish LBA death rituals suggests that the death of an individual was considered to be one aspect of a rite of passage, a transition from one stage in the lifecycle to another. Brück (2006) has suggested that instead of finality in death or the end or extension of life in another realm/otherworld, an extension of the liminal stage of the death ritual may have highlighted the understanding of death as a process of transformation.

Other potential insights into how the human lifecycle was conceptualised in the Irish LBA may be found in the numerous examples of human bone deposited within settlements or in their enclosing elements. Both Cleary (2005) and Brück (2001; 2006) highlight the liminal nature of these enclosing features as well as their supposed suitability for the placement of domestic ‘rubbish’ *and* cremated human remains. This practice has been ascribed to the marking of liminal spaces and/or to links between the lifecycles of individuals and the lifecycles of particular structures or whole settlements. Similar associations were identified by Jones (2008) for the MBA in Cornwall. He suggests that the deliberate demolition of roundhouses in conjunction with the deposition of significant objects inside the houses during settlement abandonment indicates that both objects and structures had “biographies intimately associated with the occupant of the house” (Jones 2008, 163). Cleary (2005) and Brück (2006) emphasise deliberate placement at liminal locations but also stress the heightened significance of human bone when inserted into the realm of the living. The infrequency with which human bone is found on Irish BA settlement sites led Cleary to question whether these deposits reflect death ritual at all or are more likely linked to the marking

of rites of passage for individuals, structures or whole communities, practices which may have in turn been connected to ensuring fertility and its regeneration within the household or wider group (2005, 34).

Further connections between human death, inhabited settlements, agricultural production of cereal grain and a worldview which included rebirth and/or regeneration may be seen in the phenomena of later prehistoric house urns. In a discussion of 10<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century BC house urns in Northern Europe, Bradley (2002) has suggested they represent granaries and the placement of cremated human bone within them refers to an understanding of death as one stage in a cycle:

“Through the use of these particular vessels, the remains of the dead were associated with the crops which would have been sown and harvested year after year. These pots were much more than copies of domestic buildings. The connection between cremations and model granaries provides an example of the agricultural metaphor that played an important role in late prehistoric Europe.” (Bradley 2002, 375 after Bloch & Parry (eds.) 1982)

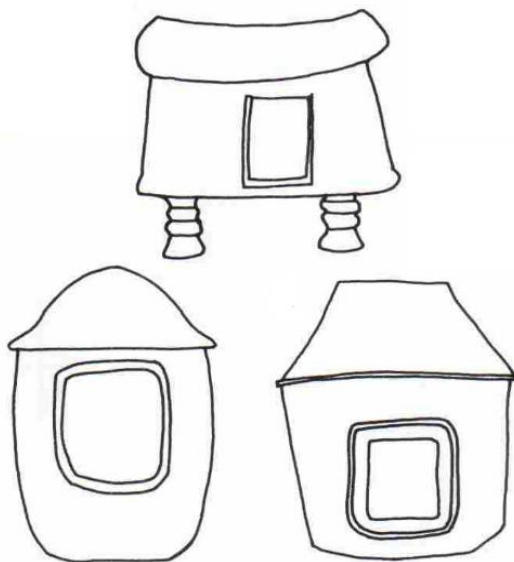


Fig.26 LBA House Urns, N. Europe (Bradley 2002, 375)



Fig.27 EBA Encrusted Urn, Ireland (Lynn 1993, 73)

Lynn (1993) has suggested that EBA Cinerary Urns from Ireland may have served a similar purpose to the house urns discussed by Bradley (Figs.26 and 27). It is suggested that the manner of inverting the urns over the deceased' remains references a house for the dead as this is not a utilitarian orientation for a container; the Irish Encrusted Urns representing a conical thatched house whose roof hung low over its walls. Lynn suggests that the 'heavily-encrusted neck' may signify the ornamental daub or wickerwork of a structure and the lattice-like decoration on the body of the vessel may represent thatch (1993, 74). Although by the LBA the dominant death ritual had changed from that discussed by Lynn, a component which remained was the association of ceramics with deposits of cremated human bone. What we are observing in the

change of death ritual from the earlier to LBA in Ireland may be the introduction of new rituals alongside the maintenance of traditional ideas regarding the components necessary to ensure a successful transition from living to dead. If Bradley is correct in that the house urns from later prehistoric Northern Europe in fact represent granaries it is plausible that this concept of granary/house of the dead was also known in contemporary LBA Ireland (possible LBA raised granaries were noted during excavations in South Tipperary (McQuade and Moriarty 2009, 118)). As we have seen, other symbolic associations were shared across vast regions of contemporary BA Europe.

An interesting observation made during excavations conducted for the *Bord Gaís Éireann* Pipeline may provide further indications of the symbolic association between cereal grain (as a metaphor for fertility and the cyclical worldview) and death ritual in LBA Ireland. In particular it was noted that cereal and other plant remains were recovered in much greater quantities and in higher frequency from ritual contexts, especially cremation burials, than from domestic contexts like settlements where there was a paucity of grain (Johnston 2007, 75). Interestingly, this trend was consistent along the entire route of the pipeline from Co. Dublin to Co. Limerick and it was suggested that it would be possible for cereals to remain identifiable if they had been placed on the pyre and incinerated along with the corpse (Johnston 2007, 75). Although there are various explanations for the recovery of carbonised grain in cremation deposits, such as from stray seeds on the field surface below a pyre, according to Johnston “[t]he large information bank generated by the pipeline excavations has demonstrated that some samples contained burnt grain in such significant quantities that it is difficult to doubt that they were consciously inserted in the deposits” (2007, 74).

Cereal grains were recovered from pits containing cremated human bone but it is also possible that cereal grain was a feature of further death rituals as it has been recovered from non-burial deposits associated with the cremation process, for instance at ring-ditches such as Dalystown, Co. Westmeath (Johnston 2007, 75). The grain was most likely located at the base of the pyre, as the reducing atmosphere of the smouldering fire would have been the best condition in which to produce identifiable carbonized cereal grains (Johnston 2007, 75). It is easy to image handfuls of grain being thrown onto the pyre, only to fall through to the base and later to be collected along with the cremated bone and additional pyre material deemed suitable for deposition. This trend seems to have spanned a considerable amount of time as carbonized cereal grain was identified in MBA cremation deposits and consistently in deposits until the early historic period (Johnston 2007, 75). Johnston proposes that the inclusion of grain in death ritual(s) is most likely reflective of symbolic associations between the agricultural cycle of producing cereals (sowing, harvesting, consuming, replanting) and regrowth/rebirth.

Another practice which may link death ritual with agricultural fertility and the production of cereal grain is the ritual deposition of saddle or basal quern stones, a practice known from across later prehistoric Europe. The ritual deposition of quern stones may have taken place at the possible crannóg sites on Lough Eskragh, Co.

Tyrone, investigated in 1953 when the water level was lowered (Collins and Seaby 1960). The reinvestigation of Site A, dated to 2690 BP, revealed seventeen saddle querns and two complete flat-based coarseware vessels which had exteriors smoothed with slip (Williams and Pilcher 1978). The presence of seventeen querns on one site is highly unusual and combined with their recovery in a liminal environment they may represent ritual deposition.

“...the activity of grinding (burnt flint, potsherds, grain and possibly human bone) can be seen to be closely associated with the process of transformation. In such a context, quernstones must have been redolent with the symbolism of death and rebirth, which may explain the presence of grinding equipment in so many event-marking deposits.” (Brück 2006, 304)

When the LBA Irish data concerning the find contexts of quern stones is examined a pattern emerges whereby the querns are often deposited with their grinding surface down (in some instances the stones have cup-marks on their bases which are exposed when the stones are deposited thusly), they are often associated with fragments of cremated or unburnt human bone, and are often deposited in liminal locations such as ditches or the periphery of sites. A remarkable site of quern deposition is the double ditched enclosure from Stamullin, Co. Meath, dated to 970-880 cal. BC (inner ditch) and 880-820 cal. BC (outer ditch) (Cleary 2007, 516-518). The outer ditch contained two areas of concentrated deposition at the northern and southern areas of the ditch. The northern area contained a polishing stone, three pieces of ‘briquetage’ with evidence of burning, and a saddle quern deposited grinding surface down. The southern area contained animal bone, two abutting cattle skulls, and a human skull with internal cranial surface facing up. There were three other discrete depositions within the outer ditch: a trapezoidal quern with cup-like depressions on the base (deposited grinding surface down), a pear-shaped quern (deposited grinding surface down) and a human skull fragment (deposited with internal cranial surface facing up). Therefore querns were deposited with grinding surfaces down in the north, west and south-west of the outer ditch. The contrast between the deposition of the querns concave side down and the of human skull caps concave side up is particularly intriguing. Cleary (2007) suggests that placing the querns grinding surface down may be representative of a ritual decommissioning after the end of their use-life. However, in both cases the natural orientation of the objects is inversed, creating a mirror image of the way things ‘should be’. By placing these items thusly the action of ritual deposition effectively ‘others’ both the human remains and the utilitarian objects, thus transforming them into the ‘other’ (or perhaps transferring them to an ‘other’ world).

### **Fertility ritual: pervasive and subtle**

In the introduction to this chapter the concept of fertility was discussed in relation to the maintenance of fruitfulness as well as ensuring the cyclical renewal of this fecundity as seen in the intertwining of LBA death and fertility rituals. The overlapping of ritual concerns is one aspect of the multivocality of fertility ritual, as is especially evident in the use of fertility symbolism, in particular the archetypal symbol of cyclical renewal,

the sun. The presence of cereal grain in various ritual contexts in LBA Ireland further demonstrates the prevalent subtlety of fertility ritual. The ritual deposition of saddle querns and the association of carbonised cereal grain with cremated human remains speak to associations between agricultural activity and death. Perhaps the seasonal harvesting, processing and planting of cereal grain can be seen as a metaphor for the death, cremation and crushing and then deposition of the human corpse. The use of grain or other agricultural produce to produce alcohol for consumption at feasts may have also been loaded with symbolism connected to agricultural production, transformation of materials, and opening the mind to other states/planes of existence.

Less archaeologically visible manifestations of fertility ritual are initiations and/or rites of passage ceremonies. Hints of their LBA existence can perhaps be drawn out from Irish myths and pseudo-historical sources which discuss the initiations of the renowned warrior band the *Fianna*. Although there is no evidence that the *Fianna* as a group proper were a reality, a marked warrior social role is evident across Europe in the BA (see Chapter 4.1) and it is not outside the realm of possibility that to achieve this status in LBA Ireland training was required, and at its culmination a ceremony enacted to mark the transition into the social role of warrior. As ethnographic examples demonstrate, initiations can involve protracted periods of training in order to transform the initiate, even without their conscious knowledge that the transformation is taking place. However, the event which celebrates their return to the community and/or transition firmly establishes them in their new social role.

While rite of passage ceremonies outwardly establish and communicate to a wider group of people that an individual, or group, have proceeded from one social role into another, this does not transform their entire social identity, but only one aspect of it. In LBA Ireland it is possible that changes in social roles were publically advertised by wearing particular objects associated with the role (i.e. ornaments or warrior paraphernalia). In relation to fertility ritual, a concept discussed in more detail in Chapters 1.2 and 4.1 is that in the LBA the wearing of solar iconography, like the ubiquitous concentric circles discussed above, was also a visual cue communicating a facet of the social identity of the individual displaying it. Wearing a solar symbol may have outwardly expressed conceptions of fertility and the dominant cyclical worldview that were instantaneously understood by those who were familiar with the symbol and its wider connotations.

There are indications that some rituals may have been enacted cyclically in LBA Ireland. Since the agricultural cycle would have been of prime importance it may be assumed that cyclical ceremonial events were associated with ensuring/celebrating agricultural (and by extension) territorial fertility. Ethnographic accounts often associate these types of ceremonies with large feasts which advertise the fertility of a region and a community or household's ability to accumulate a surplus. Such events may have taken place in LBA Ireland, perhaps most notably at Haughey's Fort, Co. Armagh. Seasonal ceremonies were seen up to, and, in some manifestations including, modern times in Ireland in the form of large gatherings or *óenach*'s, and certain saint's days which

explicitly celebrate agricultural fertility. There were particular fertility rituals enacted as part of these gatherings in recent history, such as the passing of cattle between two fires on May Day/*Bealtaine*, which have not been discussed in detail here but are undoubtedly worthy of further discussion elsewhere in relation to the possible longevity of traditional ritual practice.

## 2.5 The identification of ritual practice in Late Bronze Age Ireland

Of the four categories of LBA ritual practice discussed in the previous chapters, the archaeological evidence for feasting is perhaps one of the most contradictory. Many social implications of feasting were discussed above, all of which likely involved a variety of formal and informal practices. However, there are few instances where a distinct feasting event can be identified and thus it is very difficult to propose what a LBA Irish feast entailed. Regardless, LBA Irish feasting was likely as varied and complex as the other categories of ritual practice investigated. As in most societies (including our own modern Western one) there were undoubtedly a number of customs, traditions and etiquettes associated with communal food consumption that were more or less adhered to depending on the commensal context. These may have included consuming particular foods, using particular culinary and/or serving equipment, conducting ancillary rituals, seating arrangements, etc. There is evidence for the physical use of feasting equipment in LBA Ireland, especially in the case of cauldrons, however the context and manner in which these items were used is unclear. There is also evidence for differential food consumption practices which at the very least indicate that relative to the everyday consumption of food the practice of consuming food was special at particular locations.

In comparison to feasting the evidence for deposition is more easily interpreted in terms of the physical practices undertaken. Clear choices were made regarding what materials were deposited together, if the objects/materials were processed prior to deposition (i.e. fragmented, decommissioned, burnt, etc.), where the deposition took place, how the objects/materials were deposited (i.e. structured, layered, dumped, arranged, contained, etc.), and how the deposition was left (i.e. marked or unmarked). This degree of detail cannot be accessed for each deposition, often due to the circumstance of modern recovery. However, when possible it is very informative to consider the enactment of depositions as it allows the focus to shift away from the 'value' of the goods towards the wider socio-cultural/political concerns which may have directed each depositional event. Irish LBA depositions exhibit intentionality and are undoubtedly purposeful actions, if this notion of *purpose* is kept in mind when considering the variety of expressions of ritual deposition the variability may begin to be understood as *choice*. Following from this, if the immediate aspects of a ritual deposition reflect distinct choices then the more secondary aspects may have been directed/managed as well. For instance, it is possible to discuss the manner in which locations of deposition were accessed (i.e. traversing a bog, fording a river, etc.), how this may have affected the audience composition (i.e. group volume) and whether or not this was a known location (i.e. returned to many times vs. a discrete event).

It is clear that liminal locations were significant ritually during the LBA in Ireland, however is it possible to take this further and postulate that the materials deposited were also liminal? Is it possible that human bone and highly valued objects were conceptually analogous enough to be used in similar rituals? The answers to these questions do not seem forthcoming, but it seems possible that notions of the exotic and the other were



attached to both human bone (representing an ‘other’ state of being) and high status objects which were not available to the majority of the population (representing an ‘other’ social state). The performance of these depositions may have been similar and may have signalled to the observers that the depositors were making a highly significant social and ritual gesture.

The deposition of human bone is but the final stage in what was likely a long process of LBA Irish death ritual(s). Some of the stages of death ritual proposed have left little or no archaeological signature (e.g. preparation of the corpse) while others have left a more substantial mark (e.g. degree of bone fragmentation). Nevertheless, many inferences can be confidently made on the overall process based on those stages for which there is more concrete evidence. Although there are a number of variations, the general death ritual practice was dominated by cremation followed by token deposition and therefore it has been possible to establish a base-line of the ritual practices involved in the complete process (from death to deposition). For instance, there is very little evidence for LBA pyres, however the presence of cremated human bone indicates that pyres were built and incinerated and further suppositions may thus be made regarding the context(s) in which the cremations took place (i.e. preparation and movement of corpse, construction of the pyre, maintenance/monitoring of the incineration, etc.). Like the other categories of ritual practice investigated in the thesis there are innumerable socio-cultural motivations and repercussions for enacting a ritual in a particular way and not another, and therefore the variability within death ritual practice must also be viewed as deliberate choices made within a specific social context.

The evidence for fertility ritual in LBA Ireland is vague and, to a certain degree, ephemeral. Hints of a concern with fertility pervade all manifestations of ritual during this period, but pinning these down as distinct expressions of fertility ritual is problematic. Exceptions to this can be seen in examples like Glencurran Cave, the Cloncreen Bog depositions, and perhaps also at Haughey’s Fort. But more subtle traces of fertility ritual can also be seen in the incorporation of cereal grains into death ritual practice and through the cyclical/seasonal organisation of some ceremonial events. Fertility then exemplifies the nature of all of Irish LBA ritual practice: that it does not exist as distinct categories but that each instance of ritual practice involves a range of concerns related to the socio-cultural/political issue being confronted by the ritual action within the relevant system.

Through discussing the physical actions enacted as part of ritual action it becomes clear that there are two main theoretical concerns which run throughout the previous chapters. These are *control* (social, cultural, political) and *fragmentation* (of human bodies, objects, and materials). Control is especially evident in the concept of compelling an adherence to social custom, for instance during feasting events, and in using ritual practice to accumulate social capital, for instance through depositional activity. Fragmentation is more of a metaphorical device which reflects the BA worldview in Ireland and perhaps other European regions. These concerns will be expanded upon in the subsequent chapters which discuss how ritual practice is enacted in the landscape as

well as expanding upon the social, cultural and political affects and effects of ritual practice in a LBA Irish context.

### **3.0 The landscape setting of ritual in Late Bronze Age Ireland**

The preceding Chapters 2.0 to 2.5 focused on identifying and discussing evidence of ritual practice. However, to fully grasp what these practices may reveal regarding the lifeways and worldview extant in LBA Ireland, they must be situated in their broader socio-cultural and physical context. Chapters 4.0 to 4.3 will focus on their social context while the following chapter will investigate the enactment of ritual in the landscape.

Chapter 3.1 will begin by discussing how the Irish LBA landscape was marked through the construction of monuments, through working the land, and through the maintenance and monitoring of routeways and boundaries (both natural and cultural). The LBA Irish landscape displayed evidence of the work of past people, for instance in the construction of death ritual monuments, which may have instilled a sense of belonging and/or ancestral entitlement that in turn drove an increased preoccupation with territorial control. In addition to the monitoring and control of movement through landscapes, the use of ritual practice to facilitate and motivate movement and/or symbolically protect those moving through potentially treacherous landscapes like bogs is briefly discussed.

Another focus of the following is the consistent use of the same types of location for the enactment of the same types of ritual practice. It is suggested that this indicates consistency of socio-religious concepts over wide geographic areas. The most basic distinction noted below is that between settled and natural landscapes (although a strict dichotomy between the two is not advocated here). This is related to the concept of visible and 'invisible' locations of ritual practice which could signify that the knowledge of where to perform particular rituals may have been restricted in some instances. Such strict associations between particular categories of ritual practice and particular types of location is examined in relation to the enactment of different manifestations of fertility ritual at two very different sites: the Navan Complex, Co. Armagh, and Glencurran Cave, Co. Clare. However, before turning to the enactment of ritual practice in the landscape a brief overview of the more general use of the Irish LBA landscape is provided below.

The primeval forests of Ireland had been undergoing clearance since the Neolithic and so by the LBA there were open field systems, some beginning to be reclaimed by secondary woodland and others being divided up into more formal organised field systems (Lynch 1981, 123). Dendrochronology and pollen analysis have vastly expanded our understanding of the landscape and environmental conditions of Ireland in the LBA. For example, Baillie observed a narrowest ring event taking place from 1159-1141 BC, possibly caused by environmental stress such as increasing wetness (1995, 31-34). There is also paleoenvironmental evidence for increased bog growth during the BA, although since the rate of growth was indiscernible over a human lifespan local communities may not have noted a change outside of regular fluctuations in the water table (Cross May et al. 2005b, 141). Irish wetlands were extensively utilised for subsistence, material resources and summer grazing, thus bogs may have encroached

upon cleared field systems but an increasingly wet climate may not have had a dramatic effect on LBA farming, as was traditionally advocated.

Across Europe during the LBA there were congruent changes in agriculture, technology, socio-cultural organisation and ritual practice (Bradley 1998). Indeed, there seems to have been an expansion and intensification of animal husbandry, cultivation of domesticated plants, and land clearance, facilitated by the introduction of new technologies and perhaps generated as a result of population expansion (Cunliffe 2008, 230). The cultivation of wheat and barley are well evidenced, and rye and millet, which are able to grow on poorer soils, were now available (Cunliffe 2008, 230). The main evidence for cereal cultivation comes from carbonised grains (McClatchie 2007, 64), but there is additional evidence such as the soil micromorphological and pollen studies from the LBA horizon at Belderg Beg, Co. Mayo, which indicates spade and ard field preparation for barley cultivation (Verrill and Tipping 2010, 1223). Grain would have been stored for use during the winter months, possibly in pits or in raised granaries such as those from BA Britain and proposed for Knockgraffon and Ballylegan in south Tipperary (McQuade and Moriarty 2009, 118). Harvesting would have been done by hand using the newly available bronze socketed sickle (Waddell 2010, 276), the cereals ground using a saddle quern (Connolly 1994), then eaten as a porridge, polenta-like substance or possibly as a type of flat-bread, evidence of which has been suggested at Rathgall, Co. Wicklow (Raftery 1994, 21).

The collection of naturally growing foods was likely an important and organised process. For instance, there was a perceived autumn trend in prehistoric construction around the fen and marginal woodland at Derryville Bog, suggested to be related to the collection of autumnal fruits like hazelnuts and apples (Cross May et al. 2005a, 360). The variety of plants gathered depended on the local environment, for instance the tiny molluscs that cling to dilsc indicate the gathering of edible seaweeds by the LBA residents of Dún Aonghasa, Co. Galway (O'Sullivan and Breen 2007, 85). At Curraghatoor, Co. Tipperary, the edible non-cereal plants recorded during macro-remain analysis included vetches, sorrel, and knotgrass, which would have grown naturally alongside cultivated plants and gathered to augment the summer diet (McClatchie 2007, 65). Wild plants would have also been very important for use as building and craft-working materials (Cross May et al. 2005a, 359).

Cow, sheep/goat, and pig usually dominate the faunal assemblages of LBA Irish sites, with horse and dog also present, though their role in society is less certain. The small size of the horses suggests that they were more likely used as mounts than as traction animals, and if used for food comprised a miniscule component of the diet (Cleary et al. 2003, 142). From the average age of the bones at many sites it seems that cattle were kept as a source of both meat and milk, and a LBA unprovenanced yoke indicates their possible use as draught animals (McCarthy 2007; Cleary et al. 2003; Waddell 2010). By the LBA, sheep's wool was an important source of textiles and the sheep were likely kept as wool producers until about two or three years old, the prime meat-bearing age (Cleary et al. 2003, 142; Champion 1999). Of course sheep and goats could have also

been kept as milk producers (McCarthy 2007, 61). Pigs are usually the least represented animals on LBA sites, they would have been kept primarily as meat animals and perhaps also as convenient scavengers (McCarthy 2007, 60).

Wild game may have sometime augmented the usual diet, and hides, bones, antler or tusks were useful, attractive (Raftery 1994, 17), and in some cases of ritual importance (e.g. boar's tusks). However, the very low frequency of wild mammal remains on Irish LBA sites has been interpreted as a decline in hunting activity due to farming efficiency and possibly forest depletion (McCarthy 2000, 111). Red deer are the most common wild mammal to appear in faunal assemblages, generally in the form of antler fragments, although the relative quantities are small and antlers may have been collected rather than taken during hunts (McCarthy 2000, 109). Although there is very little evidence for fishing at Irish sites and fish bone is not conducive to preservation, it seems implausible that communities were not taking advantage of the abundant migratory runs of salmon and eel (McCarthy 2000, 108, 111). Overall the evidence suggests that hunting, fishing and fowling were not important aspects of the Irish LBA subsistence strategy. Of course, there may have been archaeologically invisible socio-cultural factors which affected how hunting was practiced, which animals were selected and how their remains were disposed.

The richness of coastal environments is evidenced by the often massive prehistoric middens that dot the Irish coastline and in some regions middens are the only indication of later prehistoric coastal activity, for example Mannin 1 and 2, Co. Mayo (c. 400-376 BC and 1020-900 BC  $2\sigma$ , respectively) (McCormick et al. 1996, 82-83). Habitation in estuarine areas could be considered even more fruitful as there are marine resources, marshes for seasonal grazing and adjacent dryland for cultivation (O'Sullivan and Breen 2007, 91). Although today wetlands may be considered inhospitable, damp, and perhaps dangerous, during later prehistory they were actively exploited for the diverse natural resources available. For instance, extensive use of wetlands into the Medieval period is evidenced by ecclesiastical grievances concerning lack of control over the areas, as local people were benefiting from their use without tithing (Cross May et al. 2005a, 353; Lucas 1958). Lakeside settlements, crannógs or proto-crannógs, were also important areas of activity. It is unclear whether these 'artificial-islands' were occupied on a seasonal basis, by specific or various social strata, or if they were ever used as habitation sites (Cooney and Grogan 1994, 154-155).

By the beginning of the LBA there is an evident increase in the amount and variety of settlements constructed in Ireland (Brindley 1995, 9). The LBA inland habitation sites tend to be sited on good agricultural soil, the majority of which appear to be unenclosed farmsteads of one or two structures (McQuade and Moriarty 2009, 111; Raftery 1994). Recent excavations in south Tipperary uncovered over twenty-four BA structures at seventeen sites, mostly unenclosed single roundhouses over half of which had suggestions of a 'porch', and all likely with a conical roof supported by a central post, a ring of internal supports, or simply the external walls (McQuade and Moriarty 2009, 114; see also Doody 2000). Often when clusters of houses are observed this suggests

long-term use of a site and repeated re-building of structures, however a few sites have evidence for contemporaneous use of structures, such as the palisaded cluster at Curraghatoor envisaged by Doody as a group of sleeping huts with communal domestic activities taking place outside (2007, 96). In general, the majority of Irish LBA settlements were simple farmsteads unenclosed or modestly fenced to pen in animals, as archaeological evidence suggests that those inhabiting these enclosures were engaged in mixed farming of cereal cultivation and animal husbandry (O'Sullivan and Breen 2007, 80). An exception is the extraordinary MBA (c. 1700-1200 cal. BC) village excavated at Corrstown, Co. Londonderry, which comprised seventy-four broadly contemporary roundhouses arranged into rows accessed via one cobbled roadway and various paths (Ginn and Rathbone 2012). The occupation at Corrstown had started to decline by the LBA, and it is the only known later BA village from Britain or Ireland and thus exceptional, it remains extremely important to understanding the complexity of BA lifeways and settlement organisation in Ireland.

There is also an increase in the construction of enclosures during the LBA, from simple stake-built palisades to substantial banks, ditches and revetments. The enclosure of settlements may be one of a number of factors indicative of an increasingly stratified society (see Waddell 2010; Cooney and Grogan 1994; Mallory and McNeill 1991). The variety and location of the LBA settlements may be further indication of the emergence of a strong social hierarchies and even the development of regional identities and territorial divisions (Cooney and Grogan 1994, 144; Bradley 2007). Small enclosures are often located adjacent to burnt mounds, ceremonial or funerary monuments and agricultural field systems, and characteristically enclose one or two roundhouses and smaller stake-built features (O'Sullivan and Breen 2007, 80). In some cases it appears that the settlements are occupied for extended periods of time, perhaps a few generations, and that groupings of contemporary structures may indicate extended family or kin groups living together (Brindley 1995, 10). As is clear from this overview, an awareness of the likely physical environment (i.e. climate, geography, settlement, cultivated and natural areas, etc.) in which LBA Irish rituals were enacted is essential to develop an overall understanding of how ritual practices were integrated into the LBA lifeway and socio-cultural system. The above thus provides a background to the following chapter which is focussed on ritual practice in the LBA Irish landscape.

### 3.1 Ritual in the landscape

Generally speaking, in the Irish LBA different ritual practices were enacted in different landscapes and locations. While some of these locations were highly visible, others would have been virtually invisible to those without knowledge of said location and/or its importance within the wider landscape. In the BA some locations were obviously of particular ritual importance as they were returned to again and again for the purpose of conducting rituals. Wet locations used for the deposition of high status objects are clear examples of this type of consistent and repetitive practice which enshrined a particular location in the collective memory of the relevant population. For instance, the human remains found under Lagore crannóg were dated from EBA to the Early Medieval period (Newman 2011, 29), demonstrating continuity of use and reuse of a particular significant location. The action of returning suggests strong communal memory of the rituals enacted at a location, such as the selection of particular body parts for deposition, a ritual practice seen at other BA sites such as Glencurran Cave, Co. Clare, which also saw repeated visitation for the purpose of conducting ritual practices (Dowd 2009b).

Social memory of the significance of particular locations is extremely long-lived, in some cases a location may be considered special or taboo up to the present day. This is the case when a population largely remains in an area over a long period of time and legends, myths and narratives are communicated from one generation to another. It is also of particular importance that many of the trends in ritual practice discussed in this chapter are consistent across Europe, indicating that the LBA inhabitants of Ireland held what was likely a widespread understanding of ritual landscapes.

“Overall, the significance of these remains of death ritual rests on their permanence on the landscape. This is particularly true in Europe where stone and brick are the major media for mortuary monuments. They are a record of past and present culture and, thus, an ethnographic resource. They are also an active presence in the community, incorporated into daily life with a significance enhanced by the emotional power of death and memory. They transcend human memory and they have more sensory and public impact than written text.” (Levy 1989, 160)

Visibility is an important consideration for interpreting ancient monuments, in particular the ability to see the monument from a distance as well as to see other locations from the monument. However, the inevitable changes to the landscape which have taken place since the BA must be taken into account (e.g. tree cover). Even though much of the evidence does point to different locations and landscapes being associated with different types of ritual practice, instead of conceiving of the LBA landscape as separated into discrete nodes of activity, landscapes were (and are) composed of a variety of overlapping and intertwined locations and paths some of which were locations of everyday interaction and some only visited occasionally. The positioning of monuments and sites in relation to each other is thus consequential to the perception of a location within a known landscape. This may include the siting of monuments in isolation, close to earlier monuments, clustering or linear arrangements in a complex,

and the enactment of discrete rituals in close proximity to significant ritual locations, within large-scale complexes, or within settlements.

### **Marking the landscape**

With the advent of farming humans began to make a sustained mark on the landscape, primarily through clearing forest for fields, and therefore communities had a physical and (perhaps) monumental indication of the activities of their predecessors which remained beyond the memory of those individuals (Bradley 1989, 135). The narratives, myths and legends associated with particular locations in the landscape (natural and anthropic) may have been linked to a concept of ancestors which in turn may have facilitated and/or fuelled perceived entitlement to said landscapes and/or particular locations within them. As Barnatt states, “People build monuments for complex reasons, often in an attempt to resolve the irresolvable, to explain the contradictions of life and to make statements about their place in the land around them” (1998, 94). In later prehistoric Ireland one factor in the situating of monuments in the landscape appears to have been reuse or continued use of a significant location, which is “usually seen to reflect a desire to associate with, and to harness, ‘the past’ for contemporary ideological ends” (Schot 2006, 65; see also McGarry 2009). A category of site which consistently references earlier monuments in the landscape is the Irish *royal or inauguration site*. Survey and excavation demonstrate that these sites have complex histories of ceremonial and ritual activity from later prehistory onwards. In their earliest phases, generally the LBA/EIA, they appear to be the ritual centres of chiefdoms acting as monumental centres used to perform rituals reaffirming territorial and group cohesion, a tradition which continued into the Medieval period as can be seen in the dominant inauguration rituals enacted (Lynn 2007 Table 1; Waddell 2011, 211-212) a ritual practice that was discussed briefly in Chapter 2.4.

### ***Entitlement and control over landscapes: the question of Irish hillforts***

A category of monumental construction particularly associated with territorial control and entitlement is the fortification of hilltops which begins around 1300 BC in Europe, the idea spreading westwards from central regions (Cunliffe 2008; Osgood 1998). The most noteworthy feature of these sites is their enclosing ditches and ramparts which point to the investment of large amounts of time and communal labour in their construction (Grogan 2005a, 123). Irish hillforts are classified as those sites which are located on hill-, ridge- or mountain-tops, enclose an area greater than 1 hectare, and are demarcated by large ramparts (Grogan 2005a, 111). Of the roughly 74 hillforts and over 130 hilltop enclosures in Ireland, only 6 hillforts have been excavated, most recently the LBA hillfort at Clashanimud, Co. Cork (O'Brien 2012b). Although the excavated examples indicate initial construction in the LBA the small sample of such a large number of sites forces interpretive caution (Grogan 2005a, 112).

A hillfort which has also been recently investigated through excavation and survey is Mooghaun hillfort, arguably the most significant LBA site in Co. Clare, which is situated on a low hill yet “has a commanding position in south-east Clare with very extensive views over the surrounding landscape” (Grogan 2005b, 25). Evidence of the



(potential) initial utilisation preceding the rampart construction dates to 925-915 cal. BC and the site continued in use until 895-842 cal. BC or even 815 cal. BC (Grogan 2005a, 129). The hillfort is situated in “an area of stable and productive soils south of the Burren” and the local economy was likely focused on pastoralism as opposed to cereal cultivation, which may explain the apparent lack of storage facilities on the site (Jones et al. 2010, 54). However, there is no clear evidence of continual habitation of the site and its role in the landscape is uncertain.

“Its construction clearly demanded a considerable expenditure of human resources but *it cannot be described as a high status settlement* site and the term hillfort may be inappropriate as well. Nonetheless it was deliberately built as a prominent and focal monument in the landscape and presumably had some role in the social and economic organisation of the surrounding territory.” (Waddell 2010, 283; emphasis added)

Grogan suggests that the sites classified as hillforts or hilltop enclosures would have been socially multifaceted during the LBA, acting as “high-status residential sites, focal centres for territorial identity, and perhaps arenas for on-going social and ritual interaction designed to further enhance and maintain communal identity and cohesion” (2005a, 132). The use of hillforts or hilltop enclosures as residential sites in later prehistoric Ireland is questionable and smaller sites, like the (undated but likely prehistoric) roundhouse excavated at Barnhill Woods, Dromoland, just west of Mooghaun hillfort, are perhaps more relevant to an understanding of prehistoric settlement (Quinn 2007).

Much of the debate concerning hillforts in the UK centres on the question: was their purpose defensive? As very few hillforts/hilltop enclosures have been excavated there is uncertainty regarding how many of the Irish sites were in use simultaneously, information necessary to ascertain if groups used them as defensive locations in their territory, as one could assume that competing groups would have used their respective ‘forts’ contemporaneously. Furthermore, in an Irish context it is not always clear if the ramparts would have functioned as defensive features (Grogan 2005a, 128). Their large size also often leads to the suggestion that they were sites used for the periodic or seasonal assembly of large numbers of people for social, political and/or ritual purposes (Grogan 2005a, 123). The dearth of archaeological evidence for these types of large-scale assemblies should not rule out the possibility that they occurred. A modern music festival or historic potlatch involving the temporary gathering and encampment of large numbers of people would not necessarily leave a robust archaeological signature. Thus hillforts/hilltop enclosures were likely significant sites situated within ritual landscapes regardless of whether or not they were used as defensive locations.

Interestingly, it was noted during the North Munster Project that of the hillforts surveyed 67.7% enjoy a ‘panoramic’ view and 32.3% a ‘very extensive’ view over the surrounding landscape while only 30.5% of the smaller hilltop enclosures having similar views (Grogan 2005a, 121). It is tempting to consider this observation as reflecting

social hierarchies within a territory, with the larger hillforts representing élites (and therefore necessitating a wide view over a larger territory) and the smaller hilltop enclosures representing communities of a lower social status. However, without secure dating of a larger sample of sites it is impossible to know how the different sizes of hillforts and hilltop enclosures related to each other within the inhabited landscape or if hillforts themselves were ever occupied as residential zones (Jones et al. 2010, 53-54). A related interpretation is to consider hillforts and other highly visible locations in the landscape as components of ‘core’ zones with influence over the surrounding ‘peripheral’ regions. In the context of LBA Ireland the terms core and periphery should be understood to reflect relationships between different regions and the types and frequency of activities conducted therein, not necessarily political domination/subordination as the terms may be understood under a World System Theory framework (cf. Harding 2013).

The exact nature of the system and mechanisms of territorial division and control in the LBA are unclear and although there is evidence of small farmsteads, there are very few similarly explicit examples of high status settlements or dwellings. Mooghaun hillfort is a possible example of a high status settlement, with the excavation having revealed roundhouses within the enclosing elements, although no finds or features which would be explicitly indicative of high status other than the hillfort itself. Nevertheless, through an examination of the location of ritual practices in the landscapes of LBA Ireland it has been possible to more clearly assess the possible socio-political organisation of this dynamic period of prehistory. For example, within Co. Clare and more broadly south-west Ireland the area around Mooghaun hillfort seems to have been of particular importance, as does the ford over the River Shannon at Killaloe, while other areas in Co. Clare like the Burren which saw intensive activity in the earlier BA may have been used seasonally in the LBA and therefore may be considered as peripheral to the core zone around Mooghaun and the Fergus/Shannon estuary. This was a region of active ritual practice integrated into an inhabited landscape in which people, animals and objects/materials were moving and acting, thus the Mooghaun region may even more broadly be viewed “with the Lough Gur-Cullen area, one of the twin cores of the North Munster province” (Grogan 2005b, 63).

Perhaps what we are observing in the LBA is a broadening of territorial control over a number of landscapes (under the influence of core areas), or the close affiliations of various communities over larger and larger areas. Again, this may be evidenced through differential use of the landscape in the LBA of Co. Clare. While evidence of both settlement and ritual activity is present in the Burren, there is a higher concentration of both around Mooghaun hillfort suggesting that both regions were utilised contemporaneously but in different ways, with activity focused to the north-east of the Fergus/Shannon estuaries and with north Clare perhaps exploited seasonally for winter pasturage. This inference is strengthened by the presence of outlying Boulder Burials and ritually deposited gorgets in the Burren, a death ritual monument and object type associated with the Shannon region. The area around Mooghaun hillfort can thus be

considered as a core area in the LBA to which the contemporary activity in the Burren may be peripheral but also integral to the wider socio-cultural system of which both regions were essential parts. As will be discussed in more detail below, the evidence for differential practices and activities conducted in the core and peripheral areas may be closely linked to the action of moving through peripheral landscapes (especially towards the west) as a component of extended ritual practice.

In a landscape study of hillforts in south-east England, Hamilton and Manley suggest that the views of and from hillforts were potentially the most important factor in their 'landscape emplacement', stating: "Such an experience of changing visual perspectives is largely lost in academic publication, yet it must have been a preeminent aspect of how hillfort builders and users described and understood hillforts" (2001, 10). In particular the authors note that hillforts, and by extension hilltop enclosures, enclose space and thus mark it as a significant location, a characteristic which can be observed from a distance (Hamilton and Manley 2001, 11). In terms of Irish 'hillforts', Grogan has stated that "if consideration is given to the local topography it seems reasonable that high altitude or dramatic panoramic views are not the principal criteria, whereas prominence in the local landscape is clearly an important consideration for classification" (2005b, 30). It is also suggested that in south-east England the later BA hillforts were 'locationally peripheral' in that they are situated away from areas of intensive habitation and are therefore outside of the sphere of everyday life (Hamilton and Manley 2001, 32). The authors further propose that hillforts were places of 'inter-community co-ordination' related to pastoralism, reflected in the fact that the hillforts "are concerned with visual and physical access to varied landscapes" (Hamilton and Manley 2001, 31). A similar interpretation has been suggested for the Irish later prehistoric hillforts, although in this case relating their landscape siting more firmly to territorial control:

"It is also probable that some measure of community status was involved in their construction: they may, in other words, have been used for display, being primarily meant to be seen from a distance by the local community and also by travellers passing by. In this way, hillforts on the skyline would have reminded people that they were within the boundaries of specific political territories. Strategically placed hillforts could have dominated routeways through mountain valleys." (O'Sullivan and Condit 1999, 35)

Hamilton and Manley's (2001) argument that hillforts may have been associated with seasonal inter-community cooperation related to pastoralism is not necessarily at odds with O'Sullivan and Condit's (1999) focus on the role of hillforts in territorial control. As there is very little evidence that Irish hillforts were occupied after their construction, they may have not been "fortified settlement sites in the normal sense" (O'Sullivan and Condit 1999, 35). It therefore seems that hillforts, and hilltop enclosures, were constructed to mark the landscape in a manner, and for a reason, not necessitating a large and/or continuous human presence within them. These locations could have acted both as markers of territorial control and as places of seasonal assembly possibly related to the movement of herds.

### **Monuments and monitoring movement**

Hillforts and hilltop enclosures were prominent sites in the later prehistoric landscape which would have advertised a human presence to ‘outsiders’. Even if the Irish hillforts and hilltop enclosures were generally unoccupied they would have advertised over a long distance the communal effort that went into their construction, and perhaps by extension the ability of local group leaders to elicit a large communal effort from their associated communities. As Grogan states: “It is possible that the multiplication of ramparts was intended as a statement of the power of the community, both in terms of their ability to muster and organise the labour required and in the impression of impenetrability given by multiple ramparts when viewed from outside” (2005a, 128). Therefore, although the exact use(s) of the hillforts and hilltop enclosures is uncertain, what does seem certain is that they are reflective of a general understanding of landscapes as associated with and controlled by particular groups. This lends credence to assertions made regarding the importance of lineages and cultural memory in the creation of significant ritual locations in the Irish LBA landscape.

### ***Hillforts and routeways***

An aspect of the landscape siting of hillforts which is linked to their perceived association with territorial control is their positioning along routeways. For instance, a regional feature of the archaeology of south-east Co. Clare possibly dating to the later prehistoric period is a dense cluster of hilltop enclosures, relative to the surrounding counties, roughly oriented north-west/south-east from Corofin to Cratloe (Fig. 28). Although this clustering may be the result of a North Munster Project survey bias, the hilltop enclosures are situated in the landscape in a way that is highly suggestive of monitoring if not controlling routeways into west Clare. The five outliers of this concentration are adjacent to significant bodies of water: one coastal hilltop enclosure across from Mutton Island at Seafield, two situated along the Shannon estuary, and two situated at important points approaching west Clare from Lough Derg. This is relevant in terms of bodies of water as natural routeways by which people and ‘goods’ would have moved through prehistoric Co. Clare as the area around the Shannon/Fergus estuary was particularly active in the LBA and south-west Ireland more broadly seems to have held a strong regional identity due to the prolific metalwork production conducted. Control over movement through the landscape thus implies control over access to significant locations in said landscape, such as core zones of activity and metalwork production.

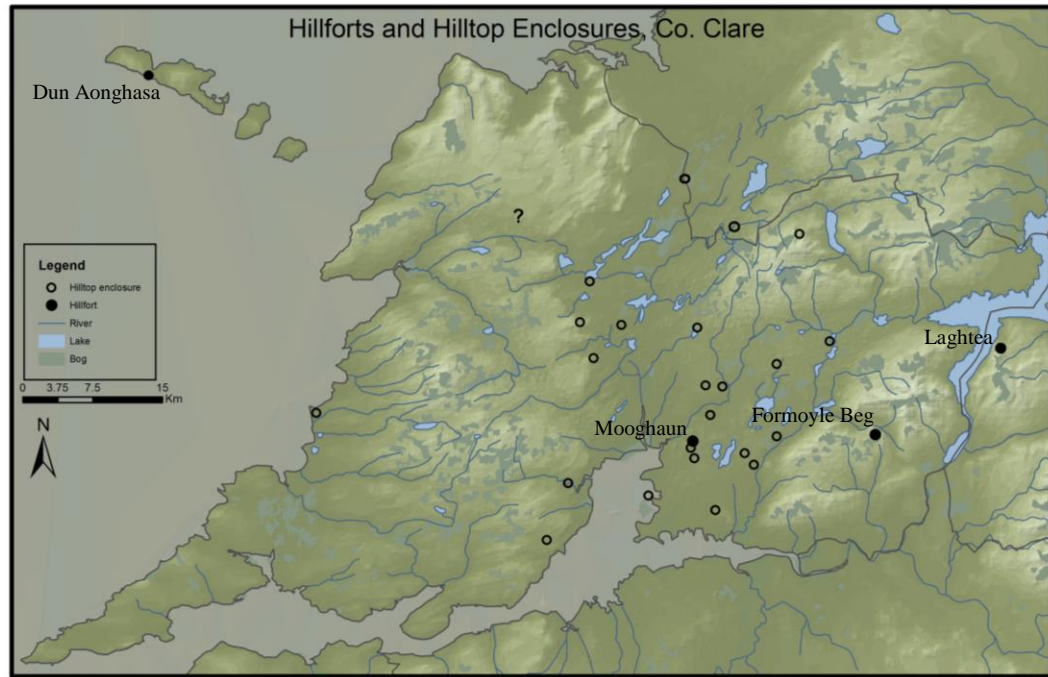


Fig. 28 Distribution of hillforts and hilltop enclosures as categorised in the SMR and data from Jones (2004) (Question mark refers to Caherballykinvarga; possible capital of the 8<sup>th</sup> century Corcu Modruad chiefdom which may have prehistoric ‘roots’)

A particularly interesting example is Formoyle Beg hillfort, situated overlooking the valley of the Broadford Gap, a pass through the mountains allowing access to east Co. Clare from fords over the River Shannon at O’Briensbridge and Killaloe. From the hillfort there are ‘extensive views’ across the valley, and it is situated adjacent to a Wedge Tomb and cairn just off the summit (Condit and O’Sullivan 1999, 32, 35). Condit and O’Sullivan stress the importance of territorial control in the siting of Formoyle Beg, which they suggest may have been paired with the Laghtea hillfort, Co. Tipperary, in order to control movement over and around the important fording point over the River Shannon at Killaloe.

“Although the two hillforts are some distance apart, they effectively form a pair situated to either side of the fords at Killaloe. If they are contemporary, and that is by no means proven, then they could be interpreted as two rival centres of regional or local political territories. This could also be the reason why they both appear to control access, through a mountain valley and along the lakeshore, on a routeway towards Killaloe.” (Condit and O’Sullivan 1999, 35)

The placing of two hillforts overlooking these important nodes in the east-west and north-south routeways through east Clare becomes even more significant when considered in the context of the depositional activity which took place around the ford of the River Shannon at Killaloe in later prehistory. As Condit and O’Sullivan state: “The evidence both of the Formoyle and Laghtea hillforts and of the Killaloe weaponry deposits argues that warfare and political conflict were central to the emerging regional

identities of Late Bronze Age and Iron Age communities on the lower River Shannon” (1999, 37). Thus, the siting of Formoyle Beg may be indicative of territorial control and by extension concepts of ancestral entitlement to the resources of a particular region. If the hillforts are situated at strategic points along routeways which needed to be monitored and/or defended, the deposits of weaponry at wet locations within the zone being monitored become even more significant as expressive of warrior identity tied to a particular location in the territorial landscape, a possibility which is discussed more below.

Although located in a more active zone of Co. Clare, similar to Formoyle Beg hillfort the landscape siting of Mooghaun hillfort seems to also have been influenced by (or influenced) the presence of a number of important routeways (Fig. 29). Interestingly, there was a dugout canoe found in Clenagh townland which is situated on the Fergus estuary end of a potential overland routeway running roughly north-south past Mooghaun to an inland fording point over the Ardsollus River (Grogan 2005b, 45). The canoe could be taken to represent water borne travel throughout the estuarine zone (which leads to the Atlantic) with overland routes which connected the estuary with the interior of Co. Clare, a potential factor in the importance of the Mooghaun zone during the LBA. The core zone of LBA activity around Mooghaun is thus situated on a gateway to the interior of Ireland from the Shannon/Fergus estuary, a significant location in terms of foreign contact and exchange perhaps evidenced in the presence of Baltic amber and unique high status insular metalworking, as in the Great Clare Find.

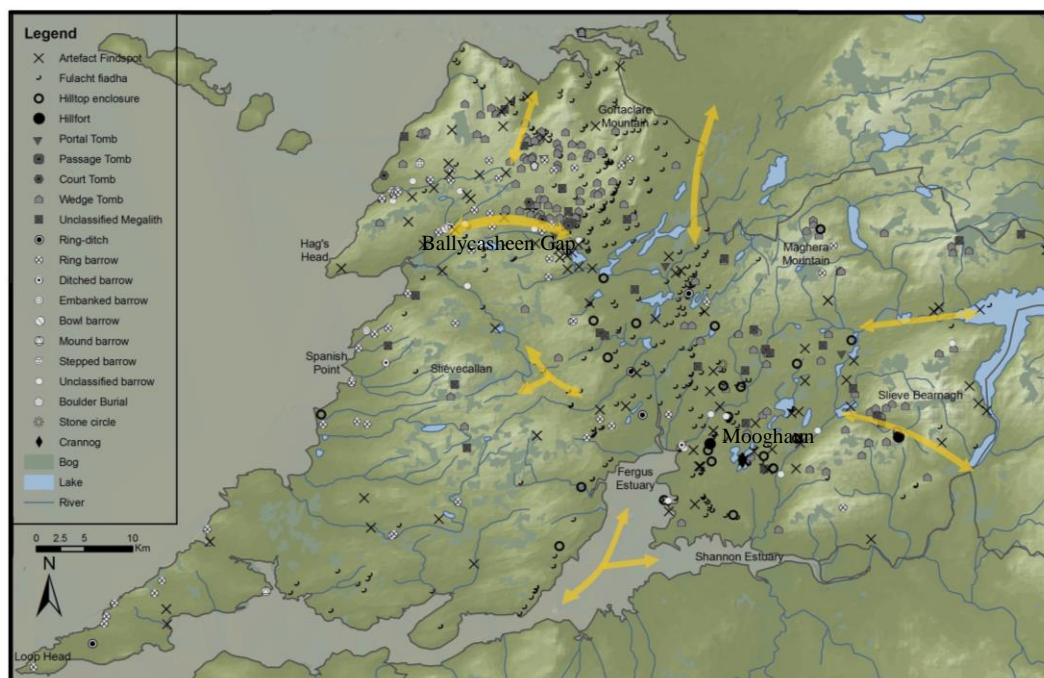


Fig. 29 Possible routes through prehistoric Co. Clare from Jones (2004) with current SMR data and artefact findspots from Gibbons et al. (1999)

Another potentially important node in the network of routeways throughout prehistoric Co. Clare is evidenced through the concentration of LBA activity around Lough

Inchiquin, which is a location of continuous ritual deposition of weaponry from the Neolithic onwards. The lough is positioned near to the Ballycasheen Gap, at the upper end of the navigable River Fergus, and to the immediate south-east of Roughan Hill, a location of prehistoric death ritual and LBA settlement activity (Jones et al. 2010). The Ballycasheen Gap could be understood as a gateway from the Fergus/Shannon estuary to upland north-western Co. Clare and the coast, as well as a junction where riverine travel would switch to an overland route (Jones et al. Forthcoming; Jones 2004). The Inchiquin/Ballycasheen Gap node in this network of prehistoric routeways is thus peripheral yet integral to the activity around and through the core zone around the Mooghaun region. That the ritual depositions performed around Lough Inchiquin are predominantly to the west of the lough is congruent with a western bias in the ritual practices conducted in LBA Ireland seemingly connected to the movement of the sun, as is discussed more thoroughly below. However, more importantly to the present discussion is that the depositions around Lough Inchiquin are primarily of weaponry, a similar pattern to that seen at Formoyle Beg hillfort which, like the Burren region, was peripheral to the activity in the region around Mooghaun hillfort, a landscape which interestingly does not have evidence for the ritual deposition of weapons. Thus there seems to be a connection between the hillforts which monitor important nodes of routeways through peripheral zones of Co. Clare and the ritual deposition of weaponry at significant locations within these same peripheral zones.

As outlined more specifically in relation to the examples of hillforts positioned along routeways in prehistoric Co. Clare, more broadly the geography of Ireland would have determined the course of routeways, for instance in that there are more available overland routes extending east-west than north-south (Fig.30). Even through the extensive midland bogs a series of east-west lying esker ridges would have allowed for easier, and drier, travel (Jones 2009, 122). The main north-south routes lie to the east of the country, namely the Bann and Barrow river valley corridors (Jones 2009, 120-121). Rivers would have been the easiest and quickest way to travel through Ireland during the LBA, but although the network of rivers is extensive it does not access all areas. For example, there are several passes through the Silvermines Mountains, or Slievefelim, in north Co. Tipperary that could have provided an overland route from the Shannon estuary to the River Suir (Grogan 2005a, 124).



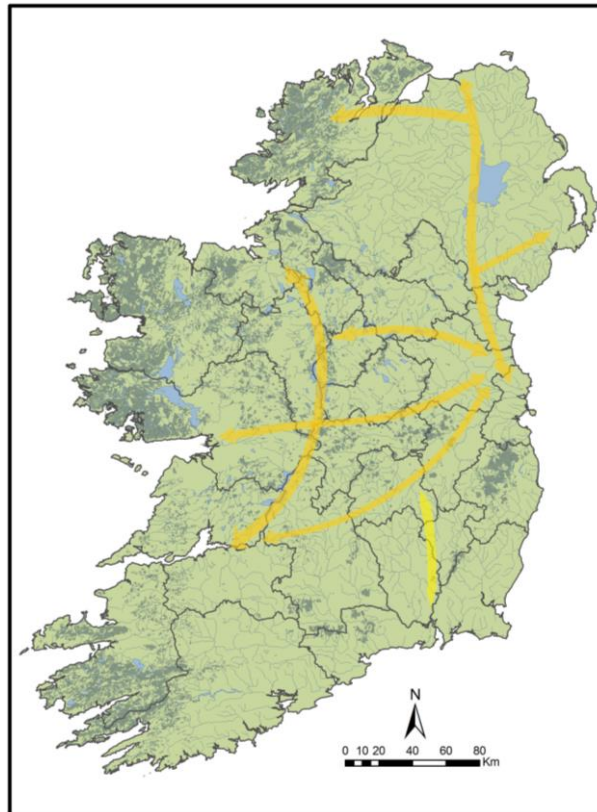


Fig.30 Possible main routes through prehistoric Ireland; after Jones (2009)

The activities essential to an agro-pastoralist economy would also have regulated movement through the landscape. This would have involved moving animals from summer to winter pasturage, visiting particular fields depending on which were under crop and in fallow, and the transport of secondary products at certain times of year (i.e. to gatherings, exchange partners, core zones, etc.). The construction of routeways, like *toghers*, which would have been built and maintained as a community enterprise, also demonstrate how different settlements would have interacted within a wider landscape to exploit available resources and participate in communal events/ceremonies (Menotti 2012, 168; McDermott 2009, 58). “Not only do wooden trackways tell us about the various architectural techniques and carpentry skills of ancient wetland (and dryland) dwellers, but they also shed light on social interactions between different communities, wetland management (who had access to what in the bogs), and even climate change” (Menotti 2012, 166).

### ***Liminal landscapes***

Although actively exploited during the LBA wetlands were still potentially hazardous environments, and also may have been conceived of as ritually imbued liminal landscapes. Thus it is unsurprising that one of the most enigmatic categories of potential ritual artefact from later prehistoric Europe are wooden ‘idols’ generally recovered from bogs or other wet locations. There are at least eleven wooden ‘idols’ known from Ireland which date from the early-Middle BA to the Iron Age but additional examples may have been found during historic peat extraction activities. For example, there was a



report of a relatively large wooden ‘idol’ which may or may not have been ornamented with gold, found in the famous Golden Bog of Cullen, Co. Tipperary (O’Curry 1862 [1873], 206 note 290). More recently, seven wooden idols were discovered in Cloncreen Bog (Ballykilleen and Kilbeg townlands), Co. Offaly, which date to between 1700-1490 BC (Fig.25). These roundwood objects are all carved from alder with one end pointed and the other end spherically shaped, all have notches carved down their length and were likely deliberately deposited (Corcoran 2003, 13). The objects have been interpreted as representing limbless anthropomorphic forms or phallic idols (Corcoran and Whitaker 2003, 44; Stanley 2012, 34). The notches carved into their sides may represent gestational periods (i.e. human, cow, horse) and the shape into which they have been carved is very abstract for a human figure. Similar phallus shaped wooden figures have been found elsewhere in Europe, dating from the Mesolithic to the thirteenth century AD, although the main concentration of their production and deposition is from the middle of the first millennium BC into the first few centuries AD (Menotti 2012, 193).

Although what exactly the Irish wooden figures represented and what socio-political/cultural roles they played in later prehistoric communities are debatable, interpretation may be aided by a consideration of their location of deposition. None of the objects from Cloncreen showed much wear or weathering, suggesting that they were manufactured *for* deposition, were displayed only for a short time prior to deposition, or were housed somewhere prior to deposition. Although some of the wooden figures lack contextual associations others seem to have been deliberately deposited during the construction, or repair, of brushwood platforms in the bog. They were possibly even deposited at “narrow sections of bog more amenable to safe passage” suggesting that they may have been “protective markers, imbued with symbolic meaning and perceived supernatural powers, ensuring the safety of people traversing/accessing the bog on trackways or while using platforms. If set upright, they would have been helpful visual aids demarcating safe areas” (Stanley 2012, 36). An equally plausible interpretation is that these figures were erected to broadcast territorial control over these areas of safe passage: “The figures may also have signified ownership of particular routeways or territories – giving physical expression to a distinct cultural identity guaranteed by the presence of supernatural guardians (or effigies thereof)” (Stanley 2012, 37). For the Cloncreen Bog the surrounding landscape contains a variety of archaeological monuments and according to Corcoran and Whitaker the monument most likely to be in use when the ‘idols’ were deposited is a hilltop enclosure which overlooks the bog (2003, 43). As discussed above, during the later prehistoric period in Ireland hillforts and hilltop enclosures likely had important roles to play in communal ritual activity as well as territorial entitlement and control, social concerns which may be even more overtly expressed through the wooden figures.

### ***Natural and cultural boundaries***

Movement through the landscape is directed by both boundaries and routeways and while rivers may be conceptualised as the motorways of prehistoric Ireland, they are

also often understood as boundaries, since crossing between territories at fords could be controlled and even exploited (e.g. O'Sullivan and Condit 1999, 37). In a study of the BA metalwork finds from the Severn and other western British rivers, Mullin notes that metalwork depositions were preferentially placed in wetlands rather than rivers, perhaps indicating that “river deposits represented acts which took place at social boundaries between groups, whilst bog deposits took place within groups” (2012, 53). This interpretation focuses on the performative aspect of deposition and the role of audience perception in these ritual acts: “Deposition in rivers may have been a method of display to other groups and a way of maintaining boundaries between them, whilst deposition in bogs may have been a way of maintaining social cohesion within groups” (Mullin 2012, 53).

Boundaries come in many forms, both natural and anthropic, and may be fluid or static depending on the socio-cultural context. A potential example of a constructed boundary was excavated in the bog to the west of the lough at Drumcullaun, Co. Clare, which lies just north of the line of the current R474 road (O'Carroll 1997). This east-west oriented linear construction (mirroring the course of the Inagh/Cullenagh River to the south) consisted of large birch posts driven into the peat every half metre for a distance of possibly over 400 metres. The post-row was dated to 700-530 cal. BC (2sigma) and its construction clearly reflects an investment of time and labour. Interestingly, the post-row is situated in a landscape almost devoid of archaeological features but is located at the Drumcullaun Lough elbow-junction of the Inagh/Cullenagh River. Therefore, perhaps it represents the demarcation of routeways and/or the marking of the intersection of routes/territories which are controlled but not monitored and/or defended in the way seen with the hillforts discussed above. The Drumcullaun post-row, and other more monumental anthropic landscape divisions like the later Dorsey embankments in Co. Armagh (Waddell 1998: 359-360), shed light on the myriad ways in which the landscape and territories within it were used and marked during later prehistory.

### ***Ritual motivations for movement through the landscape***

Ritualised movement through the landscape, at the micro-scale, can be seen in sites termed ‘ceremonial ways’ or ‘ceremonial avenues’. Their orientation is sometimes reflective of solar or other astronomical movements and therefore may be linked to an underlying cosmology. A potential example of one of these ‘avenues’ was recently excavated in Ballingowan townland, Co. Kerry (Rubicon Heritage 2012). The avenue consisted of an east-west alignment of post-pits, spaced at roughly 1m intervals, which extended for at least 30m. Although no datable material was recovered from the excavation and no comparable sites exist in Ireland (in that this site appears to be isolated in the landscape as opposed to integrated into a ritual complex) the double post-hole alignment has been interpreted as prehistoric and more specifically EBA based on comparisons with similar examples excavated in the UK. As is noted in the online publication, double post-hole alignments have been found on Irish LBA and IA sites such as Lugg, Co. Dublin, among others. At these later prehistoric sites the alignments

tend to be described as funnel-shaped and lead to an enclosure of some kind, creating a channelled access to an enclosed area. The full extent of the Ballingowan avenue was not excavated as it extended beyond the road take, but it does narrow to 5.1m at the western end from roughly 9m at the eastern end, suggesting the alignment is more funnel shaped than linear/parallel. Nevertheless, no enclosure or ritual monument was discernible at its western end (like at Cranborne Chase, Wessex, England, where a LBA post-setting leading to a Neolithic mound (Bradley 1998, 155)), leaving the comparison with LBA/IA sites lacking. It was thus suggested that the avenue may have reflected an astronomical alignment:

“For instance the sun rises along the centre line of the avenue on the 21<sup>st</sup> March and in September the Sun, Moon and Mercury all break the horizon at this point around the 16<sup>th</sup> day of the month. The moon would have risen at this point on the horizon on the 1<sup>st</sup> November at the beginning of the second millennium BC which is an important date in the pastoralist calendar. This point marked the end of the grazing season when flocks and herds were brought together and animals that could not be maintained through the winter months were slaughtered and consumed through feasting.” (Rubicon Heritage 2012)

Movement through the LBA Irish landscape for the purpose of ritual may be perceived in the assembly of large groups of people for ritual feasting, perhaps discernible in the faunal assemblage from Haughey’s Fort. Evidence from early Medieval literary sources reveals that travelling through the landscape for the purpose of commensality was a common practice. In particular, the *tech midchúarta*, or ‘the house of the mead circuit’, is discussed as a mechanism for reaffirming relative social status. The *midchúarta* involved the local ‘king’ or ‘chief’ travelling throughout his territory to visit the homes of his clients, who were obliged to feed, house and entertain the entourage (Bhreathnach 1998, 20). Therefore, we can see in the early Medieval period a system whereby ritualised commensality was directly linked to control over territory and the inhabitants of said territory. The fact that in the early Medieval literature the *tech midchúarta* is projected back into earlier times alludes to its perception as a long-standing tradition. It is not unreasonable to suggest that similar issues of territorial control and reaffirmation of relative social status were played out during later prehistoric commensality rituals.

At the macro scale it may be assumed that traversing ritually imbued landscapes would have been necessary to assemble a large group of people for any purpose during the LBA in Ireland. For example, people may have travelled to participate in communal ritual feasting as was discussed above and in relation to the movement of special foodstuffs such as pork in Chapter 2.1, or from the location of one stage of death ritual to another as in historic Ireland where coffins were carried along a pre-described (and longest) route to the cemetery (Ridge 2009, 111-112). Thus in the case of purposeful movement through the landscape to perform ritual actions at a specific destination a particular route may have been taken as these journeys may have been imbued with particular significance and particular locations along the route targeted for ancillary

ritual practices. It has been suggested that “many societies place monuments at a distance to emphasise the sense of liminality or otherness of place and the specialness of the rites; the difficulties of the journey augmenting the experience” (Barnatt 1998, 96). Such a phenomenon may be discernible in the LBA Irish practice of ritual deposition, which often took place away from the core zone of settlements in uncultivated/peripheral areas. There is thus the possibility that movement through the landscape to a place of ritual significance could be viewed as a type of pilgrimage: a purposeful journey with meaningful cultural connotations for the pilgrim. It could be argued that travelling to these locations was as integral to the ritual practice as the deposition itself (see López-Bertran 2011).

Such a practice of movement through ritually imbued landscapes could be a possible motivation for the intentional journeying from core to peripheral zones for the purpose of performing ritual practices in the Irish LBA. This can be discerned in the ritual depositions conducted in BA Co. Clare where the closest locations of sword deposition to Mooghaun hillfort are those to the north-east at the fords at Killaloe and at the River Scarriff, and those to the north-west at Lough Inchiquin and Drumcullaun Lough. There are a number of spearheads and axes, as well as a large number of gold ornaments but, other than the knife from Enagh East townland and the small/miniature sword found at Knocknalappa crannog, there is a notable paucity of bladed weapons. Instead, the depositional pattern seems to concentrate on gold ornaments and tools. The deposition of weapons thus seems to have been closely tied to particular location in the landscape. Correspondingly, it may be that those who held a warrior social role had to journey outside of the core zone to perform ritual depositions of weapons. This may indicate control over ritual practice by community/group leaders, perhaps a reflection of the dominance of the inhabitants of this core area around Mooghaun hillfort over the types of activities performed in the surrounding landscape.

A parallel phenomenon of movement from core zones to peripheral zones in the Irish landscape is seen with the deposition of intact feasting equipment in what were open fenlands in the LBA. This may be indicative of removing ritually loaded objects from their zone of use to properly decommission them. It may also be of significance that cauldrons are a type of object which was likely used during communal feasting ritual and yet was almost always deposited singly in isolated locations in uninhabited landscapes, thus this manner of deposition completely removes the cauldron from its sphere of use. This phenomenon can be seen in two separate deposits of cauldrons in Co. Clare in the townland of Moyree Commons and in the Lack East Bog to the west-north-west of Goulburn Bridge (Gibbons et al. 1999). These are the only cauldrons found in Co. Clare and were isolated depositions in peripheral zones in the landscape in relation to the core zone around Mooghaun hillfort. Significantly, both depositional locations are near to potential riverine routes through the county perhaps indicating that the depositors travelled to these peripheral zones from more settled areas in the county. The close proximity of a main route could also conceivably affect the size of the

audience who could observe the ritual deposition, as a more isolated location in a potentially unsafe/unstable fenland would not be accessible to many.

### **The practice of returning: ritual deposition in the landscape**

In the context of investigating BA depositions, in fact all ritual practices, from a practice theory perspective it is important to keep in mind that they would have taken place within a historic context visually evident in the culturally modified and inhabited landscape. This is what Fontijn terms ‘landscapes of memory’ (2002, 260), for instance in LBA Ireland the consistent use of the same physical (or type of) location for deposition over extended periods of time, even when the type of artefacts evolve (i.e. rapiers to swords) suggests that the socio-cultural impetus for depositing at these locations remains in the collective memory. Furthermore, it suggests that the socio-‘religious’ reasons for depositing at similar types of locations is potentially consistent over a vast area. An interesting feature of this trend is that certain locations were preferred over others, for instance the targeting of specific locations within a wetland landscape or river system. In Ireland this can be seen in the deposition of artefacts in one marshy/fen location, like the ‘Golden Bog of Cullen’, Co. Tipperary, while similar locations very close by in the landscape did not receive any depositions. It has also been noted that in some cases a certain type of depositional location was targeted while an adjacent but different type of location was ignored (e.g. Lough Kinale and Melkernagh Bog as discussed in Chapter 2.2 and Frensdengren et al. (2010)).

In contrast to locations of concentrated LBA ritual deposition in Ireland there are some cases where a wide area of the landscape was targeted for ritual depositions over long periods of time. For instance, from the EBA onwards the area between the Aughyvackeen and Aille Rivers where the shale region of western Co. Clare meets the south edge of the Burren seems to have been targeted for a variety of ritual depositions, in terms of location of deposition (along the rivers and in the area of bog between them) as well as types of objects deposited which include ornaments, tools and weapons (Gibbons et al. 1999). There is a paucity of earlier prehistoric activity in the wider area to the south-west of the Burren, although this changes in the EBA with the construction of barrows, especially along the coast and inland along rivers which flow to the coast. It is thus possible that this landscape of liminal upland bog between the Aille and Aughyvackeen rivers was of particular importance because the rivers flowed west towards the sea in the direction of the setting sun (a ritual phenomenon not seen in the siting of earlier monuments in the region) a phenomenon explored further below.

### ***Particular landscapes for particular depositions***

The repeated use of particular places in the landscape for ritual deposition is taken by Fontijn as evidence for the deliberate action of returning, as well as of the ‘meaningful and historical’ character of these specific places (2002, 260). The use of a particular location for depositions from the Neolithic to the LBA also attests to the strength of tradition and cultural associations of particular locations. “It might be that re-use of Neolithic deposition sites in the Bronze Age can also be explained, not by genealogical memory of the former history of use of this place, but rather by a broad continuity in the

cultural ideas on what constituted an appropriate deposition site” (Fontijn 2007, 79). In particular, the deposition of artefacts and materials at unmarked ‘natural’ locations in the landscape indicates the existence of some sort of collective and/or multigenerational memory of the significance of a particular location type. The fact that similar categories of location are targeted for ritual deposition across the southern Netherlands leads Fontijn to suggest:

“An inhabitant of another part of the southern Netherlands may well have recognised a major river or a swamp in the Meuse valley as a potential depositional place on external place characteristics alone. This is different, however, from knowing the exact zone in the river where the local people used to deposit axes (internal characteristics).” (Fontijn 2002, 260)

This suggestion is particularly applicable to LBA Ireland where many ritual depositions seem to have taken place in unmarked locations in seemingly ‘natural’ landscapes. This takes us back to Mullin’s (2012) suggestion that ritual deposition was focused on performance in front of a particular audience (i.e. communication through practice). Irish LBA ritual depositions undertaken at locations within fenland or bog may thus be contrasted with ritual depositions enacted at fording points or within settlements, or contrasted again with depositions conducted at anthropic ritual features and/or ritual complexes (e.g. King’s Stables, Co. Armagh), as there may have been differential access to any of these landscapes and locations.

Like Ireland, in BA Netherlands depositions consistently take place away from ‘the landscape of daily life’, instead being placed in uncultivated areas “better characterised as being shaped by other forces than human ones” (Fontijn 2002, 264). Fontijn stresses that using the term ‘natural’ to describe these depositional locations should not imply that they were devoid of a cultural context, instead indicating that in the BA these environments, cultivated and uncultivated, were understood as different and associated with different kinds of ritual practices (2002, 265). In LBA Ireland this trend can be detected by contrasting the paucity of metallic artefacts recovered from domestic dwellings to the large volumes recovered from ‘natural’ landscapes. Although this may on the surface seem to contest Bradley’s (1998) contention that later prehistoric landscapes should not be divided into ritual and domestic zones, in fact both authors acknowledge that different ritual practices took place in different environments but that these various nodes of activity were integrated into a broad cultural landscape.

An illustrative example of this understanding of the relationship between core and peripheral zones of activity in the LBA Irish landscape are the two exceptional ritual depositions from Co. Clare which both contained gorgets. The exact find spot of the gorget in Gleninsheen (Fig. 31) in the Burren is unclear, but it was found in a ‘rock fissure’ within the karst landscape in 1932 (Waddell 2010, 255). Interestingly, Gleninsheen townland is located adjacent to the main north-south route through the Burren (Jones et al. 2010) and is on the periphery of the main distribution of gorgets in south-west Ireland. The ritual deposition of such a regionally distinct high-status

ornament demonstrates the Burren's continued importance in the LBA even though the main focus of inhabitation/activity seems to have shifted to the lowlands around the Fergus/Shannon estuary zone and the area surrounding the Mooghaun hillfort (Jones et al. 2010).



Fig. 31 Glininsheen gorget (O'Toole 2012)

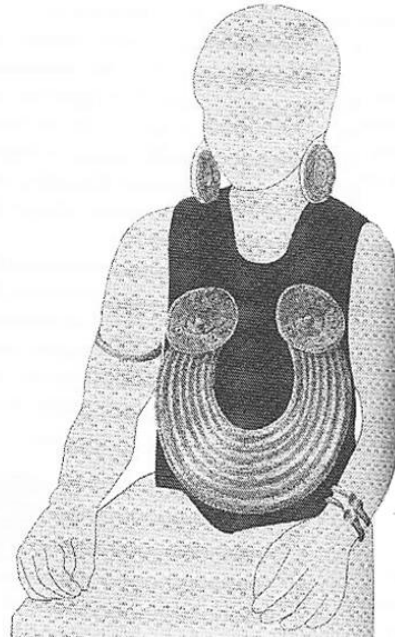


Fig. 32 Objects from the Gorteenreagh hoard as possibly worn (Waddell 2010, 256 Fig. 7.18)

The Gorteenreagh 'hoard' of gold objects contained a gorget, two lock rings, two bracelets and a dress fastener (Waddell 2010, 255-257) (Fig. 32). The objects were found beneath a large stone slab in a field in Gorteenreagh townland and the terminals of the gorget were deliberately torn from the collar, likely a deliberate action of fragmentation performed in prehistory. Gorgets are ritually significant objects as evidenced by the depiction of the formalised solar symbol on their terminals, which makes the removal of the terminals from the Gorteenreagh gorget even more significant. The distribution of gorgets is also limited to south-west Ireland and is possible evidence of the development of a regional identity in the region in the LBA. Like the cauldrons discussed above, the ritual deposition of these highly significant objects in peripheral locations of the landscape is thus indicative of their removal from the locations of use for their purposeful deposition at isolated locations in the landscape. Unlike weapons and cauldrons which could be linked to warrior and high status group identity, respectively, if the gorgets are to be association with any particular social role it must be that of the ritual specialist.

***Visible and invisible locations of ritual practice***

The cultural/ritual knowledge that would have been associated with highly visible ritual locations can be contrasted with the knowledge associated with 'invisible' ritual locations: "Knowledge on where and how to deposit items in unbounded marshes may even have been an authoritative resource, defining insiders from outsiders, at odds with

the over-all visible ordering displayed by barrows” (Fontijn 2007, 81). Fontijn seems to be suggesting that some categories of BA ritual knowledge were restrictive; in this context such an interpretation might be a reflection of the recovery of high status metalwork from wetlands, a category of material culture often associated with elites. Conversely, knowledge associated with the environment and landscape would have been an integral component of LBA lifeways. Detailed and almost instinctual knowledge of the environment has been observed historically and ethnographically across the globe, in both hunter-gatherer and farming communities. The maintenance of taboos associated with particular locations in the landscape through myth and folklore, for instance the fairy stories associated with Irish archaeological features (which in many cases ensured their survival), is also evidence of the strength of collective memory. It thus does not seem very unusual that an unmarked location in a natural landscape could be remembered over generations as a location where ritual depositions were/are conducted. Nevertheless, the examples of the ritually deposited gorgets from Co. Clare considered above may be indicative of specialist knowledge of certain locations of ritual deposition as the objects are of high ritual significance and the locations of deposition are highly isolated in peripheral landscapes, especially in the Gleninsheen example. In other words, it may be quite possible for unmarked locations in the landscape to be remembered/known as special/taboo long after they go out of use as locations for ritual practice, but this is only possible if the knowledge of such locations is communal and not specialist.

Issues related to the degree of specialist knowledge required for a deposition to take place, the identity of the depositional agent as well as the composition of the audience, and consequently of messages communicated through ritual practice, are thus of potential consequence to an interpretation of the ritual use of the landscape of Ireland in the LBA. That is, a deposition which takes place at a commonly used fording point would undoubtedly have very different socio-cultural connotations (and repercussions) than one which takes place within an isolated wetland. By moving out of a zone of higher activity to a more isolated location the audience may shift from a physical one composed of members of the wider community to other ritual participants or perhaps only an ‘otherworldly’ observer. In the former the execution of the ritual deposition is observed by many and thus has an immediate social effect on the status, identity, or social narrative associated with the depositor. With depositions conducted at locations removed from the core zone of activity, the social implications are different since the wider community/group may know the deposition took place, but did not witness it. Thus the social motivations for conducting ritual depositions in peripheral locations in the landscape may be discerned through a consideration of the types of objects deposited in relation to the degree to which the location is isolated from core zones and routeways.

### **Connections to the landscape: death ritual, ancestral ties and cyclicity**

Like the trends in ritual deposition discussed above, some death rituals and the sites and monuments where they were enacted display strong continuity over time. For instance,



from the EBA to the early Medieval period barrows and ring ditches were used across Ireland as the resting place of some, if not all, of the dead (Cooney 2009b, 375). It is interesting that during the LBA this stability is present alongside a great diversity of practices related to the deposition of human remains. Thus, instead of a clearly definable landscape of large built monuments (e.g. barrows, stone circles, etc.) situated in relation to a settlement or settled territory, the role of the landscape in LBA death ritual was in fact far more varied and complex. Nevertheless, certain trends can be discerned by examining how sites and monuments associated with death ritual were situated in the landscape and how they relate to each other within it.

### ***Relationships between death ritual monuments***

Death ritual monuments (likely) dated to the BA in Ireland are sometimes arranged linearly, often oriented roughly east-west or north-east/south-west, or clustered around what may be considered to be a 'primary' monument. Some of these monuments can be observed on the landscape without excavation (barrows, boulder burials, stone circles) while others are often only revealed as a result of excavation (ring-ditches, timber circles, pit burials). An interesting example which had no surface expression prior to excavation is that of the aligned later prehistoric death monuments uncovered at Dromore, Co. Down (Malone et al. 2008). The relevant features on-site included seven ring-ditches, sixteen cremations (all within pots), a possible timber circle, an oval structure, two semicircular structures, and a series of possible storage pits. The seven ring-ditches were positioned linearly along the crest of a hill in an east-west orientation and only two encircled a cremation. The remaining fourteen cremations were placed in pits outside of the enclosing ditches but towards the centre of the site (four of which were positioned within a c-shaped ditch). In addition to the possible timber circle, three other possible structures were excavated one of which (Structure C) appears to have received an abandonment deposit which may have included cremated bone. It is also of note that this prehistoric ritual complex was situated overlooking an east-west flowing section of the River Langan which eventually leads to the bay at Belfast.

Clustering of death ritual monuments and their orientation along an east-west axis is not a novel development of the LBA but in fact may be a continuation of earlier ritual practices, thus highlighting the importance of solar references and symbolism to the underlying ritual system of prehistoric Ireland. In a discussion of megalithic tomb cemeteries, Cooney (1990) identifies the clustering phenomena reaching back to the beginning of monumental construction in Ireland. In the passage tomb cemeteries in particular Cooney suggests that often the long axis of the cluster runs broadly east-west, for instance at Carrowkeel and Carrowmore in Co. Sligo and the line of tombs on the eastern slope of Knocknarea, Co. Sligo (1990, 743-745). Cooney also suggests that the western end of megalithic tomb cemeteries may have been focal points. For example, at the Loughcrew and Boyne Valley cemeteries "the densest concentration of tombs is around the western focal tombs with decreasing density to the east" (Cooney 1990, 744). In addition to the east-west trend, clustering has also been noted at Irish megalithic tomb cemeteries, for example the tombs around Knowth only identified as a

result of excavation (Cooney 1990, 745). A potential corollary of these sorts of arrangements is that of alignments with significant places or to incorporate cosmological events, an aspect of Irish prehistoric death ritual which is deserving of further investigation.

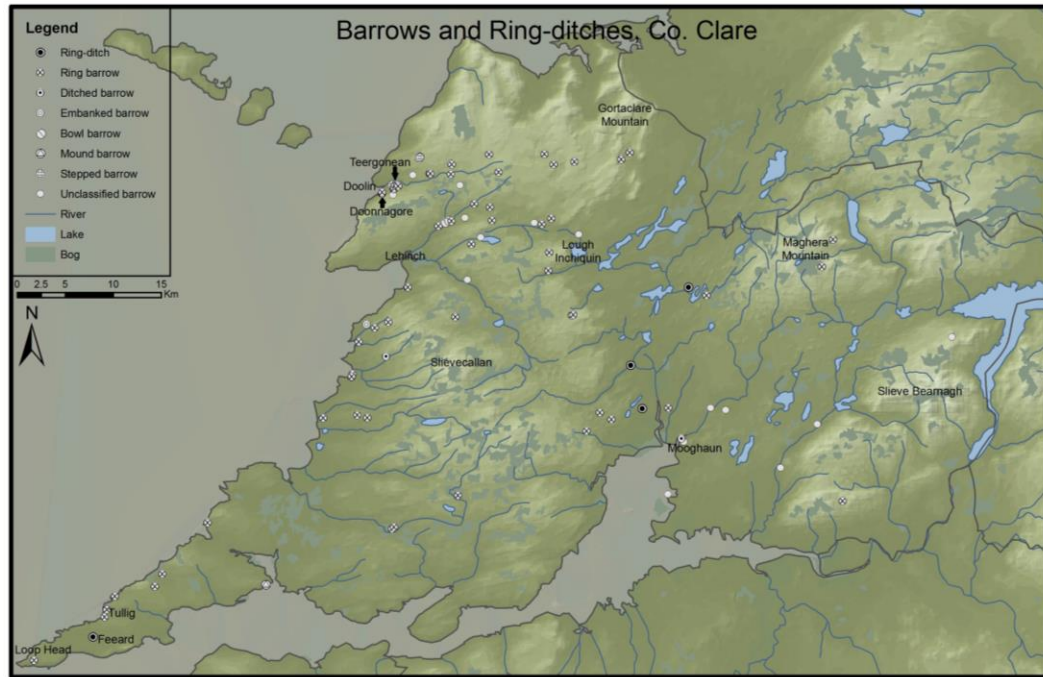


Fig. 33 Barrows and Ring-ditches in Co. Clare as categorised in the SMR

As discussed in Chapter 2.3 the grouping of broadly contemporary death ritual monuments as well as their siting close to or incorporating elements of earlier monuments and locations demonstrates how locations of death ritual practice retained their significance through shared cultural memories and ritual knowledge. Thus the presence of these monuments in a shared socio-cultural landscape highlights the continued importance of lineages and ‘ancestors’ to the enactment of LBA death ritual in Ireland. For instance, Grogan and Condit note that while many of the barrows in Co. Clare are isolated (from other barrows) in the landscape, there are some possible barrow ‘cemeteries’ (2000, 18). No linear alignments are evident in these ‘cemeteries’, and without excavation it is impossible to speculate if there is deliberate arrangement around a primary/original burial which may more concretely indicate ancestor veneration. However, when examined from a county wide perspective a pattern emerges of barrows are positioned along the coast and near to rivers which flow west to the coast, for instance in the concentrations of barrows in the Doolin area of the Aille River and the spread of barrows along the coast between Lehinch and Loop Head (Fig. 33). It is conceivable that the barrows were intentionally situated in relation to these rivers to mark the end of the known world, the place to the west where the sun set and where perhaps it was appropriate to venerate the ancestors who had moved on to an ‘otherworld’. Westward journeying to these barrows through peripheral areas from the

main area of activity and inhabitation around the Fergus and Shannon estuaries in the core zone around Mooghaun hillfort may have been an important ritual practice in itself, and may explain why there are ritual depositions enacted in otherwise isolated areas of inland bog between the Fergus/Shannon estuaries and the Atlantic coast. This could reflect a ritual practice of moving westward through the landscape from core zones to perform (or as a facet of) death ritual practice or perhaps more broadly in ritual veneration of ancestors, the sun, or more likely as a combination of both.

An impressive cluster of ring barrows directly north of Elton, Co. Limerick , overlooking the Morningstar River, was surveyed as part of the Ballyhoura Hills Project which noted “obvious grouping and successive construction of barrows” and was able to recognise “the construction sequence of overlapping barrows” (Doody 1999, 98) (Fig.34). The barrow cemetery at Elton is reminiscent of the ritual complex at Dromore, Co. Down (above) which was also positioned overlooking a river and displayed clustering and potential east-west alignments of monuments. Cooney has suggested that the “placement of barrows in relation to others demonstrated a marked concern with the past and the creation of a mnemonic pattern in which the monuments could be placed and related as social and ancestral history” (2009b, 378; see also Mizoguchi 1992). The focus would have been on a ‘founding ancestor’ even after the ancestor was no longer remembered as an individual but had developed into a concept representative of the lineage outwardly depicted through the construction of death ritual monuments in relation to earlier monuments (Cooney 2009b, 382-383). It seems that even though only particular individuals had monuments constructed to mark their death or were eligible to have their remains deposited at a monumental construction, the socio-cultural memories of particular locations and associated practices were maintained over long periods of time. This is an important point for understanding death ritual practice during Irish later prehistory as earlier monuments were a significant presence in the landscape. It may also be assumed that an individual’s social position and lineage affected the type of death ritual they were entitled to. Furthermore, the variety of locations for the deposition of human remains in LBA Ireland may indicate that the importance of ‘ancestors’ and an individuals’ and/or communities’ relationship with ancestors was in flux or more important for some social groups and/or lineages than others.

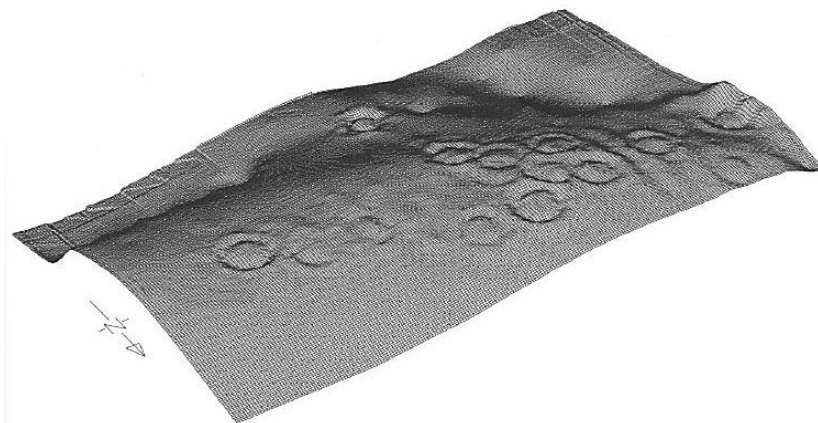


Fig.34 DTM of Elton ring-barrow cemetery Co. Limerick (Doody 1999, 97, Fig.1)

***Longevity of use: Ballyconneely flat cemetery, Co. Clare***

A long term sense of communal/ancestral connection to a particular region can perhaps be seen in the continued use of particular locations in the landscape for LBA death ritual. A particularly notable example is the flat cemetery excavated in the townland of Ballyconneely less than five km to the west of Mooghaun hillfort in Co. Clare (Read 1999). The site consists of an 8m long, and 6m wide, north-south oriented stone and gravel trackway that led south to a raised natural platform roughly 35m wide which had panoramic views of the Shannon/Fergus estuary to the west and south. Over 600 cut features, including post-holes, stake-holes, slot trenches and pits, were excavated on the platform and all were stratigraphically earlier than the trackway. No discrete areas of depositional activity were noted, and while some pits cut each other the excavator states that “of the several hundred cut features excavated, it is surprising how closely spaced they were, with so little interference” (Read 1999). The central and southern parts of the platform contained pits filled with charcoal-enriched soil and in the larger pits heat fractured sandstone. There was a clustering of structural evidence in the north-east corner of the platform, however no discernible evidence of occupation, leading Read to suggest that these post-holes, stake-holes and slot-trenches reflect ritual architecture of some kind. This structure(s) is undoubtedly related to the death ritual activity on the site and stands out from other locations of Irish LBA death ritual which generally do not have structural evidence.

Highly crushed cremated bone (most likely human) was recovered from over seventy of the excavated pits at Ballyconneely, and sieving of pits initially designated as sterile produced diminutive amounts of bone and charcoal, potentially increasing the number of pit-burials on the platform to over 170. Seven of the cremation pits also included small numbers of pottery sherds which are very similar to the pottery found at Mooghaun hillfort (Read 1999). There does not seem to be any discrete evidence for a pyre location at Ballyconneely, but many of the pits excavated contained charcoal enriched soil and heat fractured sandstone and if the BA pyre experimentation conducted by Marshall (2011) and others, as outlined in Chapter 2.3, is correct this may be the only evidence remaining of cremation taking place at the site.

Of particular note is a pit containing cremated bone cut into small squares (deliberate fragmentation) and another charcoal-rich pit which contained a highly polished ground stone axe positioned directly beneath a large sherd of coarse pottery (structured deposition). The axe was in good condition with use-wear markings on both ends, and intriguingly had a cup-mark pecked into each side. The deposition of a ground stone axe in a LBA cremation cemetery and ritual complex is evocative of the curation of ancestral objects and creating authority over a location in the landscape based on lineage and ancestral rights. Another significant pit in this complex was located in the extreme north-east of the site, dug between two seams of bedrock, into which was deposited two polished bone pins and a very small serrated copper alloy blade (<20mm), interestingly reminiscent of the deposition of the Gleninsheen gorget in the karst landscape of the Burren. In addition to the pits a small circular copper smelting

furnace was uncovered which could indicate close connections between the transformative nature of both the cremation process and metalworking.

The exceptional number of cremated bone depositions at Ballyconneely alludes to a sense of community/group identity. The continued use of a particular site for the ritual deposition of human remains (and likely the performance of ancillary death rituals) over a considerable period of time suggests a conception of being linked to those already ‘interred’ in terms of being from the same group (kin, community, etc.) as well as maintaining ties to ancestors. Furthermore, the post-cremation processing of bone indicates that the individual was transformed into ‘other’ at death, and that only a token portion of the remains were deposited at Ballyconneely, perhaps an expression of ‘dividual’ identity. The question is thus what was done with the rest? There are numerous possibilities which would not leave an archaeological trace, such as distribution to the mourners, and/or use in subsequent or parallel rituals, and/or deposition elsewhere in the landscape (e.g. in the westward flowing Ardsollus River to the north of the site).

The wider landscape in which the Ballyconneely ritual complex is situated is highly significant as it sits on the eastern bank of the northern extent of the Fergus estuary and to the west of Mooghaun hillfort and the findspot of the Great Clare Find. In the immediate area are a linear earthwork, an unclassified barrow, and three enclosures while further to the north-east is the traditional inauguration site of Magh Adhair. During the North Munster project a “significant group of well-preserved *fulachta fiadh*” was noted in the townland of Ballyconnelly to the north of the area of dryland on which the flat cemetery is situated (Grogan 2005b, 43). Grogan (2005b) associates *fulachta fiadh* with settlement, however the presence of *fulachta fiadh* close to such a large flat cemetery could also indicate an association between death ritual practice and ancillary activities connected to *fulachta* use, such as ritual food preparation or purification rituals like bathing.

To the north of Ballyconneely on an area of high ground over-looking the floodplain of the Ardsollus River, two other flat cemeteries were excavated, the multiperiod sites of Manusmore AR100 and AR102 (Hull 2006; Bermingham et al. 2012, 44-51). Manusmore AR100, which was further north from the river than AR102, produced dates ranging from the Chalcolithic to the Iron Age (Bermingham et al. 2012, 44) while the dates from Manusmore AR102 were largely confined to the early Iron Age c.780 to 160 BC with one Early Christian date (Hull 2006, 22). The earlier AR100 contained sixty-one cut features of which at least twenty-seven contained cremated human bone, and the later AR102 had thirty-six cut features with five to eight containing cremated human bone. Like Ballyconneely, both Manusmore sites did not have discrete evidence for a pyre but do have pyre debris and charcoal rich deposits within pits. Interestingly, the archaeobotanist Val Fryer identified grain (as well as nut shell and fruit stone fragments) in four of the pits from AR102 containing human bone, which may indicate food items or raw grain being placed on the pyre with the deceased (Hull 2006, 12, 15), a later prehistoric ritual phenomenon which has been noted across Ireland (see Chapter

2.4). Also, the token deposits of cremated human bone from AR102 were mostly composed of fragments under 2mm in size leaving the investigating osteo-archaeologist Sîan Anthony with “a lack of recognisable pieces throughout the assemblage” (Hull 2006, 9). Although dated to the earlier Iron Age the inclusion of cereal grain and the post-cremation fragmentation of human bone as part of the death rituals enacted on this site could suggest continuation of ritual practice from the LBA. Evidence from both Ballyconneely and Manusmor also indicate the long-term use of the sites for enactment of death ritual, thus conforming to another consistent trend in Irish ritual practice, the enduring significance of particular ritual locations, which may reflect ancestral connections to the landscape.

Ballyconneely and Manusmore flat cemeteries are situated in close proximity to each other within a core zone of Co. Clare yet are separated by the Ardsollus River. Jones suggests that the position and flow of the Ardsollus, the Fergus and the lower Shannon rivers may be of particular importance in the siting of these later prehistoric death ritual sites in this inhabited landscape:

“As the cemeteries are located on the east side of the Fergus, the views from the cemeteries over the estuary are directed to the west and south-west, the direction of the setting sun. The south-west was associated in medieval texts with the pagan god of death and it has been suggested that the south-western orientation of wedge tombs may indicate that this association between death and the south-west might go all the way back to the Chalcolithic (O’Brien 2002). This would certainly add another symbolic dimension to the sites. If the bulk of the cremated remains were deposited in the Ardsollus and the Fergus, the flow of the Ardsollus west into the Fergus which then flows south to the Shannon, which in turn flows west to the sea, may have been viewed as instrumental in transporting the souls of the dead into the land of the setting sun (while still leaving token remnants of the dead on the hill, close to the land of the living).” (Jones 2012, 57)

According to the online *Placenames Database of Ireland*, Ardsollus comes from the Irish *Áth Solas*, *áth* = ford and *solas* = light, lightning, flame, beacon. There is a ford over the river Ardsollus in the townland of the same name, but it is tempting to relate the term *solas* to the light of the sun.

The flat cemeteries may also demonstrate affiliations between particular communities and particular ritually significant locations. These two death ritual locations are situated close together in the landscape, yet demonstrate substantially different degrees of ritual activity: 37 cut features compared to over 600. The nature of the differential use of Ballyconneely and Manusmore is unclear, but it could indicate the longevity of particular lineages, or the association of different segments of society with different death ritual locations regardless of lineage or location of habitation. This is particularly relevant when considering issues of community/group identity in the LBA, as the deposited remains have been transformed through cremation and fragmentation from

individual to generic 'other' in that the remains no longer resemble the living person. Yet those locations are revisited over a long period of time suggesting a communal affinity to the remains deposited at this particular location, perhaps indicating that the death rituals enacted have more to do with the group than the deceased individuals.

The community connection to a particular location of death ritual could also be reflected in the siting of Ballyconneely in relation to Mooghaun. The landscape around the hillfort slopes down towards the flat cemetery, which is located to its south-west, and thus if a pyre were lit at Ballyconneely it could be seen burning to the west from the ramparts at Mooghaun. Even if, or perhaps especially if, it were only the highest status individuals from the region who were cremated/deposited at Ballyconneely (as opposed to all individuals from a single community) long-distance viewing of the incineration would have signalled to the surrounding community that significant social renegotiation was or soon would be taking place. The significance of views of monuments in the landscape was discussed above in relation to hillforts and the demarcation of an area to outwardly express a presence in a region/territory. It is possible that in addition to the wide views of the surrounding landscape that can be seen from Ballyconneely and Manusmore, their position on higher ground would have allowed for particular ritual practices to be observed taking place at these sites from a distance away.

### **Symbolic associations: fertility ritual in different landscapes**

As has been discussed, there are observable trends in the types of ritual performed in core/domestic landscapes and those performed in peripheral/natural landscapes during the Irish LBA. While the complete landscape would have been used by agro-pastoralists as part of everyday and seasonal routines (e.g. transhumance), it does seem that more 'monumental' rituals, in the types of artefacts employed and/or the sites constructed, were performed away from settlements like farmsteads where the rituals performed were smaller in scale and degree of potential spectacle. Therefore, the association of certain ritual practices with certain types of landscapes may be related to a perceived symbolic difference between the domestic landscape of habitual or core settlement and the natural landscape existing away from settlements. There are various inferences which could be made from this supposition:

- 1) rituals enacted away from settlements involved assemblies of people from many settlements thus necessitating a larger and/or neutral area
- 2) rituals at 'monumental' locations involved higher status individuals/groups while smaller scale rituals observed on settlements were conducted by a lower status individuals/groups (e.g. differential associations between type of location and recovery of artefact types)
- 3) dichotomies between rituals enacted in 'domestic' and 'natural' landscapes reflect a cultural subservience and attentiveness to the natural forces which directly affected the fertility and success of a community.

The first and second possibilities have been discussed above, thus the following section will focus on this third supposition in more detail.

### ***Rituals in domestic and natural landscapes***

In *The Significance of Monuments*, Bradley suggested that “in discussing prehistoric perception of the world archaeologists have made an unwarranted distinction between domestic landscapes, with their evidence of food production, and what they call ritual landscapes, with their more specialised monuments” instead of recognising that they are one in the same (1998, 150; see also Ingold 2000, 191). In LBA Ireland there are perceivable differences in the types of ritual practices performed at particular types of locations which, instead of implying a division, suggests that all landscapes regardless of their explicit association with ‘domestic’ or ‘ritual’ activities were integrated into an overarching ritual and social system (see Chapter 1.1 for a discussion of the system as understood within a practice theory framework).

In his discussion of BA depositional practices in the Meuse Valley, Netherlands, Fontijn suggests that rather than being considered peripheral to agricultural landscapes these natural landscapes “are literally uncultivated: as far as we know, there were no lasting human markers, and there were no man-made cult places” (2002, 264). Although stressing that the natural character of these depositional locations does not imply that they exist outside of a cultural context Fontijn noted that the very artefacts which were integral aspects of BA agricultural practice, the axe and the sickle, are very rarely found in domestic landscapes, instead they are deposited at natural locations (2002, 265). The tools used to domesticate the landscape are thus deposited in undomesticated landscapes. Conversely, in an article discussing natural ritual locations such as sacred groves in north-western European prehistory through the ethnographic study of Tallensi shrines in Ghana, Insoll (2007) criticises the imposition of a modern Western dichotomy between domesticated and natural landscapes onto the past. The evidence presented by Insoll demonstrates that the ritual use of domestic and natural landscapes is not straightforward, that there may have been practices undertaken which are not always archaeologically discernible (the conservation of particular trees or stands of trees is a pertinent example), and that for groups inhabiting a territory all landscapes within that territory were understood in a culturally constituted way (Insoll 2007; see also Bradley 1998, 150).

Perhaps one of the most intriguing examples of the interlacing of domestic and natural in a ritual landscape is that of the Navan complex in Co. Armagh, in particular the LBA sites of Haughey’s Fort and its associated ritual pool the King’s Stables. Although palaeobotanical evidence for cereals is present in the Navan complex from c. 1760 BC, a major clearance phase is evident from about 1400-1000 BC during which the levels for cereals reaches about 6%, suggested to be “among the highest known from Irish prehistoric sites” (Mallory 1995, 79). The large volumes of carbonised processed barley recovered from pits within the inner enclosure of Haughey’s Fort are a further indication of the importance of the products of cultivation in the rituals enacted. Wetland depositions were conducted elsewhere in the wider ritual landscape of the



Navan complex (e.g. the Tamlaght Hoard discussed in Chapter 2.2 (Warner 2006)), however the objects and materials found in the excavation of the King's Stables are different to those usually characteristic of a wetland deposit (i.e. moulds as opposed to complete metallic objects), indicating that the purpose of its construction was not to mimic the natural landscape but to create another type of ritual location entirely. To elaborate, the artefacts recovered from the neighbouring (natural) Loughnashade are more congruent with the types of ritual deposits found at other natural depositional locations than with the artefacts recovered from the (constructed) King's Stables.

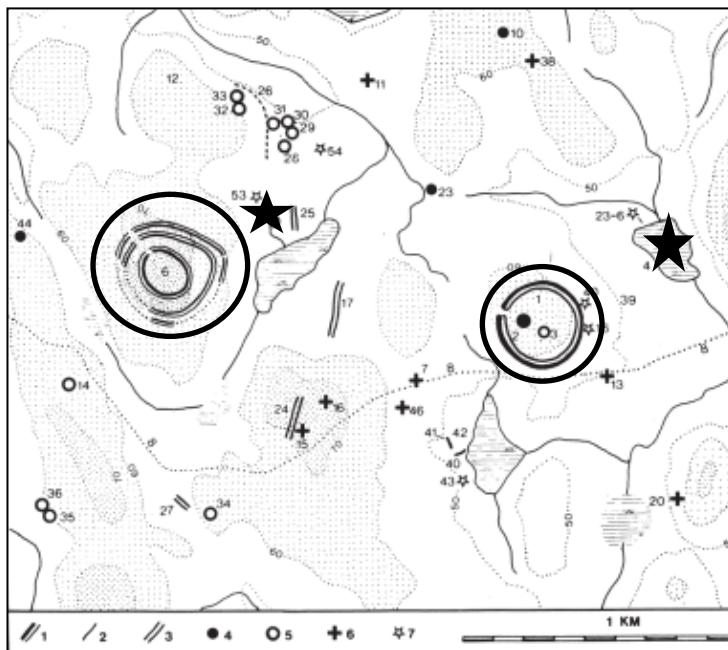


Fig.35 Navan Complex with forts circled and locations of wet deposition marked with a star (Waddell 1998, 333 Fig. 163)

The east towards west orientation of ritual monuments is also noticeable in the juxtaposition of monuments with ritual ponds to the north-east in the Navan complex, where the LBA Haughey's Fort is juxtaposed with the King's Stables and the IA Navan Fort is juxtaposed with Loughnashade (Fig.35). The discovery of the Great Clare Find 750m to the north-east of Mooghaun hillfort may also be evidence of this phenomena (Waddell 2010, 265). However, both the King's Stables and Loughnashade are at least half that distance from their monumental counterpart, suggesting another ritual motivation behind the location of the Great Clare Find. Since the Irish landscape has been drained and altered since the LBA there may well have been additional examples of communal ritual locations with ritual 'ponds' to their north-east that can no longer be discerned. It is nevertheless significant that a broad east-west trend in the alignment of multiple ritual monuments or of the orientation of single ritual monuments (or the activity therein) has been noted in particular for death ritual monuments (see for example Mogeey et al. 1956).

The trend seen in the ritual activities at Haughey's Fort and the King's Stables could conceivably be related to celebrating the finest products of the region: the best barley, the largest animals, and the most advanced ceramics (an association with the production of metalwork is also strong). As the area was under cultivation prior to the construction of monuments perhaps its fertility was a factor in its development as a significant ritual location. It has been observed that during the LBA across Ireland there is "a retraction of the expansion into marginal areas that characterised the preceding centuries and a reorganisation and probably an intensification of food production in areas with more robust soils" accompanied by evidence of a more hierarchical society focussed on control of landscapes (Jones et al. 2010, 55). What may be evident in the ritual practices performed at Haughey's Fort and the King's Stables is not only the expression of control (political and ritual) over an agriculturally fertile region but also the need to ensure its continued fertility through the 'sacrifice' of its best products through ritual commensality and ritual deposition in the earth (Haughey's Fort) and water (King's Stables).

***Domestic fertility in a wild landscape: Glencurran Cave, Co. Clare***

In contrast to monuments like Haughey's Fort and the King's Stables, are naturally isolated locations, such as caves which in prehistoric Ireland "were perceived as sacred foci in the landscape, linked to concepts of death, the unknown and passages to another world" (Dowd 2002, 89). The available evidence suggests that throughout Irish prehistory caves were significant ritual locations with particular links to death and fertility, interrelated concepts in LBA Ireland. Interestingly, very few archaeological human bone assemblages from Irish caves display signs of gnawing by scavengers even though the bones were evidently placed directly on the cave floor, implying that the cave entrances were blocked to protect the dead (Dowd 2006b, 17), or perhaps to limit access to these important ritual locations in the landscape.

"The appreciation and use of caves as sacred or special places has survived into the twentieth century. They are frequently associated with religious pilgrimages, patterns at holy wells and festive assemblies at natural places – practices which are widely believed to have pre-Christian origins. In legends regarding caves that are associated with holy wells and pilgrimages, the protagonist is, without exception, a male saint." (Dowd 2001, 28)

These caves which seem to have been associated with religious males provide a contrast to the female/fertility connotations of the later prehistoric materials uncovered at Glencurran Cave, Co. Clare, which are discussed below (Dowd 2009b). Interestingly, amber was found at both Glencurran Cave and Kilgreany Cave (Dowd 2002), perhaps signifying that this material was important to the concept of fertility or fertility ritual in general (perhaps in connection to the solar cycle) as opposed to being associated with gendered human fertility. Even from this very cursory review which has not taken into account the important magical and underworld associations caves have in myth and folklore it is obvious that caves have long been considered important liminal and ritually significant locations in the Irish landscape.

The deposition of neonatal domesticated animals, human infants and shells perforated in a way which is suggestive of female genitalia all point to a connection with female fertility and cycles of birth, death and rebirth in the ritual practices performed from the MBA to LBA at Glencurran Cave, Tullycommon townland in the Burren, Co. Clare (Dowd 2006a; 2009a; 2009b). The MBA features included a small drystone cairn (reconstructed *in situ*) related to the remains of at least two human individuals associated with faunal deposits, personal ornaments and a stone axe. ‘Grave-goods’ of this type are unusual in the death ritual of this period, perhaps indicating that these depositions are more than ‘burials’ (Dowd 2009b, 93-94). Included in the personal ornament deposits were three cowrie shells, doubly perforated so the shell’s natural opening would face outwards when worn (Fig. 36). Dowd interpreted the cowrie shells as representative of the vulva and therefore female fertility, a connotation she suggests is further strengthened by the ‘almost universal’ association found ethnographically between caves and the womb and in turn between birth, death and rebirth (2009b, 93). In addition to the cowrie shells, deposited items with a connection to the sea included scallop shells, periwinkle shells, a net sinker, and (perhaps indirectly) amber beads. Dowd suggests that marine references in this case are not related to subsistence but rather to the long-distance networks fundamental to LBA society (2009b, 93), as marine shells may be symbolically significant “whether as material symbols of interpersonal relations, as symbolic links to water and the sea, with all of their metaphorical qualities, or as a sign of inland people’s differential access to distant and rare goods” (Chapman et al. 2007, 143).

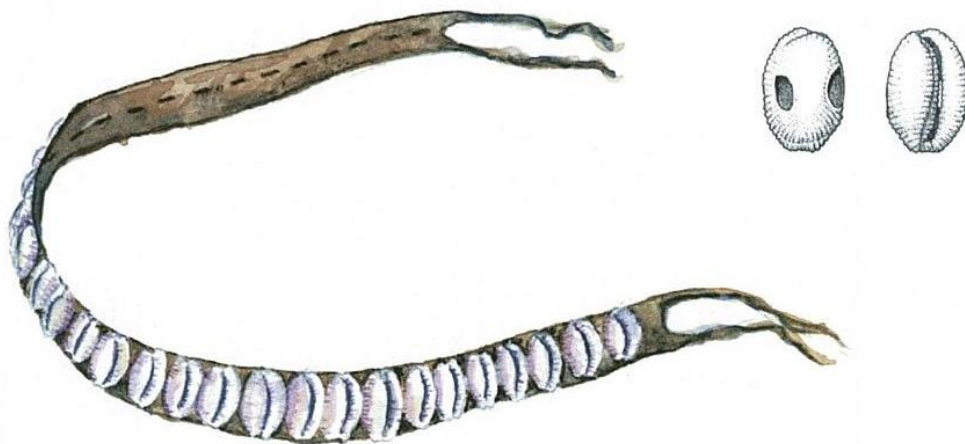


Fig. 36 Possible method of affixing double perforated cowrie shells with detail showing perforation (drawing by A.Brewer in Dowd 2006a, Figure 27)



Fig.37 Photo showing perforated periwinkle and cowrie shells, adjacent to skull fragment of 2-4 year old, *in situ* in the LBA area of Glencurran Cave, Co. Clare, from Dowd (2006a, Plate 16)



Fig. 38 Detail of perforated periwinkle and cowrie shells from LBA area of Glencurran Cave (Dowd 2006a, Plate 17)

LBA material was recovered in Area IV, further into the cave from the MBA material, and included twenty-eight human bones representing at least four adults, a two to four year old (Figs. 37 and 38) and a neonate; a pelvic bone was dated to 800-730 cal. BC (Dowd 2009b, 94). Dowd has suggested that the LBA evidence also indicates that ritual practitioners were spending extended amounts of time in the cave, a proposal which could indicate that Glencurran was a location in the peripheral landscape specifically targeted for ritual practice by ritual specialists. Curiously, there was a high proportion of

unburnt clavicles, which suggests not only the selection of specific bones from decayed (fleshless) corpses but also that the clavicle may have been of symbolic importance to the ritual(s) conducted or the group conducting them. In addition to the neonatal human bone there were a number of neonatal domesticates (three piglets, one foetal piglet, four lambs, two calves) which had all died within a few weeks of birth and were not butchered (Dowd 2009b, 96). There were also five adult hares. The inclusion of wild animals amongst human bone and domesticated animals is noteworthy, and Dowd proposes that the hares were symbolically significant, perhaps indicating a ritual hunt (2009b, 98). The artefacts associated with these deposits included two bone beads, nine amber beads, fifty-two single perforated cowrie shells, thirty-six perforated flat periwinkle shells, pottery and lithics. Some of these objects reflect a connection to the sea similar to that observed in the MBA deposits. Although associated, it seems that the LBA artefacts and human bone were distinctly deposited, with the majority of the human bone found to the east and the majority of artefacts to the west of Area IV. Dowd interpreted this deposit as structured since much of the material was relatively *in situ*, suggesting that it was placed in the cave either as a single event or close to the same time, likely spring as the neonatal pig bone indicates early spring farrowing and red deer shed antlers in late spring (2009b, 98).

Both the Middle and Late Bronze Age assemblages from Glencurran Cave contain similar elements: human death (infant and adult), animal death (domesticated and 'wild'), the Atlantic coast (shells), exotic (amber) and domestic (pottery and lithics) objects. Death and fertility/life seem to have been conceptually linked during this period and the expression of this link can be perceived at Glencurran Cave. Perhaps spring was the appropriate time of year to conduct rituals which reflected the closeness of new life to death. Conceivably these stages of the lifecycle were celebrated in some way through seasonal visits to particular sites in order to conduct rituals that acted to ensure the continued fertility (and prosperity?) of the community. Thus the evidence from Glencurran Cave may signify that in general certain locations were visited seasonally to enact particular rituals, perhaps in relation to a cyclical worldview and/or the cyclical nature of the agro-pastoralist economy. There may also be a connection between the LBA association in Clare of death and the west (i.e. the Atlantic coast), noted above, and bringing items eastward from the coast to a place of complex and seemingly specialist ritual practice. Alternatively, or perhaps simultaneously, it is possible that the ritual practices which took place within the cave system were conducted by ritual specialists who journeyed to Glencurran for the purpose. If these journeys began in the core zone around Mooghaun hillfort and the Fergus/Shannon estuary then the ritual activity at Glencurran may be related to the depositional practices that took place to the south-west of the Burren as well as to the siting of barrows along westward flowing rivers and the Atlantic coast of Co. Clare.

### **Contextualising the landscape setting of Irish Late Bronze Age ritual practice**

As it still is today, movement through the landscape and territorial divisions would have been, at least to some degree, delimited by Ireland's geography in the LBA. Although



movement through the local landscape would have been aided by extensive knowledge of local landscapes and environments, once outside of well-known territories travel may have become more perilous. The community effort required for the construction and maintenance of routeways, like *toghers*, points to the importance afforded to safe passage, not only of people, but undoubtedly of livestock and ‘goods’. Well known and safe routes through the landscape would have been essential to enable large groups of people to congregate, for instance at seasonal events like the later *oenach*.

The enactment of ritual practices like wet depositions in uncultivated landscapes outside of the domestic sphere also indicates the movement of people. The journeys themselves may have been highly ritualistic and may be referenced in smaller scale instances of directed movement such as ceremonial ways. Some locations were returned to again and again for the purpose of ritual practice, indicating the strength of cultural memory regarding such significant locations in the landscape and their associated historical/mythological narratives, the correct route and/or manner by which to approach/access them, and how to distinguish between visually similar locations in a ritually charged landscape. This knowledge may have been specialist or communal, but regardless would have had to be passed down over time. The consistent use of particular locations co-existed with a high degree of variability in ritual practice generally.

As will be discussed in Chapter 4.1, categorical or relational identity can be expressed through the wearing of particular objects and/or types of objects. Thus the practice of depositing personal ornaments in LBA Ireland may have been reflective of the social roles these objects represented. For instance, gorgets are on the extreme end of high status equipment, these are objects which were worn on the body, in particular on the chest (i.e. confronting the observer), and display the formalised solar symbol, which suggests that they were used during or expressive of ritual practice yet were deposited in peripheral locations in the landscape such as in Gleninsheen townland in the Burren, Co. Clare. It is possible, as Dowd (2009a) suggests, that ritual practitioners deliberately went ‘into the wild’ to conduct particular ritual practices, the example she cites in the extended periods of time spent in Glencurran Cave during the LBA but perhaps journeying from the core zone to the peripheral zones to ritually deposit high status and ritually significant objects could reflect a similar practice.

Hints of the complexity of LBA ritual practice are evident in exceptional sites like the caves investigated by Dowd, and with artefacts like the figures found in Cloncreen Bog. These disparate examples highlight how varied and pervasive concerns with fertility may have been in LBA Ireland and how such concerns may have been expressed ritually. Another example is the east-west orientation of monuments and features related to ritual practice which likely references the movement of the sun and thus may be reflective of a cyclical worldview infused with concepts of rebirth and regeneration, particularly valid for an agro-pastoralist economy dependent on natural forces to ensure continued fertility and abundance. Concepts of the ancestors may have complemented the cyclical worldview: we have been here before, and will be here again.

Ireland had been inhabited for thousands of years by the LBA and would have displayed evidence of this in the form of cleared forests, divided field systems, monuments and ‘infrastructure’ like portages and *toghers*. This may have instilled a sense of entitlement or belonging to a certain area enhanced by concepts such as lines of descent, as perhaps is evidenced by later prehistoric activity in the vicinity of pre-existing ritual sites which likely possessed histories and narratives. From the differential treatment of individuals at death, in terms of the deposition of token remains of the cremated corpse in different categories of location, it may be inferred that different individuals and/or lineages were associated with different locations and that the remains were purposefully placed at said locations. Possible implications of this inference may extend to conceptions of ancestors and the structuring of society in terms of lineages and/or kin-groups. It could also be suggested that some categories of location may have been associated with particular social roles (as opposed to individual identities) such as specialist skills or gender.

The construction of large-scale monuments like hillforts may have been another mechanism used for broadcasting control over or entitlement to a particular area or landscape. When travelling through a landscape, monuments may have signalled occupied territories, and correspondingly they may have been used as locations from which to monitor the movement of people around significant points in the landscape like locations of ritual deposition or routeways. Different types of ritual practice were enacted in different types of landscapes, but instead of regarding these as separate and distinct, perhaps it is more enlightening to view them as nodes in a network of significant locations, routeways, regions, areas and environments in a larger cultural landscape. Looking at the Irish LBA landscape from a macro perspective provides a glimpse of a socio-cultural context in which increasing territoriality and inter-group conflict was a likely concern. As a result, access to and control over landscapes was a probable factor in on-going socio-political change perhaps discernible in the development and construction of territorial boundaries, routeways and highly visible monuments in the landscape.

Evidence of ritual practice in a variety of landscapes can aid our interpretation of LBA social structure in Ireland and clarify our understanding of a potential hierarchy of site types. A social hierarchy seems likely for LBA Ireland as evidenced through different types of domestic structures, differential access to high status objects and/or materials and not least the obvious emergence of specialised social roles. As a result, a hierarchy of settlement has been generally accepted. For instance, in the context of the North Munster Project Grogan has gone so far as to suggest “individual communities within the wider landscape” of Mooghaun, such as at Knocknalappa, Craggaunown, Maigh Adair, Cloonmunnia and Castlecrine (2005b, 73). However, upon further investigation the ‘hierarchy of site’ explanation is somewhat lacking. On first glance the material assemblage supports Grogan’s interpretation of Knocknalappa crannóg as a higher status settlement, for instance the pottery from the site is described as ‘comparatively fine’ and is of a similar form to that found at the neighbouring Mooghaun hillfort (Grogan et al. 1999, 119). The crannóg was initially utilised during the early MBA

(c.1887-1701 cal BC) and later utilised during the LBA (c.1033-848 cal BC) and so likely in use contemporaneously to the hillfort (Grogan et al. 1999, 117). However, there were also a number of metallic objects recovered from the crannóg which is not congruent with the general paucity of such artefacts from settlements. Furthermore, in all instances ritual deposition seems to have been highly structured during the LBA (Chapter 2.2) and the objects from Knocknalappa are more congruent with those found at sites of consistent ritual practice. Explanations of casual loss of skilfully crafted metallic objects on sites like Knocknalappa therefore appear erroneous when considered in relation to the paucity of similar objects and materials on other sites.

The exact nature of this hierarchy of settlement in terms of what the different grades of settlement were and who occupied them is therefore unclear. Unlike small-scale 'farmsteads' the archaeological evidence does not always clearly indicate how higher status sites were used. Furthermore, the types of sites generally included in the upper levels of this hierarchy sometimes do not have evidence for structures which could act as dwellings, Knocknalappa crannóg being one such example. It can therefore be unclear whether these sites were élite residences, or used temporarily at significant times for settlement or other purposes such as ritual practice. Nonetheless, the presence of a possible BA farmsteads in close proximity to large-scale LBA constructions like Mooghaun hillfort, which may have taken 7 years to build with a workforce of almost 1000 supplied by the wider territory (Grogan 2005b, 91), indicates the existence of social motivations for the communal construction of monuments. Generally, then, although the exact nature of socio-cultural organisation in later prehistoric Ireland is vague in terms of settlement, there are some clear indications of concentrated and differential LBA activity which is suggestive of core and peripheral zones. Whether or not sites like Mooghaun hillfort and Knocknalappa crannóg are evidence of a *settlement hierarchy* the construction of such features in a ritualised landscape combined with highly developed regional metalworking tradition (indicative of the development of specialist social roles) is highly suggestive of a *social hierarchy* present in Ireland during the LBA. Perhaps instead of a hierarchy of settlement, what these sites can demonstrate is a hierarchy of locations for ritual practice, with common settlements the location for smaller scale ritual practice and other more ritually charged locations in the landscape targeted for more ostentatious ritual displays.



## **4.0 The social context of ritual practice in Late Bronze Age Ireland**

The evidence so far presented has focused on the practice of ritual in LBA Ireland and how it may be identified through an analysis of objects and materials and their ritual use in the socio-cultural landscape. Much of this discussion has touched on the importance of ritual practice to facilitate and/or direct socio-cultural organisation and interaction.

The following sections will address this subject from two perspectives: by exploring the identification of LBA Irish identity(ies) and social roles expressed or implied in the evidence of ritual practice, and by considering how long-distance interactions of said identities and social roles may have shaped the enactment of ritual practice in Ireland.

As ritual practice pervades all aspects of the Irish LBA worldview and ways of life it is suggested that exploring evidence for identities, social roles and socio-cultural interactions at the local and long-distance level will develop a more nuanced understanding of the stratified social context in which LBA ritual was enacted in Ireland.

#### **4.1 Identity, social roles and ritual in Late Bronze Age Ireland**

This chapter follows on from the concepts introduced in Chapter 1.2 by exploring how the archaeological record of LBA Ireland can inform our understanding of the creation, expression, transformation and maintenance of identity through practice and materiality. First the concept of identity in the context of ritual practice is broadly examined, in particular feasting, deposition and death ritual with fertility ritual implicit in these categories. More specific categorical and relational social roles and identities are then explored and discussed before the chapter is concluded with a consideration of how identity relates to and reflects the wider social structure of LBA Ireland.

##### **Material culture: archaeologically identifying identity**

Some artefacts provide very strong indications of past social processes and possible identities. Over time objects may become invested with multiple forms of identity and “similar forms of material culture (and sometimes the exact same artefact) can communicate multiple, different, and contextually-dependent identities” (Casella and Fowler 2005, 4). As objects, especially culturally significant objects, are used and transferred between and among social contexts they may accumulate histories and become related to particular individuals, events, and/or groups. While Casella and Fowler (2005) discuss material culture as carrying aspects of personal or group identity separate to the body, Sørensen proposes that categorical identity may be directly expressed through objects which were or became a permanent part of the body, were permanent parts of clothing, and/or were removable (1997, 102). While the second and third categories may have a ‘transient’ relationship to the individual, the first category “provided a permanent comment on the person” who displayed them, for instance providing a visual cue as to the social status, gender, age, etc., of the person which could be augmented but never removed (Sørensen 1997, 102). Even objects that were not permanently fixed to the body may have signalled categorical identity, for instance styles of Medieval Irish ring pins which were directly reflective of social status (Kelly 2011 pers. comm.). Other bodily modifications such as hair style, facial hair (or its removal), tattooing/scarification and the wearing of lip or ear ornaments can act as outward displays of categorical social identity. Identity is thus constantly being transformed and formed through action and interaction. Repeated actions are especially useful for recognising past identities as it is often possible to identify context specific patterns of action. As rituals are generally repeated, performative, and socially structured, they may provide glimpses of relational and categorical identities as well as of the socio-political and power/status negotiations that accompany them.

One such pattern may be discernible through the production of regionally distinct objects in south-west Ireland which are suggestive of a broad regional identity, such as gorgets and Class II horns. The tight distribution of such high status objects indicates that there were smiths present in south-west Ireland who were schooled in a particular tradition of producing objects. Furthermore, as Cahill (2005) has suggested the production of objects depicting the formalised solar symbol, like gorgets, was likely controlled by those directing their production as was discussed in Chapter 2.4. Thus the

production of these multivocal, symbolic, and regionally distinct objects and their use in performative ritual practice would have signalled to observers that the group undertaking the ritual belonged to a particular regional identity as well as having the ability/wealth to produce (and perhaps ritually deposit) such an object. Such social situations can be self-perpetuating as by facilitating the creation of such objects status would be increased thus making the creation of the next object easier, and so on. When the objects were ritually deposited status would be increased further. However, if a group or individual are consistently increasing status through this type of public ritual practice and then are no longer able to, the entire community will be aware and their status lowered and identity affected.

### **The negotiation of identity at feasts**

Feasting is generally understood as involving a large group of people from across the social spectrum. However, there are also many types of feasts which are much more socially restrictive and serve to reinforce social ties within a particular social group, for example the classical Symposium or the modern ticketed charity dinner. One aspect of feasting repeatedly referenced in the literature is its performativity, through which identity may be outwardly expressed. As ethnographic examples demonstrate, people often ‘dress up’ when attending communal gatherings and the items worn may be linked to their descent group, kinship, age, gender, social status, etc. Commensal politics, including competitive hospitality and reciprocal obligation (Chapter 2.1), may be overtly enacted during feasting which may lead to the reinforcement and/or renegotiation of social statuses and social identity (Romero 2011, 16). Competitive hospitality (e.g. Potlatching in North America or Moka in Papua New Guinea) has the potential to endow an individual, a kin-group or a community with symbolic capital, therefore transforming their identity relative to outside ‘others’ who observe and/or participate in the event. It is unknown whether competitive hospitality took place in LBA Ireland, however indications of potentially competitive ritual display (e.g. deposition) suggests that this type of social negotiation may have been existent.

Feasting was politically important from the Iron Age to the later Medieval period in Ireland, serving to maintain and reinforce relative social status and social identity, for example through the serving of the *Champion’s Portion* (Fitzpatrick 2009, 399). It seems that there was a strict hierarchical order to the seating and eating arrangements of these feasts with the king/chief centrally placed in all things, the physical arrangement of people thus highlighting relative social roles, relationships and agreements, ranks and identities (Bhreathnach 1998, 21). As Bhreathnach explains: “The king in early Ireland travelled about with a retinue and feasted in the houses of clients, who were bound to feed their lord and his company [...] Other noble clients were obliged to pay the king a food rent, thereby enabling the king to be fed and to hold feasts in his own royal residence” (1998, 20). In prehistoric Ireland political commensality may have also been an important mechanism for the formation and maintenance of warrior groups. Such a practice is recounted in the *Gododdin* an early Medieval Welsh poem in which the warlord Mynyddog uses communal feasting and mead-drinking to symbolise the

obligation of warriors to fight for him, and perhaps to remove some pre-battle reservations through intoxication (Osgood 1998, 87).

As the archaeological evidence of feasting from LBA Ireland is mainly restricted to high status feasting equipment found in isolated depositions (with exceptions), which limits speculation regarding individual or communal 'possession' and the etiquette and circumstances of use. It is possible that feasting equipment was used in a variety of ceremonial and ritual contexts, from large-scale community gatherings to small segregated assemblies (see Armada 2011). In addition to the contents of the feasting vessels, the production of vessels would have been a statement of individual and/or community affluence. It has been estimated that it would have taken three to four months to produce a LBA cauldron (J.P. Northover in Gerloff 2010, 40), a whole season during which the master smith would have had to be supported by a community or an influential individual. The ability to facilitate the production of feasting equipment and the status and social capital it entailed would have been implicitly communicated whenever a cauldron was used. Feasting in LBA Ireland may therefore have been highly instrumental in defining relational and categorical identity.

### **Objects as representative of identity**

The contexts and associations of deposited Irish LBA objects may reveal hints of societal structure and also provide information regarding the expression of identity. For example, ritual deposits may indicate the types and combinations of worn ornaments, the type of combat/warfare that was conducted (or idealised), and the locations deemed appropriate for certain types of ritual deposition. When conducted in front of an audience the performance of ritual deposition would have acted much like feasting: as a mechanism affecting and highlighting relative social status. Some would have accumulated the correct object(s) to deposit and others would have observed this taking place (similar to how charitable donations raise the positive public profile of wealthy individuals today). Public ritual depositions of high status objects like metalwork may have also acted to boost the relative social status of kin-groups or lineages. It is likely that some members of the community would have never been able to make these types of high status depositions (perhaps over generations), they may have performed different types of deposits for which there is no evidence but it is unlikely that these would have had equally significant social implications.

The ritual deposition of swords in BA Europe is a topic which has been studied extensively, with very different social aspects of the depositions as the focus of discussion. For example, in an investigation of (unmixed) deposits of multiple swords across western and central Europe during the Middle and LBA, Brandherm suggests that these specific types of deposits "with their rigidly maintained quantitative patterns seem to have been strongly integrated into a distinct ritual tradition" and proposes that these deposits may have been linked to the outward display of warrior identity (2007, 295). Thus, for Brandherm the deposition of European BA swords is an expression of individual and categorical identity connected to their use in socially structured combat. Swords in a LBA context may have held biographies and identities of their own

developed over a long period of use and display, perhaps as they were passed down from generation to generation (e.g. the sword Hrunting, bestowed to Beowulf in lines 1455-1458 of the epic poem). The inheritance of such a sword could for instance explain the empty sword scabbard in the younger male BA oak-coffin burial from Borum Eshøj, Denmark.

Adding to the potential complexity of the object biographies of deposited swords, Bridgford (1997) has suggested that Irish BA swords ritually deposited in wet locations may have had different histories from those deposited in other contexts. Although over 90% of the Irish BA swords examined by Bridgford displayed edge notching (interpreted as evidence of use in combat), generally those swords deposited at wet locations were of ‘above average’ quality, showed less sign of use in combat and in some cases design flaws which potentially affected usefulness, but not appearance, were ignored (1997, 106, 112). These observations led Bridgford to conclude that in LBA Ireland the swords deposited were primarily symbolic, and thus would not have direct associations with specific combat events or identity. These ‘unused’ Irish LBA swords suggest that the action of deposition is of prime importance in this ritual context, not the object biography, as swords with use-wear marks have been recovered from other contexts (Bourke 2001).

The differential use depending on location of ritual deposition noted for LBA Irish swords may also reflect associations between particular social roles and particular locations of ritual practice. The swords which do not display much use wear but have a fine appearance may have been carried by élite members of society who were not directly involved in combat, in contrast those swords which display use-wear marks and are more ‘functional’ in appearance may have been carried by those who held an active warrior social role. Furthermore, repeated visitation of a particular riverine zone, like the river fords at Killaloe and Scarriff as discussed in Chapter 2.2, to deposit martial equipment may signify a sense of shared identity by warriors (i.e. this is where our ancestors also deposited their swords). This may be compared to the repeated visiting of wetland zones to ritually deposit a variety of objects/materials which may be more reflective of kin-group or community affiliations as opposed to categorical identity in that the deposited objects are not necessarily connected to and/or reflective of a particular social role. Of course in both cases the performance of these types of ostentatious depositions is related to the acquisition of relative social status through audience observation, a factor potentially related to the relative isolation of the location of deposition especially if it is in a peripheral zone. The differential ritual deposition of swords is thus illustrative of the structure and complexity of social roles and identities in LBA Ireland.

### **Death and the re-structuring of social identity**

Analysis of the archaeological signature of funerary ceremonies and mortuary treatment is often used to discern aspects of past identities. Burial data is habitually used to investigate individual, group and ethnic identity “because it is in the grave we may establish a relation between a body and materialities (albeit not in any straightforward

manner)” (Fahlander 2012, 1). For example, Brück has recently discussed the identification of status and gender differentiation between British EBA inhumation and cremation rituals in which men tended to be inhumed in a central tumulus with gravegoods and women cremated and placed in satellite positions. She argues that instead of suggesting a lower status for women during this period “cremation acted as a means of destroying both the physical remains and social identity of the deceased” (Brück 2009, 2). Thus, the circulation of cremated remains among the mourners may relate to fractal or ‘dividual’ personhood, where aspects of the deceased are subsumed into their network of relationships as part of death ritual. The “dispersal of human bone during the Late Bronze Age may suggest that the self was thought of as comprising many different parts, each element constituted through a unique set of relations with particular people, places or events” (Brück 2005b, 309; cf. Kristiansen 2011, 206). This analysis of identity expressed through the burial record thus extends into an analysis of identities in past (living) communities.

When a death occurs there are repercussions throughout the social networks in which the deceased was involved, and these networks are thus reshaped, for instance by another individual stepping into a role previously held by the deceased. Therefore, an important aspect of death ritual is the renegotiation of social roles and identities by the living. As Brück states, “mortuary rites were, after all, the context in which relationships between descent groups, neighbours and friends were recast in the face of profound personal loss” (2004, 320-321). Since the dominant mode of death ritual in LBA Ireland was token cremation of highly crushed bone, usually without gravegoods, there is very little that may be inferred about the expression of pre-death individual identity in these rituals. However, the highly public and performative nature of cremation itself, the gathering and crushing of bone, and token deposition at a significant location, points to a concern with marking death in a meaningful manner. Congruently, Goldhahn and Oestigaard (2006) suggest that during later European prehistory death rituals may have been some of the most dynamic (and vulnerable) social situations for individuals and groups.

“It is in the funerals that old structures are buried in the ground, or cremated to ashes, and the descendants and the participators perform the transactions of power and obligations by rituals which renegotiate the current social structure and hierarchy. We also want to emphasise that death is not only a problem and a threat to the current society (e.g. Hocart 1954, Hertz 1960); it also involves great, new possibilities. In social sciences, most analyses are conducted when social structures are at the most static; that is when people are alive. When people die, social structures are at the most dynamic because the loss of a person by necessity implies that a family or society has to be restructured.” (Goldhahn and Oestigaard 2006, 28)

They suggest that the higher the social status held by the deceased, the more people will desire (or be obliged) to participate in the funeral, and that death rituals may include an ‘intermediary period’ of months or years to enable the relevant persons to attend and

therefore allow for the full renegotiation of social relations (Goldhahn and Oestigaard 2006, 32). This is potentially relevant to LBA Ireland, where in addition to the movement from core zones of activity to potentially peripheral locations of ancestral death ritual (e.g. barrows situated on the Atlantic coast of Co. Clare as discussed above), death rituals seem to highlight the actions of the living over the identity of the deceased: the body is transformed to material 'other' through incineration and fragmentation. There may have been a number of different ritual actions in which cremated bone was used and dispersed over a potentially extended amount of time, leaving only a small 'token' amount to be deposited when all the 'correct' mourners were assembled.

The renegotiation of social relations which takes place at a 'funeral' is intrinsically linked to the formation of individual and group identities. If, like Goldhahn and Oestigaard (2006), we consider such ceremonies to be public performances then we can also agree that through participation the 'mourners' are actively and publically taking on new aspects of identity (the social roles, relationships and alliances that the deceased previously held), therefore reforming their own identity to include those new facets. For example, if the deceased had particular trading partners one of their progeny may take over that partnership during the funeral ceremonies. It follows that if death rituals were an important arena for the renegotiation of social networks and identity then the ritual performances may have been laden with social symbolism, therefore overtly expressing these social changes to those not directly involved in the contestations of power.

Death rituals not only act as a mechanism for transforming the social order but, as social interaction must have played an important role in these events, also to reinforce existing bonds and relationships among the mourners. Owoc (2005) has proposed that collective actions, for example participation in funerary ritual practices like cutting wood for pyres or mound building, are instrumental in forming group identity. Monuments not only provided a focus for the expression of community identity during death rituals, but were also used for collective ritual actions (perhaps distinct from death rituals) for generations after the initial building episode, as may be seen at monuments that were aligned according to particular cyclical celestial events (Owoc 2005, 260) such as the east-west aligned barrow complexes of Dromore, Co. Down, and Elton, Co. Limerick (Chapter 3.1). Additional proceedings, such as funerary feasting, would have added to the performative aspect of the death rituals and underscored the potential social implications associated with large gatherings of people.

The ritual preparation of the corpse is another potential mechanism for the outward display of social, categorical and individual identity. In BA Europe, including Ireland, preparation of the corpse may be evidenced by the use of razors to remove hair (of the deceased and/or of the mourners). There would have most likely been certain culturally significant processes undertaken to prepare the corpse and these processes may have acted to present the corpse in a certain way, perhaps to highlight particular aspects of their identity. Treherne suggests that for a society concerned with an ideal male-warrior, ensuring a 'beautiful' and memorable death through careful preparation of the corpse and adherence to the correct death rituals, would have been in direct opposition to the

warrior's/corpse's disfigurement, putrefaction and ultimate anonymity if captured by enemies (1995, 121-123). Thus, identity as presented through death ritual may not be an accurate or full representation of the individual, while also revealing much about the social context of the ritual by privileging particular aspects of identity. We may see similar processes at modern Western funerals where an individual may be displayed wearing particular clothing which refers to a particular aspect of their identity which may or may not be relevant at the time of death (e.g. an elderly war veteran in uniform who performed only brief military service when young), but it is a facet of their identity which is socially significant for the mourners.

### **Identity formation through social interaction**

Gosselain (2000) proposes that the primary factor in the formation of personal and group identity is social interaction.

“One learns specific abilities and acquires specific tastes by interacting with relatives, friends, neighbors, or members of any form of social group to which one belongs or with which one interacts, within or across boundaries. This is how individuals come to do things in their own particular ways or to consume particular kinds of goods, all of which may be used subsequently as symbols of differentiation and belonging. As social networks expand, contract, and interconnect according to historical events, people are thus likely to accumulate a wide range of dispositions, including knowledge, skills, tastes, and habits, pertaining to different facets of their identity.”  
(Gosselain 2000, 209)

In contrast, Budden and Sofaer stress identity formation through *doing*: that taking on an identity such as ‘potter’ results both from the accumulation of knowledge and ability over time (the process of learning and becoming) as well as through being perceived as a potter by others (performance and audience). Thus, the important consideration is not the material culture produced, but the action of producing (Budden and Sofaer 2009, 204, 217; see also Brück 2006, 297). In prehistory the time, patience and effort required to become a master-craftsperson would have been instrumental in shaping the identity of that individual as well as shaping the identity of the community which held and/or supported a craft specialist of high calibre. As later texts record the association of particular regions with particular craft production, as well as certain family lines with certain crafts, it is possible that kin-group or ancestral identity was also connected to particular crafts in LBA Ireland (O'Curry 1862 [1873], 203-208). In the Irish LBA archaeological record three crafts stand out: ceramic production (Chapter 1.3), weaving and metalworking.

Often later prehistoric metalworkers are presented as individualistic, working apart from the community and possessing a distinct and one-dimensional identity. However, in relation to prehistoric Norwegian iron workers, Jørgensen suggests that perceptions of metalworkers range from fear/contempt/loathing to respect/awe: “Apart from yielding insight in and ideas about different aspects of life, one main lesson from



ethnoarchaeological studies is that the material left to the archaeologist can barely grasp the multitude of roles and statuses that Iron Age persons may have had” (2012, 5). Although the same complexity is likely applicable to LBA Ireland, aspects of identity formation and transformation are evidenced archaeologically and may be investigated. Therefore although a complete picture may be elusive it is possible to discuss aspects of identity especially in relation to distinct social roles like metalworking.

During experimental production of LBA swords Ó Faoláin concluded that the proper production of such technically complex objects required a team of at least two (Ó Faoláin and Northover 1998, 85). This suggests to the present author that the activity of metalworking (or at least bronze-working) would have affected personal/individual identity and a sense of group identity, as it is probable that certain individuals would have worked closely with each other and been perceived by other members of the wider community as a group. This may have been particularly relevant in societies where metalworking was likely surrounded by an air of mystery and superstition, if not outright magic and “a generalised kind of politico-religious power” (Budd and Taylor 1995, 139; and see Barndon 2006). This is perhaps why metalworking areas are generally separate from domestic areas on Irish LBA sites (Ó Faoláin 2004, 4). As Kristiansen contends: “Skilled crafting and travel confer an ability to cross boundaries, to transform things from one state to another, and in the process to load objects with supernatural powers” (2004, 181).

If separateness and team-work was a component of a bronze-worker’s identity, was this also the case for the gold-worker? Cahill has pointed out that some of the most technically complex LBA metallic objects (i.e. sheet gold and gold wire-built ornaments) are also the least common (1995, 66). Furthermore, Cahill has observed that the stylistic repertoire used by the Irish BA goldsmith was highly restricted and specialised, leading her to propose that the “maintenance and support of highly skilled groups of craftsmen requires the ability to manage the process through many stages, from supply and preparation of raw materials to the provision of workshops, food and housing and assumes that strict regulatory procedures were enforceable” (1995, 71). Cahill and Ó Faoláin seem to agree that metalworkers may have worked as groups, perhaps as one master-craftsperson with an entourage of ‘apprentices’.

As bronze and gold workers would have had to be provided with materials and subsistence, they would have most likely been simultaneously supported and regulated by a patron. The production of objects which carried highly symbolic motifs may have been further regulated by ritual specialists (i.e. those able to ‘read’ these symbols) who may also have been under the influence of, or were the group leaders involved in the procurement of the gold itself as suggested by Kristiansen and Larsson (2005) in relation to the potential ‘twin’ chiefs of BA Denmark. Perhaps not in contrast but in a different social sphere were objects associated with combat, labour and feasting. Thus the objects produced by gold- and bronze-workers, relatively, may have signalled different aspects of individual and group identity when in use as finished objects, and in turn the process of producing these objects may have entailed different social

constraints which would have influenced the identity formation of the metalworkers themselves.

The importance of clothing in expressing individual and categorical identity has been explored by many anthropologists and ethnographers. For instance, Sørensen (1997) has examined the issue in terms of how categorical identity may have been expressed through clothing, hair and ornament styles during the European BA. She suggests that styles of dress and personal ornamentation would have acted as a sign of the relative social status and social position of individuals by “communicating differences, categories, and events (including initiation and *rites de passage*), and also provide a means of transformation, of pretence, of taking on a role (which may be relevant for considering differences between achieved and ascribed status)” (Sørensen 1997, 95). It is quite possible to imagine this being the case for LBA Ireland where high status, and/or socially significant, ornaments like dress-fasteners or sunflower pins have a wide distribution but are limited in number, and thus may have been representative of categorical identity.

The structure of personal ornaments often points to the use of textiles in LBA Ireland, for instance sunflower pins as clothing fasteners. Evidence for Irish flax cultivation, and therefore the possibility of linen production, is indicated from around 2000 BC in Co. Louth and a possible early spindle whorl has been dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC (Waddell 2010, 62). Loom weights, although rare, have been found on a number of Irish LBA sites (McQuade and Moriarty 2009), and in addition to the relatively common spindle whorl are fairly convincing evidence of the production of textiles and cordage. Loom weights are the only extant indication of the use of the wooden warp-weighted loom, which when weighted with looms like the example from Knockgraffon, Co. Tipperary, would produce a ‘coarse’ open fabric with thick yarn (Mårtensson et al. 2009). Yet, the paucity of loom weights on Irish LBA sites suggests that weaving may have been a specialist domestic endeavour. If the majority of domesticated animals kept in LBA Ireland were cattle, and the number of sheep/goat relatively few as the evidence seems to suggest, then it is possible that the wool being produced would have been highly ‘valuable’.

Also of interest is the possibility that in the LBA woven textiles were ritually deposited in a similar manner to high status metalwork. A potential example may be the two small pieces and one large (50cm x 32cm) piece of ‘neatly folded’ woollen cloth from 4.5 feet deep in a bog near Boghil, Kilfenora, Co. Clare (NMI Reg. 1936:1775-1777). A wooden vessel, a fragment of a flat copper axe and a looped-socketed spearhead were found in the same general area (Gibbons et al. 1999), perhaps indicating that this was a significant location for ritual deposition which was returned to on a number of occasions (also providing a hesitant relative date for the cloth). Irish LBA objects like the ‘two-widths’ of plain woollen cloth decorated with an intricate horsehair tassel found with the Cromagh’s hoard in Co. Antrim (which is very similar in appearance to the woollen belts found in some Danish oak-coffin burials such as those at Trindhøj and Egtved) indicate that some clothing may have been highly decorative (Herity and Eogan

1977; Waddell 2010). Thus, since both merited a ritual deposit in still water, woven textiles may have been perceived as representative of a similar social sphere, types of categorical identity, degree of skilled labour, and/or symbolic capital as high status metalwork.

Of all the categorical identities recognised by archaeologists for BA Europe, martial specialists (i.e. warriors) are one of the most discussed. Current understanding of the BA ‘warrior’ male has been mainly based around discussions of material culture, in particular the sword. As Bridgford states: “A sword may simultaneously be, or have the potential to be, a beautiful object, an efficient killing tool, a symbol of power and wealth, an implied or actual threat, a sacrifice, a gift, a reward, a pledge of loyalty and/or an embodiment of the idea of conflict” (1997, 95). Although some authors have suggested that European BA swords would not have been effective weapons (Harding 1999, 166), analysis of use-wear marks on the blades indicate their use in combat and repeated sharpening, also perhaps indicating curation (Kristiansen 2002, 319; Bridgford 1997, 106). In Ireland swords are rarely found with BA human remains so direct/physical connections between ‘élite’ social status and a ‘warrior’ identity is difficult to establish. Nevertheless, ritually deposited swords are a significant element of the Irish archaeological record and some exhibit use-wear markings. Therefore when attempting to conceive of the position of martial specialists in Irish LBA society it is reasonable to take into account evidence for ‘warriors’ (in art and death) from European regions in contact with Ireland. Depictions of warriors and warrior accoutrements on Scandianvian and Iberian rock art, and the gravegoods associated with warriors in some regions, when considered in the context of warriors as portrayed in myth and legend (e.g. *Illiad*, *Tain Bo Cualigne*) create quite a complex image of the LBA Irish martial specialist.

Idealised male identity in the form of the martial specialist was widespread across later prehistoric Europe: “Everywhere he is recognisable through variations on the same theme, as if there was an ideal social type, which was endlessly interpreted and made to conform to local values and expectations” (Harrison 2004, 170). Treherne suggests that the expression of BA ‘warrior’ identity can be perceived by archaeologists through associations between élite males and certain types of material culture: personal weaponry, drinking equipment, personal ornamentation, ‘toilet articles’ (grooming), and in some cases horse trappings and wheeled vehicles (1995, 105). According to Treherne, these types of objects are reflective of a particular ‘life-style’ pursued by BA martial specialists “rooted in both social practices and cultural representations” (1995, 106). As the grooming equipment shows signs of use and repair, and the well-preserved Danish period II/III male burials have well-manicured hands and shaven facial hair, Treherne contends that personal grooming (i.e. an emphasis on the outward display of warrior identity) was not only an aspect of death ritual but also an important aspect of everyday life (1995, 110-111, 124-126; also Harrison 2004, 176). Tending of hair and the creation of particular hair styles was likely another practice conducted by LBA warriors to exhibit their identity (1995, 126), perhaps referenced in the necessity of the

*Fianna* initiates to maintain their braids while running through the forest. The importance of ‘long, well ordered hair’ for BA warriors is known from Herodotus’ report of the Spartans at Thermopylae, and the significance of long hair seems to have continued on after the BA, with Celtic and Germanic mercenary warriors known for it, and Thracian warriors recorded as binding their long hair in top-knots prior to battle (Speidel 2002, 260).

“Hence, the toilet articles, as well as the other consumables, were implicated in bodily practices which comprised a life style, structuring every-day interaction. The implications of this are profound, in that the notion of a unique life style of an emergent warrior aristocracy suggests not only a novel ideology, but a new notion of self and personhood, grounded in changing attitudes to and practices in, on, and through the body.” (Treherne 1995, 125)

In other words, through the use of high status personal grooming equipment LBA martial specialists were displaying their categorical identity; visually setting themselves apart from the rest of the community by exhibiting their status and social identity through specific clothing, hair-style, facial hair (or lack thereof) and personal equipment (weaponry and ornament). The presence of this later prehistoric warrior ‘life-style’ in Ireland may be evidenced by the manicured finger-nails and hair-styling (facial and cranial) seen on the male ‘bog bodies’. More specific to the LBA, the recovery of bronze razors may indicate that facial or head shaving was a potential indication of relational or categorical identity at this time. A tanged bifid razor was found in Booltiaghadine townland in the vicinity of Corrofin, Co. Clare, (west of Lough Inchiquin) with a bronze socketed chisel and a bronze bag-shaped socketed axehead (blunted cutting edge). Near to the Booltiaghadine deposit a bronze sword was found in four pieces (deliberate fragmentation?) in Nooan townland which abuts the west bank of Lough Inchiquin, and a leaf-shaped socketed bronze spearhead was found in Inchiquin townland also to the west of the lough. There are no ornaments deposited in the vicinity of the lough, only tools and weapons, which could indicate that this location was significant for rituals associated with a male warrior identity.

Of course, the freedom to identify yourself as a warrior was dependant on whether or not warrior and non-warrior members of the community perceived you as such. There may have been a variety of requirements necessary to become a full-fledged warrior, success in combat no doubt being one. It has been suggested that combat between ‘champions’ would have been particularly important across the Indo-European cultural zone during the BA as a mechanism for gaining social prestige (García 2009, 72; Kristiansen 2002; Osgood 1998, 91). An important component of this duelling would have been the possession and proper use of the slashing sword. Carrying a sword (without necessarily having to use it) would have functioned similarly to clothing or hair-style as a proclamation of warrior identity, announcing this identity not only within one’s own community but also when interacting with other communities.

European archaeological evidence demonstrates that even though individualistic male identity and combat between champions were features of these BA ‘societies with warriors’, other types of combat would have existed alongside them, group raiding being one of the most prevalent (García 2009, 61, 71; Osgood 1998). In regards to combat this is perhaps the biggest shift from the earlier to later BA, with combatants being socially differentiated martial specialists, perhaps bound to a patron/chief (Treherne 1995, 109). The associated material culture correspondingly shifts from close-range to long-range weapons: “instead of the use of daggers/rapiers, throwing spears, lances and swords were used” (Osgood 1998, 91). Commensality and ritualised hospitality in the form of drinking rituals may have been a ‘key social mechanism’ used by élites to garner a retinue of martial specialists (i.e. a soldality) and to maintain their support (Treherne 1995, 110). Other social bonding rituals may have taken place during feasts, for instance the recitation of praise poetry and the distribution of gifts from patron to retinue. Male warrior identity was thus expressed/reinforced through collective social practices.

Retinues of martial specialists seem to have persisted into the Iron Age and Classical period in the form of mercenary *berserkers* from Celtic and Germanic regions. For example, “Roman triumphal art often portrays half-naked northern Europeans, whose wild recklessness was meant to frighten, but whose loyal service was to show the emperor as ruler of the world who gathers, from the ends of the earth, hosts of fighters against all who stand in his way” (Speidel 2002, 266). Speidel proposes that there are strong indications of continuity from those described in Vedic and Homeric texts to the early Medieval Icelandic sagas, therefore spanning at least three thousand years (2002, 278). The continuation of such a specific and exclusive social institution over such a wide geographical area and long time span, if these institutions of martial specialists are in fact linked, would no doubt be due to a strong and elaborate code of honour and behaviour which was a feature of day-to-day life as well as conduct during combat (Speidel 2002, 267, 273).

If the warrior is one of the most archaeologically visible social roles/identities from later BA Ireland, the ritual specialist is perhaps the most ephemeral. Yet the knowledge held by ritual specialists is implicit in the longevity and consistency of all categories of ritual practice, perhaps most so in ritual deposition where we may discern the actions of individuals. The majority of ritually deposited Irish BA artefacts are recovered from wet environments, such as those multiple objects recovered together from watery sites which often reflect the lengthy accumulation of deposits at sacred locations. It is unusual to find grouped artefacts carefully arranged as part of the deposition ritual even from dryland sites. However, there are some clear examples which highlight this practice (see examples of structured deposition in Chapter 2.2). Such precise placement of objects relative to each other in these types of Irish BA ritual deposits suggests a specific ritual intention, perhaps enacted or directed by ritual specialists.

“Selecting objects for deposition, and working out combinations and arrangements of material, would have required learned and judgemental

understanding of the symbolic order of things, of the relationship between different material categories, and knowledge of the identity and biography of particular artefacts and materials.[...] Telling of the agency of things, these pre-depositional identities and biographies must have affected how they were deposited, with what degree of formality, and by whom.

Deposition as a practice therefore required an appreciation of the ontological status of things and their relationship to particular kinds of people.” (Pollard 2001, 322)

The majority of LBA objects were deposited in a manner which suggests that the action taken, the type of object and the location were the important factors. In other words the spatial relationship between the objects was not noticeably considered by those who did the depositing. However, there are exceptional examples of ‘carefully arranged deposits’ where the spatial arrangement of the objects in relation to each other was an obvious factor in the process of deposition. A clear contrast can be seen between these carefully arranged deposits and other types of ritual deposits, in particular those that took place again and again at the same wet locations. For instance, it has been suggested that these types of wet deposits were votive in nature and there is often a formulaic intention behind a votive deposit (e.g. supplicate, give thanks, etc.). Unlike repeated deposits at the same wet location, carefully arranged deposits seem to be one-off events, there is no strong pattern between different deposits. However, in some cases there is repetition, as can be seen in the two Bishopsland Phase ‘hoards’ from Cathedral Hill, Downpatrick, Co. Armagh (Proudfoot 1955), discussed in Chapter 2.2.

Essentially, different ritual intentions seem evident in the different types of ritual deposit. In particular it seems that the carefully arranged deposits stress control: the deliberate and careful placement of objects in a certain order. Perhaps this implies perceived control over the rituals’ outcome. It does seem that the object arrangements are purposeful and intentional, as if a recipe were being followed, thus strongly hinting at the involvement of a ritual specialist. This does not rule out the participation of a ritual specialist in other types of deposits. For instance they may have directed what wet locations were auspicious for depositions and this may explain why some bogs contain so many objects and some contain none. However ritual specialists are very difficult to ‘see’ in these contexts. Even more tenuously, ritual specialists may be evidenced in the LBA ritual depositions conducted at Kilgreany Cave, Co. Waterford, which, in addition to the cremated remains of two adult males, included a Class 2 bronze bifid razor, a bronze socketed knife (possibly also a bronze tanged knife), two bronze bulb-headed pins, two amber beads, one perforated and one unperforated boar’s tusk, a perforated dog or wolf canine, and possible LBA pottery (Dowd 2002, 84). It is possible that these artefacts represent both a hoard (if hoard is understood as a collection of objects deliberately brought together and having shared conceptual associations) and gravegoods if they are considered to be a collection of magico-ritual objects linked to a particular individual or to a social role. The types of LBA objects found in Kilgreany

Cave are potentially suggestive of the contents of a warrior shaman's bag (or bags as there are two pins present) as proposed by Goldhahn (2012) for BA Scandinavia.

In a LBA Irish context the ritual specialist could be compared to a master-craftsperson. The feasting equipment manufactured at this time required months to create and the producers of these objects would have had to be supported in some way, at least during production. It is quite possible that a similar situation existed for ritual specialists, that they were supported by the local community so that they could perform an ongoing service that was considered to be necessary. For later BA Scandinavia Kristiansen has suggested that ritual specialists may have been community leaders as well as keepers of ritual/cosmological knowledge which was passed on through formalised storytelling and recitation. The illustrative analogy is that of the Indian Brahmin priest who trains for years and is required to recite the *Rig Veda* in numerous ways (Kristiansen and Larsson 2005, 256). Similar types of training for ritual specialists were recounted by Greek and Roman visitors to pre-conquest Gaul and among traditional professions in Medieval Ireland, bards, clerics, and lawyers held very high status and were required to spend many years in training. At the other end of the ritual specialist spectrum is the holder of the local cure. For example, in some areas of Co. Monaghan it was until very recently contended that the Cassidy family held the cure for 'red water', an affliction affecting cattle. There was thus likely a spectrum of ritual specialists present in LBA Ireland, from the local healer to the territorial leader's 'druid/bard/lawyer/judge'.

### **Expressing and manipulating identity through ritual practice**

The production and use of material culture in LBA Ireland reveals the presence of a number of social roles and identities. Some of these may have overlapped and some were likely highly restrictive, especially those requiring specialist knowledge/training. The discussion above therefore demonstrates the existence in LBA Ireland of a complex and in some manner stratified socio-cultural system outwardly expressed and reinforced through the use of particular material culture and enactment of rituals. Dietler (2001) uses the example of feasting to illustrate how societies with 'formal status distinctions' or 'institutionalized political roles' which are not filled according to heredity may take on social roles, statuses and identities. He suggests that commensality is often at the foundation of negotiations of social status: "from the private hosting of a pot of beer among a small group of friends, to the hosting of trade partners from another community, to the sponsorship of majority community life-crisis ceremonies and religious festivals" (Dietler 2001, 80) and once achieved "[s]ymbolic capital translates into an ability to influence group decisions or actions. This influence derives from the relations created and reproduced in the process of personal interaction" (Dietler 2001, 78). Of course once social capital is acquired it must be maintained through continuing to meet social expectations.

Once achieved, social status and identity can be exhibited and expressed through the wearing of socio-culturally specific items of dress and ornament. Thus, although interpersonal and intergroup interaction and identity negotiation is undoubtedly an integral aspect of the quest for social capital, as Hayden (1998) points out material

culture (especially its competitive procurement and display) is a fundamental mechanism in the directing of social interaction by those he terms 'aggrandizers'. Hayden suggests that the creation of these objects is also a potential method of gaining and proclaiming status (1998, 11). I would suggest that Hayden's description of aggrandizers could also apply to those members of society who undertook long-distance voyages in order to increase their social standing and gain social capital through acquiring 'exotic' objects and ideas.

“One widespread strategy is for aggrandizers to promote the use of exotic items from distant places as prestige items of value. Such items could not be easily obtained by others (especially by those lacking contacts in distant communities), but exotic items were often promoted as being required for effective functioning in social and political events.” (Hayden 1998, 22)

Hayden focuses on prestige technologies which are practices and knowledge that must be transmitted between individuals before they can become entrenched in a specific cultural milieu (such as LBA Irish highly skilled metalworking). However, if an individual is not able to force other members of the community/group to support their status quest, then how are they able to convince others to become their supporters? Hayden suggests that the supporters must see some relatively immediate benefit for themselves in order to support aggrandising schemes (1998, 24; see also Nairn 1976). Thus, it seems likely that the enactment of some ritual activity was motivated by the quest for social capital and relatedly the (re)negotiation of social roles and identities, in that large scale ritual practices act as venues for social interaction and may facilitate 'aggrandizing'.



## **4.2 Exotic items & long-distance socio-political interactions**

Much of the materiality of Irish LBA ritual practice is indicative of long-distance contacts between the island of Ireland and other regions of Europe. The movement of objects used in ritual events across vast distances as well as the similarity of ritual practices enacted across Europe is highly suggestive of a shared conception of the structure of rituals and perhaps of the cosmology and narratives which underlay them. The following will examine how the archaeological record can be used to inform our understanding of these pan-European contacts and how they affected the structure of Irish LBA society. In turn this can inform our understanding of how European BA ritual practice influenced and was influenced by the materiality and performance of ritual in LBA Ireland.

### **The archaeology of interaction**

“In archaeology, the spread of artefacts, practices and even ‘vanished peoples’, are often conceived as the result of large-scale cultural encounters between homogeneous social collectives (cultures or ethnic groups). It is, however, very likely that different individuals and/or groups handle and/or appropriate new information in different ways. Such varied responses to encounters certainly will have a formative effect on the archaeological record and the encounter thus constitutes an important issue to pursue.”  
(Cornell and Fahlander 2007, 1)

Any discussion of the ‘exotic’ must begin with interaction, for it is only with the designation of a cultural group (and their objects) as distinct from your own that something can be perceived as exotic or ‘other’. The exchange of goods over long distances may be motivated by many different factors, however the results can be seen archaeologically and point to the human agents who transported them. In BA Europe, perhaps especially in the LBA, there were groups and/or individuals who travelled and who brought ideas, materials, and things with them and returned home with different ones. So what effect can interactions between people have on ritual practices? Certain ritual phenomena present in LBA Ireland may have been influenced from outside the island, for instance the transition from inhumation to cremation in the MBA and the widespread use of the formalised LBA solar symbol.

It has been proposed that particular BA social groups were more active in these interactions and exchanges than others and in particular the focus of interpretation has been élites. There are various valid reasons for this focus and, in fact, it seems very likely that the majority of BA people never made long-distance journeys, but objects and ideas were nevertheless transported over vast distances. Sørensen has noted a difference in costume trends between the Atlantic zone and elsewhere in Europe, which would have been noted when people moved from one area to another (1997, 108). Thus, when people travelled great distances other cultural groups may have appeared exotic in terms of costume and personal grooming. Some authors have argued that objects were moved along the networks via ‘short-hops’ from one adjacent region to another (O’Sullivan and Breen 2007, 104-105). In contrast, other authors advocate for long-

distance voyages of high status members as a mechanism for obtaining social capital and status (e.g. Kristiansen and Larsson 2005).

The outward display of the same or similar objects and symbols by members of distinct groups would have facilitated the interaction. Hulin suggests that symbols should only be interpreted “within the context of the host culture, and not on the basis of visual similarity with other cultures across space and time, unless an unbroken link can be proven” as the meaning behind the symbol could have been modified during the transmission from one cultural context to another (1989, 95). However, others would contend that in BA Europe very similar symbols found in disparate geographic and cultural contexts can carry the same or similar meanings, and that meaning can be retained over hundreds (perhaps thousands) of years (e.g. Kristiansen 2010; Kristiansen and Larsson 2005). According to Hulin, “the successful diffusion of a symbol rests on its relevance to, and fit with, the host value system” (1989, 94). As very similar practices were performed across Europe in the LBA (e.g. ritual deposition of metallic objects) it could be argued that the societies and value systems at both ends of the ‘diffusion’ may have been comparable. It is also important to acknowledge that Hulin is discussing more complex socio-political contexts and more institutionalized religions than would have been present in BA Europe, and thus the flexible fabric of European BA cosmology may have facilitated the spread of certain symbols and practices along networks of interaction.

Of course ‘things’ are not only important to interactions between distinct cultural groups, but to the actions of actors within their own communities. Earle would suggest that material culture is especially significant in terms of understanding past political economies: “Across human history as societies have become increasingly large, centralized, specialized, stratified and contested, the genres and media of culture become increasingly involved in the production and exchange of symbols signifying, identifying, and reinforcing difference, cooperation, dependency, and power” (2004, 163). Fletcher has argued that material messages are less susceptible to change than are verbal messages, and as a result ‘dissonance’ may occur between ‘material’ and ‘active’ messages when transmitted over time and space (1989, 37). Furthermore, since non-verbal messages embedded in material culture can only be interpreted with the relevant knowledge, often verbal (or ‘active’) messages accompany the spread of objects. For Fletcher this dialectic relationship is inherently unstable and contributes to the generation of new interpretations of the meanings embedded in material culture (1989, 38).

By examining the layers of meaning embedded in material culture and expressed through its contextual use both as “individual embodied technique” and as “widespread styles and traditions” Kohring suggests that it is possible to access “different scales of analysis, different sets of social relationships, and hence, different social complexities” (2011, 146). The premise of Kohring’s approach is that social complexity exists in all social contexts (domestic, political, etc.) and at all scales, and so instead of approaching social complexity differently for each social context it is more effective to take a

relational perspective by investigating material culture variability at both the macro and micro scale. “Thus, contextually rich details at the micro-scale can inform us about the daily events, practices and actions that, at the macro-scale, form the structures, institutions and social construction of the society being analysed” (Kohring 2011, 146). Kohring advocates a ‘bottom-up’ approach to investigating social complexity as she believes that material culture can often be ‘pigeonholed’ at the macro-scale. By looking at how material culture is produced at the local scale she suggests that ‘broad-brush’ social structures will also be exposed (Kohring 2011, 148). This is a framework worth considering. However, if material culture is often not found in domestic or ‘community’ contexts, as it is often not in LBA Ireland, then this approach cannot be effectively applied to the available archaeological data. That is not to say that interactions at a local/community level are not significant, simply that for the archaeological record of LBA Ireland these relationships are very difficult to identify and therefore investigating materiality using a macro-scale perspective is more suitable (see also Chapter 1.1 above in relation to the practice theory focus on asymmetrical power relationships).

### **Long-distance interaction in the Bronze Age**

“The Bronze Age is *the age, par excellence*, of cosmological power and distance linked to the heroic travels of skilled artisans and specialists. To overcome the inherent danger, the work of shipbuilders, metalworkers, hunters, poets and warriors was often highly ritualized. Skilled craftsmen were often also long-distance travellers and traders, adding foreign mystique and power to their crafting. Thus, travel as a distinctive, ritualized activity was comparable to skilled crafting.” (Kristiansen 2004, 181)

Long-distance travel and the exchange of knowledge, technologies, stories and objects within far-reaching social networks is an important aspect of Kristiansen’s interpretation of the nature of BA society in Scandinavia and Europe. Many authors have stressed the significance of metalwork, and bronze in particular, in the development and shaping of these long-distance networks and the socio-cultural changes they motivated (Vankilde 2007; Harding 1984). Much planning and investment of social capital was required to embark on any long-distance journey and while most probably took place over-land and via riverine routes it is travel over large bodies of water which ignites the imagination. Seafaring is undoubtedly a specialist activity and the construction and sailing of a sea-worthy vessel requires the investment of time, labour and the resources of whole communities: “Sailing and sea travel are certainly also among the most heavily ‘ritualized’ of activities with a plethora of traditions and superstitions attached to being at sea in many cultures” (Chapman and Gearey 2004, 455). Chapman and Geary (2004) emphasise the liminality of the seafaring venture, in particular that rituals may have been enacted at liminal points in a voyage: entering or exiting the boat, or, as in the example they give of the Fleet at Kilnsea, entering or exiting the open water of the sea when coastal monuments coming into or going out of sight indicate the end or beginning of a journey.

As an island, overseas contacts have always been important for Ireland, a prime example is the arrival of domesticated animals which must have come across the water at the end of the Mesolithic. From an archaeological perspective, Ireland has traditionally been regarded as being on the periphery of Europe. Nevertheless, the concept of an Atlantic identity has been emphasised by various authors and due to its' place in the Atlantic, between the Norwegian Sea and the Straits of Gibraltar, Ireland may have been an active conduit and/or core node within various networks of interaction (Cunliffe 2001; 2008; O'Sullivan and Breen 2007; González-Ruibal 2004). The concept of a late prehistoric Atlantic cultural group is largely based on broad similarities of material culture, especially warrior accoutrements, and the linguistic similarities of Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Brittany, and perhaps the Tartessian language area of southern Iberia which is suggested to be a pre-Iron Age development and a potential lingua-franca of the Atlantic LBA (O'Sullivan and Breen 2007, 95; Cunliffe 2008; Koch 2009; Koch 2010). Connections between Iberia and Ireland are evidenced through many shared objects and motifs, for instance V-notched shields, various tool types and gold bar-torcs (Almagro-Gorbea 1995; Ó Faoláin 2004; González-Ruibal 2004). More specific connections between Ireland and Tartessos in southern Portugal during the LBA may point to transmission between the Atlantic cultural zone and the western Mediterranean zone which was abuzz with Greek and Phoenician activity (Eogan 1995; Ó Faoláin 2004; Cunliffe 2008).

There is also evidence for pan-European interaction which included Ireland in the BA (Champion 1989; Cunliffe 2008; Waddell 2010). For instance, west-central Europe can be accessed via an extensive network of rivers reaching from the North Sea and English Channel to the Mediterranean, and is the potential ancestral area for many Irish objects and suggested practices (Eogan 1994; Cunliffe 2001, 311; Ó Faoláin 2004, 11; Gerloff 2010). Northern Europe is also considered to have heavily influenced Ireland during the BA, and direct contacts have been suggested, often citing the increased occurrence of amber objects in Ireland during the LBA as evidence (Eogan 1994, 1995). Interestingly, the Irish artefacts that show Scandinavian influence are predominantly ornaments, a direct contrast to the more utilitarian contributions from Britain (Eogan 1995, 133). This overseas interaction was not one sided however, as Irish insular developments were vibrant during the LBA, and there is evidence for Irish-made prestige objects in various parts of Europe (Herity and Eogan 1977; Eogan 1995).

Britain was an undeniably close contact to Ireland throughout all of prehistory, both directly as seen through the distribution of various weapon and tool types, for instance the Ballintober swords (Eogan 1995; Ó Faoláin 2004, 8), and as part of larger European networks. Dynamic interfaces likely existed between Ulster and Scotland as part of a network connecting Ireland with Northern Europe, and between Leinster and Continental Europe through Wales and the Thames estuary (Eogan 1993; Eogan 1995, 128; O'Sullivan and Breen 2007). Various additional routes have been proposed: between the Rhine and the Thames, and between Calais and Dover (Champion 1999, 106; O'Sullivan and Breen 2007, 105 after McGrail 1987). There have also been direct

links proposed between France and Ireland via the Garonne estuary, a sea voyage possibly facilitated by sails as early as 1200 BC (McGrail 1987; O'Sullivan and Breen 2007). Several LBA artefact types, such as triple-linked chains, double rings and curve bladed socketed knives are known in Ireland and France but not Britain, strengthening the claim for direct contact between France and Ireland (Herity and Eogan 1977, 213).



Fig.39 Leaf-shaped, flange-hilted bronze sword from Kilkee townland, Co. Clare (note use-wear edge-notching) (Clare County Library 2013c)

There are many LBA Irish objects which evidence exotic influences, however the sword is particularly significant due to its social importance across Europe (Fig.39). The introduction of the sword to LBA Ireland revolutionised the nature of conflict and combat tactics as it is both longer and more versatile than the thrusting dirk or rapier, being light and rigid enough to be wielded for slashing and parrying (Bourke 2001, 98). The Class 4 sword is considered to be the first truly insular type produced in Ireland, at around the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC (Eogan 1965, 12). A change therefore seems to have taken place between the introduction and adoption of sword technology and combat techniques to the development of an insular type which was produced in far greater amounts, a development of perhaps 300 years if Ó Faoláin (2004) is correct in suggesting that the Ballintober sword was introduced to Ireland in the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC. This therefore seems to reflect a change from exotic sword types being used as archetypes to innovative insular designs being used as archetypes, perhaps indicating a concern with expressing indigenous affiliations and identities within specialist social roles like that of the warrior. The prevalence of the male warrior ideal, and the outward display of warrior accoutrements, was possibly a fundamental link in the long-distance networks which facilitated the transmission of technologies, styles, objects, ideas, and practices (including ritual practices) during the LBA.

The high status objects produced by highly skilled craftworkers in LBA Ireland often display technical or stylistic influences from distant regions of Europe. Although no LBA sea-going vessel has as yet been uncovered in Ireland, the presence of continental European objects like those from the Tamlaght Hoard, Navan Complex, Co. Armagh, demonstrate that sea journeys were taking place (Waddell 2010, 227). Thus, although evidence of seaworthy boats from LBA Ireland may be lacking, material culture and foreign raw materials clearly indicate that travel across the seas (Irish, North and Celtic) and interaction with outside groups was an important activity (e.g. Eogan 1995). It has been suggested that in the LBA Ireland had direct long-distance connections with cultures across the North Sea and along the Atlantic coast. Alternatively, short journeys in small craft may have been made, perhaps in plank built-boats like those found in

southern Britain (O'Sullivan and Breen 2007, 96,104-5). Journeys across seas may have been conducted by a select group of individuals, perhaps those who held specific social roles/identities, were members of seafaring lineages, or were at a certain life-stage (i.e. journeying as a rite of passage).

The BA dugout canoes found in Ireland demonstrate that people were travelling by river and perhaps also navigating coastal bays and estuaries. It is interesting that a region celebrated for rock-art depictions of BA seafarer's and seagoing vessels, Scandinavia, like Ireland exhibits a paucity of actual remains of these boats while river-going dugout canoes (logboats) have been recovered (Coles 2004, 180). Perhaps this indicates that seafarers were not common, or that these boats were ritually decommissioned like the (possibly) deliberately sunk BA dugout canoes recently found at Must Farm near Peterborough, England (Mustfarm 2012). That dugout canoes have not been recorded on Scandinavian BA rock art may indicate that riverine travel was not as ritually infused as was travel across large bodies of water. However, Chapman and Gearey (2004) caution that riverine travel would have also been a risky undertaking and like open water journeys would have contributed to 'social bonding'. They suggest that "boatbuilding, repair and seamanship all require very specific skill sets, and in some ways may be seen as being as specialized as activities such as metalworking" (Chapman and Gearey 2004, 455).

Water borne travel therefore represents the formation and expression of identity on a number of levels. Individual identity would have been transformed by partaking in a long voyage, (hopefully) returning with tall tales, gifts and new (or reinforced) social networks. Community identity would have been shaped through involvement in boat-building and repair, and more exclusive group identity would have been strengthened through social bonding generated by the shared voyage. The outward expression of identity may have also been altered through participation in sea voyages. For instance through the wearing or gifting of exotic objects acquired on the journey, or by physical augmentation like tattoos, piercings or hair-style (including facial hair).

The dialogues concerning long-distance networks in prehistoric Europe have largely focused on high status members of society and their perceived control of metalworking and the exchange of metals and metallic objects. An economic basis for these exchanges was long assumed by archaeologists. However, as Harding states,

"Only those whose privileged position enabled the acquisition of exotic goods by means of gift exchange of the like were involved, and what (if anything) they provided in return may equally have had little to do with the economic system. The fact that such goods were traded over long distances thus says nothing about the economy, but potentially a great deal about society." (1984, 144)

It is important to keep in mind that other types of objects and materials may have accompanied (or even initiated) the exchange of metalwork. Again, the focus in metals

can be explained in part by their durability: it is difficult to interpret the exchange of objects/materials for which we have no trace. Nevertheless, other objects and materials which would *not* have left such a distinct archaeological signature were likely exchanged. Sherratt points to the importance of wine in the ancient Greek and Roman economies, as well as the more recent trade of Australian *pitcheri* and West African kola, to highlight the possible importance of ‘psychoactive substances’ in the development and maintenance of prehistoric exchange networks (1995, 8). These types of substances may be highly influential to socio-cultural change, which may or may not be reflected in the archaeological record. In the case of the introduction of wine to regions outside of the Mediterranean the social implications are archaeologically discernible through the adopting of various aspects of the Mediterranean banqueting assemblage and etiquette (implying shared commensality between people from different cultural backgrounds). This did not mean that traditional banqueting practices were forgotten, simply that they were transformed by the introduction of the new beverage and the paraphernalia that accompanied it.

In addition to exotic substances, like those Sherratt highlights, exotic knowledge and practices were also transmitted through BA long-distance networks. For example, in a recent publication Vankilde (2007) discusses the spread of Urnfield materials and practices (beginning around 1200 BC) from Central Europe to the Atlantic coast, Northern Sea and south to the western Mediterranean. Pottery, metalwork and funerary practices in these various areas all demonstrate connections to the Urnfield cultural area. However, Vankilde is keen to stress that although there are similarities in objects, symbols and practices across a vast ‘macro-region’ this does not indicate that a homogenous culture existed (2007, 143). Although current evidence and research (e.g. stable isotope analysis) is indicating that long-distance movement of people, materials, objects, and through them ideas, was more common than archaeologists had previously assumed, local identity and ‘culture’ was retained. Thus, whole-scale movement of and replacement of cultures is not realistic for the LBA in Europe and instead the situation seems to be much more varied and complex. Many authors agree that the socio-political situation across much of Europe was unstable at this time, a condition which no doubt drove the circulation of objects and materials over the long-distance networks (Rowlands 1984; Vankilde 2007; Kristiansen 2011), and may have created a socio-cultural situation that allowed for the espousal of exotic practices alongside both exotic and indigenous materials.

### **The exotic in Irish Late Bronze Age ritual practice**

Long distance interaction in the Irish LBA can be perceived in material culture and archaeological discernible practices, both of which may display exotic influences while maintaining a regional character. For instance, although ritual feasting was extant throughout Irish prehistory a dramatic change may be seen in the LBA with the introduction of cauldrons, buckets and flesh-hooks from the Aegean via south-eastern Europe (Almagro-Gorbea 1995, 142; Gerloff 2010, 335, 348; Armada 2011). Aegean influences can be seen across Europe in the BA and possibly reached Ireland via a

number of active channels. It is very tempting to make direct connections between BA Mediterranean and Irish feasting because of the high status and highly formalised nature of the assemblages in both areas (Figs.40-42). However, it is more likely that commensality was highly formalised in *all* European regions at this time and since feasts are an ideal venue at which to (re)establish long-distance connections through fêting visitors, exchanging gifts, and subtly negotiating alliances, the modes of conducting these types of feasts were transmitted through participation.

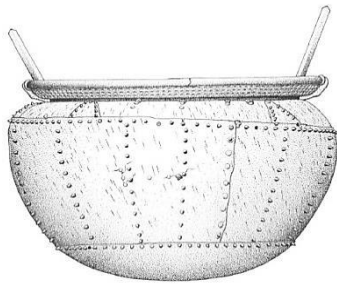


Fig.40 Lisdromturk, Ireland; 700-600 BC (Gerloff 2010 Plate 79)



Fig.41 Sipbachzell, Austria; Hallstatt A (Gerloff 2010 Plate 163)



Fig.42 Greek Cauldron from Hochdorf tumulus, Germany (Allen 2007)

The questions that arise as a result of the dissemination of feasting paraphernalia across Europe in the LBA are very similar to those asked in relation to the spread of the Bell Beaker phenomenon in the Chalcolithic. According to Kohring the Bell Beaker spread is often explained through a ‘shared ideological meaning’ related to emergent social hierarchy due to participation in prestige goods networks by “the agency of individual elites participating in larger regional networks and accepting the concomitant ideological values that go along with the material accoutrements of ‘individualization’ and power” (2011, 150). However, she goes on to state that the beakers themselves varied locally in terms of style, context of use and deposition, and vessels in local assemblages, so much so that the beakers “materialized different things to different people” (Kohring 2011, 150). The suggestion is therefore that a better understanding can be gained of both local use and the broader social institutions and structures that the beakers reflect: “If Bell Beaker assemblages materialize an elite ideology at the macroscale, then the local variation in styles, decorative techniques and contexts of use provide means for understanding how these new ideologies were negotiated and established community by community” (Kohring 2011, 151). A similar view may be taken of the feasting equipment found across Europe in the LBA: that a wide reaching ideology can be expressed in different modes depending on the socio-historical circumstances in which it is introduced to a new area (i.e. the pre-existing social/political/cultural context will affect how new ideas and practices are taken up).

As with LBA ritual feasting, ritual deposition is another example of ritual practice which when viewed on a macro-scale seem very similar across Europe (e.g. swords deposited in rivers) and when viewed at a micro- or regional-scale can be considered as varied interpretations of an archetypal concept (e.g. weaponry deposits from timber



structures at rivers as opposed to natural fording spots). What certainly seems to be consistent across Europe in the LBA is that highly ‘valuable’ and rare objects were deposited and not recovered. This is seen most obviously in the metallic artefacts due to their durability (especially when deposited in wet locations where they were not disturbed), but possibly also due to the fact that they were so highly prized and therefore ‘worthy’ of being ritually deposited in this fashion. Although the exact motivation, or meaning, of the depositions may remain unknown, this practice was consistently enacted across Europe which implies a shared understanding of the significance of depositing highly prized objects. Choices were made when depositing materials as part of ritual practices, in LBA Ireland this is demonstrated in carefully arranged deposits and deliberate fragmentation (Chapters 1.2, 2.2 and 4.1). The choice of an indigenous or ‘exotic’ material, object and/or style for deposition is therefore significant because this may reveal the relative or inherent status enjoyed by materials/objects/styles before being chosen for deposition. Therefore, the types of materials that are deposited can provide important insights into the long-distance connections prevalent in the LBA and how significant these connections were for the societies performing the depositions.

One of the most intriguing and consistent depositional trends seen across Western Europe in the LBA is deposition at wet locations. This can vary from what archaeologically appear to be natural locations in the landscape (e.g. bogs, open pools of water, rivers) to wet locations adjacent to structures which have been described as sanctuaries or temples (e.g. Cannes-Écluse, Dép. Seine-et-Marne, France). Ireland has more wet deposits than other European regions, but it is unclear whether this reflects the importance of this type of ritual practice in Ireland, or the fact that many of the objects were deposited in areas which are now bog, and so were in extremely good condition when found (as well as being actively recovered due to peat extraction). In Ireland the vast majority of the wet deposits seem to have taken place at significant locations in the natural landscape which may be remote from human occupation and/or activity, and in other cases intrinsically linked with ritual centres (e.g. the Tamlaght hoard in the Navan complex). The deposit of large volumes of material at wet locations in Ireland may also reflect an adherence to a wider Atlantic phenomena, as the Iberian peninsula has gold hoards of comparable size (Perea 2008, 56) and in Scandinavia the majority of hoards are found in bogs (Bradley 1988, 249).

In Goldhahn and Oestigaard’s (2006) thought-provoking discussion of the social repercussions of death in the European Bronze and Iron Ages (Chapter 4.1), they stress the importance of funerary events for the (re)establishment of alliances and the exchange of meaningful gifts. In particular: “Funerals were such occasions where the descendants and the living could legitimate future hierarchies by transferring the deceased’s social status and power to themselves by re-negotiating former alliances and creating new ones” (Goldhahn and Oestigaard 2006, 27). The deposition of objects, and human bone, at natural, liminal, and domestic locations in LBA Ireland could be understood as a mechanism for the renegotiation of power (perhaps related to relationships within the European networks of interaction), as Goldhahn and Oestigaard

discuss more broadly. Perhaps participation in death rituals by politically significant members of neighbouring communities explains the quick spread of death ritual practices like the Urnfield cremation practices (Vankilde 2007, 144; Bradley 1998, 161). Goldhahn and Oestigaard suggest that high status members of interregional communities would have travelled regionally to participate in the power negotiations conducted during death rituals (2006, 31; cf. Kristiansen and Larsson 2005). This focus on regional interaction does not necessarily exclude the importance of very geographically distant alliances. However it does highlight that the catchment area of death ritual participants could affect the (re)negotiation and maintenance of power hierarchies and alliances in later prehistory.

As is clear from the discussions above, it is material culture which often allows for the archaeological observation of long-distance interactions, as evidenced by one of the most intriguing and exotic foreign materials to enter Ireland during the BA: amber. Although some Irish amber may in fact be retinite (cf. Shennan and Beck 1991; Feeney-Johnson 2012), the majority is likely Baltic amber which made its way to Ireland via long-distance networks. Although it has been suggested that the amber transported to Ireland could have originated anywhere from eastern Britain to the eastern Baltic, its relative scarcity in Britain does imply a Baltic origin (Waddell 2010, 271). Over the course of the BA the desire for amber in Ireland seemed to increase, corresponding to an increase in the size/weight, volume and variety of prestige objects being produced in this period generally (Waddell 2010, 218). Over thirty amber finds are recorded, mostly beads which are predominantly spherical, oval or disc-shaped. Extraordinary examples are the necklace of 421 amber beads from Kurin, Co. Derry (Mallory and McNeill 1991, 135), and the six stranded necklace from Derrybrien, Co. Galway, which may have included up to 500 beads (Eogan 1994, 85).

The natural characteristics of amber (it is warm to the touch, has a glowing colour, and has electrostatic properties) and its rarity would have set it apart from other materials and even in Scandinavia amber has been found in some compelling ritual contexts. For instance, a fragmented amber bead was one of the objects found in the Hvidegård burial belt-purse, dated to 1300-1100 cal. BC, an object which has strong ritual connotations and is possibly representative of warrior-shamans as mentioned in Chapter 4.1 (Goldhahn 2012, 242). Another significant object is the bronze and amber 'sun-holder' from Denmark (find-spot unknown): when held up to the light a cross (another BA European solar symbol) appears in the middle of the amber disc (National Museum of Denmark 2013a). This use of amber in connection to potential solar rituals in Scandinavia is very interesting in relation to the use of amber in LBA Ireland to fashion large necklaces, as in Ireland BA personal ornaments made from other materials (in particular gold, which has similar visual properties to amber) often depict solar symbols.

As discussed in Chapter 2.4 in the LBA there is a formalised solar symbol found across Europe. The types of objects depicting this symbol vary regionally, perhaps indicating that a variety of local meanings existed alongside the more widespread general meaning, reflecting the socio-historical context of use. For instance, while some have

advocated for the introduction of this symbol to Ireland in the LBA others have suggested that its similarity to earlier spirals demonstrates a continuation of symbolic form from the Neolithic, when in fact both interpretations may be simultaneously correct. Multivocality does not devalue the symbol, in fact the use and expression of a symbol in a variety of ritual and other socially significant contexts may increase its vigor as a mechanism to indicate power and authority (social, political, and/or religious) by increasing its ability to be recognised across the social spectrum and across cultures. It is therefore possible that this symbol was an implicit visual cue of shared cultural understanding which enabled the interaction of disparate groups with perhaps different languages and/or etiquettes of interaction. The recognition of a known significant symbol in exotic lands may have helped to alleviate tension for both parties, and thus facilitated the building of relationships. These symbols were depicted on high-status, likely ritual, objects in many regions and these objects were moved along the long-distance networks. It is therefore not far-fetched to suggest that what may have initially been an exotic symbol quickly became well-known and widely understood.

### **Integrating the exotic with the insular**

The lure of the exotic and previously unknown material speaks to something fundamental within us, as does the lure of the exotic object. Seeing something which is familiar, but decidedly not, such as a sword fashioned or decorated in an exotic way, often engenders feelings of excitement and desire. In the BA exotic objects would have signaled that an individual or community was situated within long-distance networks and most likely would have acted as an outward visual cue of relative status within the local region and/or community. However, in BA Europe often only some elements of exotic technologies and styles were integrated into local practices and productions. It can therefore be difficult to uncover from where and by which methods of transmission novel objects, ideas, and practices entered into local discourses.

What is noticeable in the above discussion is that many of the ritual objects and practices found in LBA Ireland had exotic roots or influences, yet the Irish material remains distinct and some objects and practices do not exhibit strong European influences. The indigenous character and sheer volume of objects produced may suggest that specialist goldsmithing centres existed in BA Ireland, for instance in the lower Shannon region as suggested in Chapter 4.1. For instance, the gorgets which were produced and deposited in the south-west have some possible stylistic links to Iberia and France (Cahill 2005), but their form and construction appear to be distinctly Irish. There are also insular bracelets of a round, or oval-sectioned, type which can be solid or hollow, usually of gold (very infrequently bronze). Other contemporary bracelet forms are widespread across Britain and Ireland in the BA, but this insular form seems to be particularly Irish, with only a few having been found in Britain. Other personal ornaments which seem to have been produced more insularly in Ireland include ‘lock-rings’, ‘hair-rings’/‘ring-money’, sleeve-fasteners and dress-fasteners.

It is probable the adoption of exotic objects and practices may not have involved the entire spectrum of society, that there may have been elements of both élite and lower

status groups who resisted change. Thus the upsurge in the variety and volume of object-types in LBA Ireland must be understood as a reflection of the social processes and contexts within which this phenomenon developed, not simply as an inevitable process. As Earle argues, “ideas held in human minds cannot be shared directly in any way” and must be transmitted via media of some kind, be it speech, symbolism, or practice (2004, 153). The study of LBA Ireland inevitably involves the analysis of artefact types and typologies and investigations into what influenced their production. However, it is very important to not segregate the study of LBA society and culture from the study of material culture as the interaction between people is an important factor in the transmission and adoption of novel technologies, styles, objects and practices. The above discussion has demonstrated that material culture and materiality affected the structure of these interactions and social relationships, and in turn were affected by them.

### **4.3 Identity and interaction in Late Bronze Age ritual practice**

Before some forms of individual and group identity can be expressed they must be formed through action and practice, for instance through the building of monuments, producing objects, long-distance travel, achieving goals, learning skills, and amassing specialist knowledge. These practices also imply a degree of performativity, especially when they are facets of ritual events which sanction the outward expression of various identities and social roles to a large group of observers. During ritual feasts, for example, there are various avenues for the expression of identity: commensal politics, reciprocity, hospitality, visual displays, seating/eating according to rank/status, control over the availability of types of food and serving equipment, knowledge of etiquette/protocol, etc. The issue of audience also arises when identity is outwardly expressed through ritual practice. For example, the communicative character of ritual deposition implies some sort of audience/witness whether human or supernatural. Prior knowledge the audience may have of object biographies may further affect the social impact of the process of deposition (i.e. heirloom swords used in multiple combats vs. swords produced primarily for deposition).

Different aspects of identity may be highlighted through different types of ritual practice. For instance, death ritual is often used to evaluate the identity of the deceased (e.g. gender, ethnicity, social status, etc.) through the analysis of grave-goods, preparation of the corpse and manner of burial. Evidence of death ritual can alternatively be archaeologically useful for gathering information concerning the renegotiation of identity by ‘mourners’ as they may use the public forum of death ritual events to take up new social roles and identities. This allows for both social mobility and the maintenance of the status quo. As well, the public and collective actions taken during death rituals may generate a sense of group identity and solidarity between the participants. Of course, aspects of individual identity may also be expressed through participation in ritual practices, as was seen with the example of the ritual specialist, an archaeologically vague but ever-present social role in LBA Ireland. What is clear from the discussion presented in Chapter 4.1 is that LBA Irish identity was multifaceted. Both individuals and groups hold multiple aspects of identity which come together to form a whole, and with particular aspects potentially coming to the fore depending on the context. Consequently, the archaeological evidence for LBA social roles and identities clearly points to the existence of a complex and dynamic social hierarchy or heterarchy and implies much formality in terms of the etiquette of action and interaction.

In the LBA, Ireland was situated within active and dynamic networks of interaction, perhaps the most prevalent being the Atlantic zone which may also have had a regional identity (based on material culture and a potential language grouping) within the larger European networks. These networks are largely identifiable from the material culture which was transported within them. However, as discussed above, this is not necessarily indicative of economic processes, as much as reflecting socio-cultural interaction. Such interactions are evidenced both by the movement of objects, production techniques and

styles of object, and by the spread of practices from one area to another which indicates the communication of specialist knowledge. The example of the swords' introduction to Ireland demonstrates the complexity of the networks of interaction as well as how new objects and/or practices were not necessarily taken-up whole-heartedly but were integrated into existing socio-historical contexts. Novel types of material culture introduced to Ireland from other areas of Europe were likely accompanied by the knowledge of their use. For instance, in the case of feasting it is likely that commensality etiquette accompanied cauldrons, buckets, and flesh-hooks into Ireland. However, it is important to acknowledge that the uptake of new forms of material culture and social practice was not a passive process, knowledge of the protocol and etiquette of other cultures undoubtedly facilitated the development and maintenance of long-distance socio-political interactions and therefore may be viewed as inherently political and strategic.

Regional interpretations of broader, yet consistent, European ritual practices are also evident in depositional activity which was performed in similar locations across Europe but exhibits different characters in terms of the types of objects deposited, associated rituals (e.g. fragmentation) and/or choice of location. This possibly demonstrates regional expressions of a pan-European understanding of ritual deposition. Similarly the pan-European use of the multivocal solar-symbol may have facilitated interaction despite linguistic and 'cultural' difference. Long-distance interaction is not only evidenced through the dissemination of symbols and the physical movement of objects but also in the widespread valuation of particular raw materials, such as amber. The outward display of exotic objects and materials may have signalled relative status within communities as well as facilitating the acquisition of further symbolic capital, for instance during ritual events.

Although there are many indications of the influx of objects, materials, symbols and practices into Ireland during the LBA, robust insular traditions are also present. These can be seen in styles/techniques of manufacturing objects as well as local interpretations of widely practiced rituals which imply that although Ireland was an active participant in these wider European networks of interaction a strong indigenous identity was present. Therefore the networks of interaction did not flow in one direction, there were interactions happening between various communities and regions simultaneously and this must have been dependent on what socio-political ties existed between various high profile members of particular groups whether these were communities, kin-groups or specialist-knowledge groups like warrior retinues.

## 5.0 Ritual in Late Bronze Age Ireland

This thesis has allowed for the Irish LBA socio-cultural system to be considered from a fresh perspective by investigating evidence for the physical enactment of ritual practice through material culture and materiality, locations and landscapes of ritual, and the identities and social roles of those who were likely to have enacted them. The Irish LBA social system would have been composed of socio-culturally and historically contingent practices, institutions and structuring mechanisms, all dynamically integrated within the dialectic relationships that existed between actors, practices and the system itself. Some of these institutions and structuring mechanisms are archaeologically discernible through evidence of practice, for instance the social role of warrior as expressed through personal grooming equipment and the repetitive deposition of martial equipment at particular locations in the landscape. There is congruency in ritual practice over the entire island of Ireland but there are also regional differences which suggest the existence of regional group identities that were in some cases outwardly expressed (e.g. gorgets in south-west Ireland). Furthermore, differential access to particular objects and materials (e.g. amber, swords, etc.) in combination with large-scale construction projects (e.g. hillforts) indicating organised communal labour under the direction of a particular individual or social group, together demonstrate formalised social stratification and group organisation in LBA Ireland.

In terms of the types of material deposited and also the depth of specialist ritual knowledge involved in the practice there is a perceptible difference between the ritual depositions performed within settlements and those performed at isolated/peripheral locations such as wetlands. This is linked to the issue of audience in ritual practice, in that a number of people would have been able to observe (and thus remember) ritual practices like foundation or closing deposits integrated into the lifecycle of a settlement and its inhabitants, but it is unlikely that many people observed the ritual depositions which took place at isolated locations in the landscape (e.g. Glencurran Cave). This implies that some types of ritual practice could be performed by a spectrum of community members while others were restricted to members of the community who held social roles enabling/allowing them to participate in specialist ritual activities. There was thus a spectrum of ritual knowledge in LBA Irish society, from the general which was known to all members of a community, to specialist knowledge known only to a few.

Social differentiation in the Irish LBA is evidenced through a variety of social roles and identities which can be discerned through the actions taken to execute ritual practices. Some of these social roles may have been more overtly defined than others, such as the warrior in contrast to the seafarer, but regardless, the presence of a variety of social roles indicates that identity was multifaceted and perhaps also 'dividual' as discussed in Chapters 1.3 and 4.1. At death there seems to have been a transformation of the individual to the generic 'other' through cremation and fragmentation of the bone, the paucity of gravegoods combined with this degree of processing of the corpse further

indicating a loss of personal identity at death. It was proposed that the extended amount of time involved in Irish LBA death ritual practice may denote that the transition from life to death involved the realignment of social relationships in which the deceased was engaged. In particular it was suggested that the social roles and identities held by the deceased would likely have been taken-up by living members of their community/social group and that death ritual events would have been the ideal venue at which to publically declare (overtly or implicitly) newly acquired social roles and statuses.

There is a distinct preoccupation with increasing social status through ritual practice in LBA Ireland. Large public gatherings may have generally centred around ritual practice (as they do today) and would have been an advantageous venue at which to outwardly display identity and status as well as to acquire higher status in a socially acceptable and structured manner. In particular, the presence of an audience formalises social manoeuvring, as other members of a group must acknowledge the acquisition of social and/or symbolic capital in order for social change to be effected. Much social interaction and negotiation was likely symbolic and implicit in other actions. Since shared cultural knowledge is required to perceive and translate embedded meaning(s), the use of material culture and materiality provides an avenue for culturally constituted non-verbal communication in ritual practice. The types of objects and symbols incorporated into ritual practice were also likely to be multivocal in that they communicated various meanings and messages depending on the circumstance of use and the perception of their use by observers. This is especially evident in the high status material culture which was repeatedly used within ritual practice and then ritually deposited in what may have been dramatic ritual events.

This thesis has confronted the issues of the Irish LBA worldview and socio-cultural system, but has refrained from outlining a cosmology. It could be argued that the terms worldview and cosmology can be and have been used interchangeably, however I would contend that cosmology holds connotations of religious narratives while worldview connotes an understanding of the world which is not necessarily contingent on mythology. At the outset of this research project there was a deliberate choice made to approach an analysis of LBA ritual practice from the archaeological evidence and not integrate later Irish or contemporary Indo-European myth and legend into its interpretation. This latter approach has been conducted elsewhere in Europe and has produced intriguing results, particularly in relation to the representative iconography available in Scandinavia on objects and rock art (Kristiansen and Larsson 2005; Kristiansen 2010). Such data has allowed Kaul to envisage an entire cosmology and suite of myths, narratives, and rituals concerned with the voyage of the sun and the active facilitation of its return to the sky each morning as well as ensuring the lengthening of the days which heralded spring and summer (and agricultural productivity) (1998, 270-271). However, the types and volume of archaeological data available for BA Scandinavia is different to that of Ireland. The sun has been identified as an important structuring mechanism in LBA Irish ritual practice, but this initial interpretation of the archaeological data was necessary before conducting any additional



studies considering Irish LBA solar symbolism as related to the Indo-European mythological cycle. Nevertheless, there are many aspects of later Irish myth, legend and pseudo-historical sources which may implicitly reference much earlier ritual and social practices, for instance the rite of passage necessary to become a full member of the *Fianna* warrior-band as discussed in Chapter 2.4. Integration of contemporary European BA and later Irish literary narratives within an analysis of LBA Irish social roles, practices and structure is thus a potentially rich avenue of future research.

Broad themes in LBA Irish ritual practice that emerged during research were control (social, physical, ideological), ritual as a mechanism for social manoeuvring, and the sun as a metaphor for the dominant cyclical worldview. Some of these themes are clearly reflective of the dominant concerns of the agro-pastoral lifeway, such as the continuation/development of a link between birth-life-death-rebirth and the diurnal journey of the sun (as well as the yearly seasonal cycle and the agricultural cycle). It is also possible that the preoccupation with control in the LBA was related to the precariousness of life at this time and in this economy: a prolonged period of low crop yield and/or diseased livestock could have serious effects. Therefore the proper enactment of rituals to placate the ancestors/deities/biosphere/etc. may have been an important mechanism to ensure the continued health and success of individuals, kin-groups and communities. Control over the performance of ritual practices and use/production of ritually symbolic objects may accordingly reflect a need to control and/or influence existential concerns such as death, life and fertility.

Control is evidenced at both the micro and macro scale of ritual practice in LBA Ireland and is significant in relation to increased social differentiation and stratification, which if relatively unstable may have allowed for social mobility. Control over knowledge is an important aspect of this, since by controlling access to specialist knowledge (technical, political, ritual, etc.) the ability to take on particular social roles is also controlled. Types of requisite specialist knowledge may have overlapped in some social roles, thus further emphasising societal sub-divisions. For instance, object production required specialist knowledge of the physical actions required to produce objects but in some cases may have extended beyond this to the ritual knowledge necessary to ensure pacification of otherworldly forces associated with said object production, the depiction of particular cosmological symbols and/or with the associated resource procurement.

Investigating the physical enactment of ritual practice has also allowed for the consideration of intentionality and deliberate choice in the past. While a general framework of ritual practice is evident across LBA Ireland, there is a degree of fluidity within that framework regarding the type or specific ritual practice necessary to achieve the desired outcome. This may in some cases reflect reaction to circumstances which determined the course of action, such as the enactment of fertility ritual in reaction to reduced crop yield resulting from a drop in temperature and increase in precipitation, and in other cases reflect adherence to custom or tradition which further references socio-cultural connections to particular landscapes and/or locations within them (i.e. this is where our ancestors also conducted this ritual). The conservatism seen in some

manifestations of ritual practice may also indicate a need to control, in that there may be a hesitancy to completely replace an established practice. This is evident when there is a change over time in one aspect of the ritual but overall the practice remains the same, for instance in the deposition of MBA rapiers and LBA swords at the same locations, or in the continued association of ceramics with death ritual when the processing of the corpse is fundamentally changed. Novel ritual practices are taken on in the LBA, for instance new feasting rituals are implied by the introduction of cauldrons, but there often seems to be an attachment to the 'old ways'. This is evident in the continued importance of particular locations over hundreds or even thousands of years and the incorporation of earlier monuments in ritual complexes which reflect a concern with lineage and referencing/respecting ancestors during ritual practice.

In Ireland from the Neolithic onwards many death ritual monuments and the deposition of human remains at both monuments and within settlements seems to display a westward bias which indicates an association between death and the setting sun and perhaps even a reference to a concept of an otherworld. This was discussed at a more macro-level in Chapter 3.1 in relation to the siting of barrows along rivers which flowed west towards the Atlantic coast of Co. Clare, an example which illustrates the association between LBA death ritual and ritualised movement through the landscape towards the west. As in later Irish mythology, if there was a concept of an 'other' world in the LBA it was likely considered a physical place on another plane of existence as well as described metaphorically in relation to physical places in actual reality (i.e. 'the west' as the mythical place beyond the western waters, or as a physical location west of your present location, etc.).

To develop a full understanding of Irish LBA ritual practice in its social context it was essential to acknowledge that the archaeological evidence for ritual practice reflects the culmination of a series of actions. Many of these actions have not left a robust archaeological signature, but may be inferred from other aspects of the evidence, therefore allowing for the construction of a thorough narrative of LBA ritual practice. In some instances the identification of these more ephemeral components led to insights concerning the role ritual practice played in the negotiation of the LBA social system. For example, fertility ritual and solar symbolism is pervasive in LBA ritual practice but only rarely are overt references to fertility present in the archaeological record (e.g. Glencurran Cave). However, once implicit references to fertility, the sun, and the cyclical worldview of life-death-rebirth, began to be noted in the LBA archaeological record their ubiquity quickly became apparent. Other instances allowed for the critical assessment of long-held assumptions regarding the social motivations for later prehistoric ritual practice, such as the traditional association between wetland depositions and ritual and between dryland depositions and safekeeping, now known to be overly simplistic.

It is clear that ritual practice in LBA Ireland was complex and dynamic, as was the socio-cultural system in which it was situated. As a result of this complexity there is much more that could be investigated which would enhance our understanding of LBA

ritual practice and the social structure within which it was integrated. For instance, identifying the degree to which, and routes by which, goods and resources (e.g. metal objects and faunal assemblages) were moved through the landscape would further inform our interpretation of LBA ritual practice. A possible example would be using isotope analysis to ascertain whether the animals consumed at Haughey's Fort, Co. Armagh, were from the local area or transported from further afield, potentially indicating whether the fort was a focal site of ritual practice for a large or small catchment area. Another approach could be to analyse the metallic composition of object types which originated outside of Ireland and had subsequent insular development, such as cauldrons. Such avenues of analysis could potentially affect the interpretation of LBA social structure in terms of evaluating the degree and type of social stratification, and modes of intergroup interaction within Ireland and between Ireland and other nodes in the European-wide BA networks of interaction.

There are certain trends in ritual practice which seems to continue beyond the LBA, for instance the deposition of swords at rivers as well as the importance of the sun as a structuring mechanism and metaphor for the dominant worldview. Now that the LBA enactment of such ritual practices has been contextualised, variance from the LBA practice in later periods could be considered. If it is assumed that the most significant ritual practices will be the least likely to change over time, the identification of change within continuity of practice could act to further distinguish those elements of ritual which are the most fundamental. This could act as the first step to assessing the potential main components of the prevailing cosmology of later prehistoric Ireland.

The tendency to orient ritual practice towards the west and by implication the setting sun is a particular example of an integral element of LBA ritual practice identified in the context of this thesis which is deserving of further study. This phenomenon has been noted throughout Ireland, for instance in the barrow complexes at Dromore, Co. Down, and Elton, Co. Limerick, which are oriented along an east-west axis, as well as in relation to siting of barrows on the western coast of Co. Clare (see Chapter 3.1). A further westward bias has been noted in the ritual deposition of materials and objects in structural elements within LBA settlements. Thus it would be valuable to compare a number of regional studies of this phenomenon within Ireland and even in relation to other regions of Europe. Correspondingly, it would be rewarding to develop the possible connections between the solar cycle, the human lifecycle and the agricultural cycle as evidenced through the integration of cereal grain into death ritual practice.

Another example of a trend in LBA ritual practice which warrants additional investigation is the pervasiveness of deliberate fragmentation of objects and human bone and the implications this has for concepts of the self, for understandings of the lifecycle, and for an understanding of the worldview of the LBA inhabitants of Ireland. Deliberate fragmentation prior to ritual deposition was noted at Moneen Cave, Co. Clare, via pottery sherd refitting analysis (Dowd 2012), and at the flat cemetery of Ballyconneely, Co. Clare, where the human bone within one particular token cremation was cut into small squares (Read 1999). There is also potentially much to be learned

from comparing degrees of fragmentation between different instances of similar deposition, different types of materials fragmented, and different locations of deposition to determine if there is any further patterning in this phenomenon. It is likely that many more instances of Irish later prehistoric deliberate fragmentation have been uncovered but not recognised and so this research question could prove quite productive in terms of further insights into Irish LBA ritual practice and conceptions of identity.

The research conducted for this thesis has contributed to our understanding of the LBA Irish socio-cultural system by revealing how categories of ritual practice are intertwined and integral to each other and to other less outwardly ritualistic social practices. The preceding chapters demonstrate the pervasiveness of ritual practice in all aspects of the Irish LBA way of life, supporting the assertion that a more nuanced interpretation of ritual practice informs our comprehension of the social system of LBA Ireland. As is hopefully clear at the conclusion of this text, the ritual practices enacted in the Irish LBA reflect the actions and existential concerns of actors within a complex social system. The foundation for further research has now been laid but there is much more to be done to develop our understanding of ritual and society in Late Bronze Age Ireland.

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