



The Metal Ages – the Bronze Age (2200 BC to 800 BC)

The transition from the Neolithic period to the Bronze Age at the end of the 3rd millennium BC was not abrupt but was a gradual continuation of the societal, economic and material changes that had already begun to take place in the previous period.



Bronze metallurgy was initially developed in the Middle East. Bronze artefacts arrived in Europe first, the technological know-how followed later. Copper ore mining in the British Isles gave rise to a second centre of manufacture whose products were exported to the surrounding areas from the 3rd millennium BC onwards.

Bronze metallurgy nevertheless changed prehistoric societies to such an extent that it gave its name to a period that lasted almost 1500 years. Both raw materials and objects made of bronze were traded over vast distances and technological advances impacted many areas, including tool making, farming, the manufacture of jewellery and other prestigious goods, weaponry, transportation etc.

However, the new technology not only brought about important economic changes. The exchange networks that formed on the basis of the bronze trade also served as conduits for the spread of cultural groups and lifestyles.

New funerary customs had a distinct impact on the landscape. The use of collective graves in the Final Neolithic gradually declined and after a period of transition, individual burials in barrows or burial mounds became the norm. Usually circular in shape, these mounds of earth or stone were erected either on their own or in groups that formed vast cemeteries. The burials inside these barrows reflected the social status of the deceased and the social differences provide a picture of a society that grew more and more hierarchical in nature.

Societies and their environment

Cultivation of new areas of land continued in the Bronze Age: the landscape was structured by cultivated fields, farmsteads, hamlets, villages and route networks. At the end of this phase, settlements began to be enclosed by ditches, ramparts and palisades, thus reflecting the formation of centres of power due to regional conflicts. Exchange networks spread throughout Europe.