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CULTURAL BIOGRAPHIES OF PERSONS, OBJECTS AND 'NATURAL' PLACES  
IN THE BRONZE AGE OF THE SOUTHERN NETHERLANDS, C. 2300-600 BC



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*Non multo post in Cantabriae lacum fulmen decidit repertaeque sunt duodecim  
securae, haud ambiguum summae imperii signum.*

(Suetonius, book VII: Galba, Otho, Vitellius)

*Und dast Sterben, dieses Nichtmehrfassen  
Jenes Grunds, auf dem wir täglich stehn,  
Seinem ängstlichen Sich-Niederlassen -:*

*In die Wasser, die ihn sanft empfangen  
Und die sich, wie glücklich und vergangen,  
Unter ihm zurückziehn, Flut um Flut*

(R.M. Rilke 'der Schwan')



# contents

## **Preface** xvii

### PART I PROBLEM, APPROACH, SOURCE CRITISM 1

- 1 Introduction: the problem of bronze deposition and the aim of this study** 3
  - 1.1 Introduction 3
  - 1.2 The social significance of metalwork among European Bronze Age societies 3
  - 1.3 The phenomenon of bronze deposits and its interpretation as ‘ritual consumption’ 5
  - 1.4 Problems in the current interpretation of bronze deposits: ‘selective deposition’ 5
  - 1.5 The southern Netherlands as a promising region for studying ‘selective deposition’ 6
  - 1.6 Research questions and spatial and chronological framework 6
  - 1.7 How the problem will be approached 9
  
- 2 How archaeology has made sense of object depositions: the distinction between ‘ritual’ and ‘profane’ deposits** 13
  - 2.1 Introduction 13
  - 2.2 Seeing bronze deposits primarily in profane terms: *Verwahrfunde* and *Versteckfunde* 13
  - 2.3 Accepting bronze finds as permanent deposits and interpreting them as ‘ritual’ 15
    - 2.3.1 The distinction between ‘ritual’ and ‘profane’ depositions 15
    - 2.3.2 Levy’s theory: is the Bronze Age ritual-profane distinction supported by ethnographic parallels? 17
  - 2.4 *Explaining* ritual deposition: economic and competitive consumption 18
  - 2.5 How ‘ritual’ is reconciled to assumptions on the universality of rationality 19
  - 2.6 Problems we face when using the ‘ritual/ profane’ distinction for the interpretation of deposits 20
    - 2.6.1 Problems raised by the empirical evidence 20
    - 2.6.2 Epistemological problems 20

2.7	How can we get round the problems of the ‘ritual/profane’ distinction?	21
2.8	Final remarks	21
<b>3</b>	<b>Theoretical framework for the study of selective deposition</b>	<b>23</b>
3.1	Introduction	23
3.2	The concept of ‘meaning’	23
3.3	Objects as ‘things’ and objects that are ‘like persons’	25
3.4	How meaning comes about: the cultural biography of things	26
3.5	Kinds of biographies: valuables associated with communal versus personal identities	26
3.6	The start of a biography: production	27
3.6.1	The crucial position of the smith as a creator of potential valuables	27
3.6.2	Material and techniques	28
3.6.3	Concept of form and style	28
3.6.4	Functional possibilities	30
3.7	The life of an object	30
3.7.1	Metalwork circulation as an exchange of gifts <i>and</i> commodities; long-term and short-term exchange	31
3.7.2	Transformation of commodities into gifts or valuables and the archaeological indications that they took place	31
3.7.3	The archaeological correlates for circulation	32
3.7.4	The archaeological correlates for ‘use’	32
3.7.5	The deposited objects as a skewed representation of the objects in circulation	33
3.8	Deposition	33
3.8.1	The practice of deposition as constituted by relations between object, people and location	33
3.8.2	Deposition as performance	35
3.8.3	What deposition brings about	35
3.9	Concluding remarks	35
<b>4</b>	<b>Source criticism: limitations and possibilities of the available evidence</b>	<b>37</b>
4.1	Introduction	37
4.2	How to recognize permanent depositions	37
4.3	How the data were collected and evaluated	38
4.3.1	Assessing the reliability of data	39
4.3.2	Retrieving information on find context	41

- 4.4 Explaining presence and absence of finds: post-depositional processes 42
  - 4.4.1 Natural processes 43
  - 4.4.2 Anthropogenetic processes 43
- 4.5 Explaining presence and absence of finds: research factors 45
- 4.6 Conclusion: which set of data is informative on selective deposition? 45

## PART II SELECTIVE DEPOSITION THROUGHOUT THE BRONZE AGE 53

### **5 Late Neolithic B and Early Bronze Age 55**

- 5.1 Introduction 56
- 5.2 Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age societies in the southern Netherlands 57
- 5.3 Discussion of the available evidence 60
- 5.4 Late Neolithic metalwork 60
  - 5.4.1 Local production and the ‘Dutch Bell Beaker metal’ 61
  - 5.4.2 Flat axes 63
  - 5.4.3 The double axe from Escharen 65
  - 5.4.4 Gold ornaments 66
  - 5.4.5 Daggers 67
  - 5.4.6 Conclusion: selective deposition in the Late Neolithic B? 68
- 5.5 Early Bronze Age metalwork 68
  - 5.5.1 Low-flanged axes 68
  - 5.5.2 Halberds 71
  - 5.5.3 The Wageningen hoard 72
  - 5.5.4 Metalwork from burials and settlements 73
  - 5.5.5 Conclusion: selective deposition in the Early Bronze Age? 74
- 5.6 From stone to bronze 75
  - 5.6.1 How metal replaced stone in daily life 75
  - 5.6.2 The cultural attitude towards metals and stones 75
  - 5.6.3 The life of metals and new elements in the cultural biography of things 76
- 5.7 Patterns in the biographies of metalwork: production and circulation 77
  - 5.7.1 Circulation: the importance of being imported 77
  - 5.7.2 Open systems: the interplay between imported objects and local products 78
- 5.8 Deposition: the incorporation of metalwork in Neolithic offering traditions and their subsequent transformation 78
  - 5.8.1 Continuity and change 78
  - 5.8.2 Fluctuations in the rate of deposition 79
  - 5.8.3 Conclusion 79
- 5.9 Deposition: graves and wet places as contrasting depositional contexts 79
  - 5.9.1 The Beaker burial ritual and the significance of objects as valuables of personhood 80
  - 5.9.2 The deposition of axes in wet places 82
- 5.10 Conclusions 83

<b>6</b>	<b>Middle Bronze Age A</b>	<b>85</b>
6.1	Introduction	86
6.2	The transition from Early to Middle Bronze Age: developments in society and landscape	86
6.3	Discussion of the available evidence	87
6.4	High-flanged and stopridge axes	88
6.4.1	Oldendorf axes	88
6.4.2	Nick-flanged or <i>geknickte</i> axes	91
6.4.3	Atlantic imports? Arreton axes and axes with high-placed short-flanges	93
6.4.4	Two ‘unique’ axes	93
6.4.5	Stopridge axes	96
6.4.6	Conclusion	97
6.5	Spears	97
6.6	‘Swords’ and daggers	100
6.6.1	Dirks, rapiers and daggers of the Sögel, Wohlde, Weizen and Gamprin types	100
6.6.2	The Overloon weapon hoard: the deposition of personal warrior sets	103
6.6.3	Tréboul-St. Brandan swords	103
6.6.4	The ceremonial dirk from Jutphaas	104
6.6.5	Other finds: two daggers of British type	105
6.6.6	Sword biographies	105
6.7	Developments in the structure of the metalwork repertoire	106
6.7.1	The category of specialized weapons and what it implies: the significance of martiality	106
6.7.2	Transformations in existing material culture categories	107
6.8	Metalwork circulation	107
6.8.1	The restructuring of spheres of exchange?	107
6.8.2	The southern Netherlands in the north-west European world	109
6.8.3	Bronze circulation and the problem of the ‘Hilversum culture’	109
6.9	Patterns in metalwork deposition	110
6.9.1	Fluctuations in the rate of deposition	110
6.9.2	Axe deposition	110
6.9.3	Weapon deposition as the surrender of the paraphernalia of personhood	111
6.9.4	Conclusion	112
6.10	Conclusions	112
<b>7</b>	<b>Middle Bronze Age B</b>	<b>115</b>
7.1	Introduction	116
7.2	Landscape and society during the Middle Bronze Age B	116
7.3	Discussion of the available evidence	116

7.4	Palstaves and mid-winged axes	119
7.4.1	Imported palstaves	119
7.4.2	Regional palstaves	121
7.4.3	Mid-winged axes	125
7.4.4	The Goirle axe: the remarkable life-path of an old, much-travelled axe	127
7.4.5	Conclusion: axe biographies	129
7.5	Spearheads	129
7.6	Swords and daggers	131
7.6.1	Rosnoën swords	132
7.6.2	Other <i>Griffplatten</i> - and <i>Griffangelschwerter</i>	133
7.6.3	Reworked sword blades	133
7.6.4	Conclusions: life-cycles of swords	133
7.7	Ornaments	134
7.8	Sickles and other tools	137
7.9	Moulds	137
7.9.1	The bronze mould from Buggenum	138
7.9.2	The clay mould from Cuijk	138
7.9.3	The clay mould from Oss-Horzak	138
7.9.4	Conclusions	141
7.10	Metalwork and contemporary material culture	141
7.11	Regional bronze production	142
7.12	Metalwork circulation	143
7.12.1	General developments: reorientation of exchange networks	143
7.12.2	Patterns of procurement	143
7.13	Deposition	144
7.13.1	Deposition in and around houses	144
7.13.2	Axe and weapon deposits: depositional zones as places of historical significance	147
7.13.3	Deposition of objects in burials	147
7.13.4	Deposition of objects in burial monuments	148
7.14	Conclusions	148
<b>8</b>	<b>Late Bronze Age</b>	<b>151</b>
8.1	Introduction	152
8.2	Society and landscape during the Late Bronze Age	152
8.2.1	North-western Europe	152
8.2.2	Southern Netherlands	154
8.3	Discussion of the available evidence	154

8.4	Socketed and end-winged axes	157
8.4.1	Regional socketed axes	157
8.4.2	Imported socketed axes	161
8.4.3	End-winged axes	164
8.4.4	Iron axes	164
8.4.5	Conclusions	165
8.5	Weapons: spears, swords, chapes and daggers	166
8.5.1	Early <i>Griffzungenschwerter</i>	166
8.5.2	The <i>Vielwulstschwert</i> from Buggenum	166
8.5.3	The weapon hoard from Pulle	169
8.5.4	<i>Griffzungen-</i> and <i>Vollgriffschwerter</i> from the Ha B2/3 phase	170
8.5.5	Gündlingen swords	171
8.5.6	Mindelheim swords	172
8.5.7	Conclusion: sword biographies	172
8.6	Ornaments and dress fittings	172
8.6.1	Deposition in major rivers	175
8.6.2	Deposition of ceremonial ornaments: the giant <i>Bombenkopfnadel</i> of type Ockstadt	175
8.6.3	Ornaments in multiple-object hoards	178
8.6.4	Conclusion: selective deposition of ornaments	182
8.7	Other tools	182
8.8	The place of metalwork among contemporary material culture	184
8.9	Regional bronze production	186
8.10	Metalwork circulation	186
8.11	Deposition	187
8.11.1	Axe and tool deposition	187
8.11.2	Weapon and ornament deposition: evidence for a structured sacrificial landscape?	188
8.11.3	New places for deposition?	191
8.11.4	Change and tradition in the practice of deposition	192
8.12	Conclusions	193
<b>9</b>	<b>Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age: metalwork from burials</b>	<b>197</b>
9.1	Introduction	197
9.2	Discussion of the available evidence	197
9.3	The urnfield burial ritual and the provision of artefacts	197
9.4	Ornaments and toilet articles in urnfield graves	198
9.5	Deposition of weaponry	201
9.6	Stages in the burial ritual and the inclusion of artefacts	203

9.7	The decorated dead	204
9.8	Local and supra-local personal identities	206
9.9	Conclusions	207
PART III UNDERSTANDING SELECTIVE DEPOSITION 209		
<b>10</b>	<b>Selective deposition: its characteristics, development and structure</b>	<b>211</b>
10.1	Introduction	211
10.2	Some general characteristics of metalwork deposition	211
10.3	The long-term patterns of selective deposition	215
10.4	Selective deposition as an indication that different objects had different meanings	215
10.5	How objects became meaningful: the significance of their cultural biography	217
10.6	Depositions in burials versus depositions in natural places	217
10.7	Long-term history of selective deposition	218
10.8	Development of the argument in the next chapters	219
<b>11</b>	<b>Weapons, the armed body and martial identities</b>	<b>221</b>
11.1	Introduction	221
11.2	The distinction between multifunctional tools and weapons before the Middle Bronze Age	221
11.3	Weapons of the Middle and Late Bronze Age	221
11.4	The nature of Bronze Age conflicts and warfare	224
11.5	Warfare as ideology	226
11.6	Warrior identities	226
11.6.1	Sword fighting and becoming a person	227
11.6.2	The evidence of warriors' graves	227
11.6.3	Warrior identities and 'imagined communities'	229
11.7	Weapon deposits as graveless grave goods?	229
11.8	Warriorhood as an ambiguous, temporary identity	231
11.9	The shift from rivers to graves	232
11.9.1	Ha C chieftains' graves as reflecting a different kind of elite?	232
11.9.2	How did a shift to burial deposition become socially acceptable?	233
11.9.3	Conclusion: the continuing ambiguity of warrior statuses	236
11.10	Conclusions	236

<b>12</b>	<b>Ornament deposition: the construction and deconstruction of personhood</b>	<b>239</b>
12.1	Introduction	239
12.2	Ornament deposition in natural places versus deposition in burials	239
12.3	Selective deposition of ornaments and dress fittings during the Middle Bronze Age	239
12.4	The significance of supra-regional ornament styles: the implications of the Oss mould	240
12.5	Selective deposition of ornaments and dress fittings during the Late Bronze Age	241
12.5.1	Ornaments and the construction of local identities in urnfield graves	241
12.5.2	Placing ornaments and pins in rivers and sources	241
12.5.3	Deposition of special ornament types in hoards: the Lutlommel hoard	242
12.6	Conclusion: the contrast between local and non-local identities	244
<b>13</b>	<b>The cultural biographies of axes</b>	<b>247</b>
13.1	Introduction	247
13.2	The significance of imported adzes and axes for non- or semi-agrarian communities	247
13.3	The deposition of single, used bronze axes: the generalized biography of an axe	248
13.4	There is more to axes than just the tool	250
13.5	Late Bronze Age axe hoards	252
13.6	Axe hoards as representing deliberate permanent deposits	252
13.7	Linking 'ritual' deposition to the flow of metal	253
13.7.1	How gift and commodity exchange are linked	254
13.7.2	Object deposition as a way to transform items from commodities into gifts	255
13.8	What happened at the transition from the Late Bronze Age to Iron Age?	255
13.8.1	Understanding lavish hoards in relation to a collapsing bronze circulation	256
13.8.2	Changes within the depositional practices themselves	256
13.9	Conclusions	257
<b>14</b>	<b>The landscape of deposition</b>	<b>259</b>
14.1	Introduction	259
14.2	Deposition in a historical landscape	259
14.2.1	The system of selective deposition as reflecting structured perceptions of the land	259
14.2.2	Multiple-deposition zones and the landscape of memory	260
14.2.3	What does the difference between adjacent multiple deposition zones imply?	263

14.3	Deposition and the landscape of daily life	264
14.3.1	Depositional zones as remote and peripheral areas	264
14.3.2	Depositional zones as natural, unaltered places	264
14.4	Depositional zones in a social landscape	265
14.5	Depositional zones in a cosmological landscape	266
14.5.1	Wet zones as cosmological boundaries	266
14.5.2	Deposition in watery places: gifts to gods?	267
14.6	Deposition and cultural attitudes towards the land	268
14.6.1	Exploitative and communalist attitudes	268
14.6.2	Depositions and notions on reciprocal relations with the land	269
14.6.3	Depositions and the logic of taking and giving	269
14.7	Depositional practices and the construction of communities	270
14.8	Conclusions	271
<b>15</b>	<b>Final reflections: what is selective deposition and what does it bring about?</b>	<b>273</b>
15.1	Introduction	273
15.2	Circulation of foreign materials and social realities	273
15.3	Bronzes and the significance of non-local identities	274
15.4	Accepting <i>their</i> logic: a sacrificial economy	274
15.5	Deposition as a practice	275
15.6	Deposition as ritual	276
15.7	What does selective deposition bring about?	277
	<b>epilogue</b>	<b>281</b>
	<b>references</b>	<b>285</b>
	<b>appendices</b>	<b>305</b>
1	List of all hoards from the study region	305
2.1	Flat axes	310
2.2	Low-flanged axes	311
2.3	Oldendorf axes	312
2.4	Other MBA A axes	314
2.5	Imported palstaves and other axes	315
2.6	Regional palstaves, midribbed	317
2.7	Regional palstaves, plain sinuous-shaped and those with trapeze outline	318
2.8	Unclassified palstaves	320

2.9	Mid-winged axes	321
2.10	Socketed axes of the Niedermaas type	322
2.11	Socketed axes of the Helmeroth type	324
2.12	Socketed axes of the Geistingen type	325
2.13	Socketed axes of the Plainseau type	326
2.14	Socketed axes of type Wesseling	328
2.15	Other socketed axes, Early Iron Age axes, iron axes	329
2.16	End-winged axes	332
3	Sickles, knives, chisels, gouges from the Middle and Late Bronze Age	333
4.1	Ornaments mainly from the MBA B	335
4.2	Ornaments from the LBA/EIA from other contexts than graves	336
5.1	Swords and daggers from the MBA A	338
5.2	Swords and daggers from the MBA B	339
5.3	Swords from the Ha A2 (A1) until Ha B1 phases	341
5.4	Swords from the Ha B2/3 phase	342
5.5	Swords from the Early Iron Age (made of bronze and iron)	343
5.6	MBA swords from the Netherlands and Belgium: deposition in graves versus deposition in watery places	345
6.1	Spearheads from the MBA A	348
6.2	Spearheads from the MBA B	349
6.3	Spearheads without precise dating (plain pegged spearheads) and arrowheads	350
7.1	Daggers, knives, halberds and ornaments from the LN B/EBA, mainly from burials	356
7.2	Burial gifts from the MBA and deposits in barrows (metalwork and other materials)	358
7.3	Metalwork from urnfield graves in the Dutch part of the research region	361
7.4	Metalwork from urnfield graves in the Belgian part of the research region	370
8	Indications for metalworking (Middle and Late Bronze Age)	373
9	Metalwork finds from settlements	374
10.1	Metal types distinguished by Butler and Van der Waals	376
10.2	Metal analyses of flat and low-flanged axes	376
10.3	Metal analyses of tanged daggers and awls from burials	377
10.4	Metal analyses of halberds, riveted knives and an awl	377
10.5	Metal analyses of objects from the Wageningen hoard	378

**samenvatting** (Dutch summary) 379

**acknowledgements for the figures** 389

**acknowledgements** 391

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous two chapters, the problem of bronze deposition was discussed from an epistemological point of view (chapter 2), followed by the outline of a theoretical approach to study the problem (chapter 3). It is now necessary to consider the phenomenon of selective object deposition from the point of view of the possibilities and constraints of the evidence at hand: how can we study prehistoric depositional practices on the basis of the archaeological record of the southern Netherlands? In chapter 3, it was argued that empirically the evidence on the deposited objects themselves and the context of deposition are the only clues available to archaeology for a study of the practice of deposition. Since the phenomenon of selective deposition is by its very nature defined in terms of patterns of presence of objects in one context and absence in others, the question of representativity of such presence/absence patterns is of the utmost relevance.

This chapter will describe how the data were collected and what method was used for identifying patterns of deposition. Subsequently, I shall investigate in which way such patterns are influenced by site formation processes (Schiffer 1976), and outline the constraints and possibilities of the available evidence for the present research.

### 4.2 HOW TO RECOGNIZE PERMANENT DEPOSITIONS

What are the empirical possibilities of recognizing permanent deposition, apart from temporary storage, loss and discard? In chapter 2, it was argued that a profane interpretation of object deposition has always been something that went without saying, whereas one in terms of ritual should be sustained by arguments. Now, one might easily reverse the argument, and state that all depositions are 'ritual' until proven otherwise (Menke 1978/1979), but I feel that this still does not help us any further either. It is better to abandon this theoretical debate, and return to the data themselves: what arguments can be found in the evidence itself to make an explanation of a metalwork find as a permanently deposited object *more likely* than one in terms of casual loss or temporary storage? I shall argue that, for a proper recognition of permanent deposition, considering and comparing *patterns* of deposition should be the starting point of our analysis. First, in trying to isolate acts of deliberate

permanent deposition, it is necessary to find verifiable characteristics of both permanent and non-permanent deposition, as well as of unintentional deposition.

*Loss*, to start with, is unintentional and incidental. If objects merely entered the archaeological record as a result of loss, then a random distribution pattern of finds would emerge. Only post-depositional processes (the presence of artefact traps) may yield some patterns. These will act indifferently to objects of various materials, and cannot account for the presence of metal objects alone in such artefact traps.

The presence of *never retrieved temporary object stores* in the archaeological record must also be the result of casual events, since by their very nature, they were not supposed to be there to be found by us. Only social disasters involving the sudden departure of entire groups of people, who are not even capable of taking their hidden wealth with them (or of returning later to retrieve it), will result in a patterned distribution of such stores. It is not likely that such disasters took place very often, and it may be expected they left traces in other evidence. At any rate, such stores should have at least one – empirically testable – characteristic: they must be retrievable, i.e. marked and buried in an accessible location.

*Discard*, on the other hand, is intentional, meant to be permanent, and a structural, recurrent way of deposition. As such it has all the aspects of what has been termed permanent object deposition. In our own society, to say that an object is discarded means that it is no longer considered to be useful and meaningful. For a non-metalliferous region like the southern Netherlands we should realize that, if a bronze artefact was seen thus, it is most likely that it was melted down. However, if bronze artefacts were thrown away for such a reason, they would probably enter the archaeological record in an arbitrary way, following the general discard patterns of other materials.

In chapter 2 it was established why there has always been a readiness to accept explanations of bronze depositions as loss, non-retrieval and discard, rather than the 'irrational' act of deliberately depositing objects without the intention of retrieval. However, accepting 'loss' and 'accidental non-retrieval' as general explanations also implies irrationalities, since we then suppose that Bronze Age communities were characterized by a general clumsiness and forgetfulness,

which is especially unlikely since bronze objects must have been relatively rare in the non-metal yielding regions. Accepting 'discard' as a general explanation implies that metalwork was available so amply that worn objects no longer needed to serve as scrap. This is not very likely.

To sum up, meaningful and permanent object deposition can be recognized archaeologically, depending on the following observations:

- 1 If it is patterned, that is, if within the region metal objects are repeatedly found in similar locations, and not in others.
- 2 If such patterns cannot be explained by other (depositional) processes (discard, general non-retrieval of stores in the case of social crises).
- 3 If such patterns are not solely determined by post-depositional processes and research factors.

It should be noted that when a pattern could also have been created by post-depositional processes, this does not automatically imply that the post-depositional processes rather than depositional activities explain it. It is better to see such a case as a situation where two conflicting explanations can explain the same pattern. Often we are in no position to make a well-argued choice between them.

*Advantages of the method: getting round the wet-dry differentiation as decisive for an interpretation in ritual or profane terms*

From this it follows that for every period a substantial number of finds should be present in the region, and that as much as possible contextual evidence should be gathered on the character of the location during deposition. Similarly, contextual evidence of contemporary sites where apparently no objects were deposited should be gathered and compared. The question should be: what constitutes the difference between them? This is in the first place a comparison of depositional behaviour of people in different locations in the landscape, but especially differences concerning the preservational character of the archaeological record of both contexts should also be taken into account.

This approach has the advantage of not disregarding a certain set of evidence from the start. As mentioned in chapter 2, most dry finds have always been prone to be *a priori* interpreted as non-retrieved stores or loss, and intentional depositions were subsequently looked for among finds from wet locations only. The approach outlined here evaluates depositional patterns, regardless of the question of whether their location is wet or dry.

*Disadvantages of the method*

However, there still are some drawbacks to the approach that need to be discussed.

- 1 It is a positivist approach, and as such just as much situated within a post-enlightenment discourse as the ones

described in chapter 2. The difference is that this approach does not dismiss or prioritise a certain interpretation of bronze finds from the outset, and that it pays some attention to the way in which every interpretation is situated within a wider discourse.

- 2 Unpatterned events are still difficult to interpret. If in a given period, for example, just one bronze axe is known from a river, then it could theoretically be either a lost object (for example from a shipwreck) or a deliberately deposited object (in view of the inaccessible context, it cannot represent an object store). Only if more bronze axes from rivers are known, the interpretation of this find as a permanent deposition becomes more likely. Reference to other evidence is thus quintessential for interpretation. If this reference material is not available, in the case of 'unique' cases, interpretation becomes much more difficult.
- 3 This approach is designed for the problem at hand, the phenomenon that particular types of bronze objects seem to be found in certain contexts and not in others. In order to study the deposition of other materials, from other periods, quite other strategies are needed. See for an example Gerritsen (2001, 91-4) on depositions of pottery in the Iron Age of the southern Netherlands, a find category that is not exclusively associated with certain contexts, but where distribution patterns overlap.

#### 4.3 HOW THE DATA WERE COLLECTED AND EVALUATED

At the heart of this research stands an intensive survey of the literature. The published parts of the Bronze Age catalogue of Butler, O'Connor (1980) and Warmenbol (references cited in appendices) formed the foundation for insight in the most important bronze finds in the regions, to which the case studies of some important Belgian hoard finds from the region could be added (Van Impe 1973; 1994; 1995/1996; Van Impe/Creemers 1993).<sup>1</sup> Information on more recent finds was collected from amateur journals, find reports of provincial archaeologists, ARCHIS, *Helinium*, the recent issues of the *Rapportage Archeologische Monumentenzorg (RAM)* of the *ROB*, and the numerous publications on urnfield excavations (see the references cited in the appendices). The literature survey was complemented by a study of two major museum collections: that of the *Rijksmuseum van Oudheden* in Leiden (henceforth RMO or 'Museum Leiden') and the *Valkhof Museum* in Nijmegen (henceforth 'Museum Nijmegen'), both possessing an important and representative collection of bronze finds from the Dutch part of the research region (in total 226 objects; 24 % of all finds known). On top of that, all new finds by amateurs and metaldetectorists during the last four years have been studied by Butler and Steegstra (University of Groningen), and I am fortunate to have been allowed to use their documentation. In all, a fairly representative picture of

the bronze finds from the Dutch part of the research region was built up, consisting not just of evidence from often old museum collections, but from recent amateur and metal-detectorist finds as well. For the Belgian part, the lesser degree of amateur and metal-detectorist organization and cooperation with archaeological authorities led to the situation that the picture for that part is more biased towards finds outside museum collections. Excluding the small metalwork finds from Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age urnfields listed in appendices 7.3 and 7.4, 961 objects were recorded (compiled of the data from tables 5.1, 5.2., 6.1, 7.1 and 8.1). The majority are bronze and a few copper finds (approximately 96 %).<sup>2</sup> There are only a few gold objects and one made of tin. Most metalwork objects are single finds. They thus potentially represent individual acts of deposition. Seeing hoards (which contain by definition more than one object) as single acts of deposition as well, the number of potential individual deposition sites then would be 734 (excluding the small metalwork items from urnfields but including Late Neolithic and Middle Bronze Age burial deposits). If we include the many small metalwork finds from both the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age urnfields, approximately 1300 objects have been recorded.<sup>3</sup>

#### 4.3.1 Assessing the reliability of data

One of the existing prejudices on bronze finds is the idea that they are in general not trustworthy, and have to be approached very critically or not at all. Verlaeck (1996, chapter 3) has developed a method of evaluating the reliability of such finds. Although his method does not provide absolute certainty either, it has the advantage of making the evaluation procedure a transparent one. With some alterations,<sup>4</sup> I have adopted his method, and used it for evaluating my own database.

The focus should be on objects of which at least some information is recorded on find spot and find circumstances. After all, these may potentially represent finds of which the depositional context can be reconstructed. The main problem then is whether objects really came from the claimed find-spots. Unfortunately, bronzes have always been a popular item for antique dealers, and there is evidence that bronzes were sold to museums or collectors with deliberately faked contextual information (Verlaeck 1996, 33). It is vital to assess the reliability of recorded contextual information first. We should take two steps to find this out. The first is to assess the reliability of a find by tracing who or which authorities were involved in the reporting of the find. Are these reliable sources? The second is to check the contextual information by seeing whether find circumstances and patina of the find match.

#### Step 1: assessing the reliability of the find report

As much information as possible should be gathered on the individuals who are said to have found or sold the object, as well as on the intermediaries involved. The following categories of reporting bodies can be distinguished:

- 1 large private collections from the late 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> century, that are now part of museum collections;
- 2 finds purchased from antique dealers;
- 3 finds by laymen or amateurs, who reported their finds to archaeological authorities including metal-detectorists;<sup>5</sup>
- 4 finds discovered during professional or amateur excavations;
- 5 unknown.

Fig. 4.1 shows the distribution of finds over these categories. In general, I regard finds from antique dealers as suspicious, particularly since some of them are unique objects that are in addition only known from far-away countries. An example is the totally unique find of a Scandinavian ceremonial axe, said to have been dredged from the Meuse between Maaseik and Stokkem (Van Impe/Verlaeck 1992). The entire history of the find, the involvement of commercial dealers and the large amount of money for which it was sold, should cause suspicion. I side with Butler (personal comment) who thinks

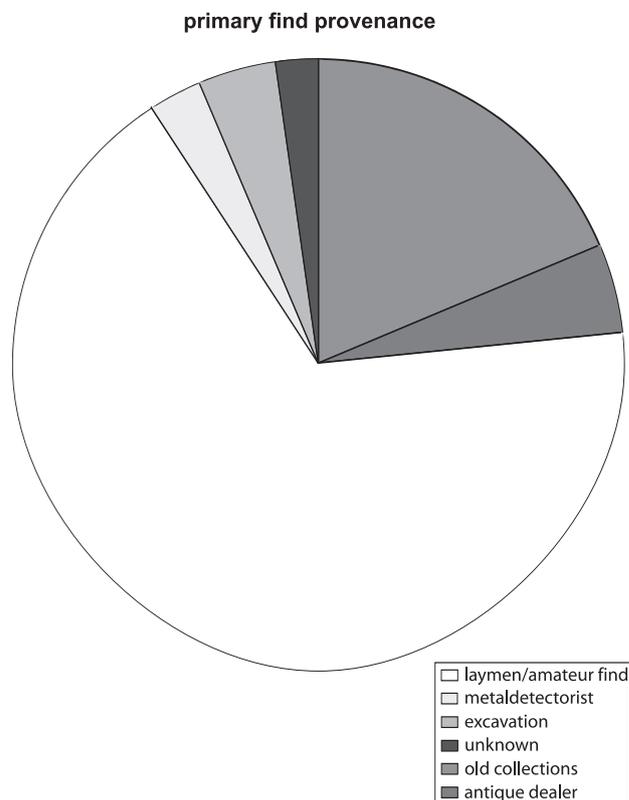


Figure 4.1 Primary find provenance.

it better not to include this find in any account of the Dutch-Belgian Bronze Age. Alternatively, the axe found in tumulus VI in Goirle is also a unique type, probably an import from regions as far away as Hungary (chapter 7). This find, however, was discovered during a professional excavation and there is no reason to doubt its reliability. Only if similar finds are made in a more trustworthy context, the antique dealer objection becomes less suspicious. Notoriously untrustworthy are the finds from the antique dealer J.N. Esser who sold a lot of bronze objects to the RMO. I shall not disregard finds from antique dealers (they will be mentioned in the find lists published here), but they must never be the pivotal element in the construction of a theory.

Verlaeckt (1996) and Warmenbol (1987b) showed the problems one comes up against in dealing with finds from old collections (category 1). Many collectors had a genuine interest in the history of their own region and bought objects from dealers and dredgers who told them that these objects came from this region. Often, however, the collectors were deceived. For the Netherlands, G.M. Kam, collector of antiquities from the Nijmegen area, is a good example; for Belgium, G. Hasse, collector of finds from Antwerpen is another (Warmenbol 1987b). It is difficult to trace whether such old collections are largely problematic or not. The reliability of large collections as a whole can be assessed by taking all finds (not just those from the Bronze Age) into account (cf. Verlaeckt 1996, 35-6). In general, I shall treat this category, like antique dealer find's, with caution.

There are no reasons to doubt the general reliability of category 3 to 5. I have more than once experienced that the find documentation of amateur collections is excellent. With regard to metal-detectorist's finds: they are often regarded with suspicion by official archaeological authorities since their surveys are legally forbidden (Willems 1990). Leaving the legal discussion aside, the increase in bronze finds of the last decades is largely due to their activities. Their finds simply cannot be disregarded by any archaeologist who studies metal finds. Most metal-detectorists I met do their surveying for the pleasure of finding, and for building a collection of their own finds. There are not many indications that objects are offered with faked find circumstances. Rather, the problem is that among this group the find circumstances themselves, or even the find-spot, are very often not recorded. This makes these groups of finds often less interesting for the present research goals.

#### *Step 2: evaluation by means of matching patina and find location*

For finds with known find circumstances, another way to test their reliability is to check whether the patina of the object is in accordance with the find circumstances. Patina is actually

a misnomer for the chemical change – or lack of it – of the surface of a bronze object (the term originally implies weathering taking place). Since it is so widely used, I shall go on using the term.

In non-oxidizing circumstances, the process of corrosion cannot take place; a bronze object therefore retains its own – golden – colour. Wet locations usually provide such milieus, and therefore wet-context finds still have their original golden colour. In the literature this is often indicated as 'river patina', which is the wrong term since it is not a patina at all (it is actually the lack of corrosion), and since it is not confined to river finds (objects lying in stream valleys in peat bogs can for example have such colours too). Also, the lack of corrosion keeps the metal in excellent condition (its surface is not thinned, burst or crumbled). A well-preserved uncorroded object can therefore only have come from a waterlogged milieu. Wet environments can also lead to change in the surface; in particular conditions, the outer surface turns black or brown, or otherwise dark-coloured. This process is actually not well understood in chemical terms, but it has to do with the chemical interaction between the milieu and the specific nature of the metal alloy. Peaty environments in particular seem to effect a brown or black patina on the surface. This is often called 'peat patina', but also objects known to have been genuine river finds can show this colour (perhaps because they were originally deposited in its backswamps; see also Verlaeckt 1996, 33-4). Apart from the discolorations, these objects are also in well-preserved conditions. Actually most finds show a combination of both 'patinas': a golden surface, covered with black or brown shades. Objects deposited in wet locations can be recognized on the basis of their fine preservation and a characteristic 'patina': a golden colour or a brown or black discolouration. Objects deposited on dry land will corrode and therefore show a green colour, and are often less well-preserved. 'Patina', or better, the colour and preservation of the surface, is thus related to the context of deposition. An object that was deposited in a peat bog should show the brown-black patina or not be patinated at all. And here we have a means to check the reliability of the said find circumstances from objects stored in museums.

#### *Pitfalls in the use of patina as an indicator of context*

There are, however, some pitfalls involved that are not often realized. What about an object which was deposited in dry ground that later became wet (for example, by blanket bogs covering older sediment)? Such a find can still be recognized by its 'patina' as stemming from originally dry conditions. Some corrosion will already have taken place. The later waterlogged conditions will have prevented further corrosion from taking place or the surface may for example have reacted with the peaty milieu and become black or brown.

Still, the primary bronze-oxides on the surface indicate its earlier history in a dry milieu. Important to note is that non-oxidation primarily relates to waterlogged conditions, and not to the object's presence in peat. An object may for example have been deposited in the sandy slope next to a small lake where a peat layer was growing. The peat may cover the sediment in which the object was deposited only centuries later, but if this sandy slope in which the object was deposited that was already within the water-table at that moment, the object would have all the characteristics of a 'wet context deposit'. In regions where that water-table was already very high at the moment of deposition, it then becomes difficult to know whether the association between the object and a wet location was deliberate or not, since every object dug in shows the characteristic of such locations. This is particularly a characteristic of wetland sites. In the southern Netherlands, the only region where such conditions existed is the Holocene clay region of the central Dutch river landscape. Interestingly, the recent large-scale excavations in the Betuwe area made it clear that bronzes found in clayey sediment, often have a quite specific rust-coloured surface, different from river finds (personal comment J. Hielkema, ADC, and my own observation). In the sand and loess regions, such ambivalent situations are generally restricted to transition zones between dry land and marshes. The patina itself then indicates whether this zone was wet or still dry at the time of deposition.

Another problem is raised by finds that come from a wet site that for some reason became dry. Many dredge finds, for example, are known to have been lying among huge amounts of gravel for a long time (some were found for example on gravel riverbanks in the Meuse that became dry land). They then begin to corrode after all. A match between patina and the original wet depositional location cannot be made anymore. In the case of the gravel bank, gravel sediment is often included in the corrosion of the object, thereby still indicating an association between this object and the river (in general, gravel is absent in the sandy soils of the southern Netherlands, the clay areas of the central river area, and the loess region. It may only be present in the sediment of the ice-pushed ridges).

Theoretically, another problem preventing an adequate match between patina and depositional location can be caused when a particular object circulates for a very long time. Dependent on the quality of the bronze, it will then start to corrode before deposition. Even if it is deposited in a wet location, it will retain its green corrosion. But although studies on the rate of such corrosion are not available, it can safely be assumed that it takes a very long time for an object to become totally corroded. In the case of real heirlooms we would expect the objects to show considerable wear.

### *The patina test*

Having discussed the possibilities and limitations of using patina as an indicator of context, we can now test it. Again bronze burial gifts from urnfields are excluded, leaving us with a total of 1059 objects. For only 520 of these objects the original patina is known (many have been lab-treated in museums, others were unavailable for study). 275 of these are finds for which there is information on the find context as well (wet or dry). 169 of these objects are from watery places and have a 'wet context' patina (dark bronze, brownish, blackish). 75 are from dry contexts and have an oxidized green patina. In only 31 cases (11 %) there was no match. These are all finds said to have been found in rivers or swamps, but which are nevertheless green or dark green. The relative low percentage of mismatches does not endanger the general idea that patina indicates find context. Nevertheless, the mismatches should be explained. First of all, we can think of the cases where a wet place became dry land, or of objects from rivers that have been resting in dry gravel heaps for a long time. Such dry gravel heaps occasionally exist in Dutch rivers, particularly in the Meuse valley. Alternatively, the mismatch may just as well be a problem of description. For the majority of finds, I had to work with patina-descriptions made by others. It is conspicuous that many of the mismatches are said to have a 'dark-green' patina in Butler's catalogue. When I studied some of these objects themselves, it appeared to me that many are 'dark' rather than 'green' in my view. By this I mean that traces of severe oxidizing are hard to detect, but the outer surface of the object underwent a darkening which reminds me of wet-context finds.

### *How is the reliability assessment reflected in the data used in this study?*

In the following chapters, numerous finds will be listed in tables. The reliability assessment carried out has the following consequences. Objects that have been recognized as fakes by Butler and/or myself are not included in any list in the appendices. Unique finds from antique dealers or unreliable individuals are not included either (cf. the discussion on the Scandinavian ceremonial axe from Maaseik/Stokkem). Finds from antique dealers or old collections that fit in a pattern are listed though, but they are clearly marked as such (designated 'dubious'). Finds where context and patina do not match are included as well since there is more than one way to explain mismatches between find context and patina (see above); such finds will not be used as the pivotal argument in the construction of ideas though.

### *4.3.2 Retrieving information on find context*

Apart from working with published evidence on find context, it was necessary to collect additional information on the

subject. The reason for this is that the existing syntheses of Butler and O'Connor had hardly paid attention to it so far. Their main emphasis was on the typo-chronology of objects. What was published on contextual evidence was so meagre that it could not serve as a basis for studying depositional practices. For example: Butler's catalogue of the Dutch province of Limburg listed 314 individual objects in 1996. 231 of these were indicated as 'stray finds' for which no additional information on depositional context was available. For only 26 % (83 objects) it was known from which kind of context it came (peat bogs, graves, rivers, hoard). It may be clear that this is much too low a percentage for any general study of bronze deposition. As a result of the present research, however, we can dispose of 203 objects – 64 % – with deposition context known from this province. I shall now continue to describe by what method this was made possible.

Starting point is that there is at least some information on the topographical situation of finds. This can range from the exact coordinates to a vague description or a toponym. If topographical information is available, it is possible to reconstruct the sort of environment where the object was deposited, ranging from very detailed information to superficial interpretations in terms of 'wet' or 'dry' contexts.

A twofold division in the locational information can be made. The first is information that informs us on context; for example: 'found during peat-cutting near the castle of Croy' (chapter 8: the Stiphout hoard). This find record suggests that we are dealing with a peat find. If this is corroborated by the patina (which should be a wet-context patina), then the find is accepted as coming from a marsh. In this case, a look at the map indicates that we are dealing with peat that was formed in the stream valley of the Goorloop next to a higher sand plateau. I shall refer to such information as *primary contextual information*.

The second kind of locational information just mentions a toponym, or a coordinate. In order to retrieve contextual information on such finds, I combined geological and pedological maps (1:50,000 and 1:100,000 for the Netherlands, 1:500,000 for Belgium), as well as the 1:25,000 and 1:50,000 historical maps of the Dutch part of the region. The latter two give detailed information on the undisturbed courses of many stream valleys and the locations of many small marshes before the great reclamations. These, of course, comprise environmental information on a landscape thousands of years after the Bronze Age. If a bronze find, for example, appears to have come from the Echterbroek near Echt (prov. Limburg), the historical and pedological information suggest that it came from a – now disappeared – swamp. I then had to find out whether this swamp already existed in the Bronze Age, something which could not always be established (for the Echterbroek it holds true). In general, the locations of streams, swamps and rivers them-

selves shifted, but the larger environmental entities of which they were part have not altered much since the Bronze Age. On the sandy soils, all the stream valleys are located within the sand plateaus that originated in the Late Pleistocene. In the Meuse valley, the river-bed of the Meuse is generally defined by the higher pre-Holocene terraces. Most of the larger marshes originated in places where pre-Holocene impermeable layers underground caused water to stagnate. Marsh formation in general set in as early as the Early Holocene, although the peat extension itself of course spread in the course of time (Zagwijn 1986). If the object's original patina is known, I then matched the reconstructed find context with the patina of the object in question, to see whether the location was indeed already 'wet' at the time of deposition. I shall refer to this reconstructed kind of information as *secondary contextual information*.

As a result of this method, contextual information was found for 661 of the objects (69 %). Unfortunately, data on patina was often not available for such finds, preventing us from adequately testing their reliability. In the find lists in the appendices, the information on context will be accompanied by a remark whether contextual information is based on primary records ('P'), or on a reconstruction ('secondary information'; 'S'). Some 245 of the uncontextualised finds have their patina described. Given the results of the 'patina test' (above section), it is tempting to translate patina to 'wet' or 'dry' contexts (as was for example done by Vandkilde 1996 in her study on the Danish finds). Because of the pitfalls in using patina-only finds (particularly the problem of 'dark green' patinas), I shall not do this: 'patina-only' finds do not play a role in discussions on deposition.

#### 4.4 EXPLAINING PRESENCE AND ABSENCE OF FINDS: POST-DEPOSITIONAL PROCESSES

It was argued in section 4.2 that recognizing patterns in deposition is central to the recognition of selective deposition. Any pattern in the archaeological record, however, is an artefact of prehistoric practices, post-depositional processes of disturbance and preservation, as well as research factors (Schiffer 1976). Having collected some 661 bronze finds that are to be analysed for indications of selective deposition, we should now assess the representativity of what we have: to what extent can patterns of absence in certain contexts, count as *evidence* of absence? When do patterns of presence and absence of bronze finds reflect selective deposition, rather than selective preservation or selective research strategies? I shall now try to deal with this question.

Since we are dealing here with a regional study, we should see the role of post-depositional processes and research factors as 'map formation processes', to use Fokkens' terminology (1998a). In his pioneering work, Fokkens has developed an elaborate strategy for analysing the impact of

such map formation processes in his study of a region in the northern Netherlands. I shall follow his approach here, with one restriction. Fokkens was able to assess the impact of processes quantitatively. For the present study this is unfortunately impossible to do. The reason is a fundamental lack of data on the collection habits of amateurs and, particularly, metal-detectorists. In a detailed manner, Fokkens could follow the way in which the most important amateurs surveyed, which areas they visited and which were excluded, and what strategies they followed. He neatly illustrated the great, if not decisive, significance of the role of these amateurs in the formation of the find distribution map. It is easy to see the general relevance of this observation for the evidence in question here. For some micro-regions, all the finds have been made by just one or a few amateurs. For example: a considerable number of dredge finds from Roermond have been found or were collected by C. van der Pijl. This recalls the situation sketched by Fokkens. However, for a much larger number of finds, I do not have any clue as to the identity of the finder and his/her search strategies. Especially the survey methods of most metal-detectorists have so far not been analysed.

Below, I shall discuss the impact of the most important natural (4.4.1) and anthropogenetic post-depositional processes (4.4.2) on the find distribution map. This will be followed by the role of research factors (4.5).

#### 4.4.1 *Natural processes*

##### *Geological processes*

Geological processes involve both sedimentation and erosion. Sedimentation may lead to the covering up of depositional locations, thereby making them potentially irretrievable for archaeological surveys. The remnants of the huge peat bog of the Peel represent such conditions, as do the clay and peat sediments in the western part of the province of Noord-Brabant.<sup>6</sup> The (post-Bronze Age) clay deposits in the central river area are highly varied in thickness, ranging from 40 cm to more than one metre. The most important existing clay and peat covers are depicted in fig. 4.3. For the central river area it should be remarked that the thickness of the cover is, however, highly varied within short distances, making find conditions in one part better than in others.

Erosion is another relevant geological process. The most important aspect of erosion is the distortion of original find contexts. The dynamic life-course of the major rivers Rhine, Meuse and Scheldt may have caused the erosion and distortion of many Bronze Age deposition sites (Berendse/Stouthamer 2001). To a much lesser extent the same is true for the many small streams on the sandy area of the Meuse-Demer-Scheldt region. The tributaries of the Meuse in middle and southern Limburg, on the other hand, can have a much stronger erosive effect due to the considerable fall.

##### *Geochemical processes*

Geochemical processes do not influence the metalwork find distribution in the sense that metalwork is not preserved in particular milieus. Unlike iron, copper and bronze can survive in both wet and dry, and in acid and basic milieus. However, there is evidence that the continuous use of artificial dung on the sandy soils may worsen their condition. Probably this relates to an interplay between the specific constituents of the metal, the soil conditions, and the amount of artificial dung being used. The Late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age flat axe of Hoogeloo is an example of an object that is severely damaged by such processes (chapter 5).

In general, bronze objects are better preserved in wet conditions than in dry ones, but the genuine finds from dry conditions show that such milieus do not effect their total destruction.<sup>7</sup>

#### 4.4.2 *Anthropogenetic processes*

##### *Essen or plaggen soils*

Since the end of the Late Medieval Period, the farmers living on the sandy soils have improved the quality of the agricultural land by practising sod-manuring (Gerritsen 2001, 30). Throughout the centuries, sods have been placed on the fields, resulting in a heightening of the arable land with sometimes one metre (Fokkens 1998a, 59). Extensive *plaggen* or *essen* complexes developed, sealing off entire areas of land that might contain traces of prehistoric occupation. Pedologists define these layers as being more than 40 cm thick. Fig. 4.3 shows the distribution of *plaggen* soils in the southern Netherlands on the basis of pedological surveys. In the case of covering *plaggen* soils, artefacts cannot be ploughed to the surface anymore, and they are generally too thick as well to allow the use of metal-detectors. Only digging activities in the *essen* may yield prehistoric finds. These *plaggen* soils constitute a considerable part of the research region. Around an *es*, deforested heath areas developed, where sheep-herding was practised. Until the industrial revolution the *essen*-heath landscape was the most conspicuous characteristic of the sandy soils in the research region. Archaeologically, heaths may easily yield finds, whereas *essen* conceal finds. Although by their very nature, *essen* are agricultural fields, they also cover small fens and marshes (Kortlang 1999, fig. 16); they do not exclusively represent the drier and better soils.

*Essen* are nowadays held in high esteem by archaeologists for their preservation of the traces of entire prehistoric settlement areas (Roymans/Theuws 1999). It should not be forgotten, however, that they were agricultural fields: the original prehistoric surface is ploughed out, and small fens underneath *essen* were also often reclaimed before being covered by sods. Traces of depositions underneath *essen*, for example in such small fens, may thus have been partly disturbed or removed already in early periods.

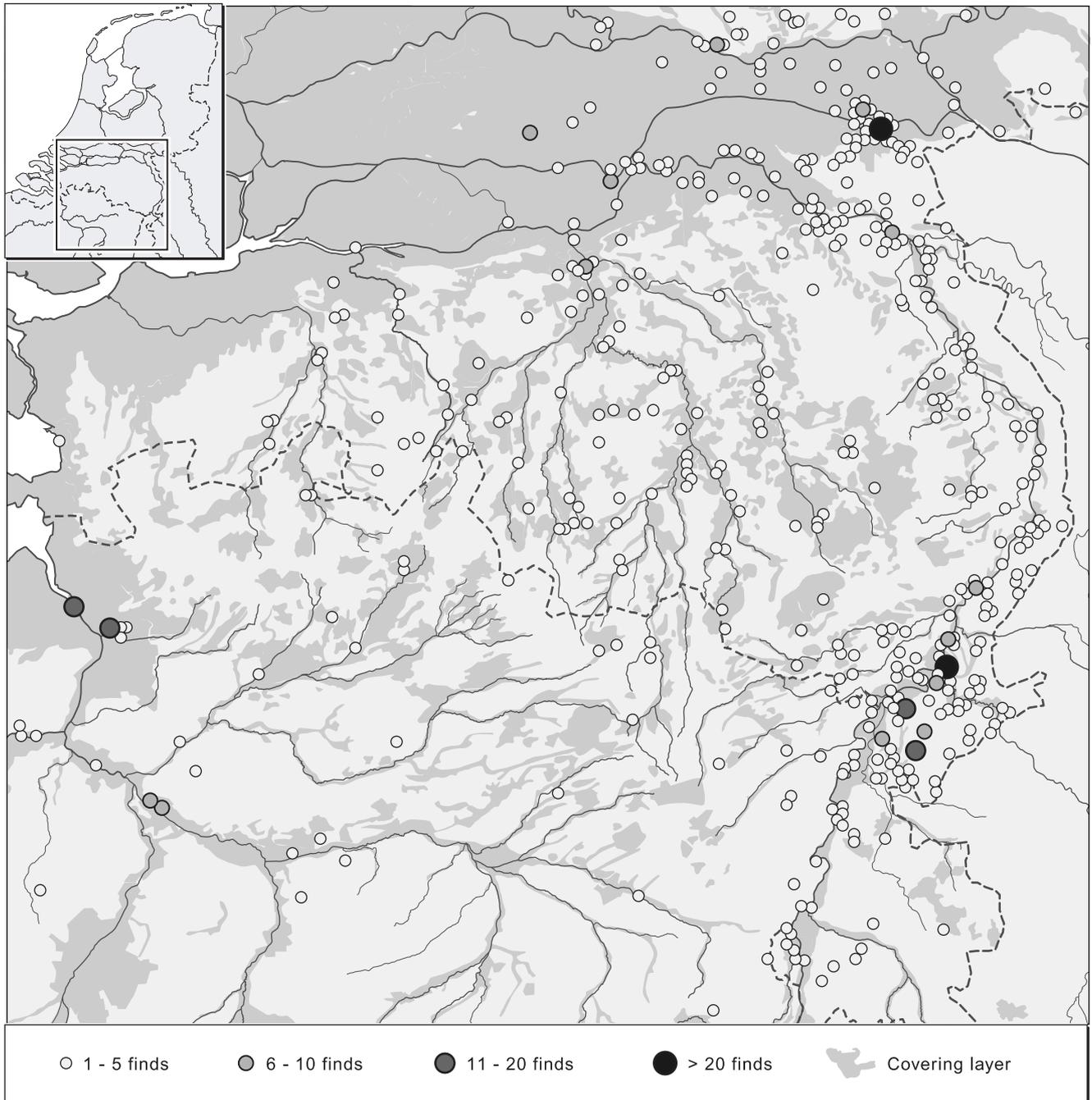


Figure 4.2 Density of metalwork finds in relation to the presence/absence of covering layers.

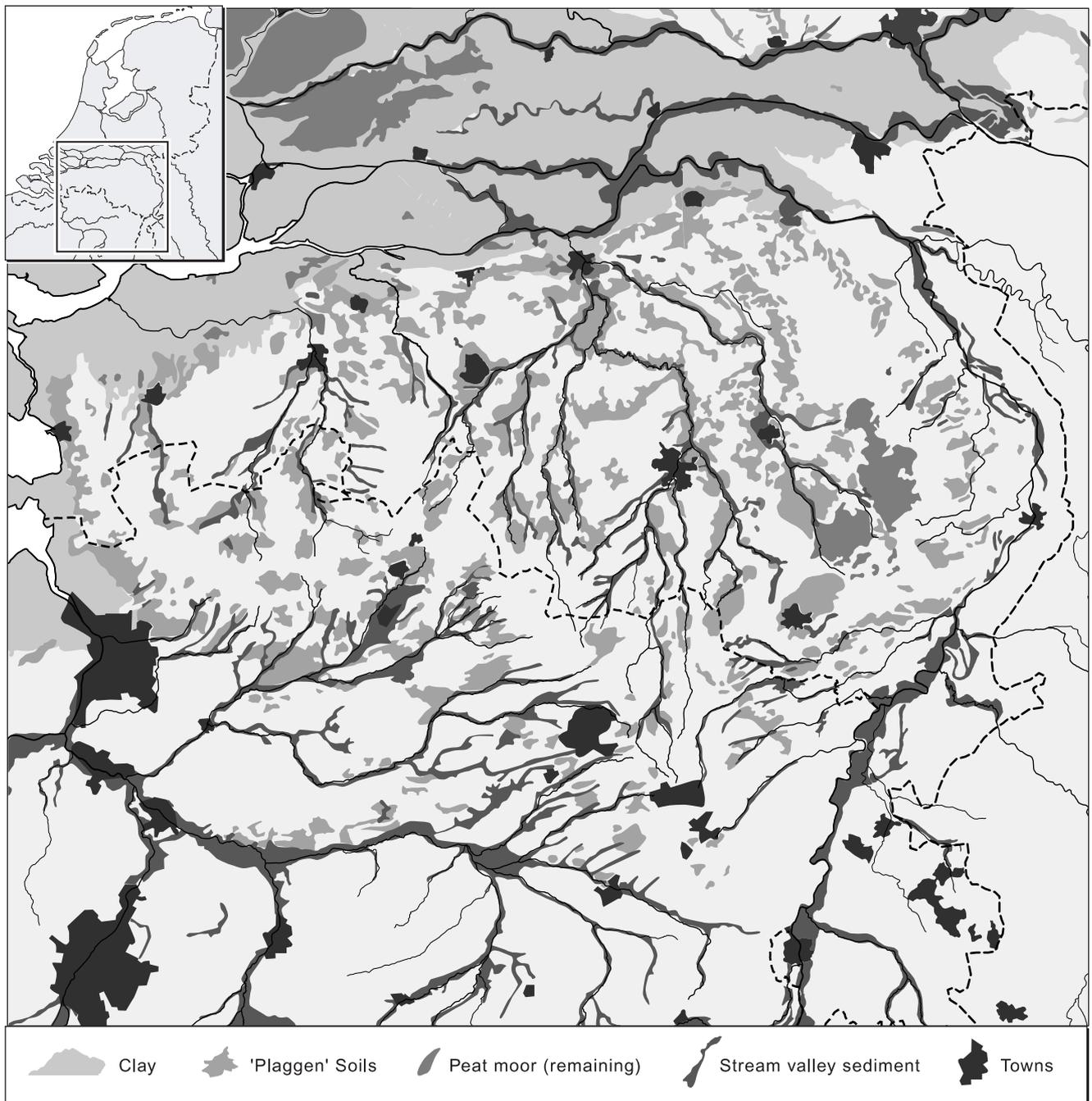


Figure 4.3 The different kinds of covering layers.

The distribution of finds shows that the majority of bronze finds was not found in the area covered by *essen* (compare fig. 4.2 to 4.3). If this happened, then this was related to archaeological excavation or digging activities. The *essen* thus seem to be an important factor in the formation of the find distribution. Indeed, only 0.1 % of the bronze finds come from the *essen* zones; the overwhelming majority has been found elsewhere.

#### *Reclamation history*

The fact that bronze axes were sometimes built into shrines in medieval castles, (Samson, south Belgium; Wielockx 1986, Hu. 122), indicates that such objects had been found long before the start of scientific archaeology. It is likely that bronze objects found by a medieval farmer were melted down, as bronze was also used and worked in the Middle Ages. In the absence of written records and collecting practices, such finds were lost without any notice. To my knowledge, C. Reuvens (1823, 219-23) has published the earliest information on what must have been finds of Bronze Age metalwork known from the study area. In Europe, bronze hoards may have been found in much earlier periods as well. The Roman author Suetonius, for example, mentions the find of twelve axes in a lake in Cantabria after lightning struck it.<sup>8</sup>

Although the scale and intensity of modern land use is unparalleled when compared with reclamations in earlier historic periods, it is very likely that the latter have also disturbed a considerable number of prehistoric finds. It might therefore be expected that areas that saw early reclamations are likely to have witnessed the unrecorded finds and hence loss of more deposition sites than areas that were reclaimed in periods when an active archaeological interest already existed.

The loess belt in the Dutch and Belgian province of Limburg had already been extensively reclaimed early in the medieval period. It is therefore likely that if there were many deposition sites in the reclaimed areas (the middle terrace in particular), these have been lost for archaeological research, and perhaps only stand a chance for later recovery if objects were buried deep in the ground, or if the site was covered by substantial colluvial deposits. The peaty areas near the transition of the middle to the high terrace in these same provinces, however, have not been reclaimed until the end of the late 19th and early 20th century. This was a time when the interest in archaeological finds was growing in local circles, and it became also common knowledge that such areas potentially might yield finds. Therefore it comes as no surprise that a considerable number of the bronze finds from Limburg were indeed recorded as having been recovered during these reclamations. In the Roerstreek and the nearby 'Westelijke Mijnstreek', where a considerable number of

bronze finds have been made in peaty areas, such conditions existed (fig. 1.3; Van Hoof 2000, 17-22). Another locality where this is true is the 'Kempen' area in the province of Noord-Brabant (fig. 1.3; Theunissen 1999). The impression is that the most bronze-rich peats are also those regions where of old historical societies took an active interest in archaeology.

The largest peat bog, the Peel, is remarkably empty, however (fig. 4.2). Currently, this huge area has yielded just 12 Bronze Age finds.<sup>9</sup> It is generally thought that this emptiness is related to the industrial scale on which its reclamation took place, and the absence of active amateur archaeologists (Gerritsen 2001, 174, note 176). The latter is not entirely true: a few amateurs were actively monitoring the reclamations, most notably L.D. Keus in the 1930s. This led to the find of the Kronenberg sword (chapter 7). A structured cooperation between amateur archaeologists, a museum and labourers working in the bog did not come into being. Such a cooperation was very successful in the case of the reclamation of the peat bogs in the province of Drenthe, in the northern Netherlands. The almost industrial way in which the reclamations in the part of the peat bog situated in the province of Noord-Brabant was carried out will indeed have diminished the chances of finding artefacts. On the side situated in the province of Limburg, reclamation was small-scale and more haphazardly organized; chances of recognizing bronzes were probably higher. Nevertheless, the only two finds are from Kronenberg, which is situated at the fringes of the bog.

In general, the *essen* represent the earliest reclamations on the sandy soils that had an effect on the archaeological record. The same goes for the larger part of the loess area in southern Limburg. The land surrounding medieval cities and villages (now mostly part of the town itself) are another example of early reclaimed areas (see fig. 4.3). It is thus very likely that if there were substantial numbers of bronze deposits in these areas, these are now lost without ever being recorded. As a matter of fact, Reuvens (1823, 219-23) recorded such finds made during building activities in and around Nijmegen. The large peat areas, such as the terrace swamps, the Peel, and the marshes once bordering the ice-pushed ridges of Nijmegen-Groesbeek and Rhenen, were reclaimed in the late 19th-early 20th century. As such areas potentially stand a better chance of yielding recorded finds (dependent on the activities of local amateurs, and the type of reclamation), they are more likely to become find-rich areas. Actually, this is another mechanism apart from the better preservation circumstances that may lead to the over-representation of peat-finds in relation to dry finds (deposited in areas that became agricultural fields in the Middle Ages).

From the point of view of reclamation history, conditions for preservation of bronze deposits seem to be relatively bad

in the loess area and in the *essen* area on the sandy soils. They are favourable in the peat areas that were reclaimed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

*Dredging and other activities in rivers and stream valleys*  
Special mention should be made of the activities in rivers. The numerous stream valleys in the sand and loess zones in the region have mostly been canalized since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. This often meant that new stream channels were cut into the older fluvial sediment of the stream valleys themselves. Such activities are known to have yielded finds of Bronze Age metalwork and flint and stone axes. Digging activities in the (former) river-beds and backswamps of the major rivers Meuse, Scheldt, Rhine and Waal, however, have in places led to high number of finds, particular in the Scheldt near Antwerpen, the Waal near Nijmegen-Millingen, and in a zone of some 15 km in the Meuse valley, from Buggenum in the north to Stevensweert in the south, and near Roermond in particular. Here, not only objects from the Bronze Age were recovered, but also from the Late Iron Age, and the Roman Period, and to a lesser extent, from the Neolithic and the early Middle Ages. The most important activity where finds were recovered is gravel and sand extraction; the deepening and straightening of the river-bed is another. A special case is the construction of harbours, which involved the excavating of entire stretches of land. This took place in connection with the development of the growing international significance of the harbour of Antwerpen (Warmenbol 1987b).

Gravel extraction was already done before 1850, but was practised on a large-scale from that time on. It has in particular been carried out in the rivers Meuse and Waal. At first in the river-bed itself and on existing gravel banks and later on in the backswamps of the river (in the Meuse this took place since 1935, both on the Dutch and on the Belgian side of the river). The huge gravel extraction lakes are a visible remnant of it. The alluvial valley of the Meuse was furthermore excavated from 1929 until in the 1940s, in order to make it navigable for large ships (Mooren 1999, 45).

Fig. 4.4 indicates the stretches that have seen severe, high intensity, and moderate, medium intensity, dredging. 'Severe' is taken here to imply intensive gravel extraction in the backswamps, deepening of the gully, and the construction of dams and side-channels, and 'moderate' is taken to mean that only two of these activities took place. In the case of 'low intensity dredging', digging activities were mainly restricted to deepening of the gully. When the rate of dredging is compared to the find distribution of dredging finds, it is clear that the stretches with the highest numbers of finds are all situated in those river stretches that have been heavily dredged. This implies that dredging activities have strongly determined the distribution of river finds. It is

remarkable, however, that the western part of the rivers in the central area has hardly yielded any finds, although dredging was also very intensive here (particularly in the harbour of Rotterdam) (fig. 4.4). This need not reflect a prehistoric reality: in the Meuse valley, and in the eastern part of the central river area the river has always flowed in a relatively small narrow valley, because its bed is confined by higher terraces or ridges. More to the west, such confining ridges do not exist, and the river could shift its course much easier there. The river area is indeed much broader here than it is in the east (near Lobith and Nijmegen) or in the Meuse valley (province of Limburg). This implies that chances are higher for dredging in the eastern part, or in the Meuse valley to yield sediment of the Bronze Age river-bed, whilst they are lower in the western part.

Dredging intensity and the lateral extension of river sediment are not the only factors, however. This becomes particularly clear in the case of the stretch of the Meuse in Limburg between Maasbracht and Borgharen, which constitutes the border between Belgium and the Netherlands. Although severe gravel extraction took place on either side, only a few are known from the Belgian side, whereas 84 reliable finds are recorded for the Dutch side. This must relate to the active interest of collectors and amateur archaeologists monitoring the dredging activities on the Dutch side. Many finds recovered in the Belgian side of the Meuse are known to have been sold to dealers, without ever being recorded by archaeologists (personal communication J. Butler). An additional problem is that a systematic and thorough survey of Belgian amateur archaeologists comparable to the one done by Butler since the 1960s has not yet taken place. Such a survey was impossible to carry out within the present research. Without any doubt, we are dealing with a serious gap in the evidence.<sup>10</sup>

In sum, the distribution map of river finds is strongly determined by the intensity of dredging activities and their monitoring by amateurs. Another distorting factor is that dredging, by its very nature, is an excavation method that precludes any way of establishing the stratigraphical position of objects. Objects of other materials, that may have a relation to the deposited bronze objects, are therefore often not even recognized as such. It should also be realized that dependent on the size of the sieve used, many small bronzes are lost or remain unrecognised. Nevertheless, small object finds like tiny needles have been found.

### *Conclusion*

The *essen* zones largely explain the blank spots on the find distribution map. The reclamation history of the loess zone and the lack of covering sediment may explain why this zone is poor in bronze finds, except for the find-rich peat areas that were reclaimed in the late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The

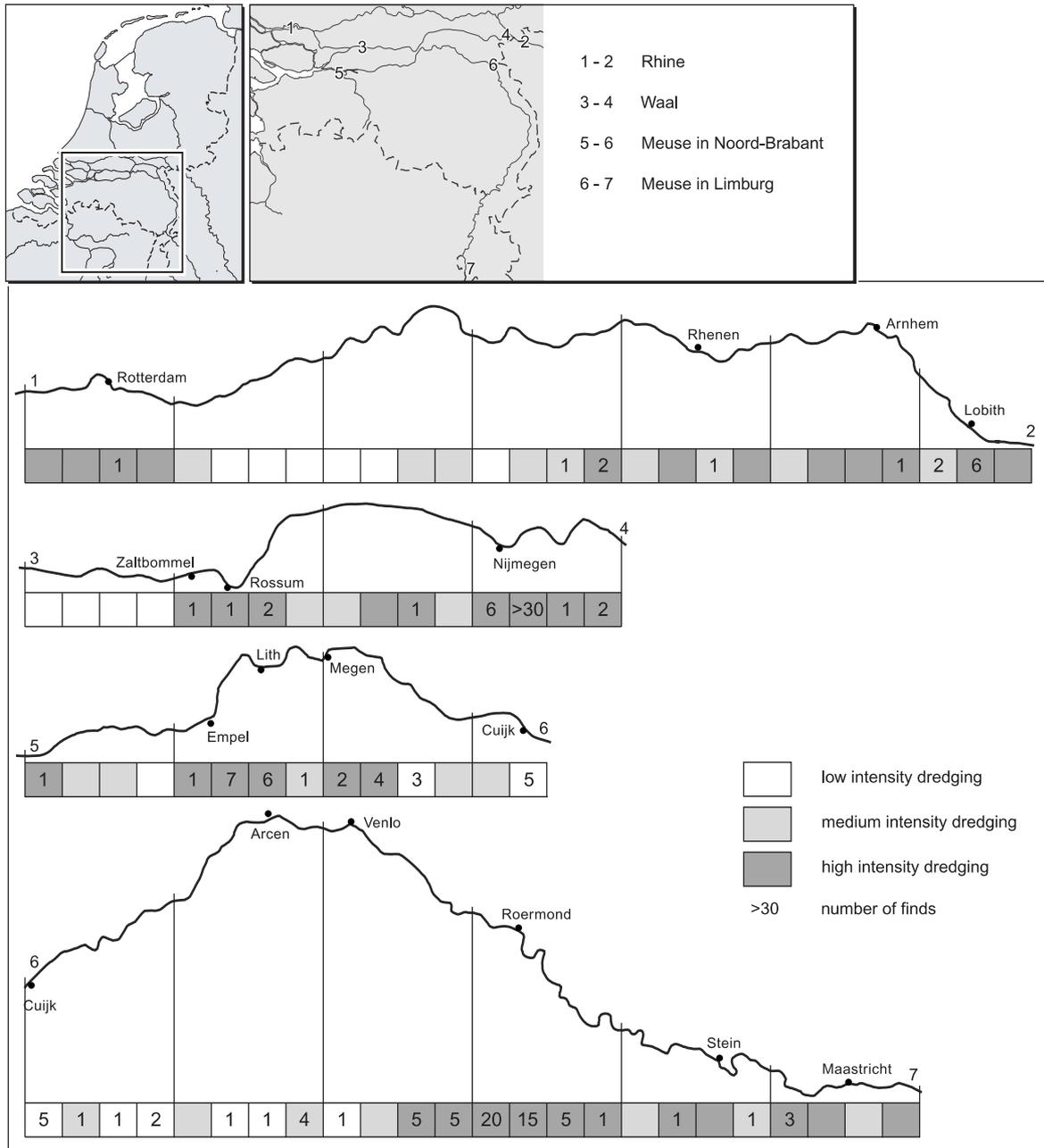


Figure 4.4 The relation between dredge finds in the major rivers and the intensity of dredging.

largest and youngest peat reclamation is that of the Peel bog. This bog, however, has hardly yielded any bronze finds. Find circumstances were generally unfavourable and they may well explain this scarcity of finds. On the other hand, the few finds recovered, among which a sword, are from an area where find circumstances were relatively better.

#### 4.5 EXPLAINING PRESENCE AND ABSENCE OF FINDS: RESEARCH FACTORS

Above, reference has been made several times to the crucial role of amateurs and laymen in finding bronze objects. Fokkens (1998a) has already worked out in detail how amateur finds influence and determine the existing find distribution maps in general. For the present research, their role is even more important, as amateur and laymen finds make up for 67 % of the total of finds. The following aspects are relevant:

- 1 The interest of the finder for metal finds, and his or her knowledge of the material. Amateurs have varying interests; some only collect flint and never pick up shards (see Fokkens 1998a, note 25). In general, amateurs and laymen have a high appreciation of metal finds, so this factor is of lesser relevance. An important factor, however, is their knowledge of the material. Small finds, in general objects like undecorated rings and needles, tend to be under-represented, as they are often believed to be modern. Even large finds, like rapiers, are often not recognized as such. The rapier from Den Dungen, for example, was considered to be a useful tool for papering rooms, something for which it also was subsequently used by the finder.
- 2 The use of metal-detectors. Since the 1980s, the use of metal-detectors has increased enormously. In general, this led to the finding and recognizing of more smaller objects, that formerly remained unnoticed. Most metal-detector collections I have seen indeed consist of an array of all sorts of small metal items. Unfortunately, it is not possible to map the use of metal-detectors in any detail. The central river area is known to be one of the areas in our region that is very intensively surveyed by metal-detectorists because of the high number of metal-yielding sites from the Roman Period. This makes the low numbers of Bronze Age metalwork stand out as remarkable. I know of fewer metal-detector activities from the western part of Noord-Brabant and Dutch southern Limburg, and of hardly any from the Belgian part of the region. This probably does not imply that metal-detecting does not take place there, but rather that people working there do not have much contact with archaeological authorities and amateur groups.
- 3 The existence of areas within the region that have witnessed a long history of amateur surveys has already been touched upon. Of these, the following micro-regions have

yielded high numbers of bronze finds: the Roerstreek near Roermond, the Kempen in southeast Noord-Brabant, and the area around the city of Nijmegen.

- 4 The relationship between finders and archaeological authorities and museums. As already mentioned, this factor is particularly acute in the case of metal-detectorists, who are very often only known in circles that are out of touch with those authorities. This factor largely explains the considerably smaller number of recent finds from the Belgian area as opposed to the Dutch one.
- 5 Of great importance is the accuracy with which the finder recorded the find circumstances, or at least the locality where it was found. For 69 % of the finds, there is more information on find-spot than just the name of the municipality where it was found. This is largely due to the work of individual museums (particularly the RMO), the numerous visits paid by dr. J. Butler to the original finders and some provincial archaeologists who had close contacts with the finders. In particular, the former provincial archaeologist of Noord-Brabant, the late G. Beex, should be mentioned here.

#### 4.6 CONCLUSION: WHICH SET OF DATA IS INFORMATIVE ON SELECTIVE DEPOSITION?

Having seen the impact of post-depositional disturbances, it is now necessary to evaluate the limitations and the potential of the database. I shall begin by dealing with the question whether we can read the find distribution map as indicative of differences in the rate in which ritual deposition was practised among different communities of the southern Netherlands. For most areas it has been shown that people lived there in the Bronze Age. Does the small number of bronze finds of finds in, for example, the western part of the study region imply that bronze deposition hardly took place there? Next, I shall deal with the crucial question on contexts. In which contexts should the lack of evidence on bronzes be taken as evidence of absence? In other words: on which set of data should we base our comparisons?

*In what way is the find distribution map indicative of differences in the rate at which bronze deposition took place?*

Although we are in no position to model the find distribution quantitatively as done by Fokkens (1998a), we can get a good impression of the impact of post-depositional processes by looking at the richest micro-regions in the study area: why are they so rich? A look at the map immediately shows that the Dutch-Belgian border has consequences for the numbers of finds outside rivers and stream valleys. In the Netherlands, we see that bronzes are fairly often found in between stream valleys (province of Noord-Brabant and Dutch Limburg). However, crossing the border, we have

hardly any evidence for such finds in Belgium. We see the same when focussing on the dredge finds. The river Meuse constitutes the Dutch-Belgian border, and is equally intensively dredged on either side. On the Belgian side, the number of finds is much lower than on the Dutch side, however. Still we are talking here about the same river, and similar processes of disturbance by dredging. The inevitable conclusion must be that it reflects the quintessential role of amateurs and the degree of contact between amateurs and 'professional' archaeologists. In the Netherlands, amateur archaeology has of old been much more organized and cooperative towards 'professional' authorities. This alone shows that our find distribution map is to an important degree the artefact of research factors.

A look at the map shows that the area with the highest number of bronze finds is the area around Nijmegen and Roermond. Both micro-regions are characterized by a combination of favourable preservation and research conditions. The major rivers in both are among the most intensively dredged ones in the entire region. Also, they are both characterized by a long-standing history of amateur surveys (since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century). Peat reclamations in the Roermond area (the Roerstreek) and the construction of new building sites in Nijmegen have received ample attention from local historical circles and/or museums.

Still, the richness of these micro-regions cannot solely be explained by such favorable conditions. Similar conditions existed for example in the Maaskant area: the river is intensively dredged and monitored by amateurs and archaeologists (Ter Schegget 1999), and the inland area has also seen intensive surveying by amateurs. The area around Oss has even witnessed the most extensive excavations ever carried out in the Netherlands.<sup>11</sup> The excavations have yielded evidence of many Bronze Age settlement terrains, and even traces for bronze production itself (the clay mould from Oss-Horzak; chapter 7). The use of metal-detectors is standard practice at such excavations, as illustrated by the many finds of (Roman) bronzes (Wesselingh 2000 for examples). Bronze Age metalwork is also known, but not in the quantities we know from the *Roerstreek* or Nijmegen. Within a rectangular area of 130 km<sup>2</sup>, including most excavations in the Oss/Berghem-micro-region and the Roerstreek, only six bronze finds are recorded from Oss, but 48 from the Roerstreek.<sup>12</sup>

In sum: the find distribution map is to an important extent the product of post-depositional factors, but it is difficult to assess how far their impact stretches. It is clear that it is much to simple to see a find-rich micro-region as straightforwardly reflecting an exceptionally rich depositional tradition. Only for micro-regions with very favourable find conditions like Oss, Nijmegen, or Roermond, a comparison of absence or presence of bronzes may reflect a prehistoric reality. Even then a more thorough assessment of map

formation processes is needed. Therefore, I shall refrain as much as possible from making such comparisons.

*In which contexts does the absence of evidence indicate evidence of absence?*

For the present research, the issue is not about questions like: in what way is our information on different micro-regions within the southern Netherlands comparable? Can core regions be recognized? Rather, our question is: how are we able to recognize patterns in depositional practices that are the result of selective deposition rather than selective preservation?

It was argued that there are two factors that make bronzes from wet contexts potentially better represented in the archaeological record than those from dry contexts. The first is the impact of geochemical decay, which is higher in dry contexts. The second is that dry contexts often represent those parts of the landscape that have been agricultural fields for centuries, and that the archaeological record on such contexts therefore is more biased because of ploughing. I have also presented arguments to nuance this distinction, making it clear that many bronze finds have still survived geochemical decay and ploughing on dry locations, but of course we can never know about the numbers of objects that have been ploughed out or corroded without leaving any trace. Therefore, we need better control contexts where we can be sure that the absence of certain types of bronze objects, or of bronze at all, represents a prehistoric depositional reality. Such contexts are not abundantly available, but they do exist. The following contexts can be distinguished.

1 *Barrow or urnfield graves* that have been professionally excavated. The southern Netherlands are rich in both barrows and urnfields. Some 225 barrows are known, almost all of them excavated, and some 85 urnfields.<sup>13</sup> Both comprise numerous graves, often containing cremation remains. On the heath areas of the sandy part of the region, many barrows and urnfields have never been levelled. Although some saw plundering or unprofessional excavation, the number of professionally excavated graves is high enough to state that they are representative of the general burial ritual. Although such contexts are dry ones, and hence potentially represent less favourable geochemical conditions, bronze objects have been found in some numbers there, particularly in urnfields (chapter 8). Even if bronze objects were badly preserved (as for example in the case of the barrow of Goirle; chapter 7), they were still recognizable as bronze items in a grave. When such barrows were excavated, this was never done with machines, and the emphasis was on finding things for dating the grave. The high number of graves excavated and the absence of bronzes in graves can thus in general be assumed to represent a prehistoric reality.

- 2 *Excavated settlement terrains, or other sites where there is evidence that Bronze Age activities took place.* These sites can only serve as an argument if bronze finds could potentially have been preserved there, and if systematic metal-detecting took place. Not all excavated sites meet these criteria, but the numerous recent large-scale excavations in the central river area (the Betuwe) do. As a matter of fact, bronze items have been found here repeatedly. I shall come back to the value of such sites for the present research in chapter 7.
- 3 *Several types of wet contexts, for example inland swamps versus rivers.* Rich wet find-contexts of different types can also be compared. In Limburg, the contrast between the find-rich inland marshes on the terraces and the adjacent Meuse. In dredging, large objects are much easier to find than small objects like pins or ornaments however. In late 19<sup>th</sup> century manual peat-cutting, as it was practised on the terrace marshes, smaller items stand a better chance of being discovered. The reverse is not true, however: that more than ten swords have been found during dredging in the Meuse near Roermond, while only one was found in the adjacent marshes of Echt on the land (that yielded dozens of smaller bronze tools), is more likely to be explained by selective deposition, since it would be rather odd if peat-cutters overlooked an object as large as a sword.
- 4 *General find patterns from metal-detector finds.* The last example is the most problematic one. As already said, we are badly informed about the practices of metal-detectorists. It is known, however, that many work in the Kempen area and in the central river area. In both cases, they brought numerous bronzes to light. It is quite remarkable, though, that dozens of bronze swords are known from the major rivers, but so far not one from the intensively detected areas of the central river area outside the rivers themselves and the Kempen. The implication of this is that swords apparently are absent from areas outside the rivers themselves. As our knowledge on metal-detectorists is biased, I shall not use their surveys as an argument any further, but it should be remarked that more detailed investigation of their work is badly needed.

## notes

1 These comprise Butler 1963 (general survey); 1987 (French and British imports); 1990 (Early Bronze Age and Middle Bronze Age hoards); 1995/1996 (flat and flanged axes) and Butler/Steegstra 1997/1998 (palstaves). In a number of publications Warmenbol published the finds recovered in and around the city of Antwerpen (1983; 1984a, b; 1987a, b, d; 1991).

2 For the Late Neolithic B and Early Bronze Age, there are sufficient metallurgical analyses to differentiate between copper and bronze

objects. For the later periods such analyses are lacking. In line with what has been observed for most parts of Europe at this time, it is assumed that these are all bronze alloys.

3 It should be remarked here that only a sample of urnfield bronzes has been studied. The total number of urnfield bronzes stored in museums and amateur collections is as yet unknown (chapter 9). Since most metalwork finds from urnfield context are incomplete, it is difficult to assess how one should quantify these finds (in this case every fragment was considered to represent one individual object).

4 Verlaeckt (1996) was concerned with the accuracy with which the original find spot could be retrieved. 'Found in the river Waal at De Winseling near Nijmegen' would in his approach rank higher than 'found in the river Waal near Nijmegen'. For the present research, however, both inform us of the fact that an object was found in a river near Nijmegen'. Depending on the reliability of this, and whether the spot was originally wet, they both inform us on objects deposited in rivers. For my purposes, the more detailed find information is welcome, but not vital.

5 This category both includes very old find reports (for example, the discovery of the Wageningen hoard in the 1840s) and modern metal-detectorist surveys. What matters here is the reliability of the report, and what I see as uniting these examples is that in both cases no clear commercial intentions seem to have influenced the find report. This contrary to what might be expected in the case of antique dealers. There is no compelling reason to see an old layman's find report as less reliable than a recent one.

6 The same goes for the colluvial deposits on the loess belt in southern Limburg, and the driftsand sediment in Noord-Brabant. On a regional scale, however, their impact is limited. For that reason, drift-sand areas and colluvial deposits are not included on the maps here.

7 For example, the socketed axe found during the excavations on Nijmegen-Kops Plateau was deposited in the dry sediment of an ice-pushed ridge. Apart from green oxidation of the surface, the axe was in excellent condition. Geochemical processes, however, can lead to differentiated preservation of objects of other materials that may have been deposited with the metal object. In peat bogs, wooden or leather objects are preserved, whereas porous stones and the coarse-tempered Middle Bronze Age pottery will fall apart under such conditions (Fokkens 1998a, 69). In dry conditions, such stone objects and such pottery stand a much better chance of preservation, whereas the organic objects will disappear without a trace.

8 Suetonius: life of Galba, in: *The lives of the Caesars, book VII: VIII*. 'Non multo post in Cantabriae lacum fulmen decidit repertaeque sunt duodecim securae, haud ambiguum summae imperii signum' (Not long after this lightning struck a lake of Cantabria and twelve axes were found there, an unmistakable token of supreme power). Translated by J.C. Rolfe, in Loeb Classical Library 38.

9 The Rosnoën-like sword from Kronenberg, a spearhead now lost from the same area, a palstave and a socketed axe from Volkel, a palstave provenanced 'Peel' and, less reliable, a spearhead from Liessel. The Late Bronze Age Deurne hoard (3 objects; chapter 8) and the ornament and palstave from Deurne-Klein Kasteel are located on the fringes of the Peel bog (chapter 7).

10 The precise methods of dredging used also have consequences. The way in which the sediment is sieved is vital. On modern, large ships the processing of sediment can take place at such a high speed that it is almost impossible to detect artefacts among it. Many smaller dredging ships have a system of conveyor belts where sediment can relatively easily be sorted out for artefacts.

11 Fokkens 1996; Fokkens/Jansen 2002; Schinkel 1998; Wesselingh 2000.

12 A north-south/west-east oriented rectangular area was chosen, including the most intensively surveyed/excavated areas within the micro-regions. For Oss, the coordinates of the north-west corner are 160/425, the south-east corner 170/412. For the Roerstreek, the corners have the following coordinates 190/350 and 200/337.

13 Barrows: Theunissen 1999, 47 plus newly discovered barrows. Urnfields: Roymans 1991.