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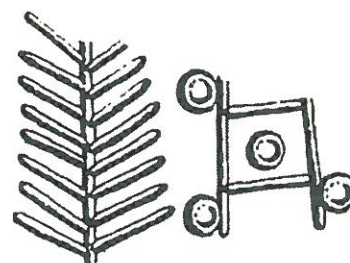
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# THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF VIOLENCE *Interdisciplinary Approaches*



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Volume 2

EDITED BY  
Sarah Ralph

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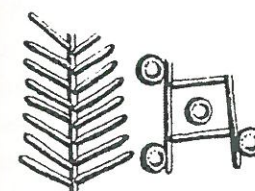
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## CHAPTER THREE

## Warfare in Northern European Bronze Age Societies

Twentieth-Century Presentations  
and Recent Archaeological  
Research Inquiries

Helle Vandkilde

**Abstract** *This paper first reviews the archaeological discourse on prehistoric warfare in Europe and particularly Scandinavia. Two opposing and bloodless tales of the prehistoric Other have long been prevalent—either noble warriors in contradiction-filled and changing societies or peaceful peasants in harmonious and static societies. It was only after 1995 that warfare became an established field of research; the many contemporary wars, and the media coverage, probably playing a decisive role. It is suggested that both the ideal and real sides of war and warriors in prehistory should be studied, and that interpretative stereotypes can be avoided by using theories that view human agents as interacting both routinely and strategically in the world. The paper proceeds to examine selected Bronze Age data from such a perspective: weaponry in itself, weapon technology, weaponry in burials and in votive deposits, fortifications, skeletal trauma, and iconographic representations. It is tentatively concluded that war was variably present in the Bronze Age. Even if war was often present, it was not endemic in the Hobbesian sense.*

## INTRODUCTION

What was the nature, scale and significance of warfare in European pre-state societies of the Bronze Age? In order to provide some possible answers to this broad question this article employs two main strategies. First, it will explore how and why warfare and warriors have been omitted, or incorporated, in archaeological discourses of the early metal ages in temperate Europe. There are historical and ideological reasons for the prevailing neglect of warfare prior to ca. 1995 and for the recent “discovery” of violent aspects of human



prehistoric existence and culture. This meta-archaeological analysis elaborates on previous publications (Vandkilde 2003, 2006a) and draws on examples from Scandinavian research.<sup>1</sup> Second, archaeological sources from the period ca. 2500–700 B.C. will be consulted, in a noncomprehensive manner, in an attempt to reveal the actual position and significance of warfare and warriorhood in temperate Europe before the emergence of state societies. The archaeological analysis will then, based on the discourse analysis of war and warriors in the twentieth century and using a theoretically informed approach, explore the existing knowledge base, as this has considerable potential in this area of study.

### ANALYSIS OF THE "ARCHAEOLOGY OF WAR" DISCOURSE

Two opposing tales have long characterized archaeology—one of them regarding prehistory as being populated with potentially violent warriors who repeatedly changed society, and the other presenting prehistory as being populated with peaceful peasants in harmonious and static societies. Remarkably, war and warfare did not become an established area of study until the last decade or so (from ca. 1995), and it must be assumed that recent wars played a decisive role along with the increasing recognition among professionals that the discipline can provide new insights on a number of issues that concern us today. The factual horrors of war and political violence are now analyzed in a growing body of social anthropological studies (e.g., Löfving 2006; Nordström 1997), whereas it might be claimed that archaeological studies still do not portray prehistoric war realistically enough, probably because the discourse is still influenced by persuasive myths of the Other.

#### A TALE OF WARRIORS WITHOUT WAR

This tale visualizes societies of the European Stone Age and the Bronze Age as antagonistic entities under radical change. Shifts in material culture are explained with reference to migration or revolution, often with ferocious warriors as front figures. Gordon Childe was a prominent proponent of this standpoint in a long series of articles and books written during the period 1926–1957, including the groundbreaking concepts of the Neolithic Revolution and the Urban Revolution (e.g., Childe 1936/1951). The same attitude was expressed by his Danish contemporaries, notably P.V. Glob who, in an influential study from 1945, portrayed an invading Corded Ware people, the Single Grave folk, as axe-wielding warrior nomads on horseback. Glob's colleague Johannes Brøndsted presented a similar picture in his great narrative of prehistoric Denmark published prior to and after World War II (Brøndsted 1957–1958). Here, the Nordic Bronze Age is depicted as a class society with an aristocratic upper class and an oppressed peasant class. The same trend recurred in structural Marxist archaeology of the 1970s and 1980s (e.g. Kristian Kristiansen 1984a and Michael Rowlands 1980), and in the overlapping and ensuing postmodern archaeology. Here, power, dominance, and conflict were firmly written into prehistory in studies by, for instance, Christopher Tilley (e.g., 1984) and Charlotte Damm (e.g., 1993).

Considering the emphasis placed upon such phenomena as warriors, underlying social tensions, immigration, and revolution, it is surprising how little warfare and violence

formed part of the interpretations of archaeological data patterns. In the few studies actually approaching the topic of warfare (Hedeager and Kristiansen 1985; Nordbladh 1989), this happened in a rationalizing manner underlining the social functions of war and introducing the idea of ritual warfare; a bloodless theatrical kind of warfare. This absent realism, I suggest, can be traced to contemporary history shaping scholars' preconceptions of the past. The group of researchers behind the warrior tale can be loosely attached to twentieth-century left-wing European politics. The political left wing was deeply influenced by pacifist movements, which might explain the absence of violence in the dissemination of the past. An additional reason could have been idealistic attitudes to rebellion and social change with a tendency to suppress the violent aspects.

#### A TALE OF PEACEFUL PEASANTS

The other tale had its breakthrough during and especially after World War II. Societies of the Stone Age and the Bronze Age in temperate Europe were presented as harmonious, egalitarian, and peaceful entities with a static and tradition-bound character and thus without latent conflicts. The populations are typically described as skillful hunters, enterprising traders, and especially as hard-working peasants. The agrarian, technological, and economic foundations of prehistoric society were emphasized, not least in the British archaeologist Grahame Clark's influential studies (e.g., Clark 1952). Through the Cambridge Chair, Clark's academic strategy was to resist the hitherto predominant Childean interpretations, and the emphasis therefore shifted toward societal adaptations to nature and toward cultural function rather than cultural change.

This trend recurs among Scandinavian archaeologists, notably C. J. Becker (e.g., 1954), H. C. Broholm (e.g., 1943–1944), Mats P. Malmer (e.g., 1962, 1989), and Søren H. Andersen (e.g., 1972). Stone and Bronze Age people were, according to these authors, occupied with day-to-day work of the forest, the field, or the marketplace; peaceful and laborious societies in full harmony with each other and with nature. Trauma on skeletons is assessed as nondeadly and occasional. Weaponry is categorized as working tools or as status symbols. Interestingly, several of this generation of Danish archaeologists were inspired by contemporary cultural anthropology that typically mediated the contemporary "savage" as an utterly peaceful being, preoccupied with his daily doings.

In the 1960s and 1970s, New Archaeology renewed the discipline's scientific practices, among other things, inspired by the Neo-Evolutionism of contemporary anthropology. Modernization, however, happened without warfare and warriors, and the focus continued to be upon the economic foundations of society. The durative trends in history were highlighted, in which societies developed from hunter-gatherers through tribes to chiefdoms, which were argued to have resulted from ecological crises and demographic pressures. In Scandinavia, Jørgen Jensen's books (e.g., 1982) exemplify such a combined position of Neo-Evolutionism and New Archaeology. Even if many tribal societies known from ethnography are notoriously warlike, this insight did not impact upon the archaeological interpretations. Weapons were considered mere symbols of social rank with key functions in the exchange of gifts between high-ranking persons.



Prehistoric societies were thus disseminated as peaceful, socially balanced, and prosperous, undergoing imperceptible evolutionary change. This understanding of prehistory echoes the prevailing ideal of post-World War II Western societies, which were strategically aiming at technological development, peace, and wealth; an optimistic attitude to life that was surely a reaction to preceding years of war, deprivation, and genocide.

### TWO STEREOTYPES OF THE OTHER

The aforementioned presentations of the prehistoric past rely on negations and idealized accounts of contemporary Western societies. Their origin can, I will suggest, be traced to two opposed myths of the primitive Other, both supposedly unaffected by Civilization, and henceforth reproduced in the wake of colonialist endeavors and through the exotic mediations of early travelers and explorers. These myths, at the very least, go back to the seventeenth century. The bellicose and aggressive savage relates to Hobbes's visions in *Leviathan* (1651/1958) featuring human beginnings as chaotic and brutal, and later transforms into Marx's antagonistic and latently violent society. By contrast, the noble and peaceful savage in Rousseau's romantic writings portraying humans as peaceful by nature, arguably reemerges much later in Weber's consensus-society. These stereotypes seem to have lived almost their own life being confirmed and reconfirmed as each other's opposites over the years, through material, written, and spoken discourse.

The archaeological warrior tale with its emphasis on disharmony, immigration, and revolution, notably allowing much less brutality than its Hobbesian prototype, took form at the onset of the twentieth century. The peasant tale with its focus on harmony, tradition, and gradual change became more prominent after World War II, but gradually lost ground after ca. 1975 with the reemergence of Marxist archaeology and the advent of postmodern debates. Neither of the two tales, however, really agrees with the archaeological source situation, as we shall see, and it may be claimed that empirical data have mostly been ignored, moderated, or rationalized. Warfare is minimized in the warrior tale, while it is utterly ignored in the peasant tale. In effect, prehistory becomes pacified and populated with idealized figures of male identity, especially warriors and peasants, whereas other identities are widely absent.

#### A TALE OF WAR CHIEFS, AND MORE WARFARE

In the last couple of decennia the warrior tale has grown to become predominant, and additions have occurred. The social categories of warrior elites, warrior societies, and warrior aristocracy are increasingly being employed in representations of Europe's prehistory. The Bronze Age is often presented from the perspective of such an elitist and heroic stereotype independently of period and place in Europe, and a modern project of Europeanization is thereby hinted at. In its core, this tale is a continuation of the warrior tale, which most recently has been feminized.

A significant change compared to previous research is that warfare is now increasingly attributed active roles in prehistoric society. The keen interest in warrior elites coincides with

the first appearance of specific archaeological studies of war and violence in prehistory. From around 1995 there has been a veritable eruption in the number of publications about warfare in the past. This may well connect to the many ethnic wars and genocides of the 1990s in dysfunctional nation states; not least the massive media coverage of atrocities had made it difficult to continue neglecting or idealizing archaeological data about violence in the past.

Then, at the threshold to the twenty-first century war finally entered the archaeological agenda, and henceforth interpretations compare better with the archaeological sources, as we shall see. Although this IEMA conference certainly showed improvements, the horrors of war—as universally experienced by combatants, civilians, and victims (Kolind 2006; Scarry 1988)—have still not been written firmly into the prehistory of Europe. This calls to mind the rationalizations of war that have characterized science in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. From Clausewitz (1832) to Otterbein (2000) and Keeley (1996)—icons of warfare studies in the disciplines of philosophy, anthropology, and archaeology—war has systematically been reduced to facts, rules, procedures, functions, causes, and effects in a modern political project (Pick 1993); the outcome and purpose of which, one might claim, have been a legitimization of the slaughter and human suffering on and outside the battlefield. Analytical distance is necessary in all scientific practice. The question should nevertheless be tentatively posed if this rational approach underlying the recently increasing body of archaeological war studies should, or could, be supplemented by an intuitive empathy toward those who suffered from violence in the past.

### THEORIZING WARFARE AND WARRIORHOOD

Throughout most of the history of archaeology, war has been ignored as relevant for our understanding of prehistoric societies, but the many recent studies of prehistoric war (e.g., Hårde 2006; Harding 2007; Harrison 2004; Jockenhövel 2004–2005; Keeley 1996; LeBlanc 2003; Peter-Röcher 2007; Schulting 2006; Weinberger 2008) now turn the tide, hence tending through outspoken argumentation, or through the sheer focus upon warfare, to pinpoint prehistory as an innately violent place. The body of data on war-related violence has grown noticeably, as the Bronze Age examples provided below amply testify. Does this, however, mean that the Hobbesian stance of *bellum omnium contra omnes* (Hobbes 1651/1958) has been right all along?

The availability of a rich dataset is not the only prerequisite of “striving to see the past as it was” (Trigger 1989:411); to reflect theoretically on warfare and its agents is equally important. Ethnographical cases, though excellent to think with, should not overrule the archaeological sources as happened with the so-called tribal zone theory (Ferguson and Whitehead 1992). Stereotypic understandings of the past, such as those discussed above, can possibly best be counteracted through the use of those theories that commence from the basic view that human agents interact both routinely and strategically in the world. Hence, warfare can be defined as collective, violent social interaction, which is built upon a cultural logic and waged against other groups. Historically, war has been waged predominantly by men, but women may often be seen to orally and effectively defend the family's and society's honor. They may contribute by rousing to war and by assisting in the actions of war.



Actions of war vary from raiding to large-scale military actions; its precise form and content depending on the specific societal setting. Categorization of warfare as sport or ritual practice sometimes occurs when it is supposed that societies without centralized political power are mostly peaceful as opposed to more complex societal developments. The earlier Bronze Age is, for example, often described in terms of person-to-person combat—a prestigious and theatrical kind of warfare—opposed to the later Bronze Age with arguably a much sharper military profile (Harding 1999, 2007; Osgood 1998). While we may accept that war can be sometimes ritualized and sport-like, such “ritual war” will merely be one facet of a broader warlike reality that also implies violence and death. Conversely, war in itself often relates to various rituals carried out before, during, and after interactions of violence. Quite possibly, sacrificial depositions in watery places of weapons and of people in prehistory can be regarded as part of a series of actions that includes war.

If war is always synonymous with (varying degrees of) deadliness and human suffering, the question may arise, How precisely does warfare in non-state societies differ from warfare in state societies? We tend to put great emphasis on distinguishing between state and stateless societies, but with regard to war and its relative frequency and social organization, the difference is not necessarily very great (Vandkilde 2006c). In state societies the military sector is always a major source of social power that can be readily employed to back up the state apparatus. In stateless societies—our main concern here—power (leadership) and warfare may occur quite separate from each other, or they may go hand in hand. Stateless warfare in a cross-cultural perspective can deliver many examples of both these scenarios.

Since war inspires identification, warriorhood can be considered an adjacent social identity; a double being and boundary crosser engaging in violent encounters with other groups while also holding representational roles in rituals and everyday sociality. These real and ideal sides are very much motivated by cultural myths of men and war.

Cross-culturally, warriors do not necessarily create organizations, but when they do, they organize in a limited number of ways. This insight can be used to further theorize warriorhood, with particular relevance for prehistory. Warrior clubs may have several social objectives, a primary one being of military character, and their members are usually of male gender. Such warrior institutions occur in three varieties (Vandkilde 2006b) based upon whether access to them is regulated through the criterion of age, of status/prestige, or of social rank. All three categories contain elements of *Gefolgschaft*, defined as reciprocal relations between a war leader and the group of warrior-followers. This relationship of mutual dependence in a band is defined by economics, in addition to a number of ethical, social, and moral rules uniting the warriors. Gender is a relevant element to study, since warriorhood like any other identity is relational as well as changeable. The border between soldier and warrior is hard to define, but the latter of these is characterized by a more individualistic mode of organization and belief. Warrior bands can live their life on the periphery of society, or alternatively can place themselves at the very center of power and authority (Steuer 2006; Vandkilde 2006b).

Material culture mediates, translates, and transforms distinctions in society: age, gender, social status, profession, and so forth. Warriorhood combines such distinctions in various culture-specific ways. Objects, and indeed bodily appearances, are intricately used in

strategies of identification among these warrior identities as they exist in many prehistoric, historical, and ethnographic contexts (Otto et al. 2006). Weapons, particular dresses, and bodily postures can materialize and manipulate the image of the warrior as identity and ideal within the warrior group, between warrior groups, and in respect to the outside world, but at the same time have an effect on the individual warrior by stimulating in turn self-understanding and personhood (Vandkilde 2006b). In addition, advances in warfare and weapon technologies can escalate conflicts and perhaps (e.g., through horses and swords) enable societal change.

Weaponry makes warfare and warriors, in a manner of speaking. Weapons, just like the warrior, have several potential uses that are violent and social in character. They are implements of war while also having potential applications in the greater domain of identification, prestige enhancement, and rituals. This firm material link makes it realistic to study warfare and warriors from archaeological sources. Interpretations must take into consideration that function is widely independent of material form and potentially changeable within the broad range of being an active weapon and an object with other or additional uses. While in all likelihood produced to serve warlike purposes, a sword, for instance, can become a token of social position and conclude its life cycle as an heirloom. Material culture can nevertheless be summarized as a substantial ingredient in our understanding of prehistoric war and warriors; weapons in particular take key roles in both the real and the ideal sides of bellicose interaction and identification.

#### MATERIALITIES OF WARFARE AND WARRIORS IN THE BRONZE AGE

Selected archaeological data from the European Bronze Age, in particular southern Scandinavia in the period 2000–500 B.C., are examined below from an interpretive perspective concentrating on the following contextual groupings: the weaponry in itself, weaponry in burials and votive deposits, weapon combinations and technology, fortifications, skeletal trauma, and iconographic presentations. The intention is more broadly to clarify the significance of war and associated identities in the Bronze Age of temperate Europe.

##### WEAPONRY AS ITSELF

Weaponry may be divided, somewhat arbitrarily, into implements with a warlike potential and genuine weapons made for offensive and/or defensive purposes (e.g., Chapman 1999). Bows and arrows, points, axe blades, knives, daggers, etc. of organic or nonorganic materials, belong to the first category whereas the second category comprises mainly swords, spearheads, shields, and body armor, but also mace heads and battle-axes. The typology roughly suggests that most weapons have potential uses outside warfare, notably hunting. Bone assemblages from Final Neolithic and Bronze Age settlements normally show little inclusion of wild animals, and it can thus be presumed that hunting in these periods, and most certainly in the Bronze Age, was more a matter of prestige than economic necessity for at least the privileged part of the population (Arnold 2010). The boundary between prestige-hunter and warrior can be blurred, as famously illustrated by the lion-hunt dagger from



Shaft Grave IV at Mycenae. Dating to ca. 1600–1500 B.C., it shows warfare against the lion. This is likely a metaphor for bravery in combat and for the princely warrior chieftain in early Mycenaean society. In the thirteenth century B.C. this symbol was appropriated by the royal house of Mycenae as their “coat of arms,” visualized so vividly by the Lion Gate to the citadel.

North of the Alps, in the Final Neolithic (Copper Age) and particularly in the Bronze Age, the group of genuine weapons grew markedly in numbers and in technical and ornamental elaboration. This seems tied to the general inventiveness of the period, but almost certainly also to the formation of institutions of war and new ideologies to support them. Although the presence of warrior clubs is rather strongly indicated from around 2800 B.C. (Vandkilde 2006b), their more precise position, central or marginal, in the societal meshwork is unknown, but could have varied enormously in the period 3000–500 B.C.

From the Bronze Age of temperate Europe numerous weapons exist; the sheer quantity being ample testimony to warfare as an option that could be acted upon, and indeed to the presence of warriorhood as an identity (cf. Treherne 1995) feeding from bellicose interaction. Macro- and microwear analyses of swords confirm that many have indeed been put to use (e.g., Kristiansen 1984b, Bridgford 1997; Kristiansen 2002). Likewise, spiral-decorated and finely shaped weapon-palstaves, often accompanying the sword in Danish burials of privileged males 1500–1300 B.C., show a use pattern similar to that found on swords. These wear patterns and damages are clearly different from those occurring on mass-produced coarse work-palstaves, which like many flanged axes appear to have been used for woodwork (cf. Adam 2011; Aner and Kersten 1973ff; Kienlin and Ottaway 1998). It is often maintained that some of the most spectacular weaponry: shields, helmets, giant axes, and body armor—for reasons of construction—cannot have been very suitable for warfare. Such weapons may have had ritual functions in funerary games, religious performances and/or were parade armor that should impress and scare. This may be supported by the pictorial slabs from the Kivik tomb, rock-carving scenes, and Patroklos’s funeral in Homer’s *Iliad*. By contrast, a substantial series of other weapons exists that were surely meant to wound and kill other human beings: spears and arrows definitely belong here, as do the swords. Especially the swords are central to our understanding of the Bronze Age as a phenomenon and era.

The exquisite and highly specialized craftsmanship of many of these weapons further supports the suggestion of organized warriorhood. It would also support the suggestion that such warrior groups in Scandinavia and elsewhere in Bronze Age Europe were recruited and organized internally according to hierarchical principles, and thus not unlike the system that can be deduced from the *Iliad*, from Tacitus’s *Germania*, and from a large number of ethnographically studied cases (cf. also Schweizer 1990; Vandkilde 2006b, 2006d). A material hierarchy of weapons arguably existed, which was differentially constituted in different periods; in the later Bronze Age likely with metal-hilted swords and body armor in the top part, followed by organic-hilted swords, axes, spearheads, and archery equipment lower down, and wooden clubs and similar items in the bottom part. Such hierarchies of weaponry may be suggested to faintly reflect social divisions within the warrior institutions.

Weapons can be highly individualized objects—swords usually are—and thus invested with personalized names and meanings while simultaneously mediating in variable measure gender, status, rank, kinship, ethnicity, profession, etc. Weapons may have whole biographies and stories attached to them, which could have been invoked on special occasions. The famed boar’s tusk helmet that Odysseus puts on for a nightly spying expedition is a case in point (cf. Vandkilde 2006d), which could very well generally apply when looking at the finest weapons from the Bronze Age. Such particular weapons are perhaps likely to be inalienable possessions kept in the family as tokens of memory and inheritance or ritually exchanged with the gods in sacred places or with very particular ancestors in monumental tombs. The potential multifunctionality of material culture thus implies that weapons cannot be reduced merely to being war implements, as also suggested by contextual evidence.

In later European prehistory the cultural biographies of weapons typically ended with a ritual deposition either in burials or in votive offerings. Such depositions may comprise one item or a combination of several items depending on cultural and social factors. The archaeologist thus obtains intimate knowledge mostly of the concluding activities, the ritual death of things, which may have had several very active lives prior to the final deposition. These final destinations of weaponry, however, may still be able to deliver information about the living society (Hansen 2009, 2010).

#### WEAPONRY IN BURIALS

Numerous graves with weapons are known, but their direct or indirect relationship with warriorhood is still not well studied. From the Final Neolithic—the Corded Ware and Bell Beaker periods—good cases can be made for warrior identities and institutions, although allowing for cultural variations (Vandkilde 2006b). From the Bronze Age one can easily identify conspicuous individual graves with rich weaponry attached to mature males, such as at Gemeinlebarn F in Austria from the seventeenth century B.C. (Neugebauer 1991: grave 7) or at Hagenau and Asenkofen in Alsace and Bavaria from the thirteenth century B.C. (Demakopoulou et al. 1998; Schauer 1971). Similar weapon graves occur all over Europe throughout the Bronze Age although not equally frequently, but it seems clear—and still allowing for cultural variations across time and space—that the dead warrior was commemorated in the Bronze Age by kin and community in the same way that warriors and soldiers have been celebrated and remembered throughout history and in our own time. Such presentations are always strongly ideologically colored, even persuasive, especially contrasted with the knowledge that the warrior is an identity also maintained by violence. Grooming items such as razors, combs, awls, and tweezers, in addition to ornaments for dress and body, very often accompany elaborate weaponry in so-called warrior burials (Treherne 1995), hence tallying with a cross-cultural inclination of warriors to be almost obsessed with their personal appearance. Clear-cut visual presentations of warrior identities are normally rooted in myths and narratives of war and its heroes, but are also underpinned by social strategies of distancing “us” from “them.”

As argued above, based on weapons alone, warriors of the Bronze Age were organized in warrior institutions consisting of members recruited on the basis of rank, age, and gender.



This may seem in general harmony with the funerary evidence, which is, however, also a very complex data source. Weapons and dress accessories in burials may be a specific metonymic statement of the roles played by the dead individual in life. Swords seem in the Bronze Age very rarely associated with child or female interments, and sword-burials would then be generally suggestive of male warriorhood. However, weapons and dress accessories may additionally be used to make more general metaphoric statements, and thus have a less direct bearing on the lived identities of the deceased. If a small, exclusive group of mature males are interred with rich weaponry, this is likely to reflect symbolic warriorhood in the sense of an earlier warrior identity, heroic status or ambition, political authority or high social rank; all of it possibly in combination. Likewise, weapons accompanying small male children and young adolescents, such as those found in some Corded Ware communities (Vandkilde 2006b), are likely to be metaphors originating in warrior values rather than signs of active warriorhood.

The newly discovered inhumation cemetery at Neckarsulm in Baden-Württemberg dating to the earliest Urnfield period, ca. 1300 B.C. (Br. D) is very interesting in this respect due to its unequivocal association with warriorhood *per se*. The majority of the 51 bodies turned out to be adult males of excellent health and physique, most of them with standard equipment of fine pottery and body accessories, however, surpassed materially by three sword-graves situated close together at the eastern margin of the cemetery. Many burials contained several interments of males who apparently died on the same occasion (Neth 2001). It is fairly clear from this case that the cemetery was for warriors, that is, that the buried males were active warriors who died and were buried companion-wise, and, finally, that the warrior institution(s) had an internal ranking defined by those with swords and those without swords.

In future studies based on burial practices, warriorhood in the Bronze Age should preferably be analyzed as a relational and changeable social identity, incorporating the fact that objects can be deposited in burials for a variety of overlapping reasons. These reasons are dependent on culture and society, such as emotion, social ambition, social rivalry and social identity, cultural values and norms, and religion; a series of parameters not necessarily related to warfare.

#### WEAPONRY IN VOTIVE DEPOSITS

A large number of weapons are known from sacrificial deposits all over northern and central Europe, and many of them have been retrieved from wetlands. This specific ritual practice has been explained with reference to several overall purposes: rites of passage, commemorating the past, gifts to the gods, and "potlatches" to promote the importance of particular persons or social institutions and to legitimize or question power and authority (Bradley 1990; Hansen 2009; Vandkilde 1996, 1999). These social and religious motives need not exclude each other, but can warfare possibly also be involved? A proportion of Neolithic and Bronze Age ritual depositions of weaponry might, at least hypothetically, be considered the commencement, culmination, or conclusion of warfare, which even today is intertwined with rituals.

Neolithic depositions contain mainly implements with the potential for war, while the more mono-functional weapons in depositions from the Bronze Age make an association with warfare more obvious. War booty offerings, a generally accepted find category in Iron Age Europe sustained by written sources, could well be rooted in the Neolithic and especially the Bronze Age (Randsborg 1995). Three or more sites in a swampy river valley at Altentreptow-Tollensetal in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern have reportedly since 1996 yielded bronze and wooden weapons, dress and body accessories, and a number of traumatized skeletons of mainly young adult males, apparently datable to between 1300–1200 B.C. at the transition to the Urnfield period. Is this a huge war booty offering, leftovers at the battlefield, or maybe both? (Krüger 2009; Ulrich 2008; Jantzen et al. 2010). Whichever the correct explanation, the association with warfare is in this case unequivocal.

As warfare is definable as a flow of social interactions, it needs to be somehow initiated and concluded, and rituals on individual and group level present themselves as obvious choices. Depositions of bronze weapons in watery places could then in general be seen from such a perspective of war. Weapon offerings, such as those from Fårdrup and Valsømagle (Vandkilde 1996), may then be interpreted as metonymic statements of concluded warfare, in terms of victory, peacemaking, and alliance maintenance, or perhaps as an offering made by the warrior band or the war leader to ensure luck in an impending war. Hypothetically, then, the number of weapon offerings would increase in periods with intensified warfare.

Weapon offerings may, however, also be metaphoric statements that more distantly relate to the waging of war. It can be argued that the institutionalization of warriors and war—arguably an increasing trend during the Bronze Age—implies that these two scenarios of metaphor and metonym were carried more symbolically into other social fields of the Bronze Age world, as part of processes of signification and legitimation. Finally, a wide variety of other bronze objects than weapons occur in votive depositions (cf. Aner and Kersten 1973ff; Vandkilde 1996). These are pervaded by other intentions, indirectly or not at all, associated with war-related violence.

#### WEAPON COMBINATIONS

Weapon combinations in wetland depositions and in cemeteries can, used with caution, inform about the internal organization of the warrior bands and the equipment and fighting methods of the Bronze Age warrior (Thrane 2006). It is, however, necessary to note—and this tallies with what has already been noted above—that the warrior may not be interred with his full equipment but rather only those parts of the equipment that had a certain symbolic meaning. Particular weapons may have been curated, rather than deposited, for any number of reasons; perhaps kept as inalienable objects to be used on special occasions or transmitted from father to son as insignia of rank and warrior status. Close combat armament predominates in burials and hoarded depositions, which should not let us conclude that archery was unimportant during fighting, as the continued occurrence of arrows of flint and metal shows.



The social presentation of the warrior in funerary contexts varied systematically through time, indicating that fighting methods also changed. In the mid-third millennium B.C. the battle-axe-wielding warrior gave way to the dagger-carrying archer, who in the mid-second millennium at the threshold to the Tumulus culture of the Middle Bronze Age became a sword, axe, and spear fighter with several fine toilet articles to groom hair and body. Battle-axes and other axes of potential use in war were still available, especially in the earlier Bronze Age, and it is possible that body armor and shields of organic materials were in use. Wheeled horse-pulled vehicles were also present. In the Urnfield Period of the Late Bronze Age, from around 1300 B.C., weapons look increasingly effective and standardized, with elite warrior equipment consisting of the whole suite: sheet bronze armor, helmet, round shield, sword, and spear (Figures 3.1 and 3.2). This was in addition to toilet implements for grooming and now more often a four-wheeled cart or a two-wheeled chariot. The wheeled vehicle was to bring the war chieftain to and from battle and to present him as a superior being on social and religious occasions. This impressive assortment of weaponry showed developments over time from the beginning of the Urnfield period around 1300 B.C. to its conclusion prior to 700 B.C., as well as regional differences (Harrison 2004; Schauer 1975).

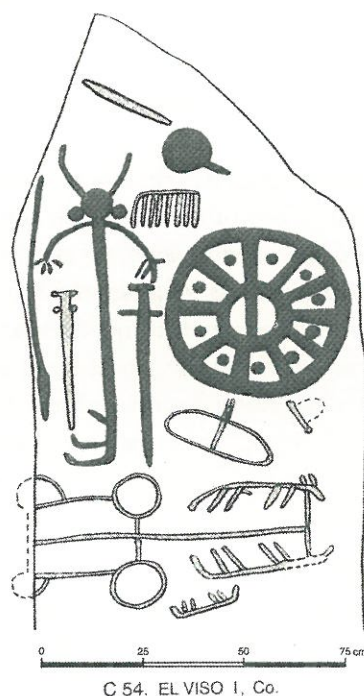


FIGURE 3.1 Phallic warrior with horned helmet and holding two swords. He is surrounded by comb, mirror, brooch, spear, bow and arrow and round shield in addition to a four-wheeled cart pulled by two horses; a stallion and a mare accompanied by her foal (after Harrison 2004).



FIGURE 3.2 Warrior hero clad in his corselet and helmet and surrounded by the panoply of sword, round shield, spear, fibula, comb, and chariot in addition to dead enemies, a mourning wife (?), and lowest down possibly the companions holding hands (after Harrison 2004).

Recent studies often identify the sword wearer as the aristocratic war chieftain, who had a particular territory under his command from which the companions were assumedly recruited, at least in the Late Bronze Age (Sperber 1999; cf. Kristiansen 1984b, 1998, 2002, 2010; also Neth 2001). In the Tyrolean cemetery of Volders the sword wearer of that region, presumably the war chieftain, can be followed through as many as thirteen generations, according to Sperber (1999). It is not always clear however, whether it was only the leader of the warrior band, all of the companions, or only some of them who carried a sword. Some hoards hold several swords, several spearheads, or several shields—perhaps the collective offerings of a whole warrior band? In Clausen's recent examinations (2005) of weapon burials of the Urnfield period north of the Alps both sword and spear occur alone, in combination with each other and sometimes with arrowheads. This may reflect fighting methods, status differences and division of labor among the companions of warrior clubs, and even cultural differences in funerary consumption.

#### WEAPON TECHNOLOGIES

A comparison of weapons over time can give clues to significant changes in weapon technology, understood as styles of fighting and the functionality of weapons in warfare, but also in transport or other technologies that improved the logistics of bellicose interactions. Weapon technology is certainly not unimportant for the outcome of war, and improvements have been known to escalate the extent and viciousness of warfare in numerous ethnographic cases, and even cause radical social change, such as was documented among the Grand Chaco Abipón in South America during the eighteenth century, when horses were adopted for riding (Lacroix 1990).

Consequently, it is possible that innovations in the technology of war could have increased the speed of social change in the Bronze Age. Some of the great turning points in central and northern Europe are associated, quite possibly in a quasi-causal manner, with new arrivals in weaponry and with evidence of increased warfare such as trauma and fortifications. A case in point is the change from the Early to the Middle Bronze Age. The appearance of bronze spearheads around 1700 B.C., and slightly later the first swords, is likely to have had considerable social, physical, and cognitive impact upon conventional warfare, ways of socially interacting with others, and thus the entire societal habitat. The contemporaneous introduction of chariots and carts with four-spoked wheels and horses as draught animals could have further contributed to changing the conditions of interaction. Shortly after 1600 B.C. and as a possible result of previous events, a new macro-regional "culture of contact," the so-called Tumulus culture, had its breakthrough over large parts of central and northern Europe (Vandkilde 2007). This introduced and dispersed new forms and frames of socializing violently and nonviolently (Kristiansen 1999). Warriorhood now occurred in a transformed form equally suitable for warfare and social representation. Change on an even larger scale took place between 1300 and 1200 B.C. with the emergence of a new European "culture of contact," namely, the Urnfield culture, also associated with improved weaponry and seemingly intensified warfare. The above-mentioned recently discovered sites



of Altentreptow (Krüger 2009; Ulrich 2008) and Neckarsulm from the earliest Urnfield period (Br. D) (Neth 2001) point in this direction, together with an increase in the number of fortifications.

#### FORTIFICATIONS

In central Europe, including the Alpine region and the Balkans, fortified settlements occur early on and progressively more frequently (Czebreszuk et al. 2008), while in southern Scandinavia and elsewhere they remain more or less absent throughout prehistory. Bronze Age Scandinavians were hardly more peaceful than central Europeans during this period, as also suggested by the large number of deposited weapons. Clearly, the presence or absence of fortified settlements cannot be used as evidence of war and peace, but might be rooted in different cultural ways of handling hostilities and of presenting power. Cultural tradition, topography of the landscape, settlement organization, and social and intersocietal structure are factors that might be relevant in pursuing the question why settlements are sometimes fortified in central Europe and rarely so in southern Scandinavia.

Fortified sites demonstrate considerable variation in size, permanency, landscape setting, period of use, and construction of defense works. Independently of their date, most sites are comparatively moderate in size while others are larger and some are really huge, encircling 30–70 ha or more. The techniques of ramparts, ditches, and palisades also vary over time and geographical space (cf. Nowacki 2008: Figure 9; Vandkilde 2007: Figure 49B). Utilization of the potentials present in the local terrain for defense and surveillance is universal, hence accounting for the frequent association between fortifications and hilltops. Fortifications and territorial marking go well together, but distinct territoriality can exist without fortifications.

Although many sites are practically unexplored and thus not easily datable, many do seem to belong to a broad time zone between the Early and Middle Bronze Age while the majority are of Urnfield date. Early examples are Nitriansky Hradok in Slovakia, the huge and high-lying Spissky Srtok also in Slovakia (Nowacki 2008), Bruszczewo on low ground in central Poland (Czebreszuk and Müller 2004), and the stone-walled citadel of Monkodonja at the Adriatic coast of Istria (Teržan et al. 1999). Many fortified tell sites in the Carpathian Basin are roughly of the same date, for instance Otomani and Sălacea (Czebreszuk et al. 2008). Later examples include the Czech site of Blučina, and the enormous southern German hillforts of Houbirg and Bullenheimer Berg, and many others (e.g., Czebreszuk et al. 2008; Harding 2007; Jockenhövel 1990; Primas 2002). The largest of these hillforts in both the earlier and the later group suggest that the military sector at these particular points in time was a social source of power that could supplement other power sources, be it economy, ideology, or even politics (cf. Mann 1986; Vandkilde 2007: Figures 30, 49).

Fortifications such as the above-mentioned may have had several functions, depending on their cultural context: providing defense and daily security for the inhabitants in addition to being centers of trade, of crafts, and of rituals. Of course, fortified sites may in certain cases also be or become a visualization of authority, and some fortifications were

evidently also the residential sites of one or more leading families. Territoriality is a related aspect that has been studied over the last decades based on the regular spacing of fortified sites in many regions (e.g., Jockenhövel 1990; Primas 2002), and it can quite often be shown that each fortified site was in a relationship of interdependence with a surrounding territory. This may well have included aspects of control and power. In the Late Bronze Age, larger, sometimes proto-urban, sites emerged more systematically enclosed by complex systems of ramparts, palisades, and ditches, each one amidst a well-defined territory, and many of them constituting nodal points in a superregional network of commerce. Undefined villages and hamlets tend to be attached as satellites to the fortified central site, perhaps particularly in times of peace (Ivanova 2008). In other cases, fortifications are marginal phenomena placed at the boundaries of settled areas to scare off the enemy and to protect against intruders. These may not have been permanently settled, or perhaps only with certain specialized personnel serving as a potential refuge site should the need arise (cf. Primas 2002).

It may stand as a hypothesis that the construction of defense work intensified in periods of social transition, notably from the Early to the Middle Bronze Age ca. 1800–1500 B.C., and from the Middle to the Late Bronze Age ca. 1300–1200 B.C. It is not surprising that people in times of war fled to protected ground and/or made efforts to protect their settlement by fortifying it. Some of these sites, however, continued in use for generations and attracted additional and much less war-related functions.

#### ICONOGRAPHIC IMAGES

Scandinavian rock art images are oral tales carved in stone. The stories on rock are comparable to orally recited epics in that certain easily recognizable traits recur, that the actions of mortals, gods, and other unworldly creatures occur intertwined, and that the narrative and its interpretation easily diverge into new versions. The Homeric poems are narratives of an ideal and heroic nature maintaining the interests and ideology of a particular social group; the long life of the epics beginning in an elitist Late Bronze Age setting with a continued development within aristocratic circles until ca. 700–600 B.C., when writing was reestablished in the early Greek city-state (Vandkilde 2006d with references). The rock carvings could well have had a similar background. It is worthy of note, and depressing, that images and words can enrich and depend on each other to such a degree that if the epic narrative is lost, understanding of the images will henceforth be partial. The rock carvings nevertheless reveal—in contrast to the thematic focus upon men and war in Homer's *Iliad*—that warfare and warriorhood were rarely at the very center of the depicted narratives. Instead, ships and maritime travel are the key issues of the rock carvings (Ling 2008), hence actually making them much more in line with Homer's *Odyssey*. The religious-ritual component (Kaul 1998, 2004), moreover, seems stronger in the Scandinavian epic imagery than in the roughly contemporaneous Greek oral epics.

Rock carvings with warlike motives are in fact notably few in numbers measured against the considerable number of known carvings from Scandinavia. The whole series with warlike, less warlike, and nonwarlike motivation are relevant to the interpretation



of Bronze Age warfare, its ideal forms and broader societal significance. Jarl Nordbladh (1989) has analyzed patterns of fighting at the rock art site of Kville in Bohuslän. Person-to-person combat predominates, the combatants being of equal size and weapons never touching. When fighting occurs on ships, only a few crew members, made larger than the rest, carry weapons, and some ships have more than 135 crew members. Nordbladh finds this number much overrated, and therefore hints at the idealized character of the narrative. This agrees with what is suggested above, but he continues to suggest that the images of combat at Kville provide a fairly accurate description of how fighting was actually carried out in Bronze Age society. Richard Osgood presents a similar view (1998; Osgood et al. 2000:34). Fighting supposedly took place as heavily ritualized action or performances of a sport-like character (Osgood et al. 2000:34)—that is, as a rule with a nondeadly outcome.

Exquisite weaponry inserted into the specialized ritual settings of outstanding burials and votive offerings—like heroic poetry—overemphasizes the ideals of war combat, leadership, and companionship and underrate the violence also involved; Scandinavian rock carvings with bellicose motives hold some of the same idealistic qualities. In a comparative vein, the *Iliad* is about the Trojan War, obviously a militaristic affair, but the narration nevertheless highlights fighting as sporting duels between high-ranking warrior heroes. War scenes in rock carvings similarly reduce fighting to the demonstration of potency among high-ranking warrior heroes, who fight as equals and according to certain aristocratic rules and ethics. The scene from Fossum in Sweden of two men fighting on a boat from the fifteenth century, and a series of similar pictures, illustrates this point clearly. While the *Iliad* has traces of other kinds of warfare, much more vicious and much less heroic, such as raids on settlements to obtain slaves, women, and portable wealth (van Wees 1992, 1997; Vandkilde 2006d), this more real face of war is completely absent from the rock carvings; likely because the words that should accompany the imagery are lost to us. However, sufficient cases of skeletal trauma (see below), damages and sharpening traces on swords (Bridgford 1997; Kristiansen 1984b), and other evidence demonstrate that Bronze Age warfare in pre-state temperate Europe included more violent and deadly forms.

It is probably significant that rock carvings with warlike motives are rare. The vast majority have other motives, particularly fleets of ships but also religiously motivated images related to sun-rituals (Kaul 1998, 2004; Ling 2008). Although this iconographic choice might also be ideologically colored, it does hint at aspects of Bronze Age life little concerned with war, warfare, and warriors.

#### SKELETAL TRAUMA

Traumata on skeletons are caused by various forms of interpersonal violence such as warfare, homicide, gang aggression, intra-family fights, feuding among fraternal interest groups, and forceful kinds of sport. The boundaries between these forms of violence can be quite subtle, but ethnographic examples suggest that a high occurrence of interpersonal violence other than strictly warfare quite often coincides with periods of intensified war (e.g., Chagnon 1968). Abnormal mass graves with several injured individuals as well as normal single

interments with an injured individual occur throughout the Neolithic and the Bronze Age all over Europe (Peter-Röcher 2007). The injuries vary from projectile wounds to head and limb injuries with marks and cuts from weapons. Some wounds have healed, while other wounds were fatal.

Skeletal traumas are, in fact, relatively frequent in European prehistory when it is taken into account that in some areas skeletons are not well preserved, that they are not routinely examined for marks of violence, and that much physical violence does not leave visible traces on the skeleton. Looking at the known examples it is probably significant that spears and arrows are often involved. This is exemplified by the burial at Over-Vindinge on Sealand dating to ca. 1600 B.C. This individual was a 50-year-old man who had been hit from behind with a bronze spearhead; the tip still sits in his pelvis (Kjær 1912; Vandkilde 2000). There are several other examples, such as the contemporaneous mass burial at Wassenaar in the Netherlands where a flint arrowhead was found embedded in one of the victims of a raid on a small community (Louwe Kooijmans 1993), and the Middle Bronze Age dead at Tomarton in England, also with spearheads involved (Osgood 2006; see Peter-Röcher 2007 for a long list).

In studies of warfare, skeletal trauma is a valuable source of additional information, which should also remind us that war produces victims. A number of mass graves shed light on the more sinister sides of Bronze Age communities, but the circumstances that created these particular graves varied quite a lot. A small number of anomalous graves with several individuals exist from eastern central Europe, and studies of forensic data indicate a succession of ritual killings, each immediately followed by abnormal interment in a storage pit on, or adjacent to, a settlement area (Hårde 2006; cf. also Harding 2007; Rittershofer 1997). These Early Bronze Age cases may especially exemplify the political potential of ritual violence and victimization, and it may be argued that it was the political elite who used public humiliation of defeated enemies to maintain their power (Aldhouse-Green 2006; Hårde 2006).

At the two Czech fortified sites of Blučina and Velim from a later period, ca. 1400–1300 B.C., human skeletons and skeletal parts were frequent in ditches and pits. It remains unclear whether they were the remains of ritual killings or from hostile attacks, or maybe both (Harding 2007:87ff), but there is otherwise clear evidence that the two sites suffered several instances of attack (Harding 2007:87ff). Quite another scenario is apparent at the above-mentioned site of Wassenaar from ca. 1700–1600 B.C. (Louwe Kooijmans 1993). Twelve individuals of all ages, some with trauma, were carefully placed side by side in the mass grave, obviously put there by surviving kin who cared for their dead relatives, thus communicating to us the empathy and emotions involved (cf. Harris and Sørensen 2010). By comparison, a mass grave from Sund in Norway illustrates a much more chaotic and uncaring situation. Swords had undoubtedly been in action killing a number of people in a small local community around 1400 B.C., and afterward the dead were only very provisionally cared for (Fyllingen 2006).

It seems to the present reviewer that skeletal trauma occurs in most periods, although with a variable frequency (Peter-Röcher 2007:Abb. 40a), and that the transitional periods to the Middle and to the Late Bronze Age have an especially large number of cases. The new



battlefield or war booty offering site of Altentreptow in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, dating from 1300–1200 B.C. (Krüger 2009; Ulrich 2008; Jantzen et al. 2010), confirms this emerging pattern.

### CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

The above examination has explored both the ideal and real faces of Bronze Age warfare and warriors and has also pointed to areas of life little affected by violence and war. This result deviates from previous research prior to 1995, which roughly followed two opposing and stereotypical myths of the Other; both of them neglecting archaeological sources that attested to violence and war. Since 1995, scholarly interest in prehistoric warfare has literally exploded, revealing a clear and increasing tendency to make prehistoric societies militaristic and violent at their very foundations. Above, this latter view has been challenged and nuanced. Warfare and warriors undoubtedly formed a significant part of Bronze Age social life, with everything this implied in terms of culture-relative meanings, heroic tales, violent interaction, victims, and human suffering. This conclusion is in accord with the existing archaeological evidence, which simultaneously indicates that peaceful activities also formed part of life at home and at public events (e.g., Earle and Kristiansen 2010; Sofaer 2010; Sørensen 2010). Both violent and nonviolent interactions appear firmly sustained by cosmologies and religion, as suggested by votive offerings, funerary rituals, and iconographies.

Societies of the Bronze Age probably experienced—like the Neolithic societies before them—a variable presence of war. War never seems to have had a genuinely permanent character in the Hobbesian sense of *bellum omnium contra omnes*, everybody's war against everybody (Otto et al. 2006). Rather, the sources for final Neolithic and Bronze Age warfare in temperate Europe suggest that war occurred most frequently in periods with macro-regional sociocultural shifts. Conjunctural change with the emergence of a new "culture of contact" occurred at the transition to the Middle Bronze Age around 1700–1600 B.C.—ending with the establishment of the Tumulus culture—and again at the transition to the Late Bronze Age, between 1300 and 1200 B.C.—concluding with the formation of the Urnfield culture (Vandkilde 2007). Both these time zones of transition, in their broadest sense, had rather intense data on warfare and warriorhood, both ideal and very real. Interestingly, this variable occurrence of warfare (see also Robb 1997; Thorpe 2006) may confirm that war-related violence is culturally constructed much more than it is rooted in human psychology and biology.

A challenging aspect for the future is, of course, to pursue the question of the more precise role of war, warfare, and warrior organizations in bringing about sociocultural change of a macro-regional magnitude. The relationship between war and social change has historically and sociologically been argued to be of a complex, often indirect nature. War is waged with particular purposes in mind, but tends to produce unintentional effects, notably more war (Otto et al. 2006). At least it seems beyond debate that war inspires new forms and frames of identification, and this is in accordance with the above observations of

an increased cultural and social spotlight on warriorhood and warfare in periods of radical transition. As other authors have noted (e.g., Harding 2007), a quantitative and qualitative development in the culture of war seems to take place from the earlier to the later Bronze Age. Early examples of military-based authority can be pinpointed, but the tendency through time clearly is that the relationship between leadership and warfare as a potential power source grew tighter. Warrior bands may earlier have lived their lives mostly on the margins of societal leadership, whereas in the Urnfield period they made themselves available to the centers of power and authority.

Warfare was a fairly widespread form of social interaction in the Bronze Age, just as it continues to be today. One reason for this remarkable consistency through time may be that war easily constitutes a particular social environment to which actors and local groups have to adapt for the sake of survival. Warfare is not usually a form of interaction people engage in because they cannot be without it; rather, people in non-state settings wage war because it is a less risky strategy than peace, inasmuch as allies can never be fully trusted (Helbling 2006). Another reason is the persistency and persuasiveness of heroic tales of war as inspirational material in strategies of identification, and still another reason is the fact that warfare and warrior bands hold a vast potential for the maintenance and expansion of political power. The realization of this potential in the context of the non-state is normally effectively countered by the norms and rules of society (Steuer 2006), but in the general chaos and challenges of social transition this constraint may be overcome.

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