Waste or What?

Rubbish Pits or Ceremonial Deposits at the Pryssgården site in the Late Bronze Age

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Abstract

Stålbom, Ulf. 1997. Waste or What? Rubbish Pits or Ceremonial Deposits at the Pryssgården site in the Late Bronze Age. Lund Archaeological Review 3 (1997), pp. 21–36.

The article discusses ways to reveal attitudes to the spatial organization of a settlement site in the Late Bronze Age. The "waste problem" is an important part of this organization. The article therefore focuses on an attempt to analyse the finds and waste material from the site. An element of ritual and ceremonial deposits on the site is emphasized. Studying Bronze Age society at large is a way to search for patterns and attitudes which must also have been significant for everyday life at a settlement site in Östergötland.

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Introduction

Large-scale excavations of ploughed-out settlement sites are by no means unusual in Swedish rescue archaeology today. The number of these excavations has increased rapidly in the last two decades. The increase is partly due to the breakthrough in the identification of the post-built house (Björhem & Säfvestad 1993), and partly to the huge expansion of the infrastructure in recent years, which has led to large areas for excavation. Severe demands will be made in future of these excavations, which are often rather similar. The results of the excavations must not be allowed to stop at repetitions or confirmations of existing knowledge, so new questions must be asked all the time. Today we are at a point when it feels urgent to search for new approaches to the study of sites like these. We must go beyond descriptions presenting trestle width and chronologies, since the house material today is both extensive and well documented (Björhem & Säfvestad 1993; Tesch 1993; Carlie 1992; Rasmussen & Adamsen 1993; Göthberg, Kyhlberg & Vinberg 1995). This article seeks to be part of a forward-looking discussion, searching for new outlooks by reasoning about settlement sites and finds.

The empirical material and the impetus come from the excavation of Pryssgården outside Norrköping in Östergötland (Borna-Ahlqvist, Lindgren-Hertz & Stålbom, in print; Stålbom 1995). This site, which was discovered in connection with the rerouting of the motorway past Norrköping, proved to be one of the largest complexes of settlements in Sweden. The excavation documented remains of a large number of prehistoric sites. The chronological centre of gravity is in the Late Bronze Age, but there was continuous settlement at least from the Early

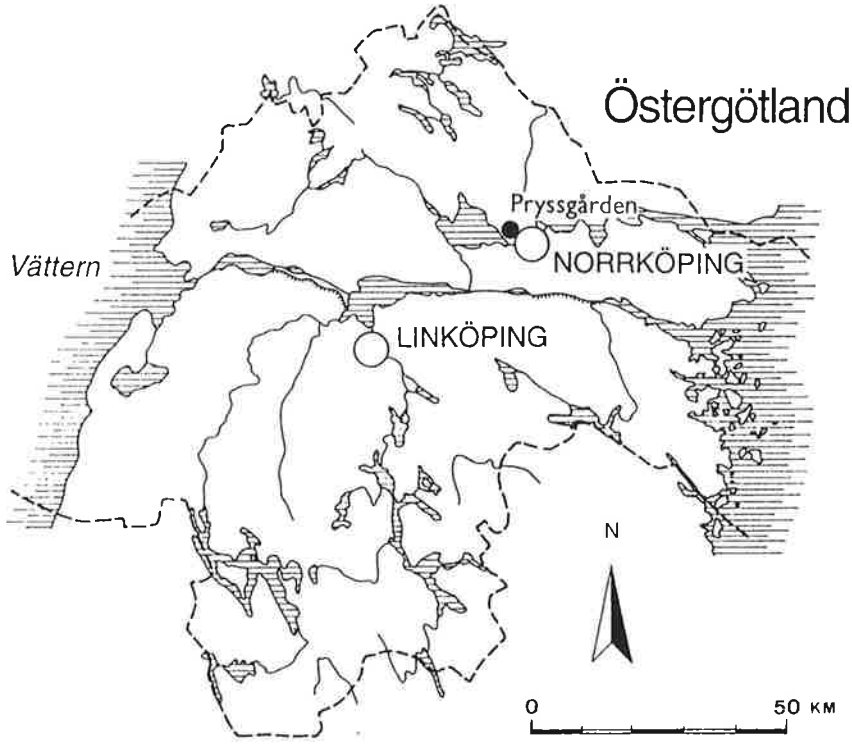

Fig. 1. Pryssgården is situated near the city of Norrköping in Östergötland, Sweden, in a sheltered position in the innermost part of a deep bay of the Baltic Sea. The location is close to the mouth of Motala Ström, a river that was the backbone of the district's communication and transport system. This location was probably the main reason for the rich and complex settlement pattern of the site.

Bronze Age until the Early Middle Ages. A total of about ninety houses have been identified, and a third of these can be dated to the Late Bronze Age, which is an unusually large proportion compared with other sites. This state of affairs is not surprising, however, in view of the richness of remains from the Bronze Age that occur in the rest of the Norrköping district. Among other things, this area has one of the largest collections of rock carvings in Sweden (Stålbom 1995; Nordén 1925; Kaliff 1995; Larsson 1986; Olsén 1965; Selinge 1989). The highly impressive scale of the settlement area at Pryssgården, with many well-preserved houses, features, and finds from the Late Bronze Age gives good conditions for discussions of spatial issues and questions concerning the use of land at settlement sites.

The aim here is to try to understand people, to speculate about their thoughts and ideas about the farm as a deliberately shaped entity. I wish to see how they ordered their physical surroundings and how one can search in this order for the ideas and norms that guided the internal organization and spatial perception of the site. An important part of the argument is based on a search for associations and attitudes to the different parts of the site and to study how things and activities were handled in relation to these.

My interest centres on how people shaped and "furnished" a home out of the material remains that we can study today through an archaeological excavation. The home stands as a concept for the desired order according to which the physical environment in the form of houses,

hearths, and other features and activities were arranged. The organization of the farm expresses a visualization in material shape of the prevailing world view (cf. Zachrisson 1994; Ullén 1995). The everyday effort to maintain order creates security and a sense of control. An order of this kind can be expressed by means of unity in the layout of the farms and houses. Strict organization of the settlement site suggests that the idea of the house and the farm, and patterns in access to these, may have been more important than adaptation to geographical conditions or similar practical considerations. For example, a four-part division of the farm may be proposed, with the dwelling-house in the centre: a public front; a private back; one side associated with humans, dwelling, processing, and consumption; and the opposite side associated with animals, production, and economy (Therkorn 1987). There is a tendency in the material from Pryssgården suggesting a pattern in which the south side is mostly free of features while the many structures and pit systems are found to the north and east of the dwelling-houses. This indicates that the houses were surrounded by areas with different values and meanings. We can presumably find both public spaces for meetings and human interaction as well as more private corners to which strangers seldom gained access. This pattern also had rules regulating places for different activities, waste management, and other forms of deposition.

To achieve this aim requires a holistic view of the archaeological material. This means that we need to consider all known components. The house on the farm is just one component, which does not become an interacting whole until it is seen together with the other parts and functions of the farm. An excavation of a settlement site like Pryssgården also shows that the house, especially in the Late Bronze Age, is a small part of the total usable source material. Other types of features and finds dominate the information picture. Unfortunately, the interpretations of many features excavated at settlement sites are still highly unclear. Since we do not understand such a large part of the source material, it is consequently also difficult to analyse the spatial disposition and organization of the farm. We must therefore begin by paying attention to other things besides the houses. It is important to suggest alternative interpretations of the components that make up the site.

The physical content of the site – pits and artefacts

Pits of different sizes were a typical feature of land use in the Late Bronze Age in much of southern Scandinavia (Thrane 1971; Widholm 1980; Olausson 1992; Björhem & Säfvestad 1993) and on the continent (Coles & Harding 1979). This group of features has been the subject of different kinds of studies (e.g. Becker 1961; Thrane 1971; Widholm 1980). In recent years, they have been considered above all at the Fosie excavation in Malmö (Björhem & Säfvestad 1993) and the Pryssgården excavation (Borna-Ahlqvist, Lindgren-Hertz & Stålbom, in print). In the subsequent discussion the term "settlement site pit" is used to mean a hole that is dug in the ground and then filled again, to which no exact functional definition can be given today. Dag Widholm (1980) has discussed the problem of the pits in a chronological perspective. His analysis gave a clear picture of how the frequency of these increased significantly during the Late Bronze Age at settlement sites and then declined in the Pre-Roman Iron Age. Experiences from Pryssgården show a parallel development.

The functional interpretations that have hitherto been put forward regard the pits as the result of the extraction of raw materials, chiefly clay for the wattle-and-daub walls of the houses. This interpretation appears reasonable, and presumably it was an important reason for the digging of many of these pits. At Pryssgården the pit was a predominant type of feature, although the soil here is fine sand. If it was clay that people were looking for, this was scarcely any problem, since clay could be found a few hundred metres

away on the low-lying land near the river, Motala Ström. If the pits were dug for raw material, then fine sand was attractive material for Bronze Age settlers. One suggested explanation for this is that people used a daub consisting of fine sand and cow dung (Engelmark 1995). However, it cannot be ruled out that there are other explanations. Whatever the reason for the digging of the pits, they contain important information about how the site was used. The location of the pits and the process behind the filling of the pits, the depositions and waste management, are important parts of an organizational pattern in a spatial perspective (Hodder 1982).

A common trend for the pits at Pryssgården was that they were rich in finds, especially pottery. The role of pottery as a dominating group of finds appears to be typical not only of Pryssgården but also of sites in virtually the whole of Scandinavia in the Late Bronze Age. The wealth of finds from settlements from the Early Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age is rarely comparable with what we find from this period. This situation is relatively well known, and much has been written about it, chiefly describing it as probable waste, both when it occurs in pits (Björhem & Säfvestad 1993; Lindahl & Olausson 1991) and in layers (Jensen 1967; Stjernquist 1969; Draiby 1985; Berglund 1982). Few scholars have devoted any thought to why we have this well-developed and large-scale waste management at this time. What we see appears to be a system arising from a deliberate organization of the settlement sites, whether in the form of intentional deposits or as an almost ritual aspiration to achieve cleanliness by removing waste from the sites. The latter may perhaps be exemplified by the often highly elaborate structures in which fire-cracked stone was piled. There has been no discussion in this context of why pottery makes up such a large proportion of archaeological material from Late Bronze Age sites. There is reason to look for ideas and strategies which can explain these deposits. There may have been social norms and rules which governed the behaviour of the population and hence influenced the composition of the find material that we see today. I should point out that my continued argumentation is guided by a desire to search for a tradition of deliberate deposits – various types of offerings – at settlement sites in the Late Bronze Age, with the explanations above all being social, religious, and ideological causes and not so much practical considerations.

What driving force governed the behaviour concerning offerings and waste management, and according to what norms and preferences did these deposits come about? Are there systems that create general patterns and which allow societal norms and attitudes to be reflected in the picture of remains from individual sites at a detailed level?

Ideology and society

Bronze Age society in Scandinavia has been described as stratified, with chieftains at the top exercising political and ritual functions and a subordinate group of warriors (Kristiansen 1983). Society was characterized by the uneven social distribution of prestige goods and the consumption of personal fortunes by means of deposits in graves and hoards (Larsson 1986). Identified centres of wealth in the landscape have been interpreted as hubs in a network of contacts and systems of exchange which linked different chiefdoms together. These places are characterized as religious and political centres built up around rivalry and competition between chieftains by monopolization of production, by alliances, and by control over exchange and trade (Kristiansen 1987). A society like this must have been subject to strong internal and external stresses, requiring a powerful structure to maintain it. The structure is built up around an ideology that claims to be universal, although it represents the special interests of just one group. Its main task is to explain, deny, or conceal the injustices or oppositions that exist within the society. The aim is to justify prevailing conditions by anchoring them in a cosmology and a world view (Giddens 1979).

Society as an idea is therefore a powerful creation. Through its own right it has the power to control and govern the thoughts and acts of its members. The structure gives the power to reward and to arouse horror over all forms of provocation of the existing order (Douglas 1966). The form of order is expressed as a culture which offers a predetermined pattern of action that is favourable to the society, a pattern of standardized concepts and values, a system of norms in which values and ideas are incorporated. Because of its general and official character, this cultural categorization of the constituent parts of a society is not inclined to change in keeping with the experiences of individual people. It is therefore unable to disregard experiences in the form of events which conflict with the prevailing pattern of order. Each culture has therefore worked out ways to handle such anomalies. Things that go against prevailing opinions can be reduced or reinterpreted, forcibly eliminated, regularly avoided, or designated as unclean or dangerous. Ritual is the prime way to attract attention to these matters or to bring the problems under control. Ritual is under societal and cultural control. It is necessary to modify and adapt out-of-the-ordinary experiences so that they fit the dominant world view through their expression, in the same way as language works. There may be thoughts that have never been formulated in words. When it is put into words, the thought has changed and been limited by the selected words. The concepts and classification system of language changes and adapts thoughts to what is culturally accepted (Douglas 1966). All social systems contain oppositions, and in societies with a strong norm system, perhaps as a consequence of outer and inner stresses, harsh antagonisms may arise, which have a tendency to lead to the development of highly ritualized behaviour.

Purity and order

One of the most powerful cultural tools for maintaining this order is the polar concept of purity/impurity. Dirt and impurity are not objective. There is nothing that is and remains dirt, it exists solely in the eye of the beholder and can therefore be ascribed to anything at all. Dirt is actually disorder, something that does not fit into the observer's internal pattern of order (Douglas 1966; Frykman 1987). The sense of uncleanness arises at the transgression of a boundary that is not supposed to be overstepped. By classifying the world, ordering it according to the system that one has learned, one can sort out things that do not fit. Dirt is simply a by-product of this systematic ordering. By restoring order, for example, by cleaning, we reorganize our immediate environment and define the world as we want to have it (Frykman 1987). Reality is then ordered once again in the categories of our world view. When things that belong together are brought together, order arises. Society's expectations of the adaptation of its members in this respect are normally very high. The fear of pollution and the terror of the unclean work as a driving force for adaptation. Transgressions are punished through the disgust and scorn that impurity provokes. Fear makes a person regularly choose to avoid the unclean and hence adapt his behaviour to the world view of the prevailing ideology. Striving for purity therefore means counteracting change, compromise, and ambivalence (Douglas 1966), in other words, a system for the preservation of social stability.

Categorization in the Bronze Age

Prehistoric source material can often be said to occur in distinct categories which are characterized by a will to separate things. I believe that this trait was expressed forcefully in the Late Bronze Age. There is a division in the material that indicates an aspiration to segregate actions, expressions, and contexts according to a very narrow and well-defined pattern (Levy 1982). The archaeological material from the Late Bronze Age may be said to express a distinct will to be sorted and categorized according to the principle

"everything in its proper context".

A clear example are the rich finds of Bronze Age objects which occur in standardized combinations and in standardized contexts (Levy 1982; Bradley 1990). Standardization is also a theme when it comes to the manufacture, design, and decoration of the artefacts. The majority of the finds are fitted into tightly defined categories, which nevertheless permit a certain degree of local variation, showing that production was not entirely monopolized (Sørensen 1987). The bronzes are characterized by their special ornamental styles, which are often arranged in decoration covering the entire artefact. Neither this ornament nor the manner of decorating occur in the pottery, nor does the ornament normally occur in the pictorial world of the rock carvings (Hauptman-Wahlgren 1995). Conversely, motifs from this world, in the form of, for example, human and animal figures and ships occur on a limited selection of bronzes associated with men, in principle just on razor blades (Sørensen 1987). If we look at the motifs in the narrow and uniform expressions that we find in our rock carvings, we see that the content is also clearly categorized. The selection of motifs is so limited that the 15 most common types together account for about 95 per cent of all rock art in Sweden (Malmer 1989).

In a similar way, one can observe a change in mortuary ritual in the Late Bronze Age. The change can be interpreted as a stricter categorization of this social function. In the course of the Bronze Age we see a development from inhumation graves in more or less monumental barrows where the link between the living and the dead is emphasized, partly by means of the scattered location of the graves in systems which seem to surround and protect the settlement site (Säfvestad & Björhem 1989). This pattern changes with the introduction of the new type of urnfield, which seems to be more spatially dissociated from the individual settlement site (Olausson 1992). The graves are densely concentrated in cemeteries, covering a very limited area, which suggests a tendency to shift this activity to specially selected and significant places. At the same time, the practice of cremation is introduced on a broad front. Burning the body may be an expression of an aspiration to point up the difference between life and death (Bradley 1990).

The idea here is that we can also find patterns like this at settlement sites. Perhaps the clearest example of this is the uniform orientation of the houses (Björhem & Säfvestad 1993), which at Pryssgården was particularly strict in the Late Bronze Age. In addition, there is the identical division into rooms, with a "kitchen" and dwelling section in the west and a byre in the east, and the arrangements with the uniform post positions along the length of the house (Borna-Ahlqvist, Lindgren-Hertz & Stålbom, in print; Tesch 1993). The arrangements give the impression that the settlement sites are carefully organized with respect to perceptions of the compass points. Such natural conditions and other similar functional criteria can presumably take on symbolic and mythological meanings which become part of a world view which thereby has repercussions once again on the organization of the farm (Pauketat & Emerson 1991). Everyday life on the site was also permeated by the same way of thinking in categories. This steered the behaviour that created the archaeological material which is uncovered today by excavation. It is a worthwhile aim to try to reveal the forms of this thinking.

Seeing a meaningful pattern

A prehistoric settlement site, as we see it today, is a product of its historical situation, the prevailing ideology and its specific social context. Cultural and patterns of behaviour proceed from the ideology and world view of a society, which encourage and legitimize an appropriate lifestyle. This is taken for granted in everyday life. People act almost instinctively according to learned patterns and norms which permeate their way of thinking. If the pattern is broken, every

community has social mechanisms and rituals which bring the individual back within the bounds of conformity (Douglas 1966). For this reason, we should be able to regard a body of settlement material as an extension of a society's attitudes and values. An important initial assumption is that the disposition of the settlement site is not due to chance but reflects part of the structure of society. When people used space by positioning houses and structures and their content, they were thus steered by more or less taken-for-granted considerations. There must have been an order in the spatial organization of the farm, where different activities were localized according to the attitudes and values ascribed to them. The structure of the farm is "tidy" in accordance with the principles that applied to maintaining control.

By testing the meaning of seemingly random arrangements, it is possible to expose patterns. Assumptions based on "key dispositions" may be worth testing as general patterns. This idea is based on the search for links and associations by identifying repetitions and recurrent combinations or separations. As a first step I want to test patterns for depositions of finds in pits, with the intention of identifying and distinguishing remains of everyday habits from ceremonial rituals.

The finds - a key to understanding?

At Pryssgården the Late Bronze Age pits often contained large amounts of finds. The richest pit in this respect contains, among other things, more than 7 kg of pottery. A distinctive feature of the find composition in these pits was that in principle they contained only pottery, while other finds were sparsely represented. This generous intensity of pottery was in stark contrast to features from the Early Iron Age, which normally contained few or no finds. In his studies of Early Iron Age Jutland, Becker (1961) also noticed a change like this over time. He believed that, in the course of the Pre-Roman Iron Age, there was a gradual decline in the quantity of finds in pits, leading to a virtual cessation at the start of the Roman Iron Age. Becker also discusses the significance of why the pits from the oldest part of the Pre-Roman Iron Age contain so much pottery. He points out the similarity in the composition of the pottery in the pits and the sets of pots found intact in excavations of houses that burned down. The find composition in the pits corresponds to the household's entire stock of pots. Becker left open the question of whether these should be seen as offerings or a reflection of the farm's waste management. Perhaps it is time to consider this question once again. Although offerings and waste are two very different interpretations of one and the same deposit, we must be prepared in most cases not to be able to see any great difference. In both cases the pit may have been dug for a different reason and with a completely different purpose in mind. The sacrificed material, like the waste, may be intact, smashed, or mixed, depending on what was customary at the time when it was deposited. Even "ordinary waste" may be affected by taboo and rules which affect the composition (Hodder 1982).

A possible approach to the problem is to search for intact and complete objects or reusable and valuable material which might indicate non-waste. It should also be possible to study the deposition pattern at a settlement site by seeing which pits contain finds and where they are located. At Pryssgården the size of the pits was not in relation to the quantity of finds. Far from all the big pits contained large amounts of finds. On the contrary, several of the biggest pits contained few finds, and several of the functionally interpreted pits (wells, storage pits, cellar pits) likewise did not contain any great quantities of finds. The pits with the richest quantity of finds were in fact relatively small and normally lacked a sensible functional interpretation.

Chance or choice?

We study a society by studying a fragmentary and incomplete part of its material culture. All artefacts of perishable material, such as wood and bone, are normally missing unless the preservation conditions are favourable. This means that we cannot even estimate the significance of a very large part of the original material culture. We may also reckon with an under-representation of metals and other valuable or reusable material. Nor should we forget that what we are normally studying is the remains of an abandoned dwelling site (Welinder 1993). We can consequently assume that everything that was considered useful or important was taken along in the move to a new site. All that is left is what was dropped or lost and what was deposited in layers and structures (cf. Schiffer 1987; Olausson 1986). From a settlement site in arable land with no preserved occupation layers, in other words, from the kind of setting in which Pryssgården was situated, finds are mostly discovered only in different types of buried contexts. Finds like these are often regarded as waste, that is, as something that can be viewed as a general source of knowledge. The finds are taken to represent a kind of "mean value" for the whole site. No specific ideas are thought to be expressed in a find context like this; there is no active control of the composition of the finds. The refuse is supposed to reflect an act and a context on the site of the dwelling, but to a lesser extent at the specific find spot. The value lies in the general evidence for the settlement site as a whole.

A view like this does not encourage us to work with contextual interpretations, but one can in fact choose to assume that the material has something of its own to tell us. We can actively look for the reasons why the finds have survived and why they lie in the compositions in which we find them.

The first question that arises is why there are finds at excavated sites at all and why these finds have been preserved in their archaeological context. With some simple calculations one can obtain an idea of how large a proportion of the finds have actually been preserved. At Pryssgården the Late Bronze Age is represented by about 30 long-houses; in other words, there was rather intensive and continuous occupation during the period. If we consider the time span represented by these houses (about 600 years), this means that only about 19 sherds per year have been left in the soil. Since the large quantities of finds are mainly found in different settlement site pits, we can make a rough calculation of how often deposits like these were made. A total of about 1,000 pits were dug, of which about 320 contained pottery. This means that, on average, pottery was deposited in a pit every other year during the Late Bronze Age. Consequently, deposits of large quantities of pottery were much rarer, perhaps separated by many years. If we reckon that every find unit with a rim sherd represents an individual pot, and if we estimate the average weight of a pot as about a kilo, then the operation results in a hypothetical minimum original total weight of pottery of about 1,000 kg during the Late Bronze Age. The preserved material accounts for little more than a tenth of this figure. The figures thus suggest a very sporadic deposition procedure, which was perhaps not a result of everyday routines. The examples show that just a small proportion of objects end up as archaeological material. In view of the large proportion of objects that have vanished, we should expect that this is the normal state of affairs for finds at a prehistoric settlement site. Perhaps we should not expect to find anything at all. Destruction and dispersal are obviously the normal end for the material remains at a prehistoric site.

One can thus argue that finds unearthed in an archaeological context are an exception, perhaps something that can be interpreted as the result of chance or a special act which resulted in this particular find ending up in a body of preserved material. A comparison between the material from the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age at Pryssgården shows very great discrepancies

as regards preservation, although similar find environments occur in both periods. This may be interpreted as a difference in culture and tradition and different ways to relate to and handle material culture. That is why I believe that a deposit at a settlement site really can reflect an individual occasion, a unique act. The find composition at settlement site pits may thus be selected and structured according to an idea. Finds and find composition can then be just as sorted and structured as finds from cemeteries and votive deposits, where it is easier to accept an organized pattern of action. We cannot automatically assume that finds from settlement site pits are a better reflection of general factors or economic realities. The finds may be highly untypical of the everyday life of a site, since they may represent a specific situation and nothing else: a result of socially, religiously, or ideologically motivated behaviour.

The example of the quern

The rubbing stone of a quern was one of the most important hand tools for the preparation of cereals and vegetables for fodder and consumption. About 80 rubbing stones were found at Pryssgården, as many as 90 per cent of them in pits and a surprisingly large quantity of them intact (52 stones or 65 per cent). The frequency of rubbing stones is not in proportion to the two base stones found during the excavation. If we compare this with other types of excavated stone tools, we see that rubbing stones occupy a special position in terms of the number of finds. This special position may possibly be explained by a greater tendency towards deliberate deposition with symbolic overtones (Kaliff 1992).

The rubbing stone had an important practical role in prehistoric agrarian society. The tool is clearly associated with the cultivation, preparation, and processing of useful plants; it was in other words crucial for the supply of food. It is intimately associated with the conditions for the economy and for survival. It is therefore possible that the tool also had a powerful value as a symbol associated with life-giving principles and fertility. The rubbing stone functions as a link in the transformation of food from nature into culture. Regardless of how one wishes to interpret the symbolism today, it was powerful, strong enough for it to be used in symbolic or magical acts. At Pryssgården the rubbing stone was one of the most common finds in the post-holes of houses. This location suggests that it had more than a functional use. Rubbing stones are of course found in all of the four features that are interpreted on other grounds as being votive pits (see below). Rubbing stones were also used as symbols in mortuary ritual. At cemeteries in this region from the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age, rubbing stones often occur both close to the actual grave and in the fillings of stone settings (Kaliff 1992). Sometimes they have been found in very large numbers, for example, at the Klinga cemetery, where several graves contained as many as five rubbing stones (Stålbom 1994), and at the Ringeby cemetery, where a stone setting could have no less than 15 rubbing stones (Björkhager 1996). The rubbing stone thus appears to have had a strong symbolic function and should thus be regarded in this way even when it occurs in other contexts. This may be an explanation why the rubbing stone was the most commonly found tool at the settlement site. The rubbing stones were handled and deposited as symbols, not as tools. The rubbing stones that were used and deposited as tools have long since "vanished" as a result of the same processes of destruction and dispersal that have affected other finds. Since a large proportion of the settlement site pits at Pryssgården with rich quantities of pottery also contained rubbing stones, we once again have reason to wonder about deliberate process behind these rich deposits of finds.

Deposits of pottery

The large quantity of pottery found at Late Bronze Age dwellings at Pryssgården suggest that the

material may have had a special meaning at this time. This is also underlined by the fact that one of the most striking finds from Pryssgården was also made of this material. The object, which was discovered together with a deposit of pottery, was a hollow decorated ceramic figurine, about 10 cm tall, which lay in a small pit (Stålbom, in print). The figurine was found in a sooty layer with a lot of fire-cracked stone and charcoal together with the remains of two complete domestic pots of similar design. One of them was a coarse-slipped pot and the other a smooth pot. In a lighter coloured bottom layer there was also a smooth round-bodied "miniature pot" with the same design as the two domestic pots. The sooty layer also contained a large amount of grain, a rubbing stone from a quern, and a small number of burned bones and a piece of flint. Arranged together with the miniature pot and the two larger pots, the figurine may possibly be linked with depictions of "the goddess with the pot" (Stålbom, in print), who is usually also portrayed with arm rings or neck rings (Glob 1969). This find appears to show that the place was the site of an offering as part of a fertility cult, a deposit among houses and pits on the settlement site in the Late Bronze Age, far from the nearest cemetery.

The find and its composition provided a key to the possible interpretation of certain rich deposits of pottery. The find of a figurine was unique, but it is not unreasonable to assume that the act that the feature and the find represent was not unique. The act may have occurred on other occasions and in other parts of the settlement site, although not with a figurine (at least not a preserved one). It is moreover relatively unusual to find intact or complete pots in archaeological excavations of settlement sites. On a living farm, a host of factors normally contribute to a continuous fragmentation process, and the waste then consists of few sherds from a great number of different pots (Lindahl & Matenga 1995). Not even damaged or defective pots need have been regarded as unusable and been consigned to the rubbish. Since there are many conceivable alternative uses for a defective pot, the parts of a pot may be widely spread. One should therefore pay special notice to the fact that there may even sometimes be several complete pots together in one and the same feature. Pottery deposits together with the figurine consisted of a set of three almost complete pots. Is it possible to recognize a composition like this from other features? The distribution of intact or complete pots on a site gives us grounds to suppose that it is.

At Pryssgården the distribution picture of features with complete pots shows a clear concentration in a limited area. Outside this area, such finds are more sparsely represented. If this is compared with the group of "relatively well preserved pots", that is, pots where the sherds together make up about 25 per cent of a whole pot, one obtains a much wider spread with an even distribution over most of the excavated area; this distribution is presumably a reflection of a "normal" find picture. Furthermore, over 60 per cent of the complete vessels consist of large domestic pots. It is remarkable that such a large proportion of domestic pots should be represented. The pots were rarely found in such a position that they can be interpreted as storage vessels still in the place where they were kept; instead, they seem to have been smashed when they were deposited in the holes. These pots may perhaps be seen as deliberate deposits. We may at any rate note that the same type of pots were used as mortuary urns in urnfields in the district (Stålbom 1994; Kaliff 1996; Hörfors 1995). The domestic pot thus appears to have had an important ceremonial meaning, both in the cemetery and on the settlement site in Östergötland in the Late Bronze Age.

In the material from Pryssgården there are eight features containing two complete domestic pots. They all lay in a limited part of the central excavation area. The sets of pots express a clear shared pattern. The combination of one coarse-slipped and one smooth pot recurs in every case. Two intact coarse-slipped pots never occurred

together in the same feature. In three features there were further points of agreement with the pit containing the figurine; the composition of finds is virtually identical. Like the pit with the figurine, they also contained a third pot. In two features the third pot was of a different type, a tureen (*terrin,* Baudou 1960). In these features there was also at least one rubbing stone, a relatively large amount of burnt animal bones, and flint or quartz, which otherwise was unusual. All these features were also clearly linked to fire, as documented in thick layers of soot and cracked stone. Moreover, one feature contained a curved bronze rod, 0.4 cm thick and 4 cm long and with a round cross-section. It was probably a cut-off part of an arm ring or neck ring, a find which, like the figurine, may be associated with the ritual ceremonies of the time. Rings like these are characteristic of finds with figurines and votive deposits in the Late Bronze Age, so we may presume that the same idea lay behind the deposit of this find too.

At Pryssgården, then, ceremonies appear to have taken place, as manifested in finds in the form of a figurine, part of a bronze neck ring, rubbing stones, and the deposition of sets of pots, perhaps intended for drinks or a meal. Three different types of pot may represent different symbolism, functions, or contents. The finds indicate an emphasis on fertility. The finds were discovered within a relatively limited area, which should perhaps be understood as a concentration and a specialization of these acts in a specific context, perhaps in a particularly significant place or in a place under the control of priests or some other socially defined context. Perhaps the meaning of the deposit was symbolic, understood only by the people who performed it.

Different types of votive deposits at settlement sites are not unusual in northern Europe. Possibly belonging to this category are the five intact pots with grain found at the Voldtofte site in Denmark, especially since they appear to have been located outside the actual habitation area (Berglund 1982). Offerings in pits and wells are attested at several contemporary places on the continent, for example, at Berlin-Lichterfelde in eastern Germany (Müller 1964) and sites such as Lüdersdorf and Seftenberg, with hoards that contained, among other things, large quantities of pottery, including some intact vessels (Coles & Harding 1979). The same interpretation is also applied to the pottery-filled pits that occur in many places throughout north-west Europe in Celtic times. The votive trenches could be more than 30 m deep (Holzhausen in Bavaria), but usually had a more normal depth of about 10 m. Besides pottery, the pits contained bones of both animals and humans. Sometimes there were whole tree trunks, images of gods, and large quantities of organic material indicating the presence of flesh and blood (Piggott 1965). Perhaps it is in the light of this type of votive deposit that we can explain many of Scandinavia's pits and deposits at settlement sites in the Late Bronze Age.

Alongside the "ritual" pits discussed above, there were many other pits at Pryssgården with a rich pottery content. They were often associated with the western side of the houses, the dwelling section. The occurrence of these pits can also be interpreted as depositions made on special occasions. Since they can rarely be explained on the basis of form, design, or stratigraphy, we may suppose that these factors were not relevant to this category of pits. Perhaps it is only the location that was important. It is conceivable that these were places where people repeatedly buried ceremonial objects as part of a tradition in which the covenant between man and the earth was renewed as the social structure of the farm changed. This may explain why many of these pits had been redug, for no obvious functional reason. The finds may derive from occasions such as birth, marriage, and death, or as part of other types of ceremonies which were confirmed and manifested through such symbolic depositions. An important occasion for depositions of this type could be when new occupants claimed the site or when people abandoned it. Since there

was no great supply of unused or virgin soil in this district, the right to occupy land perhaps had to be manifested in some way. The right to land in the local perspective could not have been claimed by invoking a long tradition of use marked by graves; not a single grave has been found in the entire excavated area. Moreover, continuity was not marked by the construction of houses on the same spot as an earlier dwelling-house. There are few overlapping houses in the archaeological material, despite the fact that it must have been possible to distinguish farm sites in the landscape by virtue of their cultivated lands and surviving memories, even many years after people had moved away from them. It seems as if people avoided returning to the same location. One may assume, however, that the new site was in some way subjected to some kind of acknowledgement and acceptance before it was occupied. The right to settle and farm the land depends on the kin group, the social context (Zachrisson 1994), and this right must surely have been manifested. I suggest, then, that the opening of a pit may have been part of an initiation ceremony marking a claim to occupy the site – a deposition that can be renewed and changed as circumstances on the farm change. The deposition is the bond and the covenant between the living and earth from which they lived.

Pottery with meaning

I have tried to argue that features with rich finds at settlement sites cannot just be interpreted as waste pits but should also be viewed in a ritual or ceremonial perspective. Why was pottery such a common ingredient in deposits of this type? I believe that many other types of find are conceivable in symbolic depositions, but pottery appears to have had a special value in the Late Bronze Age. It is of course probable that it was the contents of the pot that were most important, and that the actual pot just served as a container. Yet I want to consider the meaning of the pottery as important ceremonial material.

In the Late Bronze Age, on important occasions in life, people chose to use pottery on a very large scale. There is much to suggest that pottery as a material had a high status compared with other comparable materials. The significance and high status of pottery may be reflected in the importance attached to the manufacture and design of the vessels. New advanced techniques and forms of surface treatment caught on vigorously. A wealth of variation arose in the stock of vessels which, with their sophisticated forms and modelled details of various types, show one of the most highly articulated and well developed ceramic traditions in prehistory. Despite this rich array of vessels, their type, form, and execution show that they faithfully follow a tradition shared by much of northern Europe. The design followed a virtually fixed framework, and manufacture remained standardized, with certain given types. These types were presumably closely linked to their specific social and symbolic contexts.

We find large bodies of pottery at settlement sites all over Scandinavia and on the continent in this period. Remains from the Late Bronze Age tend to be very rich in pottery compared with remains from other periods. In southern Sweden, Bronze Age pottery predominates in the occupation layers, pits, and pit systems of settlement sites. In the Mälaren region, where pits are mostly lacking, there is instead a huge wealth of pottery in thick occupation layers (Jaanusson 1981; Ambrosiani 1959; Olsson 1995). This is equally obvious regardless of the structure of the site. We find the same picture in piles of fire-cracked stones and in rows of Bronze Age votive hearths (Thörn 1996). It is correct to say that pottery has an extremely strong bond with Late Bronze Age remains, a bond that is unparalleled in much of our prehistory.

One of the most important changes in the period was that the mortuary ritual changed so that the grave was furnished with both funerary urns and accessory vessels. The new custom of using cinerary urns spread over southern Sweden in connection with the start of the Late Bronze

Age. The funeral ritual meant that the new identity of the deceased was clarified and separated from the world of the living by means of fire. This also meant a distinct emphasis on the pottery in the funerary ritual. Whereas pottery scarcely occurred in the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age, we now see a will to gather and concentrate the bones in a ceramic urn. There is now a strong desire to exercise control over and separate the dead. Pottery as a container provides a tight and immutable shell. Unlike other material, there are few natural processes that decompose pottery, allowing free passage into or out of the grave. The symbolism of enclosure and protection is underlined when the urn in many cases is sealed with a lid or an upside-down bowl. The same segregating symbolism recurs in the house urn with its closed and sometimes barred door (Olausson 1987). In addition, the actual urn was sometimes guarded by being placed in a small stone cist or by the covering of the grave with a flat stone. We see perhaps an aspiration for purity in that the bones in the urn were normally washed clean, that is, separated from the residue of the funeral pyre. The burnt bones were lifted out of the sooty pyre and washed clean in water (Sigvallius 1994). The burial ritual thus shows a strong desire to separate and protect the clean remains from mixture with unclean material. The role of the pottery in the ritual may be interpreted as a way to guarantee the purity of the remains in the future as well. The permanence of pottery is best suited to satisfy the demand for ritual purity. The material of which the funerary urn is made has the same symbolic purity as the bones. The deceased is surrounded by a material which, like the body, has acquired a new identity through fire.

There is a great deal in Bronze Age society to suggest that there was an emphasis on segregation, perhaps based on taboos surrounding concepts such as purity and fear of pollution. The effort to order and classify the surroundings into concepts such as clean and unclean results from a need to organize the world in a concrete way into a positive, ordered environment, in order to gain a sense of control. It is a way to apply the world view in concrete terms by translating thoughts into actions and organizing, structuring, and visualizing reality as people wanted to see it (Durkheim 1915; Douglas 1966). The importance of keeping opposites apart can be satisfied and clarified with a visual boundary (Åkersten 1996). Pottery can thus be one of the strongest protections against contamination that the culture had. Pots as containers would thus have had a powerful symbolic meaning as a boundary protecting its content against surrounding impurities. This symbolism may be a reason for the prominent role of pottery in the Late Bronze Age. There may therefore be a link between the symbolic meaning of pottery as a container and a protector in the urnfield and the way the same material was regarded at the dwelling site. It is conceivable that the fear of pollution and taboos about food, cooking, and eating meant that the handling of pottery was regulated. We may envisage that impure vessels were no longer considered suitable for use, however functional they may have been, and that vessels purified for use in ceremonies and rites could not subsequently be used for profane purposes. Perhaps this is one reason why Late Bronze Age remains are so rich in pottery. Different types of vessels presumably had their strictly defined places in a system like this. If so, this outlook must also have had an influence on the handling and deposition of pottery as waste.

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Translated by Alan Crozier