



## WORKSHEET 2. THE BRONZE AGE

Bronze is an alloy composed of copper and tin. From the technological point of view the introduction of bronze marked a considerable step forward in metalwork processes in that it gave greater malleability in various phases of the work and made it possible to create objects that were difficult to achieve with copper alone.

On the historical level the consequences were enormous. Tin is extremely rare and can be found in few areas and, as a result, the procurement of this raw material led to the development of a long-distance traffic network via sea routes and inland waterways. This opened communication channels between various regions, above all between the Aegean and other parts of Europe. This marked increase in traffic and exchange is considered the chief reason for the intense development of Europe during the Bronze Age, and for the substantial European cultural unity that is registered during this period.

During the second millennium BC, in the Aegean and the Western Mediterranean, we find civilisations of the state or city type, boasting an advanced socio-economic organisation. In Europe, however, we find communities based on aggregations of villages with a markedly less evolved form of organisation, but one that was able to develop economic, social and political forms of a certain complexity.

In the first period of the Bronze Age (between 2,300- 2,200 BC. and 1,300 BC), the demographic density of the villages is not much different from that of the preceding period, and we can assume that settlements counted between a hundred and two hundred inhabitants. However, an overall increase in the number of communities can be noted, as well as greater stabilisation and organisation of the same. In many cases they have fortifications. The production of metal increased, achieving high quantities, above all in certain prestige objects such as weapons and ornaments.

Some objects have led archaeologists to suppose that there were trading contacts which, using major waterways like the Danube and maritime routes, extended to territories thousands of kilometres away, placing markets in the Aegean with those at the outposts of Europe. This trade involved not just metals, but also amber, the fossilised resin that is particularly abundant in the Baltic and the North Sea, and with which precious jewels were made. Hence, Europe was covered by a complex trading network through which prime materials and finished products were distributed, as well as know how, techniques, ideas, cultures. Never before had so many European village communities been so closely connected.

How were European Bronze Age societies organised? An answer to this question comes from the necropolises, which often supply the most useful archaeological information needed to reconstruct the society the burial grounds served. Already in the earliest phases of the Bronze Age, we find burial

arrangements for people of rank, and this alone suggests the existence of ruling castes that began to emerge more strikingly than had been the case in Copper Age society.

From around 1300 BC, the village communities were generally more substantial, and many villages counted several hundred inhabitants. As a rule, the duration of these settlements increased compared with the preceding period, and they lasted from four to five centuries. Fortifications were more common and became, at times, quite imposing.

This archaeological evidence is accompanied by other data such as the strong presence, besides weapons and ornaments, and already observable in previous ages, of bronze objects designed for farming and handcrafts. In addition, new burial rites begin to appear throughout the continent that envisage cremation and the placing of the ashes in ceramic funereal urns.