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Social Relations and the Local: Revisiting Our Approaches to Finding Gender and Age in Prehistory. A Case Study from Bronze Age Scotland

MARK HAUGHTON

In many periods, our efforts to understand social relations from the burial record are frustrated by the small size of cemeteries and the relative poverty of grave good assemblages. This usually leads researchers to create large databases which can be used to identify broad trends in practice that serve as departure points for theorising about societies. This paper argues that such an approach fails to account for nuances in the archaeological record, and moves the discussion to a scale beyond the local, at which identities, such as gender or age, were experienced and contested. An approach that is firmly rooted in the local data is advocated and applied to the Earlier Bronze Age cemetery site at Dunure Road, South Ayrshire, Scotland, to demonstrate the types of insights into gender and age generated and how they articulate with wider European narratives.

INTRODUCTION

In the 1960s, when feminists declared that ‘the personal is political’ they recognised the interpersonal level at which ideologies are felt and contested. Our attempts to people the past often forget this insight, as we argue at a degree of remove from local interpersonal relations. Burials, through which we encounter the people of the past most directly, frequently lack clear patterning, or exist in sites which are too small for statistically significant analysis. Thus, we press them together into databases, the analysis of which homogenises practice across space and time (Sofaer 2006), and ignores the possibility for subtle but meaningful differences at the local level.

In this paper, I wish to return to the burial record, to ask whether there is more that we can deduce by paying careful attention to practice at the graveside. I am particularly interested in gender, which has spearheaded our attempts to people the past, and age, with which it intersects throughout the life course (Sofaer Derevenski 1997, Sørensen 2004a). Local patterns of practice may reflect local understandings of both ideologies, and it would be foolish to adopt methods which erase the possibility of testing for this.

The Earlier Bronze Age¹ cemetery site at Dunure Road, South Ayrshire, Scotland, will provide a case study for exploring this possibility. These graves were neither ‘richer’ nor more ‘elaborate’ than others from the Scottish Earlier Bronze Age. Far from being

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a problem, this focuses attention on the existing evidence, and how variations in practice open up our understanding of social relations in the past.

CONCERNING IDEOLOGY

This paper is concerned with social ‘ideology’, rather than ‘identity’. I want to begin by dwelling upon this distinction, with particular reference to my focus: gender and age.

By ‘identity’ I refer to the personal sense of self, or how a person might describe who they are. Though this overlaps with certain physical realities, such as their body or the place in which they live, it is both variable in life and clouded in burial by the actions of the mourners.

By ‘ideology’, on the other hand, I refer explicitly to collective aspects of identity formation (Sørensen 1992, 2000). Ideology denotes the generally shared, yet often ill-defined, notions which communities hold about how certain types of people could or should act and be. It is a framework, or a range of possibilities, which reflects no one individual, but has an impact on how each person experiences their own identity, and which forms structuring principles for the society in which they live. Identifying ideology, then, identifies the framework in which people formed and experienced who they were. For instance, the conception of women as naturally caring formed one element of an ideology of femininity in Western society during the twentieth century. This does not mean that all women supported or upheld this ‘virtue’, rather they were often judged for the degree to which they conformed to this ideal, and they defined their own identity within or against its boundaries.

Social ideology is formed, negotiated and contested in subtle and often unspoken ways in our interactions with each other and the things, places and ideas that make up the world around us. As gender and age come about through our relations with others, they can be described as relational. This is a

realisation that has emerged from discussions of ‘personhood’ in archaeology (e.g. Brück 2004, Fowler 2004, 2016), which have also given rise to the recognition that agency, or power, within such relations lies with ideas, things or places as well as with people. The understanding of gender, and by extension age, as brought about and contested through performance and discursive practice (Butler 1990, 1993) has been extended to recognise the importance of the physical reality of the body to such performances (Barad 2003). While such discussions have certainly expanded the ways we discuss past peoples’ perceptions of themselves, the specific interest in gender which was originally forwarded by feminist archaeologists has been somewhat subsumed into investigations of ‘modes of personhood’. I advocate, here, an explicit return to gender, and align myself with calls for a deliberate and focused investigation of aging beyond childhood (e.g. Appleby 2010, 2018).

Though they may feel pre-discursive to the individual, gender and age are firmly rooted in the social and are always present within social interactions, even when people are not conscious of them. The body is both the locus for the performance of gender and age (Butler 1990, 1993), and the centrepiece of funerary practice. Thus, for the mourners, the body cannot be divorced from the identity of the deceased for it materialises the relationships and interactions they had with this specific person. The mourners treat the deceased within the architecture of acceptable funerary practice with reference to what fits that person, and naturally their gender and age must accord with this. To some degree, then, the dead *do* bury themselves (contra Parker Pearson 1999, and see Brownlee In prep). Though it must be noted that some practices purposefully erase the deceased’s identity, such as mass cremation or the interaction with defleshed bone.

The interrelated nature of categories such as gender and age has recently been explained by the term ‘intersectionality’ (e.g.

Fahlander 2012, Arnold 2016), originally proposed to account for the additional discrimination experienced by Americans who were both Black and female (Crenshaw 1989). Attention to the intersectional nature of experience has enabled studies which deconstruct the binary nature of gender and instead recognise the changing nature of gender ideology over the life course (e.g. Sofaer Derevenski 2000, Sørensen 2004a). Therefore, we should not expect to create opposing boxes which we can label 'men' and 'women' or 'elderly man' and 'young man'. Rather, we should seek to identify the overlapping spectra of appropriate treatment for different sorts of people. For instance, setting out to investigate a binary gender in the past is to presuppose our results, and to narrow the range of possible genders which we seek (Joyce 2008, Ghisleni *et al.* 2016). However, recent attempts to move away from gender to avoid this so-called binary trap (e.g. Fuglestedt 2014, Stratton 2016) misidentify the problem. Nothing within the concept of gender mandates intra-gender uniformity. Gender norms are never fully embodied by one individual (Butler 2004) and gender categories are neither absolute nor static, but diverse and contain the counter-hegemonic as well as the hegemonic (Gilchrist 1999, Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, Weismantel 2013, Moral 2016). The concept of sex, far from being one to which we can make a return (Fuglestedt 2014) is rooted in the modern expectation of binary biology (Laqueur 1990). The 'sex' of people in the past can be determined because the modern gaze can be applied to the remnants of these bodies, it tells us little of how they saw their own bodies. Conversely, gender relates to the sphere of differentiation entangled with the body and the extended cultural milieu in which it finds itself. Although, gender differentiation may be viewed as natural in many societies, it is not tied up with notions of the biological, pre-cultural or pre-cosmic, and this both differentiates it from sex, and makes it the

appropriate term to use when investigating pre-modern ways of being.

CRITIQUING CURRENT METHODS OF ACCESSING GENDER IN THE PAST

Gender archaeology has advanced our attempts to people the past, with burial analyses to the forefront since its inception (e.g. Løken 1987, Arnold 1991, Damm 1991). These studies have tended to present statistical data and explain trends with reference to ethnography and/or contextual material culture studies (e.g. Rega 1997, Brück 2009, Skogstrand 2016). This ranges from the statistically rigorous, such as Shelach's (2008) study of early 1st millennium BC China, to the discursive rigour of studies such as Joanna Brück's of the British and Irish Bronze Ages (2004, 2006, 2009), where the data form broad trends which open onto extensive discussion of ethnography and other evidence to flesh out the story. Although a 'bottom up' approach is frequently used to begin the discussion of cemeteries in excavation reports (e.g. Duffy 2007), and has been used in some discussions of funerary practice (e.g. Chapman 2000, Fahlander 2003, Boyd 2014), this has largely not been transferred to our attempts to understand social ideology. The few cases where a detailed case study of gender has been undertaken have tended to focus on particularly well-furnished burials, such as the famous so-called Princess of Vix, France (e.g. Arnold 1991), or the elaborate barrow burial at Leubingen, Germany (e.g. Sørensen 2004b). Approaches to age have largely been limited to investigations of childhood, and a theoretically rigorous approach to age difference throughout the life course is still being developed (but see Appleby 2010, 2018), thus I will focus my attention here on the more developed gender archaeology.

It is obviously impossible to provide any critique of the specific methods employed by the various authors mentioned above in the space available here, but I do want to dwell

upon the features of these approaches in general, for there are specific limitations to statistical departure points which I hope to address in the subsequent discussion.

Chief amongst these is the limitation to a particular scale. While recent methodological developments allow an investigation of intersecting categories of identity (e.g. Arnold 2016), the quest for statistical significance precludes such approaches for smaller cemeteries, such as those of the British Bronze Age. To use statistical approaches, then, we must create datasets which extend in time and/or space (e.g. Doucette 2001, Burchell 2006) and homogenise practices, eroding differences and ambiguities (Sofaer 2006, Fahlander 2013). In the context of the British Bronze Age, for instance, Brück's (2009) revolutionary analysis questioning the male-dominant model of society was based on a dataset extending across all of Britain throughout the thousand-year period of the Earlier Bronze Age. The analysis was conducted both on the dataset as a whole, and on subsets of the burials grouped into four 250-year periods. Given the variability and regionality which characterises funerary practice in the British Bronze Age (e.g. Mizoguchi 1995, Fowler and Wilkin 2016), we might be better served by a method which seeks to preserve this variation and recognise it within the analysis. Furthermore, many such discussions of gender take place at a degree of remove from the data, relying instead upon detailed ethnographic analogies or contextual argumentation. As we have seen, gender is experienced relationally, thus, the search for a 'valid' sample size is often one which explicitly removes us from the scale of our question.

The outcomes of these studies also give pause for thought. A focus on gender promises insights into how conceptions of personhood and societal structures varied through time; is it not disconcerting, then, that we seem to find, again and again, the same gendered structure in prehistoric societies? From Neolithic China (Jiao 2001), to

Bronze Age Europe (Kristiansen and Larsson 2005), to prehistoric North American hunter-gatherers (Burchell 2006), the picture is often alarmingly familiar – men held the balance of social power, with some women accessing limited power, either by virtue of their achievements or their kin relations, depending on the author's politics. Worryingly, this gendered picture could apply to our own society too. Are we arguing that this is a universal social order? Or is this a claim which archaeology is inadvertently making because we lack the methodologies to enrich our pictures of gender in the past?

In an attempt to overcome such difficulties, I propose a new approach to tackling gender in the mortuary sphere. This approach is grounded firmly in the data and attempts to tackle gender in the sphere in which it was experienced – the local. We should begin with ground-up narrative building, detailing the sequence of what happened at the cemetery site. This allows for subtle patterns to be revealed which structure local action but would be easily erased in wider analyses. Subsequently, the analysis may tack between different levels of interpretation – wider statistical trends can be contrasted with local trends, and the subtle regional variations in how social ideology is expressed, and the content of that ideology, can be revealed. I am explicitly attempting, here, to speak of a method which can be applied to small-scale cemeteries which do not feature large numbers of grave goods. In fact, it should be possible to take this approach to cemeteries where grave goods are almost entirely lacking. This is perhaps best explained through a case study, so it is to this which I now turn.

INTRODUCING THE EARLIER BRONZE AGE IN SCOTLAND, AND DUNURE ROAD

The Earlier Bronze Age cemetery unearthed at Dunure Road, South Ayrshire will form the basis of this case study. Before we assess

this evidence, however, it is useful to review the current picture of gender in the British Earlier Bronze Age.

The study of the British Earlier Bronze Age (c. 2500–1500 BC) has been dominated by the barrow cemeteries of the Wessex chalklands (e.g. Piggott 1938, Barrett 1990, Garwood 2007), though there have been recent attempts to redress this balance (e.g. Brück 2005, Bradley 2007, Jones 2011, Fowler and Wilkin 2016). The picture that has emerged is one of a male-dominated society, in which travel and the exchange of exotic artefacts was an important underpinning of male power (e.g. Needham *et al.* 2010, Sheridan 2012, Sheridan *et al.* 2013). Across Europe, gender structures are imagined to be ‘mostly binary’ and ‘stable’ (Robb and Harris 2018, p. 1) and the British model reflects wider European conceptions (e.g. Kristiansen and Larsson 2005). Such models have a loose basis in the study of grave goods, and the differential provisioning of male and female graves (e.g. Woodward and Hunter 2015). Two points of observation are important here. First, the settlements of the British Earlier Bronze Age are largely dispersed farmsteads, and there is little evidence for the aggrandisement of elite lodgings (Halliday 2007, Rathbone 2013). Second, there is only slight evidence for a systematic and widespread gender patterning of the burial record, and it only exists at the very earliest stage of the transition from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age, sometimes referred to as the Chalcolithic (e.g. Tuckwell 1975, Shepherd 2012). Other supposed categories of male and female grave goods (e.g. Sheridan and Shortland 2003, Stanley 2013, Woodward and Hunter 2015) are neither common nor always supported by modern osteological sexing.

In reaction to such models, some recent work has attempted to move away from sweeping models for the island of Britain and instead emphasises regional differences (e.g. Mizoguchi 1995, Jones 2011, Wilkin 2011, 2013, Fowler 2013). This has led to some

suggestions of regional constructions of personhood (Fowler and Wilkin 2016). However, much of the work attempting to undermine the male model of society at large, has similarly relied upon statistical arguments (e.g. Brück 2004, 2006, 2009). The problem here is two-fold: first, because there is such variation in practice, the models created in response are not capable of speaking for every case, and second, as a direct consequence, there is nothing to compel a researcher to back one model or the other based solely on the evidence. This has allowed the creation of two camps of researchers, effectively speaking about different Bronze Ages for the island of Britain. My aim here is to investigate one Bronze Age society at a direct level of connection with the evidence, generating interpretations that thoroughly accord with the data.

To that end, I introduce the site excavated at Dunure Road by Glasgow University Archaeological Research Division (GUARD) in March 2005 (Duffy 2007). The site is an Earlier Bronze Age cemetery set within and beneath a low mound, comprising 22 stone cists, of which only 11 contained any trace of human remains (Fig. 1). The remains of at least 23 people were identified, the majority having been cremated and placed in the cists unurned. Tooth enamel suggested the presence of inhumations in some cists, but others are unlikely to have ever held human remains (Duffy 2007). The site thus reflects a fairly ‘typical’ Earlier Bronze Age cemetery in northern Britain – while it presents some opportunities to us in the form of a good number of well-recorded burials for comparison, it presents challenges in other respects, the destruction of inhumed bone by the acidic soil being chief among them.

FUNERARY PRACTICE AT DUNURE ROAD

The first task is to detail the evidence for practice at this site – essentially asking what happened here, and when. This section is indebted to the excavators’ thorough report, and more detail may be found there (Duffy 2007).

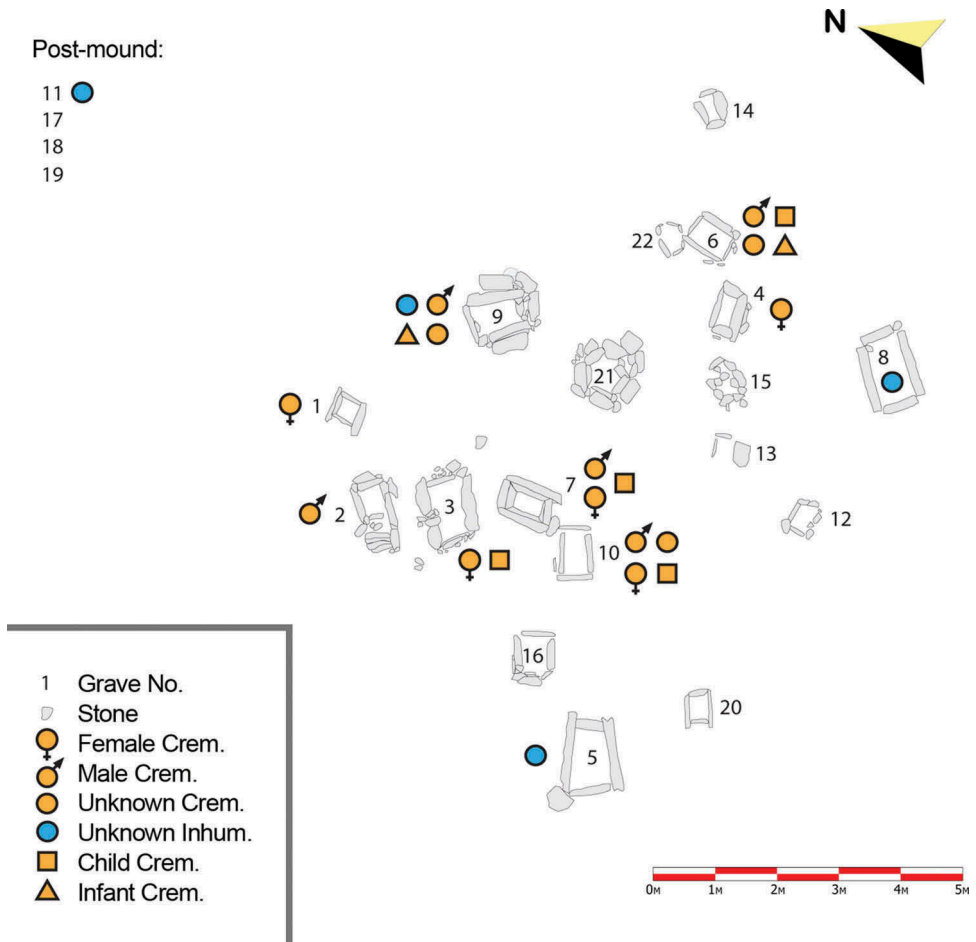


Fig. 1. Plan of the pre-mound phase of the cemetery at Dunure road, including demographic information on the occupants of the cists. Cists are renumbered for simplicity. After Duffy (2007), Illus. 3.

Initially, the community constructed cists as a flat cemetery, selecting some for the burial of human remains while others stood empty, or were later cleared out². It is difficult to sequence this activity from the radiocarbon dates (Table 1), except to say that there was a short, intense period of activity around the turn of the second millennium BC. Stratigraphically, Cist 10 predates Cist 7, and Cist 6 predates the empty Cist 22. After the construction of 18 cists, a mound was erected covering the cemetery. This was probably shortly after the construction of Cist 8, as sherds of pottery within this cist

match those within the fabric of the mound (Sheridan 2007). Three stone settings in the mound marked the positions of four earlier cists. These four (Cists 4, 6/22 and 15) may have been recent constructions or held some other importance. After the construction of the mound, four more cists were built, but only one of these (Cist 11) was used for burial. Thus, while burial is a major element in the story, there was also significant amounts of activity which did not result in the permanent deposition of human remains. Clearly, this was a place which was forever in the process of being remade.

Table 1. Summary of the contents of the occupied cists at Dunure road. M = Male, F = Female, pF = probable Female, Ch = Child(3–11), Inf = Infant(0–3), U = Unknown. Y = Present, N = Absent. Crem = Cremation, Inh = Inhumation. Details of radiocarbon dates are available in Duffy (2007).

Cist No.	Human Remains	Rite	Pottery	Animal Remains	No. of Worked Flints	Bone Artefacts	Cist Size (cm ³)	Context No.	C ¹⁴ Date (at 2-sigma)
1	Ad, pF	Crem.	N	N	1	N	1224	010	2120–1870 BC
2	Ad, M	Crem.	N	N	0	N	2822	012	2130–1890 BC
3	Ad, pF	Crem.	N	N	0	N	8480	014	2200–1950 BC
	Ch	Crem.							
4	Ad, pF	Crem.	N	Y	1	Y	1800	147	2030–1770 BC
5	Ad	Inh.	Y	N	0	N	7560	151	
6	Ad, M	Crem.							
	Ad	Crem.	Y	Y	4	N	6440	184	2130–1880 BC
	Ch	Crem.							
	Inf	Crem.							
7	Ad, M	Crem.							
	Ad, pF	Crem.	N	Y	3	N	2816	178	2140–1920 BC
	Ch	Crem.							
8	U	Inh.	N	N	0	N	6120	300	
9	Ad, M	Crem.							
	Ad	Crem.	Y	Y	3	N	5500	309	
	Ch	Crem.							
	U	Inh.							
10	Ad, M	Crem.							
	Ad, pF	Crem.	N	Y	5	N	1950	322/335	2200–1890 BC
	Ad	Crem.							
	Ch	Crem.							
11	Ad	Inh.	N	N	0	N	4800	009	

When the community did decide to make a burial, there seems to have been a fairly rigid formula which dictated how cremations were to be treated. Usually, the dead were accompanied on the pyre by animal remains and worked flint, the burnt remains of which were collected with the bones of the deceased and interred together. In all but one case where burnt flint was present there is an exact correspondence between the number of flint pieces and the number of cremated people in the grave (Table 1). Surely, both flint and animal remains were redolent with meaning to those who collected them from the pyre. Whether the animal bones were tied to feasting, or to offerings, or cremated in their own right, and whether the stone was worked as

part of the ritual or brought to the pyre to represent the domestic sphere or particular tasks, we cannot be sure. No evidence for a pyre was found during the excavation, so funerary practice presumably also involved the movement of the remains from the pyre site, or sites, to the cemetery.

The treatment of inhumations also showed signs of consistency – food vessel pottery occurred with every known inhumation, except for the post-mound Cist 11. The excavators also noted that larger graves were only constructed when required to accommodate an inhumation burial (Duffy 2007, p. 108). On this basis, Cists 3 and 6 may have contained inhumations; a food vessel in Cist 6 is potentially further evidence for this.

Importantly, all lone inhumations received neither animal remains nor flint.

Therefore, an overall distinction was drawn between the appropriate treatment of the cremated and the inhumed body. Inhumations did not 'require' or 'receive' flint or animal remains, and cremations seem not to have been directly associated with food vessel pottery. It is doubly frustrating, then, that we cannot access any demographic information about the inhumed population.

However, these formulae were not universally followed. Cists 2 and 3 contained cremations accompanied by neither flint nor animal remains. In Cist 1, the worked flint was unburnt, and thus added to the remains after the cremation, and animal remains were absent. These represent specific and deliberate differences in practice. These three burials sit together in the north west of the cemetery and also contain unusually low numbers of occupants. They may represent early activity at the site, before the 'rules' had been formalised, or this treatment may have deliberately marked them out, perhaps for social reasons, or as a response to the circumstances of their deaths, or because of their origins, either real or imagined.

As we have seen, the only occupied cists to have their locations marked on the surface of the mound were 4 and 6. Both conformed to the established pattern for grave inclusions – in Cist 6 an adult male, another adult, a child and an infant were accompanied by four burnt flints and burnt animal bone. The size of the cist, and the presence of a vase food vessel, suggest that an inhumation may also have been present. In Cist 4, an adult female was accompanied by burnt animal bone, a burnt flint scraper and a burnt bone pin. That she was buried singly, particularly away from the western cluster, and the presence of a burnt bone pin mark this grave out as different. The pin presumably held garments or a shroud together when the body was laid out on the pyre. Though it may seem trivial, this may represent a change in how

the body was prepared for and represented on the pyre, a potentially significant difference in how people interacted with the body and experienced the cremation. The slightly later date and the marking of this cist in the mound suggest a burial demarcated as different from those before and this female's death may have influenced the decision to construct the mound.

IDENTIFYING SOCIAL IDEOLOGY IN THE EVIDENCE

The evidence here, though not elaborate, is complicated and represents many decisions taken by the burying community. In seeking social ideology, it is the aspects which mark out certain types of people that we should take particular interest in.

The most striking element of differentiation is in the treatment of children. Both children and infants were always placed in burials with adults, and spatially (Fig. 1), they cluster towards the centre of the cemetery. Children, then, are central to the burying community both in space and their connection to other people, but they were not buried alone. It is also interesting that subadults are spread amongst the graves, only co-occurring once with the infant and child in Cist 6. Their place, then, is neither clustered around particular adults, nor set aside from the community together, but rather they are rooted firmly within it. This suggests that it is not a simple question of the status of parents adhering to their children – rather, it is a question of how people chose to build the space, which kinds of bodies they thought fitted together and articulated the right sense of place or occasion. Something about children, in particular, meant that they were only seen through the lens of the presence of an adult.

This is important to recognise given the range of treatments of adults. There is little evidence for rigid differentiation between males and females. Rather, the particularities of individual deaths allow some to stand

apart from the general formula, for whatever reason. This does not mean that gender was unimportant to how the images of the dead were constructed, rather gender may have been enacted in subtle ways. The association between adults gives particular pause for thought. Cremated adults occur together in four of the graves, and they never do so without children also being present. Thus, when adults are buried together they are buried as a particular part of the community, or potentially part of their family, but never as a group of adults. The relationships between adults, then, may have been tied to the relationships they had with the wider community and their roles in child rearing. This is categorically different from, say, a system where adults were buried in the graves of their direct ancestors, and suggests a different emphasis in inter-personal relationships. Additionally, it seems that no two males or two females occur together, except for Cist 10, where a male, female and an unsexed adult were buried together. This may hint at conceptions of complementarity in the construction of gender, where males and females were conceived of as representing different parts of the community in these collective graves.

It seems from this evidence that males and females did not exist in ideological spheres that were conceived of as wholly separate – they could fulfil the same functions or roles in funerary ritual without each other, or be deployed together in association with children. It becomes apparent then that (1) men and women did not exist within totally separate ideological spheres, conceived as wholly separate things, (2) it was appropriate for people to conceive of both men and women alone, neither needed to rely on the other for their identity construction, and (3) when their identities were considered together, it only made sense to do so while also thinking about their relationships with children, and their roles within either the family or the community-at-large. This is not to say that we are looking at the burials of nuclear

families or ‘married’ couples. Rather, males, females and children may be viewed in spheres which complement each other, and the burials repeatedly made use of the metaphors which their combination drew out.

It has recently been argued that Earlier Bronze Age people ‘adopted’ certain social roles – such as warriors or ritual specialists – at certain times (e.g. Needham *et al.* 2006, Woodward and Hunter 2015). Perhaps, this idea can also be applied to burial. Particular circumstances may have led particular deaths to become the focus for proscribed funerary treatment culminating in burial, in the same manner that individuals may have adopted roles temporarily in life. The deceased’s ‘role’ need not require a clear articulation of gendered identity, but of course the body was still the remains of a person who had been gendered. Whether we find this metaphor useful or not, the buried corpse certainly does take on a social role, for they become the centre of the community’s thought and effort for that particular time. The places in which we find men and women within this role reflects a society in which gender did not necessarily curtail the public roles of individuals, but their status as subadults did.

Joanna Sofaer’s theoretically informed analysis of age and gender at the Hungarian Copper Age cemetery at Tiszapolgár-Basatanya (Sofaer Derevenski 2000) provides an interesting counterpoint to the discussion here. At this site, specific artefacts were associated with transitions from one stage of life to the next, and thus these objects were called upon to metaphorically represent and reinforce an understood life course. This life course was culturally constructed but mapped onto biological realities that made it appear ‘natural’. Thus, the hierarchy that was produced through age and gender categories was also made to seem ‘natural’. At Dunure Road, however, there is no evidence of an attempt to construct a gendered difference over the life course, though there is a clear concern for the progression of age. The male-dominated model suggests we should

see a particular concern for marking out adult males, but this is clearly not the case. If this is a model which, in reality, only describes certain communities at certain times, that has ramifications for how we understand this period as a whole.

CONCLUSIONS

Having considered this cemetery, then, we can return to the original problem – the lack of nuance in our explications of social relations in the past – and ask how this approach has affected the outcomes reached. The point here is not to suggest that a statistical approach be avoided in every case, but rather to ask how an in-depth analysis of a cemetery can change the way we think about social relations in the past.

This investigation has shown that meaningful inferences about past conceptions of gender and age can be gleaned from a careful examination of small datasets. This is important because it indicates that the rush to create statistically valid datasets is an unnecessary, and potentially unhelpful, one. Furthermore, that these inferences originate in the local scale, where social ideology was enacted and experienced, puts them on a firmer footing. If we seek to understand the nature of such phenomena it is imperative that our investigations occur at the same level as that at which such phenomena are enacted. As previously noted, local trends in practice have been noticed elsewhere in Bronze Age Britain (e.g. Mizoguchi 1995, Jones 2011, Wilkin 2011, 2013, Fowler 2013) and it may be time to seriously question the likelihood of any single social model applying across this diversity.

Critically, this study also suggests that regional analyses may be misidentifying factors in social differentiation. While some individuals do stand out in the treatment they receive at Dunure Road, these are not the same individuals who would stand out in a regional statistical analysis. The male in Cist 2, for instance, stands out in the preceding analysis for what he lacked – the burnt animal remains and worked

flint that were standard fare for most of the other graves. A regional analysis, however, would find that burnt animal remains or worked flint were not included in the majority of graves, and would recognise this as a group marked out as different. This small scale can, thus, both generate meaningful inferences and provide a check on trends found in larger analyses.

Furthermore, these findings are not limited in their impact to the local scale. The picture of social relations hinted at through a close analysis of the cemetery at Dunure Road provides little to support the application of models of a male-dominated society to this community. It remains to be seen if this would be borne out at other cemeteries from this period. Indeed, a statistical analysis of Scottish Earlier Bronze Age graves which relies on modern osteological data remains to be completed. It is, therefore, difficult to say if the wider models of male-dominance are applicable to Scotland broadly, but they do not seem to fit Dunure Road at this time.

Attention to the detail of how social ideology is enacted and maintained on a local level allows us to form nuanced narratives of interpersonal relations. In talking about social relations in the Bronze Age through the lens of this site, we are not limited to discussions of a male group and a female group and the balance of power between them, rather we can see that there was an overlapping range of treatments for both which reflects the subtle ways in which people would have enacted their identities within the scope of local gender ideology. This is a preliminary glimpse of the kind of dynamic and multi-faceted engagements which characterise human lives, it remains to build a lattice of such investigations at sites across Scotland from which to tell more engaging and nuanced stories about the people of the past.

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NOTES

¹The Earlier Bronze Age is here preferred to ‘Chalcolithic’ and ‘Early Bronze Age’ to convey the continuity inherent in tradition from one to the next. The utility of ‘Chalcolithic’ as a delineated period in Britain seems limited when discussing social dynamics.

²My thanks to Tom Booth for this suggestion.

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