Chapter 2

Of middens and markets: The phenomenology of the market place in the Bronze Age and beyond

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1. Introduction

With regard to the role of exchange in Bronze Age Europe, it has been argued that 'the use of the word "trade" is not very appropriate, since it implies an economic system in which markets or even money were in use' (Harding 2013: 370; for a critique, see Rahmstorf 2016). Instead, the interpretative framework for an understanding of the wide distribution of certain artefacts or materials is often sought in 'the result of successive cycles of gift exchange' (Gunnaf 2012: 282). Social models derived from other pre-modern societies are often considered very useful in acquiring an understanding of the mechanisms of the circulation of objects in European Bronze Age societies. For example, P. Wells noted recently that 'Malinowski's description of both the material and the social aspects of the Kula helps to remind us that in all pre-modern societies, we must take account of the social basis of goods circulation and not only consider it in terms of the "economic" or "market-based" models of today' (Wells 2016: 173). Malinowski's description of the Melanesian kula indeed gives us a fascinating example of how exchange can be organized as a particular social phenomenon. Nevertheless, the social embeddedness of exchange is not only an aspect of pre-modern societies; various authors have emphasized that modern markets too are socially and politically embedded (van Bavel 2014: 149–150 with references). While rejecting the existence of market-based economies in pre-modern times does not necessarily mean that the proponents of such views dismiss the existence of markets entirely in these periods, it certainly minimizes the role that market exchange might have played during this period.

In this article, I will therefore argue that because the potential presence of market places has not been taken into account for later prehistory the archaeological evidence for market places in the Bronze Age has not been understood and studied. This is partly due to prevailing preconceptions regarding the nature of exchange in the Bronze Age, similar to those mentioned above, which ignore the existence of market places in the variety of Bronze Age modes of exchange. It is, of course, because of the highly influential work of Karl Polanyi (1957) that scholars mainly treat exchange as involving reciprocity (gift exchange) and redistribution based on eastern, Egyptian and west Mediterranean temple and palace economies. Twenty years ago, Wilk (1998: 469) was already reminding us that 'perhaps because of the legacy of Polanyi ... there has been a tendency to make too much of markets ... or too little of them'. In fact, 'markets come in a variety of shapes and sizes, there is no single market principle, and markets can be integrated into a remarkable variety of economic systems'. Therefore, 'the next step should take us beyond the market/no-market polarity' (ibid.) simply because the presence of a market place does not necessarily mean that market principles existed in which the desire for profit governed the exchange and where prices were formed by supply and demand (Veenhof 1972: 351; Larsen 2015: 273).

In this article, I would therefore like to adopt a more empirical and less theoretical approach by investigating the evidence we have for market exchange in Bronze Age societies in Europe, the Mediterranean and Western Asia and ask how we can detect such exchange in the archaeological record. I will consider first the direct evidence for the existence of Bronze Age market places from written and pictorial sources (section 2). Using this comparative cross-cultural and diachronic perspective makes it possible to define specific general archaeological criteria for the presence of a market place (section 3). Turning to a specific example, it will be argued that the so-called midden sites of the Late Bronze Age and the transition to the Early Iron Age in southern Britain can be regarded as to a certain extent as market places, despite generally being considered sites of competitive feasting (section 4). Finally, I shall argue that the archaeology of market places still requires much more unbiased study in the future (section 5).

2. Bronze Age sources for the market place

Our evidence for the existence of market places during the Bronze Age comes from three different sources: (1) textual evidence, mainly in the form of cuneiform tablets found in Turkey, Syria and Iraq, and to a far lesser extent in Ancient Egyptian texts; (2) depictions from Old and New Kingdom reliefs on Egyptian tombs; and (3) a few controversial archaeological cases. More potential archaeological data will be discussed in section 4.

a. Written sources

Words for 'market place' can be identified in Akkadian and Sumerian (AHW II: 583; Röllig 1976; Zaccagnini 1987–90; Biga 2003). Well known is the Akkadian kāru(m) describing in the first place the location of a place of exchange (literally meaning quay). Another significant Akkadian word, mahrū(m), is usually translated as
'equivalent' or 'price', while the basic meaning of the associated Akkadian verb mahrû seems to be to 'approach somebody' (AHw II: 577; Lipiński 1997: 232), possibly a reference to face-to-face meetings during market exchange. When used in composition with bâbu ('gate'), bitu ('house') and rabû ('great'), mahîrum is translated as 'market' (Wilcke 2009: 73). This Semitic root (mhr) is also found in Hebrew, in which the word mhrîh is also translated as 'equivalent value' (Lipiński ibid.). In the Bible, markets are usually located at the gates of a city, as at Samaria (2 Kings 7: 1) – at least it is stated that one can buy flour there for a certain number of shekels. Beside mahîrum(m) and kârum(m), the word saqû(m) seems to refer to market exchange as it emphasizes the location of places of exchange along a road within a city (Zaccagnini 1987–90: 422–3), and its connection with the Arabic word is obvious, even though considerable changes in its specific meaning may have occurred over time.

The 23,000 texts from Karum Kanesh in central Anatolia from the early second millennium BC depict a full commercial exchange system in which 'the merchants bought low, sold high, looked for bargains, avoided what taxes they could, and assumed the risks for their ventures without any support from the palace on either end of the trade route' (Sagona and Zimansky 2009: 231). Mainly from these texts, but also from other references from Nuzi, Assur and in a building inscription of Samsi-Addu I, we learn that market places were physical realities in Syro-Mesopotamian and Anatolian cities, for example, at Assur (We shall buy one heavy textile in the market'), Nuzi ('On the market in Nuzi'), Karum Kanesh ('Ennâm-Assur and Buzazû grabbed each other in the market place'); 'When A brought down a slave (l) from the market, B and C paid 12 minas of copper, the purchase price of the slave') or an unidentified town or neighbourhood of Assur ('On the market of Urame') (see Veenhof 1972: 353–5, 390–4; Larsen 2015: 273 for further references). At least two different markets could be present in such cities: a small market and a large one are mentioned in the texts from Nuzi (Zaccagnini 1987–90: 422). The existence of a market overseer or inspector is mentioned in Sumerian and Akkadian texts (Veenhof 1972: 394; Saalberger 2008: 100–1), their function apparently being to keep order, prevent theft and make sure the properly approved weights were used. In Ancient Egypt state representatives controlled the exchange; they may be depicted in market scene reliefs (see below) as men walking with monkeys and baboons (Fig. 2.1, second row; Moussa and Altenmüller 1977: fig. 10; Hassan 1955: fig. 4) because one is described as a supervisor in the inscription. However, the possibility cannot be excluded that they simply wanted to sell these animals (Altenmüller 2001: 446–7). In sum, the written documentation indicates that the much later agoranomoi in the markets of the Classical and Hellenistic periods may have had a very similar function, namely to ensure 'that buyers and sellers could make transactions without fear of violence or intimidation' (Harris and Lewis 2015: 30).

In his fundamental study of 1972, K. R. Veenhof had already pointed out that 'the rationale of the trade was the procuring of silver and gold, not for the city (or "state"), but for the merchants and firms, which, though perhaps checked and certainly taxed by the "state", were rather exponents of private "capitalistic" enterprise' (Veenhof 1972: 350). This trade was driven by the existence of different exchange rates for the goods that were in most demand: whereas in Assur one could acquire ca. 15 shekels [ca. 125 g] of tin for 1 shekel [ca. 8.3–8.4 g] of silver ... one could obtain 1 shekel of silver for ca. 7 shekels [ca. 58 g] of tin' in Anatolia (ibid.). The rate of profit was therefore about 215%. And even though there were also considerable deductions due to the costs of the caravan trade from Assur to Karum Kanesh, with taxes to be paid at both ends, the revenue still made this trade highly lucrative. Unfortunately, the textual evidence from Karum Kanesh is still often ignored by prehistorians. Larsen pointed out that, in the most widely used introduction to archaeology worldwide, Archaeology: theories, methods and practice, now in its seventh edition, the merchants of Kültepe are characterized as 'acting as agents: that may be regarded as redistribution. But in some cases they do seem to have been trading on their own account, for personal gain' (Renfrew and Bahn 2012: 354). As Larsen remarked, 'this is turning everything upside down by converting the normal into an exception' (Larsen 2015: 278), thus minimizing the role of markets in the Bronze Age. This example highlights the frequent preconceptions of researchers against the existence of markets during this period.

b. Pictorial sources

The fact that there are depictions of market scenes from the Bronze Age is also not well known. These consist of reliefs on the walls of Ancient Egyptian tombs. The
earliest depictions come from the Old Kingdom (Hodjash-Oleg and Berlev 1980: 31–32; Muhs 2016: 46–47, with further references) especially during the reigns of Pharaohs Niuserre, Unas and Teti (ca. 2450/2400–2300 BC), from the tomb–chapels of officials, as in the Mastabas of Djadjaemankh (Hodjash-Oleg and Berlev 1980) and Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep (Fig. 2.1; Moussa and Altenmüller 1977: 84–85, pl. 24; fig. 10) and the Unas causeway (Hassan 1938: pl. 96). More than a dozen have been preserved, though in several cases either only part exists or the whole depiction has still not been published (Altenmüller 1980: 1191–1192; Hodjash-Oleg and Berlev 1980). Only one unpublished market scene is known from the First Intermediate period, and none from the Middle Kingdom (Altenmüller 1980: 1192; Zingarelli 2010: 37). There are at least five market scenes from New Kingdom tombs (Altenmüller 1980, 1992, with further references), and some authors argue that there are potentially more depictions than this (Zingarelli 2010: 44). All in all, we know of about twenty market scenes from Egypt in the third and second millennia BC.

Market scenes generally show sellers and buyers. Usually the sellers are squatting on the ground or sitting on a low chair in front of a basket filled with their products, and the seller is standing in front of them, but sometimes they both stand. No architecture, not even any stalls, are shown in the scenes, but sometimes sunshades are depicted (Fischer 1972), especially for those from the New Kingdom. Inscriptions next to the depictions show them in lively dialogues. For example, in the tomb of Anchnmahor (around 2300 BC) the seller offers his dried fish as follows: ‘See these’, and the customer responds ‘Excellent’ (Badawy 1978: 20, fig. 31, pl. 34, right). The goods are exchanged through barter, the most common being food, especially fish and vegetables, but tools (e.g. angler’s hooks, fans) and other objects of daily use (e.g. sandals, caskets) were also exchanged for foodstuffs (e.g. barley), tools (e.g. spindle) or jewellery (e.g. beads) (Hodjash and Berlev 1980: 47; Livingstone-Thomas 2011). It is interesting to note that certain simple commodities, like shoes, mats and baskets, are never mentioned in distribution lists in the official ‘state’ documents in Mesopotamia, where instead people had to exchange them in markets (Steinkeller 1996: 253). The inscriptions on the Egyptian tombs imply that the equivalences of value between the different commodities seem to have been generally well acknowledged by all members of society, though all the goods exchanged in these market scenes are of rather low material value. However, there is one exception, depicted in the lowest register on the right side of the tomb of Chnumhotep and Niankhchnum at Sakkarra (Fig. 2.1, bottom right; Moussa and Altenmüller 1977: 84–85, fig. 10 [Scene 11.4.4]; Harpur and Scrimin 2010: pl. 67, context photograph 587 [top right]; context drawing 71). In this case a certain amount of cloth is being exchanged for six š/t (shati). Precious cloth was the ‘material most commonly given in high value Old Kingdom exchanges’ (Muhs 2016: 38). The problem is still what was meant by shati: was it a measure of value in a metal which itself was actually usually exchanged, or else never exchanged, used as an abstract currency (ibid.: 37 with further references)? At least since the Middle Kingdom, a shati was a twelfth of a deben, a unit of weight. Hence, mentioning shati in connection with at least one sale depicted in the market scenes underlines two important issues: first, in rare cases highly valuable commodities were also exchanged in markets; and secondly, the value of these commodities was expressed in units of weight. The connection with the practice of weighing is further underlined in market scenes from the New Kingdom. In Kenamun’s tomb, two stalls with persons offering and weighing out goods are depicted next to market places and mooring sites for ships on the river bank. While markets are generally described as local (Altenmüller 2001: 447; Zingarelli 2010: 35; Muhs 2016: 86), considerable distances had to be overcome to reach markets, at least in some cases. In the Middle Kingdom literary text ‘The Eloquent Peasant’, which is set earlier, during the First Intermediate Period, a peasant takes his products on a donkey about 200 km from Wadi Natrun to Herakleopolis (Nennesi) to exchange them for barley before being robbed of his possessions. Even though it is not explicitly stated, he seems to have intended to exchange them in a market place for food for his family. J. Renger suggested, with reference to the Mesopotamian context, that ‘villagers would come individually to towns and cities as the natural central place to obtain objects and goods made by persons with special skills. As for goods which came over long distances, a central location would also be the obvious place for obtaining them’ (Renger 1984: 72). Judging from the Egyptian depictions from the Late Kingdom, it is apparent that markets were located at harbors, river banks and mooring sites, as in the case of reliefs in the tombs of Kenamun (Davies and Faulkner 1947: pl. viii), Chaemhet (Pino 2005; Zingarelli 2010: fig. 6 a–b) and Ipui (Zingarelli 2010: fig. 3 a–b). These locations and the presence of ships validates the suggestion that the market had not only local but also regional and interregional importance in exchanges of goods. This is also supported by the fact that the Ancient Egyptian word mrt (bank) is also translated as ‘market’ (Römer 1992: 259), an interesting parallel to the Akkadian karī, which also means quay or embankment. In addition, the markets are situated at road junctions (Altenmüller 1980: 1193).

c. Archaeological sources

In this section, I will briefly describe possible sites of exchange from Neolithic Europe and then turn to potential market places which have been proposed in the archaeological literature for the Bronze and Early Iron Age Near East and (rarely) for Europe. So far, the actual location of markets is often only suggested by the existence of large open spaces within a settlement area and other potential indicators, like paving. Often authors are fully aware of potential hypotheses (e.g. Larsen 2015: 36), but sometimes a large open ‘public’ space alone is enough to enable an author to speak of the ‘earliest known marketplace’ (Kolb 1984: 53), for example, that linked to the ‘town court’ (Cadogan 1992: fig. 13.3–4) in Late Bronze Age Gournia on Crete. And indeed, an open space is probably the most important element of a market, one that must be considered indispensable to the classical-ancient, occidental and oriental city (Wirth 2000: 403), though they could also have been located along streets (cf. in Akkadian:
sīq šimātim, ‘streets of the merchandise’; Zaccagnini 1987–90: 422). In general, the archaeological context has seldom been examined due to the methodological problems involved in identifying market places and preconceptions regarding how the trade was organized stemming from simply ignoring the possibility that market places played any role in exchange.

One of the earliest examples of open spaces that have been also discussed as potential market places may be the large causewayed enclosure sites of the Neolithic in Europe. While causewayed enclosures with specific characteristics are known from different periods of the Neolithic in temperate Europe, they are especially known from the late fifth and fourth millennia BC in western, central and northern Europe, for example, in the Michelsberger culture in central Europe, the Funnel Beaker culture in northern-central Europe and the Windmill Hill culture in Britain (Andersen 2014; Geschwinde and Raettzel-Fabian 2006). F. Oelmann may have been the first to suggest a functional interpretation for these sites as market places in 1923 (Oelmann 1923: 96–7; cf. Andersen 1997: 304). Arguments that have been put forward in favour of this hypothesis include their locations at important geographical sites (e.g. river crossings) and the presence of imported materials. In recent years various authors have indeed emphasized their association with supra-regional historically known road systems (Klassen 2014; Meyer and Raettzel-Fabian 2015a: 28), visible, for example, from the fact that they are located along the axis of later Roman roads (Schyle et al. 2015: 363). In Denmark, causewayed enclosures are restricted to the coastal zone, which ‘might have had to do with the long-distance routes to which they related’ (Klassen 2014: 254). In older theories these enclosures, with their impressive ditch systems, were regarded as fortified sites or refuges. The main objections against such an understanding is the fact that the ditches are most often not continuous but have very many untouched blocks of soil in between them. In addition, they are often much too big to have been easily defended during the Neolithic period, and the banks were much too low for this, perhaps never even intended to be such, as ‘the soil dug out of the ditches usually lay in heaps along the sides of the ditches’ (Andersen 1997: 303).

It has also been suggested that the large number of passageways in the enclosures is due to their use as corrals for animals (e.g. Rest 1940; Piggott 1954: 29; Toupet 1988). Cattle bones are common finds in the ditches of the enclosures. This idea has recently been revived, namely that the enclosures were erected in order to handle large herds of cattle during transhumance, during which the whole population would also be brought together for social and religious activities (Geschwinde and Raettzel-Fabian 2006). Their many openings would be an advantage in this regard (Jeunesse and Seidel 2010: 67). However, many of the enclosures are on top of or on the slopes of hills, which would not be very practical as corrals. Finds of human skeletons, often just body parts, deposits of animal bones (e.g. cattle horns) and artefacts (axes, pottery) and indications of the use of fire suggest that some kind of ritual practice took place in the enclosures. With some plausibility, they have been interpreted as places for communal feasting. Ethnographic data points to the fact that societies without inherited hierarchies only generate large labour effort for communal feasts (Kerig and Knoch 2015: 147). Seasonal feasts and rituals performed in these enclosures would have intensified social cohesion in the community (Knoch and Schyle 2015: 371). In sum, it is likely that the causewayed enclosures were used for a variety of reasons, one of them, and probably the most important, being to hold community gatherings and religious feasts. Alongside these events, exchanges of goods, including moving cattle herds, may have taken place for reasons of both transhumance and exchange. Therefore, the assumed functional range of these later Neolithic enclosures is in this respect similar to market places and fairs from the Bronze Age to the modern period, as we shall see below.

Discussions of the locations of potential market places and their archaeological detection are rare for the Ancient Near East and Egypt, actual archaeological evidence for them having been described as ‘extremely scanty’ (Zaccagnini 1987–90: 421). A. Otto suggested that a large open area (c. 30 × 60 m) in the middle of the western city (‘Weststadt’) of Tell Bazi was a market place. Her arguments in favour of this interpretation are the presence of thin, indifferently built walls. Small rooms are all that can be reconstructed. In other cases these walls seem rather to be the remains of partition walls or foundations for racks. The open area is easily accessible from the built areas from the main roads. The remaining city area has no further open areas, except for those which are clearly related to specific houses. In the compound only a few vessels, some weights, fragments of bronze objects, small terracotta figurines and animal bones were excavated. Otto suggests that the rather low number of finds is due to the sloping terrain, on which deluges of water run down after heavy rain (Otto 2006: 266–267). Nevertheless, such archaeologically observed market places are rare, according to Otto because they are located beyond the settlements, as is still typical of Mesopotamia today (ibid.: 267, and n. 472). The supposed market place at the Late Bronze Age site of Tell Bazi may also have once been extra muros and became incorporated into the settlement only later, after the latter’s expansion. One can agree with Otto that assumed locations of market places outside cities or in free compounds between different parts of a city may explain the lack of archaeological evidence, at least to a certain extent. In the Old Babylonian Period, the Paternoster Row in ancient Ur (Woolley and Mallowan 1976: 32) may have functioned as a ‘street of the merchandise’. Nos 5, 7, 9 and 14 Paternoster Row consist of deep rectangular, subdivided buildings with a narrow frontage on to the street. The street’s general resemblance to the souks of recent times, with their narrow streets and houses opening on to the lane, surely influenced this particular interpretation. In the Second City (c. 2550–2200 BC) at Mari in Syria, a triangular quarter reflecting the street layout is situated in the western part of the city close to the temple of Istar. The open space (c. 10 × 15 m) is surrounded by pillars forming a kind of portico. The buildings at the back have been interpreted as shops, and the whole architectural arrangement as ‘a market for the neighbourhood’ (Fig. 2.2; Margueron 2014: 54, 57, fig. 55). In both Ur and Mari, detailed documentation of all the finds (artefacts and ecofacts) has
the pre-Roman and Imperial periods (e.g. Willroth 2002: 207; Aufderhaar 2016: 260, ‘Lande- und Umschlagsplätze’), both at the mouths of rivers and in the immediate coastal zone, like at Elsfleth-Hopenkamp (Mückenberger 2013; Schlothfeldt 2016). In Lower Saxony estuarine river systems of the Weser and Ems are currently studied in their role as infrastructure for traffic, exchange and trade. Concentrations of foreign artefacts at certain places, especially at confluvial areas, may indicate market places (Siegmüller 2013).

3. Detecting market places: Cross-cultural and diachronic indicators

Various methodological approaches have been proposed in the last 20 years or so in American archaeology to detect market exchange, especially by K. Hirth, being defined as contextual, spatial, configurational, distributional and regional production-distribution approaches (Hirth 1998; 2009; Feinman and Garry 2010: 176–177). It is not possible to go into a detailed discussion of these approaches here, but it has been pointed out that they partially ‘suffer from the problem of equifinality: it is rarely, if ever, possible to rule out alternate exchange mechanisms for observed archaeological patterns’ (ibid.: 178; also Stahl, this volume). The ‘configurational approach’ seeks to detect physical evidence of marketplace(s) (ibid.: 177). This approach, when used in adopting a cross-cultural and diachronic perspective, is the most rewarding in my understanding.

a. Market places as large open areas

Market places as large open areas where men sit on the ground or on low chairs in front of baskets is a trivial characteristic feature. It is found cross-culturally as a phenomenon in the market scenes mentioned above from ancient Egypt, in depictions from sixteenth-century AD Mesoamerica (Hirth 2012: fig. 47.1), in oil paintings from Early Modern period central Europe (e.g. those of Jan Breughel the Elder, Great Fish-Market, 1603, Alte Pinakothek, Munich and Joachim Beuckelaer, Ecce Homo in a Marketplace, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum). In this respect, their non-specific settings make it hard to define any particular type of location. For example, during the Late and most likely also the Classical Mayan periods in eastern Mexico, Guatemala and Belize, ‘markets may have simply occurred on whatever open plaza space was available and, in most cases, were not formally designated or architecturally designed by the ruling classes’. In addition, there are no separate words in Mayan for ‘market’ or ‘plaza’, which implies a deeply entrenched semantic affinity (Speal 2014: 92).

b. Massive cultural layers

Thick layers containing human cultural debris are usually encountered in market places. Whereas today, for example, the debris of weekly markets in German city centres is immediately taken away by public street-cleaning services after the market
has closed in the afternoon, this was not the case in ancient times. The result was a constant increase in cultural debris on the ground, mainly organic refuse (vegetables, fruit, bones with remains of meat, parts of fish, etc.), containers made of ceramic, bast, wood, etc., but also artefacts like tools broken accidentally or with imperfections and half-finished artefacts that were also produced on the site (see below). Whether such components are still traceable hundreds or thousands of years later depends on the soil, but examples from Mesoamerica (e.g. Dahlin et al. 2010) or the later Medieval period in central Europe (e.g. Küchelmann 2014: 'mit Knochen gepflastert/paved with bones') demonstrate the extensive accumulation of such debris in market places. The cultural layers are traceable in favorable circumstances. The organic material changes the pH content of the soil as well as increasing the presence of certain trace elements there, especially of phosphates (Dahlin et al. 2010). Due to the presence of large numbers of humans and animals, the soil can be expected to be highly condensed, unless there is a stone platform over it.

c. Limited amount of architectural features

Because of all the open space, there are usually only a few built features in market places, if any at all. Typically there are no traces of permanent dwellings in market areas, but only lightly built stalls, booths and fences, as, for example, at Early Medieval Tissø, Zealand, in Denmark (Jørgensen 2004: 201). Also tables and benches occur, suggesting an area with postholes 1 x 0.9–2 m in size in the thirteenth-century market area at Tulln in Austria (Scholz 2016: 57–58: fig. 8; also Scholz, this volume). The postholes of the sunshades in the Ancient Egyptian depictions (Fischer 1972) mentioned above would not have left many archaeological traces in the ground, though they were also used for hanging commodities (Davies and Faulkner 1947: pl. 8; Zingarelli 2010: fig. 4 a–b). Lightly built stalls are also sometimes depicted in the Late Medieval and Early Modern periods in central Europe, the oil painting of a Lakenmarkt (cloth market) in s'Hertogenbosch, Netherlands, from around AD 1530 (Nagel-Schlicksber 2006: fig. 15).

d. Markets as production sites

It has often been observed that market places are not only places of exchange but also of production. For example, Late Medieval market areas often contain large numbers of kilns (Scholz 2013: 145–151). The so-called ‘productive sites’ from the seventh to ninth centuries AD in Early Medieval northern Europe are at the same time market places (Pestell and Ulmschneider 2003). Obsidian blade production was a common feature in Mesoamerican markets (Hirth 2009: 99). For the Bronze Age this aspect is not yet so clearly visible (but see below), but this may just reflect our very limited knowledge of the archaeology of actual market places from this period.

f. Markets next to places of worship and sanctuaries

It has often been emphasized that there is a ‘customary location of ancient markets near places of worship’ (Agnew 1979: 103). This nexus is already visible in the early examples from the Ancient Near East: ‘Fairs (in which weights were used) took place in the sanctuaries or close to the sanctuaries’ (Biga 2006: 342). In Classical Greece, sanctuaries and market places were planned and altered as whole closed complexes (Borbein 1973: 104, n. 310). From Medieval times to the present day, fairs and markets were not only parts of a network of exchange structures serving for exchanges of goods, but were also the reason for feasts being held in public spaces (Scholz 2014: 69). The presence of a holy precinct was a necessary requirement enabling humans unknown to each other to interact in exchange without fearing for their lives and possessions. As M. E. Aubet has put it:

The sanctuaries in antiquity were the prime places of commercial transactions in a foreign country. The first condition of any market or trading colony set up on a frontier or in a distant land was to ensure that its visitors were not molested or robbed. And, as a general rule, that security was offered by a god, under whose auspices and protection deals were verified. The name of the god was invoked in oaths sanctioning contracts. (Aubet 2001: 277)

In sum, from a cross-cultural and diachronic perspective, various archaeological indicators may suggest the presence of a market place. These comprise a small number of rather simply built structures, large amounts of fragmented artefacts, thick organic but trampled levels, large assemblages of bones, evidence for production on site, finds of weighing equipment and signs of cultic practice. In the following case study, it will be argued that specific sites from the Late Bronze Age and the transitional phase to the Iron Age in southern Britain should be understood also as market places.
4. A case study: Midden sites in Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age Britain

The term ‘middlen’ is used ‘to describe any kind of occupation feature containing large quantities of refuse’ (Waddington 2012: 41). The so-called middens of the Late Bronze Age and the transition to the Early Iron Age, which date mainly from the ninth and eighth centuries BC, are known from roughly 30 such sites (ibid.: 42) in southern Britain and on islands in the English Channel, like Mez-Notariou on the island of Ouessant off the western coast of Brittany (see Le Bihan and Villard 2001; Webley 2015). They comprise thick midden deposits consisting of large numbers of finds and especially large quantities of bone fragments, for example, at Poterne (Locker 2000) and East Chisewbury in Wiltshire. While only 1% of the midden at Poterne (c. 3.5 ha) has been excavated, 130,000 animal bones and a ton of pottery have been recovered (Lawson 2000: ix). Due to the massive presence of live animals, the dark humic layers at these sites, as at Llannmaw in southern Wales, are thought to have been formed by slurry (Gwilt et al. 2006). However, metal and bone artefacts have also been recovered in great numbers, and human bones in more limited numbers. The accumulations are impressive: at Poterne they are about 2 m thick, but might originally have been 5 m thick (Lawson et al. 2000: 269). It has been remarked that ‘the monumental scale of deposition is unparalleled in a British prehistoric context’ (Madgwick and Mulville 2015: 630), especially when compared to average settlement sites of this period. The sites are often placed on hilltops or hill slopes near to waterways, route ways (Waddington 2012: 42, 52) and river confluences, so that the ‘communication network benefitted from river transportation as much as possible even’ (Needham and Spence 1996: 246, on the case of Runnymede Bridge), though the elsewhere the first-named author suggested that ‘the nodality was not in terms of some kind of mercantile economic system’ (Needham 1991: 383), a point to which I shall return below. In sum, it appears that the middens were most often placed in well-chosen locations ‘at the junctures of different perceived environments’ (Waddington 2012: 42).

Also fascinating are the data obtained from animal bones. The animals’ cull patterns indicate that most were butchered in spring and summer (Locker 2000: fig. 38). Trampling by large numbers of animals occurred at various middens, and even though the taphonomic processes are difficult to decode in detail (Madgwick 2015), the accumulations were apparently created in a short period of time. Recent isotope results have revealed further interesting results. Carbon and nitrogen isotope analyses of the bones can be used to reconstruct the animals’ diets, showing for pigs especially that they were not raised by specialist producers but in different areas using a variety of resources (Madgwick and Mulville 2015: 635, fig. 5). This could be interpreted as many humans coming to the middens with their own animals, which had been raised in different ways. In addition, strontium-isotope analyses of six pigs demonstrate that four of them were not local but were raised a considerable distance away (~20 km). The butchery practices (the presence of a large number of skull fragments) and the slurry deposits mentioned previously indicate that the animals had been brought alive to the middens (ibid.: 636–637). The authors conclude that ‘isotope results provide convincing evidence that people were converging on Llannmaw, bring their locally raised animals with them’ (ibid.: 641). Exceptionally large in the pig bone sample are the right fore-limbs with a much larger percentage (68.5%) of the number of identified specimens of pig limb bones (including scapulae and pelvis) than the left fore-limbs (17.9%), the right hind-limbs (6.9%) and the left hind-limbs (6.7%). This evidence indicates ‘highly formalised, socially circumscribed practices relating to the selection, processing and deposition of animals at Llannmaw’ (ibid.: 634). For this reason, Madgwick and Mulville interpret the midden deposits as the result of sacrificed offerings. There is very little evidence that larger buildings were constructed on these sites, the lack of reconstructable round houses or huts placing them in sharp contrast to settlement sites. However, there are pits, hearths, kilns and rows of small postholes (e.g. at Poterne: Lawson 2000: 25–37). The kilns, crucibles, waste, etc. indicate the production of pottery and metal artefacts at these sites. Excavations at the middens have brought artefacts of great material value to light, as suggested by their rarity or the foreignness of the material, like a gold bracteate (ibid.: 9: 185–187, fig. 67), amber beads (Longley 1980: fig. 18, 69–70; Needham and Spence 1996: 188, fig. 101, AM1–AM2; Healy 2000: fig. 86), high magnesia glass beads (Henderson 2000; Boyle and Henderson 2006: fig. 3.3, pl. 3.2; Ladle and Morgan 2012: 5, image 19) and an Egyptian blue bead (Needham and Bimson 1988: fig. 2).

Complicated reconstructions of site histories have been proposed, with phases of living in houses, herding and fencing animals, working and producing pottery and other artefacts, and dumping on the site (Fig. 2.3; Lawson 2000: 257–261: fig. 100a–b; Needham and Spence 1997: 242–8, fig. 109). In general, the midden sites and their deposits have received a wide range of interpretations: as ceremonial centres, as places...
of feasting, especially of large-scale competitive feasts (e.g. McOmish 1996; Madgwick and Mulville 2015: 641), as elite centres (Brück 2007: 34), as seasonal community gathering places (e.g. Needham 1991; Brück 2007: 34) or as places associated with fertility, life cycles and excess (e.g. Parker Pearson 1996; Needham and Spence 1997: 85) or a combination of several or all these. The possibility that they are just ‘particularly messy farmsteads’ (Barrett and McOmish n.d.: 13 – with a question mark) can be excluded. Suggestions that these sites were market places or fairs have surfaced in the archaeological literature only infrequently and only in passing (e.g. Lawson 2000: 270; Bradley 2007: 233; Bradley et al. 2016: 240). Considering the indicators we have collated above, it would make good sense to explain these sites in southern Britain and the islands of the English Channel (Bradley et al. 2015: 240) as seasonal community gathering places and places of feasting but also as sites of exchange, indeed as market places. The interpretation of them as places of regular, seasonal exchange is also implied by a find category which is especially used in exchange and trade, namely weighing equipment. So far, the presence of such tools at midden sites and their implications have not been understood.

At the two middens for which publications are most complete, namely those at Potters Bar in Hertfordshire (Lawson 1980) and Runnymede Bridge in Surrey (Longley 1980; Needham 1992; Needham and Spence 1996), we also know of weights and scales. At Potters Bar the find of a bone balance beam was described as a ‘possible antler frag.; bobbin-like form; transverse perforations at both ends and in the centre; polished on all surfaces’ and as ‘very delicate possible balance arm’ (Seager Smith 2000: 234, 240, figs 97 and 98), but it was not discussed any further in this publication. The lead block object from Runnymede (Needham and Hook 1988: 260, fig. 2) has so far not been interpreted as a balance weight, but parallels in copper alloy or bronze from Britain (Needham et al. 2013: 89, fig. 3.21, S27) and especially central Europe (e.g. Pare 1999: fig. 10, 2; 16, 2–4) make this plausible.

The so far limited number of possible weights from the Late Bronze Age and the transition to the Iron Age may partly be explained by the difficulty of physically recognizing lead objects, rather than passing them off as dull-coloured stones (Needham and Hook 1988: 265; Schuster 2014: 182). Other significant factors here are the generally low visibility of weights (Needham 2017: 37) in the archaeological record (the lack of deposited weighing equipment because the mortuary evidence is largely lacking in Middle and Late Bronze Age Britain in contrast to central Europe) and possible stone weights being interpreted as peculiar pebble shapes (cf. Rahmstorf 2014), all the sorts of finds that need to be preserved and published on by archaeologists. The appearance of weighing equipment at the two midden sites which have the most extensive publications puts a strong emphasis on their function as places of exchange. The undeniable connections of the middens with cultic behaviour and feasting and as production sites do not contradict such an interpretation. Market places were mostly connected to or formed part of places of worship, as we have seen in discussing the cross-cultural and diachronic perspective in relation to markets.

5. Conclusions

Market places have rarely been taken into account when discussing exchange during the Bronze Age. This applies even to the Near East and Egypt, with their direct written and pictorial evidence for market places. For Bronze Age Europe, the existence of market places tends to be denied generally because their presence would imply the existence of trade with a professional class of traders, money, weights and scales and common systems of material value (e.g. Harding 2013: 370). None of these phenomena have been well researched for Bronze Age Europe as yet, despite indications of their existence (cf. Rahmstorf 2016), and it would be wrong to exclude their presence during this period just because of theoretical biases. This chapter has suggested that specific sites from the Late Bronze Age and the transition to the Iron Age in southern Britain and some islands in the English Channel (the middens) could have functioned also as market places. This does not necessarily mean that this was their primary function, but it at least represents an addition to their use as community gathering places for a variety of purposes. In fact, the earlier Neolithic enclosure sites already seem to have had a similar range of functions.

Last but not least, it should not be forgotten that the market was also a place of communication from which news spread quickly within a community. New things, technologies and innovations would first become visible there for a large percentage of the population. For those engaged in agriculture and dispersed in small farmsteads – that is, the greatest part of the population in pre-modern times – events in the market or at a fair would have been the only time in the year, or for months or weeks on end, where news from far away could be received. This role of the market as the main place for exchanges of news should not be underestimated. Human history is full of examples of upheavals starting in squares and market places where large group of men met and assembled. Already in the Bronze Age market places and public areas were considered to be trouble spots in times of uprisings (Altenmüller 1980: 1193) and therefore feared by the rulers. According to the Middle Kingdom literature work ‘Admonitions of Amenemhat’, dating from the early second millennium BC, the assassination of Pharaoh Amenemhat I was the result of the ‘slanderous gossip’ circulating in a market. Similarly the coup against the king of Emar in northern Mesopotamia apparently started in the market, though eventually it was quelled (Adamthwaite 2001: 237).

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References

2. Of middens and markets


