The Bronze Age Smith as Individual

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Actions of the mind:

A working sequence is the thought process which accompanies the crafting of a piece. Knowledge about the specific order of steps is fundamental to the successful completion of the object. This knowledge is developed through experience and is in many cases learned and adopted.

The traces of two successive working steps are visible on the Mecklenburg type neck collar from Weitgendorf, Kr. Priegnitz in Mecklenburg (period III, Nordic Bronze Age); (A) the decoration on the ribs is placed after the spirals and (B) the connective dot-lines are punched after the spirals.

The means of creating repetitive patterns can be seen on the collar from Annebjerg Skov, Holbæk Amt on Zealand (period II, Nordic Bronze Age). The starting point in the punch line is clearly visible.

Actions of the right hand:

The end-plate of the Mecklenburg type collar from Lübz, Kr. Parchim (period III, Nordic Bronze Age)

The fact that the physical requirements of crafting are similar today and in prehistory allows us the possibility to correlate specific traces with specific hand actions

The semi-circular imprints are added in the wax model of the collar from Lübz, Kr. Parchim. Due to the fact that the right side is punched deeper into the wax, one could conclude that the craftsman used his left hand to hold the tool and his right hand to place the punch.

The bulges on the disc-pin show distinct, repeated punches and the resulting destructions in hitting direction. The orientation of the crack in the bulge suggests that the direction of the punch came from the right side – ergo, the tool was handled with the left hand.

Disc-pin from Sparow, Kr. Müritz in Mecklenburg and Heinrichswalde in Brandenburg (period III, Nordic Bronze Age).

Actions of the left hand:

Intuitive and unconscious actions:

The clearly visible waves in the decoration of the Pisede type neck collar from Lubmin, Kr. Ostvorpommern in Mecklenburg (period III, Nordic Bronze Age) are the result of an unexpected situation. While cutting the decoration in the ribs, too much material was moved and therefore a smoothing was necessary. This smoothing happened to be in the opposite direction.

Unexpected situations are common to the crafting processes and require intuitive action. The result of such actions in the material culture can be traced in unique patterns like the waves at the collar from Lubmin (A). This intuitive behaviour can also lead to the development of new styles.

The spirals on the Mecklenburg type neck collar from an unknown burial mound in Mecklenburg (period III, Nordic Bronze Age) are of a different kind. Due to the limited space at the sides of the piece, the spirals had to be reduced. For this reason, the end-spirals close differently than those more towards the middle of the pattern. The changing of the spiral form happened as a result of reduced space.

Internalized actions:

Spiral decoration on several ornaments from period II and III (Nordic Bronze Age)

Similar recurrent patterns cannot be explained as simple, adopted actions. They should be seen rather as internalized behaviour dictated by society and mindset. More than 90% of the spirals from period II and III turn counter-clockwise. They are connected with various lines most commonly from the left bottom side to the right top side.

Learned and adopted actions:

The technical way of constructing specific ornamental details like spirals is a learned behaviour. The modern example of master and apprentice cannot be calqued directly to prehistory. However, it shows one possible way in which acquired knowledge is shared. Commonly the learned working sequences were adopted and were subsequently developed and improved.

The extensions at the end of the spiral decoration from the Mecklenburg type neck collar from Weitgendorf II, Kr. Priegnitz in Mecklenburg (period III, Nordic Bronze Age) are clearly visible. These characteristic traces only occur within a specific region.

The smooth grooves are a clear sign of the technique employed to place the spike on the belt disc from Dabel, Kr. Sternberg (Mecklenburg)

The uniformity of the spiral middle on the belt disc from Lava, Frederiksborg Amt on Zealand (period II, Nordic Bronze Age) is a clear evidence for the stamp technique and therefore for a mediated methodology.