

Topic Page: [Bronze Age](#)

Definition: **Bronze Age** from *Philip's Encyclopedia*

Period in human cultural development between the Neolithic period and the discovery of iron-working techniques (the Iron Age). In Mesopotamia, bronze tools were used from c.3200 bc and the Bronze Age lasted until c.1100 bc. In Britain, bronze was used after 2000 bc and iron technology did not become widespread until c.500 bc.

Summary Article: **Bronze Age**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Stage of prehistory and early history when copper and bronze (an alloy of tin and copper) became the first metals worked extensively and used for tools and weapons. One of the classifications of the Danish archaeologist Christian Thomsen's Three Age System, it developed out of the Stone Age and generally preceded the Iron Age. It first began in the Far East and may be dated 5000–1200 BC in the Middle East and about 2000–500 BC in Europe.

Mining and metalworking were the first specialized industries, and the invention of the wheel during this time revolutionized transport.

Agricultural productivity (which began during the New Stone Age, or Neolithic period, about 6000 BC) was transformed by the ox-drawn plough, increasing the size of the population that could be supported by farming.

In some areas, including most of Africa, there was no Bronze Age, and ironworking was introduced directly into the Stone Age economy.

Metalworking The earliest use of bronze has been found in the Far East and was originally assumed to have spread, through diffusion of culture, westwards and throughout Europe. However, absolute dating techniques now suggest that metalworking may have been independently invented in other areas, including the Aegean.

Some regions, such as Denmark, became important manufacturing centres although they had no native copper or tin ores, indicating the importance of long-distance trade in the European Bronze Age. Tin ore is particularly restricted in its distribution – found, for example, in Cornwall, southwestern England; Bohemia, Germany; and Anatolia, Turkey – and must have been carried great distances. The other chief metal used during the Bronze Age was gold, which occurs widely in the pure state and was used for ornament.

Culture In Europe the burials of the Bronze Age peoples have produced a great range of pottery vessels and other objects which provide clues to the way of life and ritual beliefs of the ordinary and the elite. This material can also be used in conjunction with metal artefacts to describe, distinguish, and observe the spread of local cultures, such as that of the Beaker people. In general, Bronze Age society in temperate Europe was based on farming, in which stockrearing continued to play a large part, but the Bronze Age also saw the rise of urbanization in the Middle East and palace economies, such as those of the Minoan civilization and Mycenaean civilization, which were based almost as much on manufacturing and service industries as on the rural hinterland. Interrelationships of cultures joined by

maritime trade routes are important, in particular with regard to the Mediterranean.

The evidence of Bronze Age weapons in graves suggests the symbolic importance as well as the prestige value of such artefacts. Palace economies, such as Knossos on Crete, epitomized organized systems based on hierarchical structure and the trade in prestige goods, sometimes manufactured on site, as evidenced by workshops. The investigation of the Ulu Burun shipwreck off Caş, Turkey, revealed a cargo of metal (copper) ingots, Egyptian faience, unworked ivory, and amphorae among thousands of objects, such as Mesopotamian seals and Egyptian stone scarabs, which may be traced to a source of raw or manufactured material. This complex system may be seen in prestige burials and trade goods in a network of long-distance exchange. Early Bronze Age burial mounds in areas such as Wessex, southern England, were either simple mounds or elaborate forms with ditches and banks, which may differentiate the ruling elite.

images

Bronze Age

Bronze Age dagger

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