Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

BRONZE AGE MAN & WOMAN PH 29

The term 'Stone Age' was used by archaeologists to designate the vast prehistoric time period during which humans used stone for toolmaking. In 1865 John Lubbock subdivided the Stone Age into the Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic periods. These three periods were further subdivided. In reality, the succession of phases differs enormously from one area of the world to another.

The Neolithic (or New Stone Age) is traditionally the last part of the Stone Age. It is thought of as beginning with the start of farming and ending when metal tools became widespread, depending on geographical region. In Great Britain the Neolithic extends from about 4000 BC to 2000 BC.

The Bronze Age is the next period. In Great Britain, the Bronze Age is considered to have been from around 2000 to 700 BC. During this period the techniques for smelting copper and tin from naturally occurring outcroppings of ore and then making tools from the resulting alloy became common.



A surprising amount of clothing has survived from Europe in both the Bronze Age and the Iron Age, particularly in Denmark. This is because the soil conditions there are such that sometimes both the body and the clothes it was wearing have survived. The most famous Danish body found in a bog is that of the Tollund Man (right), who had been hung sometime in the fourth century BC.

Bodies and clothing have survived in other countries too, but in smaller numbers. Perhaps the most famous British example is the Lindow Man who, like the Tollund Man, dates from the Iron Age. The Lindow Man was discovered in 1984 and is on display in the British Museum.



The Lindow Man (left) met a horrific death. He was struck on the top of his head twice with a heavy object, perhaps a narrow bladed axe. He also received a vicious blow in the back perhaps from someone's knee which broke one of his ribs. He had a thin cord tied around his neck which was used to strangle him and break his neck. By now he was probably dead, but then his throat was cut. Finally, he was placed face down in a pond in the bog. There has been a lot of speculation about why the Lindow Man met such a fate, but nothing can be proved.

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The clothes on the two models are based on those found on preserved bodies from Denmark.



The clothes on the female model are the most famous, being copied from those on the 'Egtved Girl'. In 1921 a burial mound at Egtved, Denmark, was excavated. In it was found a completely preserved coffin, and inside lay a 16-18 year old girl about five feet four inches (160cm) tall, slim, with long, loose blonde hair and carefully trimmed nails. For burial she had been laid in the coffin fully dressed on top of a cow-skin. Her upper body was clad in a loose bodice with elbow length sleeves and around her hips she wore a knee length skirt of string. On her braided woollen belt were a large, spiral-decorated bronze disk with a spike and a bronze comb. Small pieces of woollen cloth were wrapped about her feet. She wore bronze bracelets on her wrists. A bundle of rags containing the burned bones of a 5-6 year old child had been placed at the end of the coffin. At the head end there was a small box made of birch-bark containing her hairnet, an awl and a few bronze pins among other things. Before the coffin was closed the girl's body had been covered by a woollen blanket and a cow-skin. On this a bark bucket had been placed, containing a fermented drink, a kind of beer or mead brewed from cranberries and honey. A sprig of flowering yarrow was dropped into the coffin, showing she was buried during the summer. Dendrochronology (tree-ring dating) has shown the burial took place in the year 1370 BC.



Modern full-size copies of the Egtved girl's clothes have been made (see photograph above right).The originals are held in the National Museum in Copenhagen (left). The most puzzling feature is the short skirt, made from vertical strands of string, hanging loosely around the hips and twisted twice around the waist. The vertical strands were decorated in places with bands of tubular bronze or gold ornaments.

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Most clothes worn by females from both the Bronze and Iron Ages that have been recovered include a long, ankle-length skirt. For example, the illustration on the right shows the clothes recovered from the burial mound of Borum Eshøj woman. She had been clothed in a woollen bodice with elbow length sleeves, with her lower body covered by a long, roughly sewn woollen skirt - a much more sensible skirt for the cool climate of Denmark! Around her waist she had a belt on which there was a large ornamental plate and a dagger with a horn hilt. Dendrochronology has shown that this burial took place about 1345 BC. Some have suggested that Egtved Gilr's short skirt was used for rituals perhaps including dancing but no one really knows.

The clothes on the male model are similar to those found on a number of Bronze Age burials found in Denmark.



For example, an oak coffin grave found at Mjuldberg, West Jutland, contained the body of a young man who was buried with his bronze sword in a wooden scabbard. The man was dressed in a 94 cm long jerkin, wound around the body and fastened over the shoulders by leather straps. Around his waist the man had a leather belt held together by a horn button and on his head a round cap. He also wore a knee-length cloak of dark wool. He had leather shoes on his feet. Pieces of material around his ankles protected them from chafing of leather straps which kept his shoes on.



Similarly, an oak coffin found along with that of the Borum Eshøj woman held the body of an old man (right) of sturdy build and about 170cm tall. In his later years he had been afflicted with arthritis. Around his waist the old man wore a loincloth held together by a ribbon. His shoulders were covered by a cloak and on his head he had a rounded cap. His feet were wrapped with small woollen garments that had been some form of stockings. The woollen cloth of which his costume was made was coarse, loosely woven and full of weaving faults. Measurements of the growth rings of the wood of the coffin show that the burial took place around 1353 BC.