The Chalcolithic and Bronze Age in Jersey

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Preface

The archaeology of islands is concentrated, and Jersey is no exception. A rich variety of archaeological remains survive above and below ground in Jersey, along its shoreline, and within its waters.

As a British Crown Dependency outside the United Kingdom and European Union the Island is beyond the reach of national heritage management frameworks and funding but strives to comply with international best practice. In 2022 the Island's first Heritage Strategy charted a course to develop the infrastructure in which archaeology is managed, including legislation, funding, the development of an historic environment record and expert posts to support it as well as an historic environment research framework.

Commissioned by Jersey Heritage and led by Dr Peter Chowne, the framework has been a partnership project involving local experts and international scholars over several years in seminars, discussions and consultation to produce a shared view of the current state of knowledge and the questions which can be asked of our archaeological resource. It comes at a time of growing pressure on those resources through development but also of new opportunities to improve management of this significant but vulnerable aspect of our heritage and identity.

I am delighted to be able to thank Peter, the Advisory Board and Resource Assessment authors and to welcome the publication of the framework, which will be of use to planners, contractors, Jersey Heritage staff, researchers, local groups and a growing number of university partnerships. For all of us it will be a platform for further research, greater understanding, valuing, conservation and enjoyment of our historic environment.

Jonathan Carter
Chief Executive
Jersey Heritage

Introduction

The Research Framework for the Chalcolithic and Bronze Age of Jersey is divided into three principal sections. This introduction summarises the history of research and provides some background on chronology, environment and seafaring capabilities. Second is a Resource Assessment which provides an overview of current knowledge for the Bronze Age of the island; this also involves some new synthesis on our part. It looks in turn at material culture; funerary and ritual evidence; occupation evidence; and food, farming and fields. Third is a Research Agenda and Strategy which presents a series of themed research objectives aimed at addressing current lacunae, resolving some of the key uncertainties, and looking forward to future possibilities.

A variety of published and unpublished resources were drawn upon for the assessment. The great majority of the published information comes from the *Annual Bulletin of the Société Jersiaise*. Unpublished information relates to recently discovered hoards and single metal finds (inf. Peter Chowne, Perry Mesney and Jersey Heritage) and research by the former Société Jersiaise Field Archaeologist, Robert Waterhouse, primarily relating to field systems and associated remains. Jersey's online HER was also consulted.

History of research

Antiquarian interest in archaeological sites in the Channel Islands has been documented from the 17th century onwards but lifted off with the founding of the Société Jersiaise in 1873. This prompted the investigation of a number of megalithic monuments.

Between 1874 and 1883, the Société excavated five sites of Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Bronze Age date under the direction of E.K. Cable, a retired civil engineer, and Rev Bellis: Beauport Dolmen, Ville-ès-Nouaux, La Hougue de Vinde, La Moye Dolmen and Les Cinq Pierres. Some of these monuments were already in a ruinous state prior to their investigation and La Moye and Les Cinques Pierres have now completely disappeared. As is typical of the time, these investigations were undertaken in a manner that compromised the quality of the data recovered and the accuracy of the stratigraphic recording. Of these early investigated sites, Beauport, Ville-ès-Nouaux and La Hougue de Vinde are considered here to have yielded evidence relevant to the period considered here.

After the early 1880s there was a lengthy hiatus before more systematic exploration got underway in the 1910s and 1920s, now no longer focused solely on burial monuments. The sites were mainly in good condition at the time of investigation and included various Neolithic funerary sites, three of which yielded a little Chalcolithic or Bronze Age material: Le Mont Grantez, La Hougue des Géonnais and La Hougue Bie. Other funerary sites regarded here as Chalcolithic or Bronze Age, or possibly so, are the 'Ossuary', La Hougue des Platons and La Hougue des Millais. Also investigated at this time was the cist cemetery of La Motte (Green Island) which has been considered by some to fall within our date bracket. A significant addition was the recognition and investigation of Bronze Age occupation sites. Small investigations took place at Les Blanches Banques, Maîtresse Île in Les Minquiers, and Icho Islet in St Clement's Bay, and these were followed in the 1930s by Major Godfray and Father Burdo's long and thorough campaign of excavation on the multi-period site at Le Pinacle which had been recognised a little earlier. Although their understanding of the stratigraphy and recording methods can now be seen to have been flawed (Patton *et al.* 2001; discussed below), this was a ground-breaking programme which still has few parallels amongst Jersey prehistoric sites.

At the same time Jacquetta Hawkes was undertaking research for the first synthetic monograph on the archaeology of the Bailiwick of Jersey. It was published in 1938, ten years after the monograph on the Bailiwick of Guernsey by T.D. Kendrick. While this two-volume set provided a comprehensive overview of Channel Islands archaeology and remains an invaluable compendium of the evidence then available, it is now approaching a century out of date.

Following the Second World War there was another interlude before excavations were undertaken at the settlement sites of La Moye (I and II) and Les Blanches Banques (again), both in St Brelade, and at the promontory fort of Le Câtel de Rozel, Trinity. These yielded important evidence relating to settlement, enclosure and subsistence practices. Other excavations re-investigated the Beauport 'dolmen' and targeted potentially Bronze Age field systems. Occasionally Chalcolithic or Bronze Age evidence came to light in the course of excavating later sites (e.g. Mont Orgueil). As before, work tended to focus on individual sites that were studied in isolation, although the importance of a wider buried landscape of the period was beginning to be appreciated at Les Blanches Banques. No large developer-led investigations have been undertaken in Jersey to date and this severely limits any consideration of multi-period inhabitation on a landscape scale. In recent decades information on the Bronze Age has however been supplemented by metal-detector finds including a number of bronze hoards and scatters.

The accounts of the archaeology of the Channel Islands by Kendrick and Hawkes were followed in the late 20th century by synthetic publications by David Johnston, Peter Johnston, Barbara Bender (with Robert Caillaud) and Mark Patton (Johnston 1981; 1986; Bender 1986; Patton 1987a, 1993, 1995c, 1997). Patton's publications have done much to further interest in the prehistory of the Channel Islands. He was also responsible for some of the more recent excavations mentioned above. This side of the millennium, Heather Sebire's publication covered both the historic and prehistoric periods in the Channel Islands (Sebire 2005), while David Bukach's doctoral research focused on the Neolithic in the archipelago, as did Duncan Garrow and Fraser Sturt's recent project Stepping Stones in the Sea including excavations at L'Erée in Guernsey (Bukach 2006; Garrow and Sturt 2017). These works have brought the Islands' maritime interactions to the fore for the Neolithic. The nature of connectivity and sea connections in the subsequent Chalcolithic to Bronze Age remains less well-explored, partly due to the more limited evidence available. Wide-ranging research by Driscoll (2011) on the Chalcolithic to Bronze Age of the Channel Islands has been instrumental in providing a broad framework for this period, but has also highlighted the many uncertainties posed by the current evidence.

Any understanding of the Chalcolithic and Bronze Age is hampered by various factors. There was no obvious type-site that attracted early attention, such as megalithic tombs for the Neolithic. The evidence for the period has thus come to light more haphazardly and was sometimes neglected because it was not that of primary concern, as happened to some extent with the later 'urnfield' at Ville-ès-Nouaux (Oliver 1870, 63–65). Moreover, there has been considerable uncertainty over the extent to which material culture in the Channel Islands mirrored that in north-west France or, alternatively, was largely insular in its trajectory. This results in significant chronological ambiguities with repercussions for the dates of sites and the basic chronological framework. It also compounds the problem of disentangling different period evidence when, as is often the case, site taphonomy leads to much re-incorporation of earlier material in later contexts. Another factor is that the few sites that have been discovered and explored enough to determine their character have proved to be diverse; while diversity may simply be due to the small number thus far explored, it does not help with structuring the archaeological record.

Summary of chronological frameworks in Jersey

Past typo-chronological approaches have tended to fit the Channel Islands into external schemes, particularly those developed for north-west France for the obvious reason of geographical proximity. This is understandable given the virtual absence of independent dating for Island sites.[1] While there are clearly important similarities to the French and to some extent the southern British material, some evidence suggests that the islands followed their own trajectories in part. It is thus vital that new research is directed towards creating a bespoke Channel Islands chronology which stands on its own. Until then, the north-west French chronology is most likely to offer the best approximation and the most appropriate terminologies (Fig 1).[2]

There has been no consensus over the chronological span of the period in the Channel Islands. Right at the beginning there is uncertainty as to whether a distinctive Chalcolithic period can really be defined since it is not obvious that there was a discernible break with Late Neolithic cultural traditions (the evidence mainly being in the funerary sphere). Nevertheless, Beaker pottery is fairly well represented on the Islands and the first metal objects appear on the scene. Jersey Bowls are considered by some researchers to be largely contemporary with Beakers and, taken together, these two ceramic categories and certain lithic novelties (barbed-and-tanged arrowheads, stone bracers) constitute a new material culture 'package'. While Patton has seen the Chalcolithic starting as early as c. 2850 BC (Patton 1995c, 64), this was based on early rather imprecise radiocarbon measurements and it is now established that the appearance of Beaker trappings is unlikely to precede 2500 BC in this corner of Europe.[3]

The transition to the Bronze Age is also plagued by fundamental uncertainties, for example, are Jersey Bowls Chalcolithic or Early Bronze Age, or both, or indeed Late Neolithic. The disparate starting dates given for the Bronze Age by Patton (2250 BC) and Bukach (2000 BC) are the result of such uncertainties, the lack of useful radiocarbon dates and the absence of critical associations between diagnostic object and context types. For the Early Bronze Age there are no helpful associations between burials, settlements or pottery and diagnostic Early Bronze Age artefacts such as metalwork or faience beads. In neighbouring regions the beginning of the Early Bronze Age is best dated in Britain, to the 22nd century BC (Needham *et al.* 2017), and it is probably much the same for Armorica where dating evidence is sparser.

At present, internal divisions within the Bronze Age can only be applied with any confidence to bronze metalwork because of its conformity to international type-ranges. Until very recently, the detection of temporal patterns amongst domestic cultural material or categories of site was fraught with difficulty. The date span for the Middle Bronze Age was just as disputed as the Early phase (Briard 1986; Patton

[1] The first good quality date for the period has recently been obtained for a bronze spearhead, reported on below. Otherwise, very few sites have seen any radiocarbon dating and the dates that exist suffer from large standard deviations giving calibrated ranges spanning several centuries; moreover, the determinations are on unidentified charcoal giving the inherent risk of age-offset due to use of mature wood. A small body of radiocarbon dates from paleoenvironmental samples such as recent investigations by Jones *et al.* and Campbell do not directly assist the dating of the cultural sequence (Jones *et al.* 1990; Campbell et al 2001).

[2] Correlations with north-west France and southern Britain are made more complicated by the choice of different horizons to start the *Bronze Final*/Late Bronze Age respectively (see Fig 1). The beginning of the Middle Bronze Age is a complex issue; in much of France it is aligned with central European chronology where the Early/Middle transition (Reinecke A/B) is currently put at c. 1700 BC. North-west France however seems to be broadly synchronised with Britain in terms of major cultural attributes; the proposed start date of 1600 BC may prove to be a little conservative.

[3] There are not many radiocarbon dates for Beaker contexts in north-west France, but the date offered is based on the wider European picture including the transmission of Beaker culture to Britain as late as 2450/2400 BC.

Date (BC)	NW France			S Britain			Date (BC)
	Period	**Main pottery elements**	**Metalwork Assemblage**	**Metalwork Assemblage**	**Main pottery elements**	**Period**	
2500–2150	Chalcolithic	Beakers (+ domestic ware)	Copper	Moel Arthur	Early Beakers (+ domestic ware)	Chalcolithic	2450/2400–2150
2150–1800/1750	Bronze Ancien	*Urnes à décor plastique:* Urns with cordons/ lugs/ arcuate handles; Vases à Anses; Lightly carinated vessels	Keranou/ Kervrazet	Brithdir, Mile Cross	Late Beakers; Food Vessels	Early Bronze Age	2150–1950
			Escalles	Willerby	Food Vessels; Collared Urns		1950–1800/1750
1800/1750–1600			Muids	Arreton	Collared Urns; Biconical Urns; Trevisker Ware		1800/1750–1600
1600–1400	Bronze Moyen	*cf Biconical Urn, Trevisker & D-R Wares:* Urns with cordons/ lugs/ arcuate handles/ *cannelures*; Globular vessels; Tubs	Tréboul	Acton	Biconical Urns (early on); Trevisker Ware; Bucket Urns; Globular Urns; Tubs	Middle Bronze Age	1600–1400
1400–1275			Baux-Ste-Croix	Taunton			1400–1275
1275–1150	Bronze Final		Rosnoën	Penard			1275–1150
1150–1000		*cf Plainware (+ RSFO influence):* Shouldered jars; Carinated bowls; RSFO cups; Assiettes	St Brieuc-des-Iffs	Wilburton	*Plainware:* Shouldered jars; Carinated bowls; Cups	Late Bronze Age	1150–1000
1000–850/800			Vénat/ Plainseau	Blackmoor; Ewart			1000–850/800
850/800–600	Premier Age de Fer	*cf Decorated Ware:* Sharp tripartite profiles; Situla jars; Bowls/cups; Assiettes	Armorican socketed axe	Llyn Fawr	*Decorated Ware:* Sharp tripartite profiles; Situla jars; Bowls/cups	Earliest Iron Age	850/800–600

Figure 1. Overall chronology of the material culture of neighbouring land-masses. Ceramic sequences in particular are simplified

and Finlaison 2001; Sebire 2005). There is however more consensus on the end of the period, around 800 BC, largely based on comparisons with the wider north-west European evidence; new styles of both metalwork and pottery seen in the Channel Islands conform to those seen in the larger landmasses flanking the Channel and define the beginning of the first part of the Iron Age, sometimes called the Earliest Iron Age, c.800–600 BC. Driscoll is the latest researcher to have put forward an overall chronological framework for the Channel Islands (2011, fig. 12.15) but this is bound to be open to considerable debate and revision given the problems outlined. Hence we have refrained in Figure 1 from offering a Channel Islands-specific chronology.

The sea, maritime travel and connectivity

The substantial sea-level rise of the Holocene period was largely complete by the middle of the 3rd millennium BC so the coastline of Jersey was already close to that of today by the start of the Chalcolithic (Keen 1981; Keen 2001, 12; Garrow & Sturt 2017, 10 fig 1.05). Much of the inshore seabed around the west, south and east sides of the island, however, was shallow (Fig 2). One consequence is a broad intertidal zone, another is that whenever the sea level did rise a little more there was greater land loss here than on the north coast. While further loss of land to the sea was small-scale, it can nevertheless be documented, for example, probable later prehistoric ditches were found in the intertidal zone at Le Hurel Slip (Waterhouse, unpublished). Secondary effects of the main, earlier rise and subsequent minor oscillations may be seen in peat growth and/or alluviation in areas just behind the coastline due to backing up effects, as for example at the St Helier Gasworks site (Wedgewood & Mourant 1954). A more significant environmental factor for the Bronze Age was sand blow caused by destabilisation of vegetation cover. Large deposits of blown sand built up to bury previous land surfaces and in some cases engulf standing structures, as at Ville-ès-Nouaux, The Ossuary and La Moye. This was especially a problem in the west of the island where it resulted in large areas of relatively infertile land, but it occurred elsewhere too. Sand-dune areas were a major cause behind the land still unenclosed in 1795 (Hibbs 1986, fig 1). Significant sand blows should not be seen as marking particular chronological horizons (Driscoll 2011, 87); there may nevertheless be temporal oscillations in its likelihood or intensity governed by a combination of climatic and human causation.

Early accounts of the Channel Islands sometimes described them as ‘isolated’, ‘insular’ or ‘detached’. Kendrick postulated that on the one hand the comparative isolation of an island could result in a ‘retardation of cultural progress’ or even ‘a sheer backwardness’, but on the other hand the relative security of an island could lead to ‘accelerated cultural development’ (Kendrick 1928, 3). Islands can also be viewed as fostering open and dynamic systems (e.g. Evans 1973). The proximity of the Channel Islands to north-west France likely encouraged interaction throughout time. Indeed, for Jersey contact could have continued overland during the Mesolithic and earliest Neolithic due to the surviving land-bridge and may never have been lost when the rising tide finally severed the island from its hinterland (Garrow & Sturt 2017, 10 fig 1.05). Such slow, progressive changes are generally coped with by communities even if folk-memory remembered that they had happened.

For all later communities on Jersey, however, the topographic and geographic reality was an island-cum-seascape and the sea had to be negotiated if total isolation was to be avoided. Maritime travel to and from the Channel Islands was not always straightforward and could be fraught with peril; the strength of currents and the presence of sharp rocks fringing the islands created challenges. Specialist knowledge and technical expertise would have been essential to navigate safely. The southern coast of Jersey is subject to strong tides making maritime movement hazardous and difficult to undertake. Conversely, despite its forbidding appearance, the north coast offers a calmer environment and several sheltered harbours suitable for the landing of prehistoric craft. These would have provided protection against storms, particularly the prevailing south-westerlies.

Although the sea can impede the regularity and frequency of island-mainland and inter-island interactions, the technological developments in boat construction documented in north European waters early in the Bronze Age (e.g. Wright 1990; Clark (ed.) 2004; Van der Noort 2006) would have made seagoing a more reliable pursuit. At present the existence of cross-sea contact with and within the Channel Islands can only be surmised from similarities in material culture and site structures to those in other regions. The only possible evidence for waterborne transport is an as yet undated log

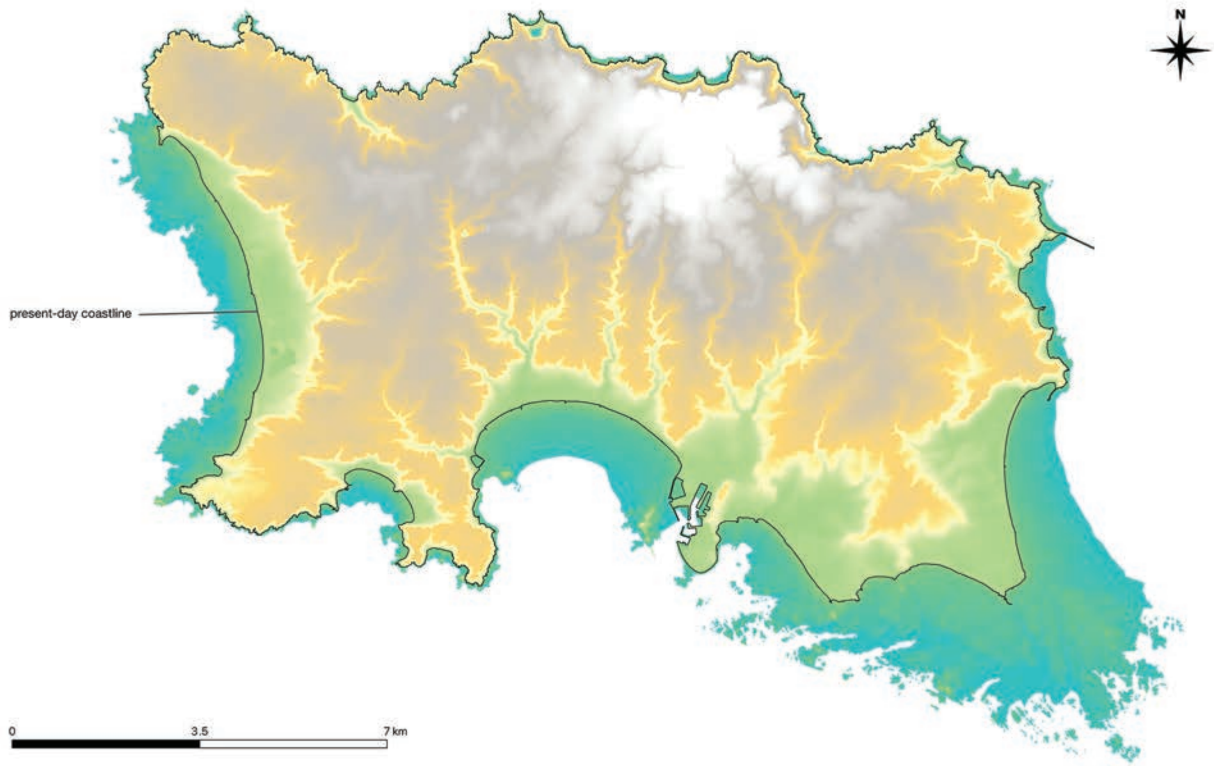

Figure 2. Map of Jersey using Lidar imagery and showing the different character of inshore parts of the surrounding seabed. The coastline shown by a black line is that of the present day which approximates to that of the Chalcolithic and Bronze Age

boat from a marsh in St Peter Port, Guernsey, which happens to be close to a Bronze Age settlement at the Royal Hotel (Sebire 2005, 93–94). The sea has been perceived as a highway linking various land masses (Rainbird 1999, 230), and islands can operate within more expansive networks than landlocked zones (also Needham 2017). The term 'maritory' has been coined to cover specific maritime interaction networks that develop between coastal and island communities, sometimes over large distances (Needham 2009). Such regular connectivity can lead to greater cultural coherence between the participating communities, but need not necessarily do so.