

Bronze Age Boy

My name is Derw, which means Oak and at the moment I'm living in a small round hut with a roof made of reeds very close to the copper mine where all of my family work. We are lucky that there are farms nearby that can provide us with food.

My family

I live with my mother, father, my elder sister and my grandfather who is my father's father.

I love listening to my father telling us the history of our family. We came here, a very long time ago, to this land that's shaped like a long worm or sea serpent stretching into the sea. My father remembers being a small child and being carried here by his parents. Sometimes they travelled by boat but most of the time they walked and walked and walked through many different seasons. Our family has always known the magic of changing stones to metal. My grandfather says that our ancestors were taught the secret by the gods of the Underworld and this is how we know how to mix the green copper with a small amount of tin to make strong and valuable bronze.

Tools and trade

We make so much bronze now that traders and merchants come from far away to buy what we make. When my grandfather first started making beautiful objects from bronze he told me that he made many

axes for people who were settling down here nearer the sea and building new homes. They needed the axes to cut down a lot of trees to make clearings for their new huts. This is good for us because we need a lot of wood when building fires to make bronze. We don't seem to be trading in so many axes now so my father and grandfather are making more long and short knives and shields too, because many want to protect themselves from bad people who want to steal from them. My mother keeps a small knife in her belt at all times. She says that you can't be too careful these days. We also make razors that are very handy for men who want to scrape the hair from their faces.

Overcrowding

Now that more people live in the low lands it's become very crowded and people are starting to argue and fight a lot over land. My father says that we should be making more arrow tips and sharp knives that can be used in battle but my grandfather says that the warriors he knows will never use arrow heads made of bronze because they like their flint ones too much!

Copper mining

I've been a copper miner since I was able to talk. The underground caves are sometimes so big and dark that we have to leave clues for ourselves at each turn or crossroads, like a tower of stones, otherwise we would never find our way out of the maze of tunnels and pathways! We do have large torches made from rushes soaked in animal fat, which we set alight, but when

they go out we sometimes have to feel our way to the surface.

When I first started going underground, my father gave me a sharpened antler and he would push me into the small cracks to hack away at the green copper stone. Now that I am too big to crawl into the small crevices, the family expects me to help with the work of the grown ups.

Cracking the stones

I have learned that when the rock is too hard to be broken up with our hammer stones the best way to get the green copper stone out is to collect a very big pile of wood and shove it against the rock face and then set it alight so that the hard rock becomes very, VERY hot. Once the fire goes out, you then throw lots of cold water over the rock face and the hot rock cracks and sizzles which makes getting the copper out much, much easier.

My mother and her friends then collect the green copper ore stones into large baskets and carry them to the surface. I love helping my mother crush the stone into powder with a large, round stone in a hard stone bowl and then washing the ore with water.

Making bronze

Once we've collected enough green copper powder this is when my grandfather shows off his magic powers by turning the powder into a hard metal.

Now that I am as tall as my grandfather, he has started to teach me how to make the clay kiln that will turn the green copper powder into a hot liquid. My brothers and I take it in turns to squash the bellows to fan the fire in the kiln so that it can stay white-hot for a long time to melt the green powder. Once it's melted, my grandfather adds a tiny bit of tin, which he buys from the trader from the south, to the liquid metal and then once it's all mixed he pours it into a stone or clay mould that could be the shape of a blade or arrow tip or long sword.

He doesn't just work magic with bronze sometimes he'll work with a metal called gold, to make brooches and special cups, so special that only the local tribe leader can drink from them. He once made a gold collar for the tribe leader's wife. Unfortunately she died soon after so we don't see it any more because she was buried with it.

Religion and burial

There was a great procession when she died. We all followed the cart carrying her body to her very own burial chamber on the side of the hill. Part of the way to the chamber was over some very wet and boggy land but luckily a wooden walkway had been built and we could all follow the cart without getting stuck in the mud.

In the evening we had a very big party in the large circle of stones where we asked the gods to take the

tribal leader's wife to the lovely Underworld where she would be well again. The beautiful bronze knife that she used to cut her meat up with was also put in the burial chamber, and my grandfather made that as well. We were proud that she was wearing the golden collar that he'd made from one very small lump of gold. There was lots of roasted meat to eat and we drank a drink made from honey which made my mother giggle a lot when she drank too much of it. It just made me go to sleep! Bronze trumpets were blown and there was a lot of dancing but when the sun had been chased by the moon through the sky and had disappeared, we all stood together in a circle and the wise man of the tribe sacrificed a goat so that the gods would be pleased to see the tribal leader's wife when she arrived in the Underworld.

Cooking

The biggest thing my grandfather has ever been asked to make out of bronze is a cooking pot large enough to make soup or cawl for a whole tribe. My mother has a cooking pot that she hangs over the fire in our hut but usually she cooks in another hut where there's a large square hole in the ground lined with wood. She fills up the hole with water and then she heats up lots of stones on the fire and places them in the water to heat it up. My sister wraps the meat in straw so that it floats when she places it in the hot water to cook.

Moving on

When we have taken all of the copper stone from the caves here my father says that we will move to another place to work and look for a new stone he's heard of that can be changed to metal. I think it's called iron or something.