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Fragmenting the Chieftain : a practice-based study of Early Iron Age Hallstatt C elite burials in the Low Countries

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FRAGMENTING THE CHIEFTAIN



FRAGMENTING THE CHIEFTAIN

A practice-based study of Early Iron Age Hallstatt C
elite burials in the Low Countries

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*This dissertation is dedicated
to my parents Koos and Merrilee and my husband Wouter
who all helped make it possible,
and to my daughter Leena
who did not make it impossible*

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Preface

Several years ago I had the privilege of placing the striking artifacts that make up the Chieftain's grave of Oss, undisputedly one of *the* most iconic finds from Dutch prehistory, into an exhibition case at the National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden. A big bronze bucket known as a *situla*, a curled-up iron sword with a gold-inlaid handle, an iron knife and axe, two iron horse-bits, assorted bronze and iron horse tack decorations, some pins and a few organic fragments of unknown function all had to be carefully placed on little pedestals (Fig. 1). As I was doing this, I found myself trying to visualize how all the bits and bobs had gone together. Where did everything go? Why did *these* objects end up in *this* grave? I then looked for the repairs that are supposedly present on the situla. To my surprise, I could not find them. The 'amateuristic repairs' that allegedly indicate that this bucket was a hand-me-down, used up, second-rate vessel (Verhart/Spies 1993, 80–3), turned out to not exist. This intriguing inconsistency led me to wonder, what else might this famous and extraordinary grave still have to tell? I suppose that this moment could be described as the one where I tipped down the rabbit hole and happily got lost in a world of Hallstatt C elite graves, because interest in the Oss burial quickly leads to interest in others.

Fig. 1 The Chieftain's grave of Oss in the National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden. Photograph by M. Bink © RMO.



The Chieftain's grave of Oss is one of a number of rich and fascinating Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age graves that have been found in the Netherlands and Belgium. All yielded captivating finds that I now wanted to understand. What did these elite graves contain? Who was buried in them? How were the burials created and why? Satisfying answers could not be found in existing publications. The time was deemed right for the present research into these remarkable archeological complexes. A *PhD in the Humanities* (PGW-12-07) grant awarded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) made it possible, and with its publication in the National Museum of Antiquities' *PALMA* series this research has come full circle.