2

Presentation and perception

2.1 Introduction

The lack of written records is often seen as serious handicap when it comes to reconstructing and interpreting the prehistoric past. Written documents can of course be helpful in many ways and shed light on elements of the past that would otherwise remain obscured. But texts themselves are not some autonomous depository of value. In the end, all they are symbols, figures, configurations of shapes on paper, wood or stone that are read, interpreted and given meaning by those who read them. Any 'normal' text is open to a myriad of interpretations. Ironically, those texts that are forged to withstand this shroud of ambiguity, which are carefully written down by lawyers or notaries, are subsequently nearly impossible to read for lay people. Just as texts, objects can carry all sort of different meanings. This chapter introduces some key theoretical concepts that are used throughout this thesis to interpret the role of objects in graves and how they relate to both the individuals they were buried with as well as the wider community.

In addition to texts, human society is full of other symbols, shapes and figures that are meant to be 'read' and convey meaning to others. Some implicitly but others explicitly, for example a wedding ring. Although one might not be able to read, speak or understand Greek, Italian, French or Spanish, the meaning of a gold ring on a *ring finger* can be understood by almost anyone. Some aspects of how objects are perceived may be embedded in their own materiality, but most are reflective of a deep cultural understanding of what objects mean and represent. Objects can have the power to convey all sorts of messages, some of these might be detailed and only understood within a local community or even kin group. Others, however, are widely shared and cross cultural and linguistic boundaries. By no means should such objects be envisaged to represent the exact same meaning or values to each beholder, instead, their power rather lies in being slightly vague and open to (re-)interpretation. On a general level, however, they convey messages and meanings that are widely understood and recognized. The wedding ring and the concept of 'marriage' can be shared and recognized far and wide even though various people (*e.g.* conservatives versus liberals) will have (sometimes radically) different interpretations of the specific details and meaning of a marriage. Nonetheless, the wedding ring and the concept of marriage can be shared and recognized widely and, even if only on the surface, will provide an image of uniformity, of belonging, of a shared cultural idiom.

'Identity' is an infinitely complex matter. What is the *self* or a *person*, what does it mean to be an *individual* or should we speak of *dividuals* (Fowler 2004) when dealing with pre-modern cultures? Many scholars have written books and papers on this subject, but unfortunately hardly any philosopher, anthropologist or sociologist agrees with one another about any of these matters (see Carrithers *et al.* 1985, Jones 2005, and Lindholm 2007 for excellent overviews and introductions). Similar to words like 'ritual' there are about as many definitions as there are researchers studying the concept.[9] In addition, the actual applicability to archaeology is often limited. In-depth treatises on the notion of self and the human condition do not provide a clear understanding of why some people were buried with stone axes while others had copper daggers or amber beads. Archaeologists need to understand and explain patterns and observations coming from the real world. How can patterns seen in the archaeological record be explained in terms of human behaviour? In the end it all comes down to understanding why people do the things they do.

In this context, the work of the sociologist Erving Goffman proved extremely useful, in particular his work on *the presentation of self* (1959). His work did not focus on the existential/philosophical aspects of *self* but rather on how people manipulate themselves and the world around them to create a particular image of themselves while in the presence of others.[10] The aforementioned ring would be a good example of a small aspect of how people can use material objects to help establish a particular image of themselves, in this case that of a husband or wife. Especially for archaeologists, Goffman's work is most useful as it investigated *how* people use material culture (among other things) to manipulate social relations between themselves and others. Particular objects are seen as an extension of the self, used to portray particular types of personhood, and help to facilitate social interaction *between* people. Since Goffman is not a house-hold name in archaeological literature this chapter begins by providing a concise summary on the *presentation of self* and the importance this has in social interaction.[11] It furthermore is explored how individuals integrate into a wider community and how both these concepts are related to the biography of objects.

2.2 The presentation of self

Throughout his book, Goffman (1959) uses the metaphor of theatre to describe social interaction. During social interaction there are always those who perform, *the actors*, and those who observe, *the audience*. The actor tries to convey a particular message, and to do so he 'plays' a particular role. When in the presence of others, we are hardly ever really *ourselves*, if such a thing actually exists. Depending on the

9 In the words of Rosenberg (1986, 1): "*the 'self' stands as a concept foremost in the ranks of confusion. The substitution of related terms such as ego, the proprium, and identity has not dispersed the clouds, mist, and vapors.*"

10 This approach is hence similar to Cohen's (1985) approach to 'community', similarly a term that he describes as "highly resistant to satisfactory definition". Instead he proposes – following Wittgenstein – not to try to define the term but rather explore how it is used (Cohen 1985, 12).

11 Giddens (1984, 69) mentions there has been critique on Goffman's work where it is said that it is highly specific to a Western/American perspective. Although he does mostly use examples of contemporary society, Giddens defends Goffman by stating that his work "holds up a mirror to many worlds, not just to one" (Giddens 1984, 70).

social context we find ourselves in, we *act* in different ways. In this sense Goffman uses a similar approach as Marcel Mauss (1985 [1938]) in his essay on the person and the notion of self. Mauss explains how the word *person* derives from the Latin word *persona*, meaning 'mask'. Being a *person* is not so much related to the individual's idiosyncratic self, but rather the role or *personage* we play in society (see also La Fontaine 1985). While the term *individual* relates to the internal self, the term *person* relates to the social self, our *social identity*[12], it is this side of ourselves that we *show to others* (see Fontijn 2002, 27; Fowler 2004; La Fontaine 1985, 124; Radcliffe-Brown 1959, 193-194; Rosenberg 1986, 9). "*We come into the world as individuals, achieve character, and become persons*" (Park 1950, 249).

As such we *act* differently when in the comfort of our home with family, or at work with colleagues, waiting for the bus among strangers, while in the pub with friends or when presenting a paper at a conference to our academic peers. In part our behaviour is determined by our own desire to actively show a particular side of ourselves in a particular social setting, but even more so our behaviour is determined by what is expected of us (Goffman 1959, 6). The tools or equipment we use during interaction with others are what Goffman (1959, 22) calls '*front*'. The 'front' is the expressive equipment we can employ to establish, alter or manipulate the image we would like to create of ourselves. This 'equipment' or 'front' involves all variables we can control or manipulate during a performance which will have an effect on our presentation to others. As part of the front, Goffman (1959, 23-24) distinguishes between the 'setting' and the 'personal front'. The 'setting' involves all scenic equipment, such as the location, room, general surroundings or 'stage props' we choose for a performance. The 'personal front' is an integral part of the performer and includes such things as body language, facial expressions, speech patterns, sex and age, but also clothing and paraphernalia such as insignia of rank.[13] Depending on the occasion (for example a business meeting, a funeral or a birthday party) we will choose different locations, or different rooms in our house where we want a particular social occasion to take place. We will also select different types of clothing, employ different speech patterns and use or avoid particular facial expressions. As such the front helps to define the situation for the observers. Some parts of a front can be uniquely linked to a particular individual (such as walking with a limp), while other elements can be shared, adopted and employed by others in similar situations, for example wearing formal clothing and avoiding laughter during a funeral. In extreme cases, a front can take over an individual entirely. For example, when someone dresses up like father Christmas: wearing special clothing, adopting a particular behaviour, lowering ones voice are all part of the performance, all part of the front taking over the idiosyncratic self entirely.

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12 Rosenberg (1986, 9) defines *social identity* as the sum of all groups, statuses or categories an individual is recognized as belonging to (male, female, Catholic, Jew, nephew, mother, doctor, lawyer, machinist, democrat, republican, etc.). The term *personal identity* refers to what makes us unique as perceived by society (our name, social security number, finger print). This, however, is not opposed to *social identity*, in fact, our *personal identity* is part of our *social identity*.

13 Goffman's *front* is similar to what Stone (1970, 397) refers to as *appearance*. Stone, however, adds that a large part of the performance, or *discourse*, also can be seen as *appearance* or *front*, for example 'name-dropping' to create a particular image of ourselves.

The front can also be divided in 'appearance' and 'manner'. The 'appearance' can be described to contain static elements of the front that signal the current social position of the performer (wearing formal attire for a ritual gathering, or leisure wear for informal recreation). The 'manner' has more to do with the actual behaviour of the performer (for example acting in a formal aggressive manner to give the impression that one is in charge, or acting in a docile, apologetic manner to give the impression that the performer is expecting to follow the lead of others) (Goffman 1959, 24). The success of a performance is largely based on the coherence between appearance and manner (*i.e.* if you *dress* the part, you have to *act* the part, and *vice versa*). If, for example, someone appears to be of high social status but uses speech-patterns or a dialect indicative of a lower class, his or her deceit is easily detected. In that case appearance and manner contradict each other. This brings us to one of Goffman's most important points: there is an expected consistency between setting, appearance and manner. Such coherence represents an *ideal type* (Goffman 1959, 25). It follows that the more formal an occasion is, the more important it is to adhere to this *ideal* consistency.[14] During an informal presentation to colleagues at work some inconsistencies might be accepted or not even noticed. However, such indiscretions will not be accepted during a highly ritualised gathering when everyone's behaviour is under scrutiny.

Another important aspect of front is that although different fronts are used in different situations, the individual elements a front consist of are hardly ever unique to a specific occasion. A front is usually composed of individual elements that can be used in different situations, albeit in different combinations or configurations. A full suit and tie are worn during a funeral, while at work the tie may not be necessary and on casual Friday perhaps only the jacket is worn to adhere at least a bit to the normally formal standards of office life. According to Goffman (1959, 26), even in specialized or entirely new occasions, the front that is employed is rarely ever new or unique and usually consists of elements that are employed in other – perhaps similar – situations as well. For example, weddings and funerals are occasions of similarly formal and ritual significance (both rites of passage), and men may wear largely the same attire to both occasions (a suit), with only minor differences (often different in different regions/cultures). In the Netherlands for example, during a wedding, men (on the groom's side) might wear a corsage (of multiple flowers), not to be mistaken with a boutonnière (single flower), which can be worn at other formal occasions, including funerals. The generality and even abstractness of such fronts makes them convenient to use, and share. Even if those minor differences may escape uninitiated observers, the abstract standards will allow the observer to at least place the situation in a broad category.[15] Hence, 'stereotypical' thinking requires observers only to be familiar with a small, and hence manageable, vocabulary of fronts (Goffman 1959, 26).

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14 Inconsistencies between appearance and manner are often a source of humour. For example, breaking wind at an inappropriate moment in public. Popular sitcoms on TV often present a continuous series of such inconsistencies. A good example of this is the classic 1990s sitcom 'Seinfeld'.

15 Goffman's concept of *front* (as relating to persons) is surprisingly similar and compatible with Sackett's (1977; 1986) definition of *style* (as relating to material culture). Apart from an object's 'active voice' directly related to its function, it also has a 'passive' voice which conveys style and acts as a signpost or banner advertising the arena in which the functional roles are being performed (Sackett 1977, 370).

This 'stereotypical' thinking not only affects how observers interpret a performance, the performer himself or herself also tends to adhere to these stereotypical expectations and will act/behave accordingly.[16] Hence, particular fronts tend to become institutionalized, a fact in their own right, they become a 'collective representation' (Goffman 1959, 27). This will make them extremely powerful tools in social interactions as they can be used to normalize or standardize social relations. Even individuals who have never met before, perhaps not even speak the same language, can use such fronts and the stereotypical expectations that go with them to act and re-act in a widely understood manner. They will be able to present themselves in such a way that is recognized by the observers, and the observers will be able to respond in such a way as is expected by the performer. When you wear a business suit and approach a stranger with an extended right hand, most of the world's population will know how to respond; by accepting the hand, shaking it, and taking this formal introduction to engage further in social interaction. The potential power of such an act therefore lies in a shared and widespread understanding of certain stereotypical fronts (which thus includes the clothing worn, various attributes, paraphernalia, insignia of rank and associated behaviour).

Although particular fronts may be used, intended, or especially suited for particular social occasions, it is often not so that one unique front is linked to one unique type of social event. The type of occasion will rather impose certain boundaries on what elements of front are deemed appropriate and which are not. Goffman (1966, 7) gives the example of an afternoon social gathering where a woman has the 'freedom to choose' between her various dresses. Although this is considered as freedom of choice, the occasion actually excludes various other items of garment intended for other types of occasions. Likewise, normative behaviour will not trigger a particular response by the audience, it passes unperceived as an event. It is not until someone deviates from the normative that people will take notice of this 'abnormal' behaviour (Goffman 1966, 7). In a way, the social rules and expectations not only dictate how people should behave, but perhaps more importantly, *how they should not.*[17] The more formal the occasion, the more strictly such 'rules' are applied and deviating behaviour is noticed and punished.

Our *ability* and *desire* to conform to these social norms and expectations determines whether we are able to engage others in the same social discourse, whether we stand out or blend in, whether we are us or them, whether we belong.

2.3 Us and them

Where Goffman explores how individuals fit into a community, it is Anthony Cohen who provides an excellent and concise analysis of what constitutes a community and how different communities relate to each other. Similar to the problems described above with the term 'identity', Cohen (1985, 11) introduces the term 'community'

16 Rosenberg (1986, 13) notes that society builds up a set of *social expectations* or stereotypes. People subsequently base their behaviour towards these individuals based on these 'typifications' (different categories of persons, professors, mechanics, lawyers, are treated differently based on their social identity).

17 Crane (2000, 173) cites a particularly illustrative advertisement for business suits in *The New York Times* of 1986 by Hart, Shaffner and Marx using the slogan "The right suit might not get you to places of power. But the wrong suit might not get you anywhere at all".

as one that has been proven "highly resistant to satisfactory definition". He therefore proposes not to try to define the term but rather explore how it is used. He starts with a basic interpretation of the term consisting of two important suggestions: "*that the members of a group of people (a) have something in common with each other, which (b) distinguishes them in a significant way from the members of other putative groups*" (Cohen 1985, 12). Essentially the term 'community' expresses a '*relational*' idea, the opposition between the members of a community to others (Cohen 1985, 12).

It is this *opposition* between members of a community and non-members that largely defines the community. By seeing the *otherness* of outsiders we are suddenly confronted with those elements that bind and define the members of our community. This observation resonates with the argument of Goffman, presented above, who suggested that normative behaviour in a specific social context is to know which elements of front are *not* appropriate. It is by inappropriate behaviour that we stand out. When we attend a funeral dressed in black with a sincere or sad look on our face, we blend in with the rest of the mourners and are possibly not even noticed. If instead we were to enter with a smile on our face and wearing a colourful leisure suit, we would most certainly be noticed. People would be offended by our inability to 'behave normally' and we would most probably be asked to leave.

The difference between the members of a community and others are marked by boundaries. "Boundaries are marked because communities interact in some way or other with entities from which they are, or wish to be, distinguished" (Cohen 1985, 12). Although boundaries may be physical, such as rivers or mountain ranges, others are administrative such as lines on a map, or racial, linguistic or religious. Particularly the latter become increasingly difficult to objectively define and as a consequence may be differently defined by different members of a community. Boundaries between communities, what separates *us* from *them* are largely symbolic in nature, which means that different members of a community will not only attribute different meaning to a boundary, but some boundaries may be even imperceptible to others (Cohen 1985, 13). The 'feeling' of community, of belonging together, is hence based on the perception of its boundaries which themselves only become apparent in the interaction with *others* (Cohen 1985, 13). This is what Cohen refers to in the title of his book as the symbolic constitution of boundaries, as the *symbolic construction of community*. Just like symbolism, community can be partly rooted in clearly definable aspects, but is also open to interpretation and idiosyncratic experience of the individuals that are part of it. The power of symbols or symbolic categories lies not in their ability to merely represent something else, but in their ability to represent meanings which can be different to each individual (also see Stone 1970, 395). Symbols, or categories such as 'love', can be shared and understood between members of a community, but each individual will have slightly different notions of what they mean exactly.

The constitution of a community therefore lies not so much in a real, objective shared common notion, but rather in a perceived common notion (Cohen 1985, 15). Members of a community believe they make similar sense of things. They share the same symbols, but this is not the same as sharing the same meaning. Cohen (1985, 73) gives the example of two Catholics saying 'I believe in God'. By sharing the same vocabulary, they 'think' they understand each other and mean the same thing, but in fact both may hold very different notions on what exactly 'God' is or what 'believes'

actually means. Cohen (1985, 73) continues to remark that a society hence masks the differentiation within itself by using or imposing a common set of symbols.

It is because symbols are 'imprecise', because part of their meaning is subjective, because people can attribute their own meaning to them, that they are so well-suited for social interaction. Because people can speak this 'common' language and behave according to similar customs, people can participate in the 'same' rituals, pray to the 'same' gods, wear the 'same' clothing, etc. (Cohen 1985, 21). Hence, when people interact with each other in a group, by necessity, the meaning of 'the message' has to be simplified, down to a form and generality with which each of the members can identify (Cohen 1985, 35). It is this very process that increases the significance of the message, as continually its basic shared meaning is reaffirmed.

In many ways the work of Cohen can be seen as a direct extension of the work of Goffman. The strategies of individuals to compose a specific front and create a particular image of themselves, will work best among members of the same community, among people who share a similar symbolic idiom and who can understand the complexities and nuances in our performances. It follows that when engaging *others*, the more distant these others are compared to ourselves the more we have to rely on simplified fronts and stereotypical behaviour. Barth (1969, 15) also notes that when people of different cultures interact, the differences between them need to be reduced and a congruence of codes and values needs to be generated. He continues to note that in the context of inter-community encounters, for all the differences that might exist between them, people need to have a basic *set of rules* to engage with one another. This relates to what Goffman (1959) would refer to as an institutionalized front, a collective representation. A basic front that due to its abstractness can be widely shared and used (Goffman 1959, 26). According to Rogers (2003 [1962], 19), homophily (the sharing of common meanings, subcultural language and personal/social characteristics) is directly linked to more effective communication, interaction and the spread of new things and ideas. Barth (1969, 15) notes that this set of rules, governing inter-community interaction, needs not "*extend beyond that which is relevant to the social situations in which they interact … thus insulating parts of the cultures from confrontation and modification*". In the context of interaction, people may thus adopt a particular front/behaviour to facilitate the interaction, but this will also act to insulate other aspects of their lives, which allows the persistence of cultural differences (Barth 1969, 15). Hence, Japanese and European businessmen will adopt a particular front – consisting of a business suit, handshakes, formal behaviour – in the context of a business meeting, this standardized encounter will insulate both parties from their respective cultural differences that would have manifested themselves in other kinds of occasions and have otherwise potentially hindered social inter-community interaction.

It follows that among potentially quite different cultural groups we can expect recurrent and shared elements, particularly those that can be connected to particular types of personal front. Such elements would help enable social interaction between members of a community, but in their most basic forms also between members of different communities. Such elements would help, if only on the surface and in the context of specific types of social interaction, to create the image of a shared cultural idiom, of shared values and a shared understanding of the world. To keep with Goffman's metaphors, this would *help set the stage* for engaging in inter-group social interaction,

for example for making inter-group exchanges of persons, knowledge or goods. It, therefore, can be expected that when we find an abundance of evidence of inter-group social interaction, for example in the form of exotic objects, we can also expect the existence of shared fronts that helped facilitate such interactions, and *vice versa*. Such recurrent and widely spread elements thus should not be seen as evidence of a widely dispersed 'culture', but rather as the elements that helped facilitate the interaction between different 'cultures'. In fact, these fronts might actually have helped to insulate the underlying differences in various communities (Barth 1969).

2.4 The cultural biography of grave goods

Objects are not merely used by people, for example as tools or as props for composing social fronts, objects can also be socio-cultural entities in their own right. Objects, whether man-made or not, can be seen as animate entities in the context of animistic beliefs (see Harvey 2006). Objects can be produced using cosmological knowledge, hence embedding them with spiritual or ancestral powers (for examples, see Akerman *et al.* 2002; Godelier 1990, 144; 1999, 113; Helms 1988, 115; Stout 2002, 704). Objects can acquire meaning by being the subject of gift-exchange and become commensurable with the givers, contain parts of their 'souls' as it were (Godelier 1999; Mauss 2002 [1950]). Objects can be involved in particular historical events and thus become inalienable possessions that act as 'visual substitutes' for history (Gosden and Marshall 1999; Weiner 1985, 224; 1992). Objects, in short, can for a multitude of different reasons be attributed all sorts of different meanings.[18]

In the previous section, the work of Goffman and Cohen was discussed which focussed on the interaction between persons and communities. In this section I would like to discuss the work of Igor Kopytoff (2008 [1986]) on the cultural biography of things. With respect to this, it will not come as a surprise that the examples I mentioned above were presented in a very particular order; from potentially non-man-made objects to the production of artefacts, to objects acquiring meaning as items of exchange or being involved in historical events. Things 'come into this world', whether they are simply found and picked up or produced by humans. They are used, exchanged, lost and found again, inherited, are involved in events and owned by particular persons. Much like how an individual is born, integrates into society to become a person, interacts with others and goes through life, also things are produced, go through a 'life' of their own and acquire meaning along the way. There is thus not such a strict separation between the life of things versus that of persons as is often thought in contemporary Western thinking (Kopytoff 2008, 64).

The idea of objects having biographies, much like persons, is an interesting concept that is especially appealing to archaeologists studying material culture. We can study where the raw materials came from, how these were worked to transform them into artefacts. We can study the technologies involved and by mapping the raw material sources we can reconstruct how they must have travelled through the world. By means of analysing traces of wear and repair, or residues left, it can be studied how objects

18 These subjects have also been extensively discussed in previous publications by the author (see Wentink 2006, 75-85; Wentink 2008; Wentink, Van Gijn and Fontijn 2011).

were used, and by analysing their places of deposition we can study how they were discarded. As such, archaeologists have various methods by which they can trace or reconstruct parts of the life-histories of individual artefacts. Although this is certainly related to the biography of things, it must be stressed, however, that 'life-history' is not synonymous with Kopytoff's use of the term *biography*.

It is important to understand that Kopytoff considers the *cultural biography* of things. This obviously includes an object's life-history; the sequence of events that led from an object's manufacture to its abandonment. However, crucially, the *cultural* biography includes the *cultural* appreciation and expectation of that sequence of events. In addition to the things that *can* happen to a person or an object, there is a cultural understanding of what sort of events or sequences in a life-history are desirable. In any given culture there are expectations of how, *ideally*, the life of a person should unfold. This is what Kopytoff (2008, 66) refers to as *idealized biographies*, what is seen in a culture as a well-lived life. What exactly constituted a 'good life' will vary from culture to culture and include such things as the acquisition of lots of money, having had many friends, being successful in one's job, having been a skilled hunter, having raised many children, etc. Likewise, the biography of things will reflect what events took place in an object's life-history and to what degree this conformed to what was expected and desired within its cultural context. Hence, the focus is not merely on what the 'career' or 'itinerary' of an object has been, but instead on what is considered the ideal career or itinerary for such things.

As an example of such biographical expectations of things in our own culture, Kopytoff (2008, 67) posits that a biography of a painting by Renoir ending up in an incinerator is as tragic as the biography of a person who ends up murdered. It follows that if particular *ideal biographies* for particular types of objects exist, this should translate to *particular patterns*. By studying an object, one can learn about this object's particular life-history. However, by studying groups of similar objects, patterns in their life-histories indicative for particular cultural biographies can be revealed. An example of this is the work of Fontijn (2002) who studied the deposition of prehistoric bronzes. He found clear patterns of particular types of objects being treated in particular ways. For example bronze swords being preferentially deposited in rivers while bronze axes were deposited in swamps. His research therefore transcended the study of individual life-histories of individual objects, and rather unveiled patterns indicative of widespread and long-lived *ideal biographies* of particular categories of objects.

2.5 Concluding remarks

This chapter dealt with the complex ways in which persons present themselves to others in the context of social interaction. Our ability to conform to social norms determines whether we stand out or blend in, whether we can successfully interact with others. As such, this ability is key in the construction of communities, but also enables members of different communities to interact. Material culture can play an important role in interactions, for example by being the subject of exchange, but also in helping to establish the proper social contexts for such interaction, for example as 'stage props' or elements of personal front. For archaeology this means that material culture can hence

be studied as proxies of these social constructs. Particularly the concept of artefact biographies can be helpful in exposing such roles.

The term biography is not without problems or critiques. It must be stressed that the term *biography* should not be confused with *life-history*. Moreover, Hahn and Weiss (2013) have criticized the term *biography* because moments like 'birth' and 'death' (terms used by Kopytoff) are difficult to pinpoint. They instead propose to use the term *itinerary* which would better highlight the "non-linear character of an object's mobility and the subsequent changes in its contexts and roles" (Hahn and Weiss 2013, 8). However, semantics aside, the term *cultural biography* as reflecting an *ideal life* or itinerary of *a class of objects* is still a highly useful concept because such ideals tend to fossilise in the form of particular patterns: particular groups of objects will show specific patterns with respect to how they were made, used and/or deposited. These patterns can be studied by archaeologists and subjected to interpretative frameworks (see Carlin 2018, 173; Fontijn 2002, 24; Wentink 2006a, 23-26). Patterns exist because people in the past did specific things, in a specific manner, for a specific reason.

The basis of this study lies at a 'grassroots' approach of studying the life-histories of individual grave goods. It will be demonstrated that these artefacts' individual itineraries reflect patterned practices, indicative of *idealized cultural biographies* of particular categories of objects. These object biographies are entangled with the biographies of the persons they accompanied in the grave and, in part, are remnants of specific social fronts. By definition both object biographies (Kopytoff 2008) and social fronts (Goffman 1959) are not associated with single individuals but are instead shared with others both in and between communities (Cohen 1985) and reflect widespread notions of personhood, identity and social integration.

> "The nature of man is a single, timeless enigma which has troubled all thinkers in all places. […] The living and the dead all contribute to the same debate. The dead, annoyingly, cannot attend in person but they supply evidence by artifact and in writing, which living interpreters kindly shell out of its archaic language and historical period" (Hollis 1985, 218).