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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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2 Theoretical framework: identifying elites and their graves

This chapter introduces and discusses a number of (theoretical) concepts and issues that are needed to study and understand the Early Iron Age elite burial practice. A workable definition of elites is presented and how we might recognize them archeologically is discussed. Related to this is how ‘chieftains’ graves – acknowledged as a specific kind of elite burial – are defined and how the very richest graves can dominate our understanding of past funerary practices. The burial practice concept and a number of related issues are considered also and practice theory is introduced as this offers a way of translating the study of actions through objects to studies of the social. Lastly, the archeology of culture contact is touched upon as this research also considers the relationship that existed between the Low Countries and the Hallstatt Culture of Central Europe.

2.1 Defining and recognizing elites

As introduced in the previous chapter, in order to understand the elite burial practice it needs to be established how many such graves there are in the Low Countries. To do so this research considers what elites are and how they might be archeologically recognizable in burials. In this section the definition of and criteria for defining elites used in this research are discussed and how they can be recognized in the burials under discussion through the sociology of elite distinction.

2.1.1 Defining elites

Defining ‘elites’ is easier said than done, even though the issue of stratification within society has been much studied, reviewed and published on (*e.g.* Daloz 2010; Drennan *et al.* 2012; Higley 2010; Lopez 2013; Sastre 2011; Williams 2012). Under ‘elite’ in Darvill’s (2002) concise Oxford dictionary of archeology is a referral to stratified society, which is defined as: “A society in which competing groups have unequal access to power and/or resources, some groups being subordinate to others. The uppermost stratum is termed an elite.” In recent theory elites are defined as “actors controlling resources, occupying key positions and relating through power networks” (Lopez 2013, 3; Yamokoski/Dubrow 2008), in which power (in the Weberian sense) “can be achieved through material and/or symbolic resources” (Lopez 2013, 3; Reis/Moore 2005). Elites, however, are not rooted necessarily in strict class distinctions. There are other kinds of social elites, and they do not automatically have greater power. For example modern day elites are not only our political figureheads, but also musicians, movie stars, philanthropists and so forth. This research therefore understands *elites* as categories of people who stand at or near the apex of society (*cf.* Daloz 2010). This terminology has heuristic advantages, as it encompasses all kinds of upper groups, rather than solely the politically powerful.

While I acknowledge that this looser definition still carries with it problems regarding what exactly is understood as an upper group, and does not resolve the concomitant complicated concepts such as social stratification and the contested issue of power, delving into these goes well beyond the scope of this research. In order to answer the research question posed, it suffices to identify (some of) the burials under discussion as elite graves, *i.e.* the burials of exceptional individuals who likely held a high social status. I stress that I use the term elites to describe, not to explain (*cf.* Stockhammer 2012a, 10–1). What, in my opinion, marks (some of) the graves under consideration as elite burials is discussed in the following sections.

2.1.2 Recognizing elites – how they make their status visible

Generally speaking, graves are accepted as the prime source of archeological information on issues of social ranking, and though frequently debated, the principle that “mortuary differences reflect social differences” remains widely accepted and practiced (Drennan *et al.* 2012, 46; *e.g.* Binford 1971; Brown 1981; Carr 1995; Hodder 1982; Parker Pearson 1999; Milcent 2015; Thurston 2012). Even though many of the burials under study are accepted relatively widely as elite burials, in this section I want to show that, for the present study, identifying them as such is based on more than just the extravagance of the burial set or the labor investment that the large funerary monuments represent (even though these are widely accepted signifiers of social differences). It is not only the elaborateness of the graves under discussion and the objects that they contain that indicate they are the final resting places of elites, it is also the nature of the grave goods.

2.1.2.1 The three main social fields of showing distinction

People can distinguish themselves in many different ways, and while social distinction is not restricted to the upper spheres of society, the logics at work at the top tend to be more visible. A person might show his/her status through embodied or external signs of superiority, as well as through indirect signs (Dalož 2010, 2–4). Of these, however, it is really only the external, material signals of elite distinction that might be archeologically recognizable. The relevant feature of elite distinction for this research is that these external signals of social distinction most often manifest materially in specific types of *transport, food and drink consumption* or the sphere of *personal appearance* (Dalož 2010), as these are represented in the traditional chieftains’ graves and Late Bronze–Early Iron Age elite burials more generally (Milcent 2015; Pare 1992; Schuman 2015; Treherne 1995).

Transport

It seems that it is, and has always been, a priority to be able to travel as fast as possible, with as much comfort and style as can be had. This is why vehicles tend to be highly valued and why they feature strongly in competitive display – they were and are more than just means of transport. Vehicles can be an important means of getting attention (Dalož 2010, 72–4), which certainly holds true for the horse-gear and wagons found in the elite burials. They are widely acknowledged as exceptional and attention-grabbing conveyances (Section 6.3; *cf.* Egg 1989; Egg/Pare 1993; Pare 1992).

Food and drink

The consumption of specific (higher-quality) foods and drink, or in certain quantities, always features in social distinction. Not only the consumption of specific special or rare foods can play a role, but likewise the ability to offer these high quality foods to guests is often a major means of distinction (Arnold 1999; Dalož 2010, 77–80; Dietler/Hayden 2001; Knipper *et al.* 2015, 579). Analysis of the Chieftain of Oss’ cremation remains suggests he may have consumed a particularly rich diet (Lemmers *et al.* 2012; Smits/Verhart 1997), and analysis of the slightly later Prince of Glauberg has shown that he consumed a distinctive diet featuring more meat and fish or special types of meat than his contemporaries (Knipper *et al.* 2015, 589). Another way to signal social distinction is the use of special food and drink containers or ways of serving, of which there is ample evidence in both the Low Countries and Hallstatt Culture burials (see Section 6.1).

Personal appearance

Within all social groups aspects of personal appearance can play an important role. These can be material or physical. Material signs include clothing and jewelry. Clothes are not only a way to protect the body, but they also convey meanings and signals (*e.g.* Grömer 2017). They can elicit deference, provoke sexual interest or in other ways reinforce identity (see also Sections 6.5 and C2.7). In addition to showing the conspicuous consumption of the individual wearing the clothes, certain garments also can signal a disassociation from physical work (Dalož 2010, 64–6; Veblen 1994 [1899]). The human body can signal distinction as well through certain physiques, hairstyles or facial hair which may be valued highly. As archeologists we may not find past people’s physical appearance, but we can find the things used to maintain their ideas of beauty. Again, there are many examples of valuable objects used in body care found in the elite burials (*cf.* Dalož 2010, 90; *e.g.* Harding 2008; Treherne 1995).

2.1.3 Conclusion on elites

Although I acknowledge the somewhat paradoxical problem that I had to pre-select graves in order to consider whether they might be elite burials, it would appear that the types of objects found in the Dutch and Belgian burials under study reflect refinement in the three social fields – transport, food and drink, personal appearance – in which distinction generally is expressed. I also believe that the swords would have contributed to and could have reflected a specific kind of personal appearance. Similar to Milcent (2015, 24–7) in his discussion of Atlantic and French elites, in this research the bronze vessels, wagons and horse-gear (and swords) therefore are identified as elite gear, a label also confirmed by their status as ‘exotica’ (especially the (decorated) Mindelheim swords; see Section 6.2.1.2). It is striking though that many of the other types of items identified by Milcent (2015, 24–7) as such are not found in the Dutch and Belgian burials (*i.e.* “large golden jewelry; defensive weapons such as shields and helmets; [...] other feasting gear, notably flesh hooks and rotary spits” or “precision weights and beams from scales; model wagons; musical instruments”).

It should be noted though that while we tend to differentiate between ‘elite burials’ and ‘others’ (see also Section 7.2.2), distinction is more commonly something that takes place within the dominant class, rather than between it and subordinate classes and there are many examples that show that distinction in one of the social fields identified above can jumpstart the ability to conquer other fields of distinction (Daloz 2010, 65–7). It is important to consider that specific prior knowledge is required to properly comprehend most signals of social distinction. Though it is also true that many manifestations of high station might be impressive, even if the viewer does not completely understand them. The point is that distinction strategies only make sense to an audience that is at least somewhat versed in understanding the strategy employed (Daloz 2010, 92; Wells 2008b; see also Section 2.3.4).

2.2 Burials – rituals and practice

As this research seeks to understand a specific burial practice, the following sections discuss how a number of relevant terms, such as grave, burial, burial ritual and burial practice can best be defined so that it is clear what is meant by certain terms. The traditional definition for an Early Iron Age elite burial in the Low Countries, the ‘chieftain’s grave’, is also considered, followed by discussion of how this has in a way hindered our understanding of the burial practice (the problem of the ‘ideal burial’). This section also discusses what burials might reflect – about both the decedent and the mourners. Following this, a number of practical issues relating to the (study of) the

cremation process are addressed as almost all burials under study are cremation graves.

2.2.1 Defining graves and burials, rituals and practice

While the terms *grave* and *burial* are frequently used interchangeably, some authors make a distinction between the two with the latter being the physical act of burying, while the former is the place of burial (McKinley 1997, 130). In this research both terms are used to refer to the result to keep the text readable. During the *burial ritual* or *funerary ritual* the corporeal remains of a deceased individual are disposed of. The ritual can include a range of activities and occupy various timespans, depending how one defines it. For example, does it start when someone dies or when the remains arrive at the burial site? And if a community returns to a burial site years later, is it part of the same ritual? What is included as part of the burial ritual therefore needs to be made explicit.

In this research *burial ritual* is used to refer to the actions taken from the moment someone dies to the activities surrounding the disposal of the physical remains. Burial rituals generally include activities that cannot be recognized archeologically, such as the laying out of the corpse prior to cremation or burial (McKinley 1997, 130; see Sprague 2005, 70–1 for an overview of some examples), and it is important to acknowledge that through artifacts and their archeological contexts we likely see only a fraction of the Late Bronze–Early Iron Age funerary rituals conducted. Moreover, some of the Dutch and Belgian burials and sites reveal activities carried out some time after the actual burying. These are discussed as they relate to the graves that form the focus of this research, to the dead buried in them and to the people who did the burying and grieving. However, these are not deemed part of the actual burial ritual. This is my own, modern distinction and this division may not have been apparent to the prehistoric communities discussed in this research.

The terms *burial practice* or *funerary practice* in this study are more in line with practices as they are described in practice theory, as developed among others by P. Bourdieu (1977) and A. Giddens (1979; 1984). According to practice theory, practices govern the actions of people, practices are made up of actions, and actions are essentially social (Ortner 2006; Schatzki 1996, 90–7). People come to be through practices and through practices they interconnect. Within practices personal viewpoints and actions are structured and brought together. Practices carry considerations, empathies, and intelligibilities. Social order and individuality are the products of practices (Schatzki 1996, 13). In other words, a practice is a series of actions carried out by a single individual, but that series of actions is not defined by reference to that person alone.

They may be composed of a single person's activities, but the life conditions these activities express determine to which practice the behavior belongs (Giddens 1984, 21; Schatzki 1996, 106; 144). People's conditions depend on two things. The first of these is the specific practice they are carrying out at a certain moment. The second is the wider system of practices that carries understandings of life conditions, and which people enact and are confronted with which nurture physical capabilities. So when an individual carries out acts of X, it presupposes a widespread practice of X-ing. People, however, may have varying views of common actions they carry out, as can be observed through differences in their doing (Schatzki 1996, 92–132). The series of actions carried out during a burial ritual are dictated by the wider, overarching system of practices – the rules, guidelines, structure and understandings of the practice – that guide how such actions should be carried out. So when acts of X are carried out during a burial ritual, it indicates a widespread (burial) practice of X-ing.

So in summary, in this research *burial ritual* refers to a specific series of actions in which a person is laid to rest. For example, the burial ritual through which the Chieftain of Oss was laid to rest. *Burial practice* or *funerary practice* refers more to a cultural norm of how to bury. *Grave* and *burial* are used to refer to the result.

2.2.1.1 The 'chieftain's grave' as an archeological type of burial

From their very first discovery centuries ago, a number of Early Iron Age graves have been known as 'chieftains' graves' or 'princely burials', or by similar terms in other languages (Section 1.1; e.g. Holwerda 1934; Kossack 1974; Modderman 1964). They are seen as the final resting places of elites, as showcased by the very words used to describe them. The interpretation of these graves has been based primarily on the ostensible richness of the burial goods and/or the apparent time and effort it would have taken to construct the (generally quite large) funerary monuments. The variation in the richness of grave goods has been taken as evidence that this upper social stratum was not homogeneous but had an internal hierarchy, and that the richly equipped graves therefore can be referred to as elite burials (e.g. Frankenstein/Rowlands 1978; Hessing/Kooi 2005, 644; Roymans 1991, 54).

With regard to Early Iron Age research, the terms 'chieftain's grave' and 'princely burial' (as well as the various translations) not only are used to refer to the exceptional burials found in the Low Countries, they also are used to refer to certain contemporaneous elaborate graves found in the Hallstatt Culture in Central Europe (Fig. 1.1; e.g. Fontijn/Fokkens 2007, 354; Kossack 1974; Krauß 2006; Modderman 1964; Müller 2012). The so-called princely or chieftains' burials from these geographically

distinct areas are both similar and different. In both areas they contain horse-gear and/or wagon components, weaponry, elaborate metal drinking and feasting vessels, tools and ornaments. In the Hallstatt Culture area, however, these terms generally are used to refer to graves where these objects are found intact in large wooden chambers with inhumations (see also Section 7.3). Examples are the *Fürstengräber* of Frankfurt-Stadtwald (Fischer 1979; Willms 2002), Großseibstadt Grab 1 (Kossack 1970), Otzing (Classen *et al.* 2013; Gebhard 2015; Gebhard *et al.* 2016) or Hochdorf (Krauß 1996). In the Low Countries these same objects (or frequently only components thereof) are found in cremation graves known likewise as chieftains' burials or *vorstengraven* in Dutch. Examples are the Chieftains' burials of Oss (-Vorstengraf; Jansen/Fokkens 2007; Modderman 1964) and Rhenen-Koerheuvel (Van Heeringen 1998) or the *Vorstengraf* of Meerlo (Verwers n.d.).

As an archeological type of burial in the Low Countries the chieftains' graves are recognizable through the three-fold set of "weapons, situlae and/or horse-gear" they contain (Fokkens/Jansen 2004, 71–4; Roymans 1991), though it has been debated whether recent finds should be labeled as such (Jansen 2011; Roymans 2011). These rich graves represent a burial practice that differs from the earlier and contemporary urnfield burials which are very poor in grave goods and are perceived as reflecting an egalitarian society (Fontijn/Fokkens 2007, 64; Roymans 1991, 29–30; Roymans/Kortlang 1999; Section 5.4). The chieftains' burials are seen as evidence of a hierarchical society, with the Wijchen grave representing the very top (Hessing/Kooi 2005, 643; Roymans 1991, 54–6).

While the extremes appear clear, it are the graves that fall between the object-poor urnfield graves and the object-rich chieftains' burials such as Oss and Wijchen, that complicate matters. Where do the 'chieftains' graves' end and the 'urnfield burials' begin? In other words, how should graves be categorized that are deemed richer than an urnfield burial, but not rich in the same way as a chieftain's grave? A burial containing pottery, a sword and two iron horse-bits, for example, is known as the "*Vorstengraf* van Meerlo", yet it does not contain a bronze vessel (Verwers n.d.; Chapter C23; Figs. 4.19 and C23.1). The "Chieftain's grave of Rhenen" does not contain a sword (Van Heeringen 1998; Chapter C28; Fig. 4.10). These graves are labeled chieftains' graves, yet do not contain the 'complete' three-fold chiefly set, and there are many more similar examples (see Catalogue). Some authors ascribe value to this supposed incompleteness, when they describe such graves with swords but lacking a bronze vessel as "much simpler" than the Wijchen and Oss burials (e.g. Hessing/Kooi 2005, 644).

There is a discrepancy between the way archeologists define a chieftain's grave and how the term is used. In

the Low Countries there are, in fact, a mere three burials (Court-St-Etienne La Ferme Rouge T.3, Oss-Vorstengraf and Wijchen) that contain horse-gear and/or wagon components, weaponry *and* bronze vessels. There are, however, more than forty graves that contain horse-gear, wagon components, weaponry *or* a bronze vessel, or a combination thereof (see Catalogue). Many of these are known as the ‘Chieftain’s grave of’. Moreover, burials such as those from Court-St-Etienne, Horst-Hegelsom, Limal-Morimoine, Meerlo, Rhenen-Koerheuvel and Someren-Kraayenstark often are referred to in discussions of ‘true’ chieftains’ graves such as Oss-Vorstengraf and Wijchen, as well as vice versa (e.g. Fokkens/Jansen 2004, 71–87; Fontijn/Fokkens 2007; Mariën 1958; Modderman 1964, 57; Pare 1992; Roymans 1991; Van Heeringen 1998, 43; Verwers n.d., 10–2), implying a mental grouping of these graves in the same category, even though explicit characterizations of a chieftain’s grave as an archeological type generally exclude such burials.

In this research I therefore distinguish between the use of *chieftain’s* grave to indicate an archeological type of burial requiring a checklist of object types, and a more intuitive use as a name to describe specific rich Early Iron Age burials. The term *traditional chieftain’s* grave is used to refer to an Early Iron Age burial that contains horse-gear or wagon components, weaponry and drinking vessels. With this use, however, this research is *not* claiming that there was necessarily a conceptual difference between such a grave and others to Early Iron Age people. However, while the burial from Meerlo might not contain the complete diagnostic set of objects, it has been known as the *Vorstengraf* of Meerlo for several decades (Verwers n.d.). For this grave and others like it, the words ‘chieftain’s grave of’ (and its translations) are historically evolved names and this research does not call for a discontinuance of their use. In this dissertation, therefore, when reference is made to a burial as *the Chieftain’s grave of* (with capital ‘C’), the reader should take this as a name rather than as a typological classification. While this research finds it unnecessary (not to mention impractical) to rename established ‘Chieftain’s graves of’ based on their lack of a complete diagnostic set, I do plead that from here on the term should be applied more diligently, or at least with more transparency. If a grave does not contain the set considered diagnostic for a type of burial, then it should not be labeled it as such.

2.2.1.2 The problem of the ‘ideal burial’

In the past the focus on the very richest Early Iron Age burials, *i.e.* the chieftains’ graves, (unconsciously) has colored our understanding of burial practices. This is not only true for this period, but within mortuary studies more generally. The focus is often on the absolutely richest graves, as these are the burials scholars are most

familiar with, and sometimes a mental ideal grave type is created – a (sub) conscious understanding of what a burial ‘should’ be. This kind of thinking has influenced how the chieftains’ graves are viewed and is something this research tries to overcome. For it appears that any Early Iron Age burial found in the Low Countries containing a bronze situla, a sword, horse-gear or wagon components, or any combination thereof, is almost automatically compared to the Oss burial and our image of the Oss Chieftain⁴ as a wagon-riding, feasting elite warrior. This is not surprising as the Chieftain’s grave of Oss was the first scientifically found burial of its kind (in 1933) in the Low Countries. It is also one of the richest graves and yielded one of the most elaborate sets of grave goods. To our modern value system it is excellent and attention grabbing. As such it has become the archetype of what such a burial ‘should’ look like. In the years since its discovery, new finds of graves containing any of the types of objects found in this burial have been compared, either explicitly or implicitly, to the Chieftain’s grave of Oss. A burial found at Rhenen-Koerheuvel in the 1990s was labeled the “Chieftain’s grave of Rhenen” because it contains horse-gear, wagon components, a bronze vessel and an axe, even though the absence of a sword was explicitly noted (Van Heeringen 1998, 85). Once a grave contains a number of elements deemed characteristic of a chieftain’s grave, the absence of other elements is deemed noteworthy, as though it is somehow incomplete.

The perception of a burial in this manner can become a checklist on which elements are marked present or absent. For example, even a burial like Horst-Hegelsom that by comparison is relatively poor in grave goods is compared to Oss because they both have Mindelheim swords (Willems/Groenman-van Waateringe 1988). The Oss burial then in turn is compared to burials like Hochdorf (Krauß 1996), even though the latter dates quite a bit later – again, because that is what our by comparison simple looking burials ‘should’ look like. When a burial does not conform to our understanding or fit into this existing grave typology, an explanation is sought for its deviating nature. For example, when an Early Iron Age inhumation burial with a rich, yet ‘unchieflly’ set of grave goods was found at Uden-Slabroek a few years ago (Jansen *et al.* 2011; Chapter C32), the decedent was labeled an import bride because the grave was deemed not to resemble other Early Iron Age elite burials (Roymans 2011). The ‘foreigner’ argument sometimes is used to explain such individual burials that seem to deviate from the norm, as it is perceived. While there certainly may have been foreigners living and dying in the Early Iron

4 Note that while I use the term ‘Chieftain’ to refer to the individuals buried in graves like the Chieftain’s burial of Oss, I use it as a name, not in the socio-cultural meaning sense of the word.

Age Low Countries, there is a risk to using this as an explanation for (perceived as) deviating burials. A more nuanced understanding of the Dutch and Belgian elite graves can result when one studies the range of burials comprehensively, including the burial practice through which they were created, rather than trying solely to explain why one deviating find does not fit (*cf.* Bourgeois/Van der Vaart-Verschoof 2017).

In short, the notion of the ‘ideal burial’ is a problem because by focusing on what elite graves ‘should’ look like, one loses sight of the actual burials (which is why this research went back to the original data and created the Catalogue). There is no ‘elite grave’ checklist that can be applied universally, though as argued above it would seem that the bronze vessels, weaponry and especially the wagons did play a role in conveying status. When we keep an open mind with regard to idealized grave types and switch our perspective to include the actions taken during the burial ritual, *i.e.* the burial *practices*, a better-rounded understanding can result. This research (also) considers what people did with these objects and the dead to determine what really distinguished them (in death). This is discussed further below.

2.2.2 What studying burial practices can tell us

As stated in the previous Chapter, this research aims to understand the burial practice through which the elite graves were created as burial practices reflect the social world of the people involved in creating a grave, both the dead and the living, and is one of the few archeologically visible practices that can give insight into beliefs about the body, death and the afterlife (*cf.* Rebay-Salisbury 2012, 15). As a social field, funerary ritual is highly suited to a study of social practices, since mortuary practice tends to be a rigidly constructed social sphere, more so than most social interactions. Graves are ultimately the result of a complex combination and interaction of ritual customs and norms that are influenced by the deceased and the social group conducting the funerary ritual (*cf.* Knipper *et al.* 2015, 579; Rebay-Salisbury 2016, Ch. 4; Schuman 2015, 315). Burial practices generally are linked with non-discursive practices and long-standing traditions, the original meaning of which may not even be apparent anymore to the people participating in the burial rituals (Rebay-Salisbury 2012, 15).

In the dialectic between individuals taking part in the burial ritual and the ‘system’, which dictates the actions that should be part of a burial ritual (*i.e.* the practice), the emphasis is on the dictating system. Burial ritual seems to allow for far less individual innovation than most social situations. Time, participants, type, process and execution of the acts associated with a ritual derive from the situation,

which is why they generally follow the same form (Trachsel 2005, 54–5). Individuals with similar *habitus* (in the sense of “internalized collective dispositions”) will behave in similar ways as they “are moved by similar motivators of action” (Stockhammer 2012a, 11). Simply put, during burial rituals things generally are done in a certain way as people remember that that is how it has ‘always been done’, making something the right way of doing it (see also Section 2.2.1). Longstanding traditions guide and justify the actions taken (Rebay-Salisbury 2012, 15). This does not mean that burial practices do not change. For while individuals learn (practices) from the people around them, humans also tend to fiddle and change things (Hodder 2012, 147). People may appear tradition bound (to specific practices), but they also easily give life to new traditions (Hobsbawm/Ranger 1992; Hodder 2012, 147). So it rather depends whether they replicate and reproduce the things and behaviors around them (Hodder 2012). However, when changes are made in the burial practice, justification and explanation for those changes are needed, and the deviant practices have to be discussed and negotiated (Rebay-Salisbury 2012, 15).

Since it is possible to reconstruct series of actions of the elite burial rituals (see Chapter 5), practice theory offers us a way to gain insight into the social motivations that may have been behind those actions. If certain actions and behaviors are represented repeatedly in the graves under study, they could reflect a practice, thereby indicating that there was a set of considerations, customs and so on that guided behavior during these burial rituals (*cf.* Oakeshott 1975, 55–6; Schatzki 1996, 96). Through practice theory it may be possible to gain insight into the social motivations that may have been behind those actions, because it is within practices that people and objects acquire meaning and that the understanding of what things are is established (Schatzki 1996, 112–3; Stockhammer 2012a). The *habitus* of the people involved in creating the elite burials motivated them to act in similar ways, and any similarities, regularities and/or structure perceivable can be interpreted as the realization or enacting of similar world views or identities (Maran/Stockhammer 2012; Stockhammer 2012a, 11).

In short, by reconstructing the actions that took place during the burial rituals through which the various elite graves were created, it might be possible to reconstruct the factors that made up the burial practice. If we can reconstruct the enacted practice, we might also be able to recognize individuality (*cf.* Olivier 1999). This research therefore endeavors to reconstruct the various steps and phases of each burial ritual. Formalization is a key aspect to ‘ritual’ (Trachsel 2005, 54–5), and this makes it likely that various actions were performed repeatedly during the elite burial rituals, increasing the odds that they may be archeologically recognizable.

2.2.3 Cremations and cremating: definitions and practical issues

A key element of the burial practice under study is that, with one exception, they are all (or all appear to be) cremation burials (see Section 7.2). Cremation is not just a means of disposing of the dead. It involves interdependent processes of technological, social and ritual transformation (Oestigaard 1999, 346). It is one of the most powerful techniques of transforming the body after death and breaking it into parts; however, it does not fully destroy the body. The cremated bones, which are left after the corpse has been burned on the funerary pyre, are as real as the physical body had been during life. The manner in which cremation remains and accompanying grave goods were handled can reveal much about the effort expended during and the rituals surrounding the cremation process. The evidence of Bronze and Iron Age funerary practices reveals that cremation remains were important. The manner in which they were treated, as variable as it was, indicates “a recognised connection between the physical remains and the cremated person” (Rebay-Salisbury 2010, 64). This section therefore discusses the technical aspects of cremation and the manner in which cremation may be enacted and experienced.

2.2.3.1 Cremation: the act and the result defined

Cremation is the process by which the dead are purposefully disposed of by means of fire (Darvill 2002, 107; Mays 2010). Archaeologists tend to use ‘cremation’ to refer to a ‘cremation burial’ or ‘cremation grave’. A *cremation*, however, is the burning pyre with corpse and grave goods or offerings on it (Marschall 2011, 13; McKinley 1997, 130). The bone fragments left after the cremation process can be referred to as *cremation remains*. The term cremation (remains) often calls up the image of modern crematoria that reduce a body to ashes (McKinley/Bond 2001, 281). Most people are unaware that prehistoric cremations can result in rather substantial remains (McKinley 1994a, 339; see for example Fig. C26.2), and it is important that we adjust our understanding of cremations to what they were in the past.

2.2.3.2 A cremation burial ritual

Any kind of burial ritual likely included a range of activities that cannot be recognized archeologically, such as the laying out of the corpse prior to cremation or burial (McKinley 1997, 130; Rebay-Salisbury 2016, Ch. 4; Sprague 2005, 70–1). Modern day Hindu cremation rituals in India serve as an example. Following the death of a relative, family members place a basil leaf, clarified butter and a piece of gold in the mouth of the decedent. This is intended to satisfy the deceased’s desire for food and wealth. It is important that the (eldest) son of the

deceased carry the corpse to the pyre site. This is considered a good deed and symbolizes carrying the decedent on the last part of his or her journey on Earth. Family members are expected to wail and cry out loudly. Failure to do so is considered unhealthy and pathological. The family members are not expected to cook and friends and family provide food for twelve days following a death. On the 13th day relatives and friends are provided with a feast. During the feast the bereaved family makes rice balls cooked in milk and feeds them to birds. They call the Atman (soul) of the dead relative, and when the birds do not eat the rice it can cause anxiety for the Atman of the deceased (Gupta 2011, 254–5). These are but a few of the rituals and customs that accompany a modern day Hindu cremation ritual that would not be recognizable archeologically. It is important to acknowledge that through artifacts we see only a fraction of the funeral rituals conducted in the Early Iron Age (see also Section 7.2).

Preparing for a cremation could have taken a significant amount of time, and it is likely that circumstances dictated the ritual sometimes be postponed (*cf.* McKinley 2006, 82; see also Section 7.2.1). Any grave goods that were to be burned on the pyre had to be brought together, perhaps even be made for the occasion (as appears to have been done at Hochdorf for example; Olivier 1999). The objects may have needed some kind of preparation prior to being placed on the pyre. The building of the pyre itself would have required selecting a site and collecting fuel. The manner of construction of the pyre does not seem to have changed much throughout history. The time needed to cremate a corpse on a pyre depends on a variety of factors, such as available fuel, the construction and tending of the pyre, as well as the weather. The placement and posture of the deceased also plays a role. These same factors also influence the efficiency of the cremation (Williams 2004, 274). Experiments indicate that prehistoric cremation rituals probably took roughly ten hours to complete, depending on the circumstances already mentioned (McKinley 1994b, 84). During this process temperatures up to 1200 °C can be reached (Williams 2004, 271), though they can vary drastically within the pyre. The internal ‘workings’ of the pyre and the manner in which it is tended can influence the process significantly (McKinley 1994b).

The actual cremation would have been a visual, aural and olfactory experience for anyone present. Cremation on an open-air pyre is not a quick, clean-cut process. It literally involves fire, blood and guts, and would have assaulted all the senses of the mourners. As the body burns, its insides can become visible as successive layers burn. Any coverings such as shrouds and clothing would burn away first, revealing the body. After this skin, hair and fat would have disappeared, revealing the inner workings of the corpse. Jets of steam may even have sprayed from

the body as bodily liquids evaporated in the heat. While the body burns, bones and muscles can emit cracking and snapping noises. Gases within the body can expand and explode in such a way that the corpse appears to be moaning. These effects of the fire on the body may have been perceived to ‘animate’ the deceased’s corpse, rather than just destroying it (Williams 2004, 271–82). Any mourners watching would remember this fiery spectacle. The cremation itself, however, was generally not the final stage of the burial ritual nor of the handling of the deceased’s corporeal remains (Rebay-Salisbury 2012, 22).

Experiments have shown that the collapse of a pyre is gradual, and that the corpse can remain in anatomical position in the final stage (McKinley 1997, 134). While the pyre cools, the fragmented bones can be visible. The bones of the deceased and any accompanying animals are relatively easy to recognize and retrieve, though complete retrieval does not always seem to have been important in the past (Rebay-Salisbury 2010, 64). The same holds true for any grave goods burned on the pyre. Some kinds of objects may disappear completely when burned, but others would survive in one form or another (see below). This was, however, not a just straightforward, practical activity. It would have been an emotional process as the mourners would have been brought into direct contact with the transformed remains of someone they had known and likely loved (Williams 2004, 278–80). McKinley (1997, 142) argues that the time expended or the number of people involved in the collecting of the remains may reflect the status of the deceased. She emphasizes that ‘status’ in this context should not be taken to indicate power, wealth or social position, but may have resulted from the individuals’ personal popularity. One can almost think of cremation rituals in terms of a *chaîne opératoire*, with the decisions of how to do things at a certain stage perhaps pre-determining certain outcomes later in the process (Rebay-Salisbury 2012, 22; see also Chapters 5 and 7).

2.2.3.3 A word of warning – working with old cremation analyses

The majority of cremation remains from the burials under study do not survive. This is generally because they were never excavated or deposited with museums or depots, but there are also cases where they were and since have been lost. In some instances, like the Chieftain’s burial of Meerlo, they were lost before ever being examined, while in other cases they were analyzed long ago and have since been lost or mixed up, like Court-St-Etienne. It is with regard to the latter that a word of warning is required. Physical anthropological analysis of human cremation remains is a relatively recent specialization that is continuously developing, and it appears that older determinations should not be taken at face value.

Several instances are known of cremation analyses being redone on Dutch and Belgian remains several decades after the initial examination, in which the results differ (e.g. Temmerman 2007, 315–6; Theunissen 1993, 33). Especially any determinations made prior to the 1990s should be treated as suspect. So while past determinations (in cases where new analyses are impossible) are included in the current research, it should be noted that these may be unreliable.

2.2.3.4 Recognizing cremation artifacts

Grave goods can be added to the burial deposit following the cremation process, but they can also be placed on the pyre with the deceased (see also Section 7.2). Certain kinds of grave goods can survive being burned on the pyre, while others will disappear completely. Clothes will burn, while any metal (dress) components can survive to varying degrees. Bone and stone objects can survive, though in burned condition. These kinds of objects that were fired on the pyre are referred to as cremation artifacts (*cf.* Roymans 1990, 219). As already mentioned, temperatures up to 1200 °C can be reached in open-air pyres, although the temperatures within the pyre can vary substantially as a result of a variety of circumstances (Marshall 2011; McKinley 1994b). Under some circumstances the melting point of bronze can be reached. The degree to which a bronze object will melt depends on its specific alloy. Bronze cremation goods therefore can show different degrees of heat-damage, ranging from a slightly bubbly looking surface to being completely melted and distorted (for example Figs. 4.24 and C35.1). On the other hand, it is also possible that temperatures in certain parts of the pyre remain low enough that bronze objects would not appear burned at all. Therefore any grave goods recovered from cremation burials that do not appear affected by heat, may nonetheless have been on the pyre. In contrast, it is unlikely that the melting point of iron (ca. 1500 °C) would ever be reached and iron cremation artifacts therefore probably will appear unaffected. It is important to bear this in mind when examining grave goods and trying to reconstruct their role in the burial ritual.

2.3 Meaningful objects and grave goods

Section 2.2 advocated an approach that focuses on the actions involved in the burial rituals through which the elite graves were created. However this does not mean that the objects that featured in those burial rituals were themselves unimportant or not meaningful. They most likely were very much so (see Chapter 6). The following section discusses how objects can carry meanings and how Kopytoff’s cultural biography model is valuable to the current research in its attempt to distinguish between culturally shared and individual beliefs with regard to

the objects interred as burial goods. Finally what can be learned from the choices made when depositing certain objects as grave goods is discussed.

2.3.1 Objects as meaningful things

In recent years there has been a general return to ‘things’ within archeology and other social sciences and there has been a focus on how society and things co-produce each other (*cf.* Hodder 2012, 1; 15). We shape the material world and are in turn shaped by that material world (Boivin 2008; Hodder 2012). At the same time, however, there has been a movement of scholars trying to distance themselves from the one-sided semiotic or utilitarian approaches to things (Boivin 2008; Hodder 2012, 10; Latour 1993; Renfrew 2004). Objects can be meaningful. This can relate to the fact that the production, use and observation of an object are mental processes as well as physical ones. People connect feelings, memories and ideas with objects, on both a conscious and subconscious level. This cognitive effect that objects evoke can be understood as *meaning* (Fiske 1993, 46; Fontijn 2002; Hodder 1987). The meaning (and function) of objects in this sense are not states but rather processes (Stockhammer 2012a, 13).

Broadly speaking objects can hold two kinds of meaning: the referential and the visual/material. When people associate an object with an idea or a specific concept, it is called its referential meaning (Hodder 1994, 73–4; see also Section 2.3.4.1). Archeologists tend to focus on the referential meaning of objects to such a degree that they lose sight of the fact that objects are more than just the embodiment of ideas (Fontijn 2002, 23). The more intrinsic, and often the more neglected, meaning of an object comes about from the fact that it *is*, its very materiality and the fact that it is perceivable (Fontijn 2002, 23; Tilley 1994, 15–6). This *visual/material* meaning refers to the effect an object can have on a person simply by being perceived. It is an effect that the observer cannot put into words (Fletcher 1989; Fontijn 2002, 23; Wells 2012). The visual/material meanings of objects tend to take a backseat in archeological research to the so-called referential meaning. As Fontijn (2002, 23) puts it:

“An object can mean many things. A sword can be understood in terms of its function (a weapon), but it can also be associated with the paraphernalia of a high social position (its societal meaning). On another level, it can also be associated with more abstract and unbounded notions (Hodder 1986, 124–125): it can, for example, be perceived as ‘sacred’ (Godelier 1999, 123).”

An interesting related concept is Saussure’s classic model of the sign, which in his view is two-parted. He divides the sign into the signifier and the signified, the *signifier* being the form that a sign takes, and the *signified*

being that to which the sign refers (Boivin 2008, 31). Interestingly, the meanings of material symbols tend to be in some way iconic or indexical. Material signs often have a non-arbitrary basis in the material world (Boivin 2008, 41); there is a link “between signifier, signified and lived context” (Hodder 2012, 16). It is in this sense that two horse-bits are interpreted as representing a team of two horses and wagon (Section 6.3). Moreover objects can have both individual and collective meanings. The meaning an object holds for a person can vary from individual to individual. There are, however, also meanings that are associated more collectively with objects, a meaning perceived, understood and shared by all within a social context (Fontijn 2002, 23–4; see also Section 2.3.4.1). For example, a set of horse-bits may refer to deceased’s favorite horses who once wore them, but at the same time the interment of a set of horse-bits was understood more generally or collectively as referencing or symbolizing a wagon. It is this type of meaning that archeologists have the best hope of recognizing. A shared understanding of an object likely will lead to a specific treatment of that type of object being repeated, increasing the odds of it being archeologically recognizable (see also above).

2.3.2 The life of an object, and the role of objects in life

This research considers both the use-lives and the cultural biographies of the objects buried with the Early Iron Age elites, as this could yield insights into why these specific objects ended up in these graves and perhaps whether they were viewed differently in the Hallstatt Culture area than in the Low Countries. According to the concept of the cultural biographies of objects, the ‘life’ of an object resembles the life of a person in many ways. Objects can be imbued with culturally specific meanings and become culturally constructed entities (Kopytoff 1986, 68). With objects, as with people, one can discern a birth, life and death. One might more naturally speak of the production, use and disposal of an object, but the concepts behind the words are the same. As with people, culturally desirable life-paths exist for objects. The life histories of specific objects often follow the same pattern within a particular society (Kopytoff 1986, 66). Within a given society there are certain expectations with regard to what kind of life-path objects should lead, so-called idealized biographies. These often only become apparent to members of the given society when an object is treated in a way at odds with its desirable life-path (Fontijn 2002, 26; see also Section 7.2.3.3). For example, the deposition of swords in rivers during the Late Bronze Age strikes some 21st century Europeans as strange, since in our society such valuable and costly objects never would be thrown away intentionally.

While a cultural biography of objects is a popular concept within archeological studies, for this research I wish to emphasize that it is something different than the use-life of an object. When one studies the production ('birth'), use ('life') and deposition ('death') of a *single* object, this is something different from studying its cultural biography. The cultural biography of objects relates to the way a given society believes that a specific kind or class of objects should be produced, used and deposited. This makes it difficult to determine the cultural biography of an object if one only studies the use-life of a single object. In order to reconstruct the former, information regarding cultural context and use is required. Kopytoff's concept, with regard to the current research, suggests that the objects interred in the Hallstatt Culture burials (or graves with Hallstatt Culture imports) likely had different meanings during the different stages of their use-lives. Olivier (1999, 119) discusses this phenomenon for the artifacts from the Hochdorf burial; they had "particular and different meanings during their manufacture, then their utilization, and finally during their placement in the grave". He argues that the foreign grave goods demonstrate how contextual interpretations are influenced by the cultural or social settings within which these objects were used. Imported Mediterranean artifacts are ascribed different meanings when used in a Greek situation than when they are used in a Hallstatt Culture context.

A similar issue arises when considering the Dutch and Belgian elite burials. Did the people in the Low Countries share a conceptual framework or cosmology with people living in the Hallstatt Culture area? It has been assumed (implicitly) that the Low Countries were not actually part of the 'Hallstatt world' (Fontijn/Fokkens 2007), and this research argues that if this were the case, then one would expect to find that the objects had been treated differently in the Dutch burials than in the Hallstatt Culture ones. One would expect to find different life histories (see also Sections 2.4 and 7.3).

2.3.3 Traveling objects – commodities and inalienable valuables

Many of the artifacts in the Dutch and Belgian burials originate from some distance away, and it is important to acknowledge that objects of similar form do not necessarily hold the same function or meaning in different contexts. Objects with a wide distribution tend to be interpreted as supra-regional identity markers, but we must also consider the social practices and contexts in which they feature (*cf.* Stockhammer 2012a, 32). If certain commodities are circulated widely, they eventually will be localized to generate cultural meanings relevant to the specific context (Appadurai 1986; 1995; Daloz 2010, 137). I return to this in Section 2.4. The significance, importance and/or meaning of an imported objects

does not (solely) derive from its transfer from one place to another, but rather comes from how it was used and contextualized. By their "integration into discourses and practices, new frameworks of meaning were created conforming neither with what had existed in the receiving society nor in the area of origin of the object" (Maran/Stockhammer 2012, 1). This is not to say that the manner in which the objects found in the elite burials made the trip to the Low Countries would not have influenced how these objects were seen and understood. If they were exchanged as gifts, they would have become infused in a way with their previous owners and become personified. In such gift-exchange their purpose is to create, influence or maintain social relations, and the objects are inalienable (Weiner 1992; see also Section 7.2.1.8).

2.3.4 Perceiving objects

The objects interred in the Early Iron Age elite burials, and in particular what they can tell us about Early Iron Age burial practices and society, are the main focus of this research. Through the detailed study of the grave goods information can be gleaned regarding the production, use and deposition of these objects. When we study archeological artifacts in brightly lit museums, often under magnification, we have to remember that in many cases the objects were never (made to be) used or perceived under such ideal circumstances. Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that the manner in which we perceive sights and images today is very different from the way Early Iron Age people did. Humans learn to perceive and comprehend images from infancy through exposure to them. Not only does the human brain have to learn to understand images, it also has to learn to perceive them as it are not our eyes that see but our brains. Our brains select what we see and focus on and to do this they rely on stored memories and on our previous experiences. Our world today is overrun with man-made sights and images, while during the Early Iron Age these were rare. Because of this our brains act differently from Early Iron Age ones (Wells 2008b, 13–29) and we must factor in how people would have perceived the objects that ended up in burials.

2.3.4.1 Degrees of visibility and understanding

Perception is dependent on the distance between the viewer and the object or image that is being observed. Understanding what one perceives is dependent on prior knowledge. My necklace serves as a modern example (Fig. 2.1). From quite a distance, say at least 10 m, one can see that I am wearing a silver necklace. A viewer, however, has to get physically close to observe that my pendant has a design made up of multiple small spheres. With our modern sense of personal space, there are few who actually get close enough to see the detailed design. You



Fig. 2.1 A silver necklace with a Zeeuws knopje as a pendant.

may say that access to that level of detail is the privilege of those that are metaphorically and therefore literally, close to me. While we cannot know what constituted personal space during the Iron Age, it seems plausible that different people would have had different kinds of access to certain objects or images, especially with regard to things worn on the body (Grömer 2017; Wells 2008b). Some individuals of the community may have been permitted to view certain figures only from afar, while others were allowed closer access and therefore were able to examine details (Wells 2008b, 60). As with lighting, this is something to take into account when examining artifacts up close or magnified, or when we study detailed photographs.

There also is a difference between seeing and understanding an object. My necklace, for example, is known as a *Zeeuws knopje*, a design from the traditional dress of the Dutch province of Zeeland. While appreciated for its attractive visual qualities by my American relatives, they do not understand it as originally part of the traditional costume of Zeeland and therefore a piece of Dutch heritage (until I explain it to them). To many of my Dutch family and friends the (unconscious) realization that it is a *Zeeuws knopje* is part of the way they perceive it. It is part of our cultural knowledge and therefore part of our perception. Most of us see a *Zeeuws knopje*, not just a pretty silver pendant. Beyond this cultural recognition of the necklace, only those who know me personally know that it has added significance for me because it once belonged to my mother-in-law. These

kinds of factors need to be taken into account when studying archeological artifacts. The distance to an object as well as prior (cultural) knowledge strongly affect not only *how* but also *what* we perceive.

The wagon from the Wijchen burial, for example, is nowadays famous for its axle-pins with Etruscan-style anthropomorphic protomes (Fig. 4.12). What the close-up drawings and pictures often obscure, however, is that these little heads measure barely a centimeter. We may assume that in the Early Iron Age many people were able to see the wagon of Wijchen from a distance, and that the bronze axle-caps and pins (as well as the other bronze wagon decorations) would have shined brightly and been quite noticeable (see also Section 6.3). However, one would have had to get extremely close to the wagon to be able to see the detailed little heads. We also might question whether the people living in the Early Iron Age Low Countries would have been able to identify those little heads as ‘Etruscan-inspired’, since this would require rather specific prior knowledge. They may have perceived them merely as foreign or other (see also Section 2.3.3).

As archeologists studying intricately made objects we can get caught up in discussions of detail features. Continuing with the Wijchen example, one of these axle-pins has heads that have different eyes, noses and ears than the other three. This observation has sparked discussion of whether this one axle-pin perhaps served as the inspiration for the other three, or that perhaps one of the original pins broke and was replaced with the new and different one (Pare 1992; Van der Vaart 2011). While this is an interesting observation to us in considering where these pins were made and whether the deviant one was inspiration for the other three or a local attempt at recreation (Section C35.2), most Iron Age viewers of the wagon likely would not have been able to see this difference, let alone consciously note it. When studying objects we must therefore bear in mind that there are different degrees of visibility and that there is also a difference between seeing and understanding.

2.3.4.2 Perceiving with all senses

The previous section discussed human visual perception with regard to studying archeological artifacts and stressed the importance of certain universal characteristics of human vision and perception. This section emphasizes that we also should try and translate our other senses onto the past. If we take, for example, the Wijchen wagon again, there is no doubt that the axle-pins with the many dangling rings would have jingled audibly. Even if you had your back turned, the very noise of this wagon moving would draw in your attention. When we try and envision how objects were perceived, whether visually or audibly, through touch, smell or taste, the sterile artifacts come alive. In this way very obvious facts can present themselves

that otherwise would go unnoticed (for example that the axle pins would have jingled and attracted attention when the wagon moved). Objects, however, may well be perceived differently during a burial ritual than during use in life. The Early Iron Age elite burial rituals were not everyday things. We need to bear in mind that these were truly exceptional events and that this special setting may have affected perception.

2.4 Archeology of culture contact

This research argues that in order to understand why the elites were buried the way they were, we have to understand what and who they were in life. One aspect of this is to consider how these elites featured in their local society and in the European network, in particular how the Low Countries (elite) may have interacted and connected with the parts of Europe from which they obtained the (majority of) the objects interred as grave goods and how these were treated in their area of origin. This section therefore considers the theory of culture contact, relying in particular on studies of appropriation (e.g. Hahn 2004; 2005; Hahn/Weis 2013; Stockhammer 2012a; 2012b) as these offer research avenues for understanding the contact and long-distance interaction that the burials of the Low Countries reflect.

2.4.1 Appropriation and entanglement

When people encounter new or foreign objects they can choose to integrate them into their lives and world. When objects are inserted into new contexts, for example when foreign goods are appropriated, the complex interaction between humans and objects becomes visible as their potential is explored and “translated into local social practices and world views” (Stockhammer 2012a, 13). Doing so triggers the making of unconscious and conscious decisions that are strongly influenced and determined by the foreign objects. This process can be

referred to as entanglement (e.g. Stockhammer 2012ab; see also Hodder 2012) or appropriation (e.g. Hahn 2004) and “primarily struggles to create a structured handling of the new or foreign by modifying the object’s context” (Stockhammer 2012a, 16). While the materiality of the object (generally) does not change, the relationship to the objects does.

Hahn (2004, 218–24) differentiates four aspects to this process, which are entangled and happen simultaneously: appropriation, objectification, incorporation and transformation. *Appropriation* is the process by which an object goes from being a commodity to an (inalienable) personal possession (Hahn 2004, 220; Stockhammer 2012a, 14; see also Section 2.3.3). The ascribing of an item into an existing grouping or kind of own objects is then the *objectification* of it (Hahn 2004, 220–1; or *objectivisation*; Stockhammer 2012a, 15), involving also the attribution of a specific meaning. This differs from ‘reinterpretation’ as this requires prior knowledge of the foreign function (Stockhammer 2012a, 15; 31). The third aspect, *incorporation*, involves acquiring the competence to handle and interact with objects in the ‘correct’ way (Hahn 2004a, 221–2; Stockhammer 2012a, 15). The result of appropriation, *transformation*, involves the transformation and integration of the object into the appropriating society (Hahn 2004, 222–4; 2005, 107; Stockhammer 2012a, 15). The object now has local meaning(s) and only to a limited extent is perceived as ‘foreign’ (Hahn 2004, 222). This does not mean that the provenance of the object is negated. In many societies objects simultaneously are seen as global goods and locally defined (Hahn 2004, 222). As noted also by Stockhammer (2012a, 15), some of the aspects of appropriation generally will not be archeologically visible, but it does provide a framework for understanding the “the integration of an object into existing social practices” that this research argues the elite burials reflect (see Section 7.3).