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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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## C3 Revealing restorations

*This chapter is dedicated to Jo Kempkens (09.02.1949 – 07.10.2016), who helped me see that conservation starts in the field and analysis starts during conservation.*

Most of the burials in the dataset, in particular the more elaborate Chieftains' burials, were discovered at least several decades ago, sometimes even several centuries ago. Since then most have been published several times, and more often than not the artifacts also have been (heavily) restored. In this section I stress the importance of not only studying the objects as they appear today, but also considering any and all information available regarding their post-excavation appearance in the past. Rare cases where restoration history was documented can provide interesting insights, such as with the Chieftain's burial of Oss, while in other cases, new restoration work and the collaboration of restorer and researcher can reveal new information, such as happened with the sword from Wijchen (see below). Many of the objects that form the focus of this research have changed significantly in appearance since their excavation. The reasons for these changes are diverse and range from various forms of human intervention to natural degradation. A common factor is developing archeological insights which are reflected in the restoration work conducted. Another important factor is the developing skills of restorers. New techniques, knowledge and experience have made new approaches possible. The now common use of X-rays for example is a significant improvement. The changing ethics that dictate restoration work likewise have played a role. In the past, for example, it was common practice to fill in missing pieces and make fragmented objects look like new (as may be the case with a number of finds from Court-St-Etienne La Ferme Rouge T.3, see below). Whole pots were recreated from a few sherds, or a few corroded metal fragments were shaped into a complete sword. The eventual shape and appearance of these heavily restored objects were dictated by the understanding and ideas of the time. Nowadays it is common for restorers to remove old additions and make any new restoration work visible and reversible. These objects may appear less attractive than the wholly reconstructed objects of the past, but they often allow for a better understanding of the actual artifact.

In short, it is important that when examining and analyzing objects one bears in mind that the object one is looking at could be nothing like the artifact it was when excavated or even when it was deposited. This makes it harder to understand the object as it was used in life or the object deposited. Trying to recognize restoration work is key, and if available, one should always study restoration reports. Older discoveries also may have degraded since their excavation, which is yet another reason to always consider old notes, depictions and descriptions wherever possible. In other cases new restoration work as well as the expertise of the restorer can offer valuable insights. The value of this approach is illustrated with three case studies below. They were selected as they are the best examples in the Catalogue of how restoration (history) can change and influence the appearance and understanding of archeological objects and complexes. Where the restoration history of the Chieftain's grave of Oss allowed for a detailed reconstruction of part of the burial ritual, restoration work on the sword of Wijchen conducted for the present research revealed unknown details. While Court-St-Etienne La Ferme Rouge T.3 shows the value of considering old depictions.

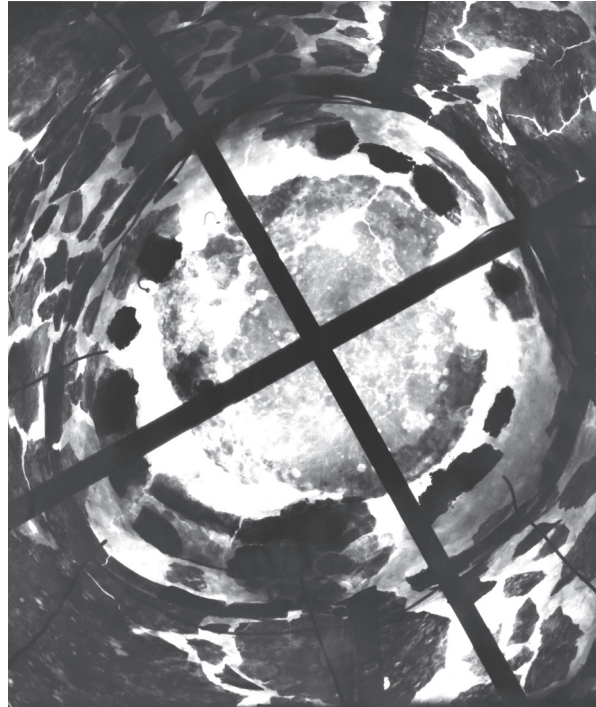


Fig. C3.1 The bronze vessel of Oss mounted on a metal and plaster frame as it appeared after restoration in the 1930s (left) and an X-ray of the vessel taken from above showing the frame upon which the bronze fragments were mounted. Photographs ©RMO.

### C3.1 Restoring the Chieftain's grave of Oss

The Chieftain's grave of Oss is not only one of the most iconic archeological finds from Dutch prehistory, it is also one of the most valuable sources of information for the present research. Its extensive research history and in particular how it was treated by past restorers and researchers allow for a detailed reconstruction of the burial ritual (see Section C26.4). Yet at the same time its research history makes it one of the most complex datasets examined in this work. There are numerous publications, and the very artifacts, as well as our understanding of this burial have changed substantially in the 80 years since its excavation (discussed below). This complexity made the normally straightforward task of creating an inventory of the grave goods quite a challenge (see Section C26.1). The Chieftain of Oss' bronze bucket and its contents have been restored *three* times and researched and re-published even more (e.g. Fokkens *et al.* 2012; Fokkens/Jansen 2004; Holwerda 1934; Jansen/Fokkens 2007; Modderman 1964). The first restoration in 1933–'34 resulted in 21 inventory numbers listed as encompassing the Chieftain's burial of Oss. In the 1960s, and again in the 1990s, more restoration work took place on the material from Oss, not only changing the appearance of objects but also revealing new ones. Heavily corroded artifacts were cleaned, and fragments were restored into single or completely different objects. A 'lump of rust' yielded unknown objects both times.

In a way, each restoration resulted in a new Chieftain's burial of Oss. During the various restorations artifacts have been altered, combined and occasionally given new or re-cycled inventory numbers. It is only by studying the (unpublished) restoration report (Kempkens/Lupak 1993a) and the actual artifacts as well as the works by Holwerda (1934) and Modderman (1964) that an inventory could be created (see also App. CA2). This section highlights how not only the physical finds from the Chieftain's grave of Oss, but also the interpretation of the artifacts and the whole complex have changed in the last 80 years, and how these changes are in part the result of choices made during restorations. First, the three major restorations are described, and an overview given of the objects that were known at the time and how they were viewed.

#### C3.1.1 Restoration 1933–'34

Following its discovery the situla and its content were block-lifted and brought back to the National Museum of Antiquities (RMO) in Leiden (see Section C26.1 for more details). Once there the museum restorer, D. Versloot, uncovered and removed the objects and cremation remains from the situla. He managed to reconstruct the fragmented situla by mounting the pieces on a metal and plaster model (Holwerda 1934, 39). Figure C3.1 shows how this manner of restoration strongly influenced the appearance of the bucket, compared to how it was restored

in the 1990s (see below). With regard to the contents of the bucket, Holwerda mentions, almost in passing, the burned bone material and two large fragments of daggers or small swords, two oval bronzes, a bronze cross-shaped piece, three small solid bronze rings, a whetstone and fragments of cloth, probably deriving from a piece of clothing. Holwerda (1934, 39–40) seems to consider these finds to be of comparatively little importance. The main focus is clearly the sword, which was uncovered in six pieces.

### C3.1.2 Restoration 1963

In the 1960s the finds from the Chieftain's grave of Oss came under the attention of P.J.R. Modderman because of a study he was conducting into a similar find from Wijchen (see Chapter C35). While studying the artifacts from this special grave, Modderman (1964, 57) came to realize that Holwerda's description of this find had become outdated and that a new one was needed.

From a picture he concluded that the situla was found askew, which explained the oval mouth of the situla (Modderman 1964, 57; see also Fig. 4.8). The weight of the earth above it had distorted its shape. When he re-examined the finds from Oss, the rusty lump known by the inventory number *k 1933/7.10* spiked his curiosity. Though Modderman was not sure what everything was, he could tell the lump consisted of all kinds of iron rings and things. These objects were taken to the laboratory of the State Service for Archaeological Investigations in Amersfoort. The chief of the laboratory, J. Ypey, first reconstructed the broken lump and then partially cleaned it (Modderman 1964, 57). As a result of this process several new artifacts were excavated some 30 years after they had come out of the ground.

These 'new' artifacts included an iron socketed axe and two 'knives' (which today are interpreted as razors). Two objects made of two separate bronze cones joined by an iron pin also were found. Modderman thought these might be dress-pins, but could not give a definite interpretation. He took the tang-end of an iron knife to be an entirely new knife, but during the next restoration this piece would turn out to belong to the knife tip already 'found' in the 1930s (see below). Modderman (1964) could give no explanation as to the function of an iron rod with a rounded cross-section, or to an iron rod with a knob and an eye (these would be restored into what are today known as two matching toggles). The uncovering of two iron bits with cheek-snaffles was one of the more important discoveries made during this restoration. Though in many pieces, of which some were not recognized as belonging to the bits, this discovery added an entirely new category of finds to the Chieftain's assemblage: horse-gear. The eight iron rings unearthed from the rusty lump probably also belonged to the horse tack.



Fig. C3.2 The Chieftain's burial of Oss as it appeared following the 1960s restoration. Note the now identifiable, but not yet complete horse-bits. Photograph ©RMO.

### C3.1.3 Restoration 1992–'93

In 1992 the RMO decided to once again have the finds from the Chieftain of Oss restored. They were still a crowd puller, and the find complex was to be preserved and restored for the opening of the renewed exhibit at the Museum (Fokkens/Jansen 2004, 54). The artifacts were in quite poor condition, and J. Kempkens spent a year and a half on the Chieftains' grave goods (Kempkens/Lupak 1993a). This was an extremely complex process. Certain finds had to be stabilized and almost all required extensive cleaning. During the restoration process it was discovered that several artifacts were in multiple pieces, with fragments sometimes rusted onto other artifacts. Several objects that Modderman had interpreted as separate artifacts turned out to belong to single pieces. So not only did the finds require a lot of restoration work to make them more presentable to the public, it was also quite a puzzle. During this restoration process the 'rusty lump' that had so interested Modderman yielded yet more finds, such as another, and this time intact, dress-pin. Several iron rings were reconstructed from loose pieces. A mass of iron rings, though already described by Modderman, looks quite different now that the broken pieces have been supplemented (Fig. C3.3). The cleaning process also revealed the presence of an iron rod with a flattened end

and two bronze hemispherical sheet-knobs. An object described by Modderman as an iron rod turned out to be a toggle, matching the broken piece already described by Modderman. It is striking though how different the object described by Modderman looks from the now restored toggle. This demonstrates how influential restoration work can be. Another example of this is the reconstruction of the two horse-bits from the cheek-snaffles and several loose pieces that according to Modderman (1964, 60) could not be part of the same object.

Certain finds also 'disappeared' during this restoration. The iron knife with a sharp edge and a blunt back on the straight side and Modderman's tanged end of a knife were restored into a single curved knife. However, the best-known example of this is the object that was interpreted as another knife or second sword for 60 years, but which turned out to be a part of the Mindelheim sword. By recognizing that the fragment interpreted by Modderman as the tip of the sword was in fact a 'middle' piece, and refitting the real tip, 26 cm was added to the sword (Fig. C26.4). It also put an end to the idea that the Chieftain of Oss might have had two swords (though reference to multiple weapons is still made in some later articles, such as Lanting/Van der Plicht 2001/2, 173).

Understanding the history of the finds of the Chieftain's grave of Oss, post-excavation, is complicated by the 're-use' of inventory numbers after the restoration by Kempkens. When separate pieces were restored into a single object, 'old' numbers were re-used for 'new' objects. For example, Modderman's artifact known as *k 1933/7.10c* turned out to be part of a knife known as *k 1933/7.9*. A newly discovered pin then was given the number *k 1933/7.10c*. And to make things even more complicated, several mistakes were made during the numbering process at the RMO when the museum restorer wrote the inventory numbers on the physical artifacts. For example, the pin that should have had the number *k 1933/7.10c*, is *k 1933/7.10a*. For more details on these numbering problems, see Appendix CA2.

### C3.1.4 Conclusion: the Chieftain's grave of Oss

In summary, during the 80 years since it was excavated the Chieftain's grave of Oss has changed in appearance and composition on several occasions. The first restoration in 1933 turned a plaster block filled with rust into a chieftain's burial, complete with exotic import goods. The second one in 1963 added horse-gear to the grave goods of our Dutch Chieftain; again changing the way the burial was seen and interpreted. The most radical physical change, however, took place in 1993. From an impressive but unattractive burial, the Chieftain's grave was transformed into the magnificent and shiny affair it

is today. A few years ago the inventory of the grave was changed again with the 'discovery' of another iron ring fragment and bronze sheet-knob.

During the past 80 years the tally of artifacts in the Chieftain's grave has been raised from some 30 finds known in 1933, to over 50 finds today. As stated above, this section is the result of a research initially started with the relatively simple goal of compiling a complete inventory of the Chieftain's burial from Oss. It, however, soon became clear that making such an inventory was easier said than done. Some inconsistencies in numbering were noted while comparing Modderman's findings with Kempkens' restoration report, which led to a more extensive examination of all available documentation. Simply trying to understand 'which object was which' required detailed study of the transformations of certain finds during the various restorations. This brought to the fore how restoration work can color perception of an archeological find.

Most who study the Chieftain's grave of Oss know that the burial assemblage we see today is for a large part the result of extensive restoration work. The majority of the finds are reconstructed at least partially, from the bronze bucket to the simple iron rings. For example, if one looks at the before and after pictures of the conglomeration of iron rings or *Tutulus*, the difference is striking (Fig. C3.3). I stress this because researchers can ascribe value to a feature of an object, which can (strongly) influence the overall interpretation of the object. For example, when a number of Hallstatt culture scholars gathered in Leiden for a workshop in 2010, the *Tutulus* from Oss was discussed. It was postulated that the raised direction of the rings on it indicated that it probably was made locally, as the Hallstatt Culture *Tutuli* found in Central Europe have horizontal rings. However, the restoration history of this object shows that these rings are fills, and their direction may not be completely accurate (Fig. 3.3).

A different aspect of the same problem are the 'unattractive' finds. There are several of these in the inventory of the Chieftain's burial that are so poorly known that if one does not go through the actual drawers in the depot, one might not even know they exist because they had never been published. A striking example of this is a ring fragment and bronze stud found in the depot in 2011 which was published in 2012 (Fokkens *et al.* 2012). In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that when one works with (old) discoveries like the Chieftain's grave of Oss, the finds you see can be influenced strongly by the way they have been restored. This burial is also an excellent example of how not only individual artifacts, but also a burial complex as a whole and even more so our understanding of it can change radically after it has been excavated.

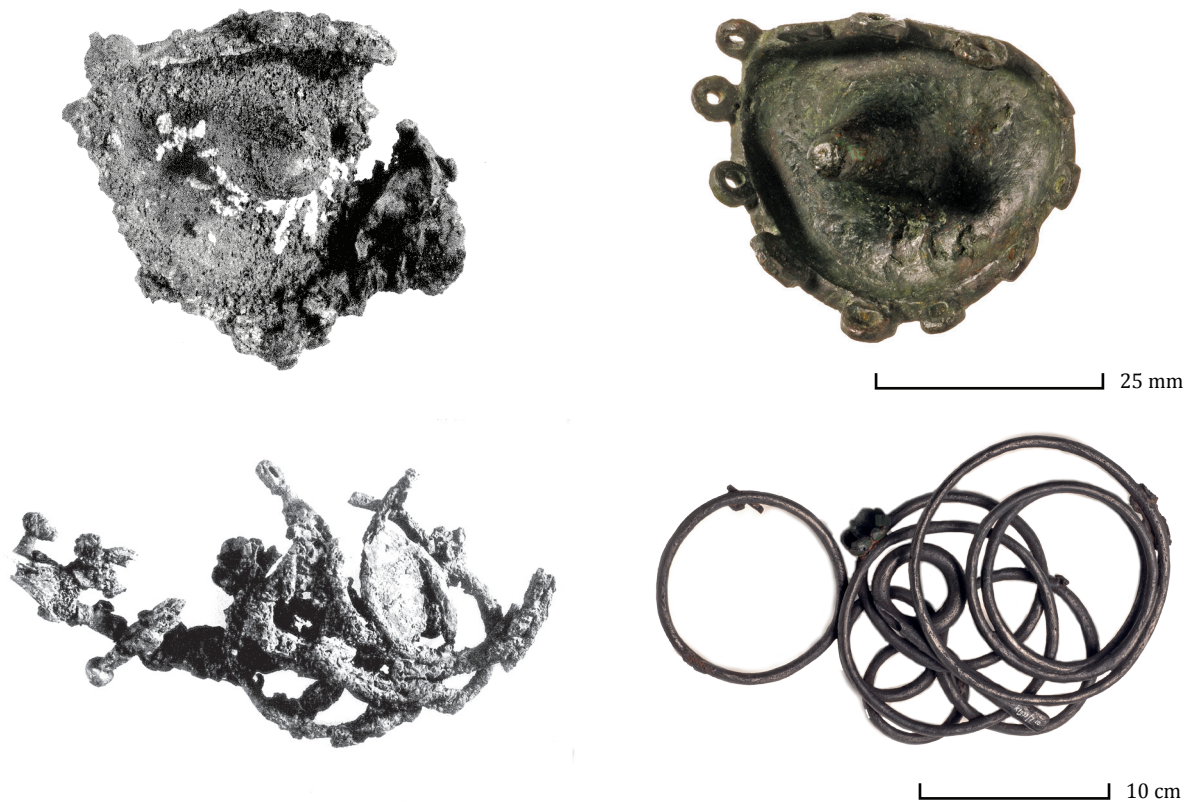


Fig. C3.3 The bronze Tutulus (OV.13) and mass of iron rings (OV.16) from Oss pre- and post-restoration. Photographs after Kempkens/ Lupak 1993, 3 and 18; by P.J. Bomhof©RMO.

### C3.2 Restoring the Wijchen blades

I first examined the objects from the wagon-grave of Wijchen (see Chapter C35) in 2011 as part of an earlier research. While the bronzes had survived well, the iron artifacts were in extremely poor condition. An iron sword (which was published also by Pare 1992, 220) was highly fragmented and corroded, which made it very hard to discern diagnostic features. Little more could be said about it beyond that it was a bent iron sword with a central rib. As this sword is from one of the most elaborate and otherwise informative elite burials of the Low Countries it was frustrating and problematic that so little could be said about the sword, an integral part of the burial assemblage. Among the rust fragments I also found what seemed to be two knife fragments which had not been identified previously. These fragments were covered in such a thick layer of corrosion it could not even be determined with certainty whether they represented two knives or belonged to the same blade. At the time I cautiously interpreted them as two knives. As part of the current research I conferred with curator L. Swinkels and the in-house metal restorer R. Meijers of Museum het Valkhof, where this burial currently resides, regarding the poor state of these sword and the knife fragments and what might be possible with regards to restoration work.

They agreed that it was a shame that major features of the Wijchen burial were not only in too poor a state to do a proper scientific analysis, but also that they were unrecognizable as being a sword and knife fragments to the average museum visitor. It was agreed that an attempt would be made to restore this sword and knife fragments. We agreed that we did not want to take the sword to a highly polished finish (like the Oss sword) and instead chose to focus on revealing diagnostic features (shape of the hilt and tip, length and curve of the blade and so forth). Restoration of the knife fragments was aimed at exposing the surfaces of the break in order to establish whether they were from a single blade.

Halfway through the restoration process I returned to the Museum to review what had been discovered and discuss what further work would be required to achieve our goal of a better scientific understanding, coupled with the desire to make the sword and knife fragments more displayable for the Museum and its visitors. Upon completion of the restoration work I returned for a re-analysis of the sword and (as it turned out single) knife, as well as to take photographs of it and of the complete inventory from this grave. The results were astounding. This sword went from barely recognizable to a highly diagnostic artifact that in fact appears to be unique in



Fig. C3.4 The grave goods from Court-St-Etienne La Ferme Rouge T.3 as they appeared in the 1950s. Figure after Mariën 1952, 281.

Europe (Figs. C35.2 and C35.4; Section 6.2.1.3). I have included this case study as an example of the need and added value of working with a restorer, both from a museum as well as a research perspective. The restoration expertise of Meijers combined with my own resulted not only in a 'new' sword, but also in a far better understanding of this grave, arguably one of the most important Early Iron Age burials of the Low Countries. It was only by restorer and academic working together that this could be achieved.

### C3.3 Court-St-Etienne La Ferme Rouge T.3 restored or degraded?

Several iron artifacts from Court-St-Etienne La Ferme Rouge T.3 serve as a last example. Figure C3.4 was taken at some point during the 1950s and published by M.-E. Mariën (1952, 281). As becomes apparent when one compares this image with pictures taken during the current research (e.g. Figs. 4.6 and C6.5), the iron artefacts appear to have been in much better condition when they were photographed in the 1950s. The iron horse-bits are intact and they have their bit rings, while today the latter are missing (see Section C6.2.4.1). The lancehead also appears to be in perfect condition in Figure C3.4, while today it is relatively poorly preserved (see also Fig. C6.9; Section C6.2.4.1).

Interpreting the difference in appearance of the objects is complicated by the fact that there are no

records of the restoration work done on these items. It is therefore unknown whether the objects truly were in such excellent condition in the 1950s but have degraded drastically since then (which is in theory possible if not stored under appropriate conditions), or whether the objects were restored quite heavily in the 1950s and that the restoration fills since have been removed (which is also a not uncommon practice). While we can only speculate in this case, it does show the importance of also considering older publications and images when re-examining artifacts.

### C3.4 Conclusion

I hope it is clear from these three case studies how important it is to understand the post-excavation and restoration history of objects whenever possible. One has to be aware that when dealing with older finds one may be looking at an objects that is largely modern, which may even be 'wrong'. They also may have once been in better condition and older descriptions and images can be of tremendous help when studying old discoveries and poorly preserved finds. It is also possible that old descriptions or depictions (still) show objects *in situ* or corroded together, which can help one to reconstruct how objects may have been interred (as was the case with the Chieftain's burial of Oss; Section C26.4). These are all things to bear in mind, and I stress that going back to the original data and finds is often crucial.