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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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1 Introduction

The transition from the Late Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age marks the start of an era of rapid development and change in European prehistory (Nebelsick 2000b, 220; Milcent 2012, 9–10; 2015, 42; Sørensen/Thomas 1989; Wells 2011). The first millennium BC has been referred to as the period in which Europe took shape with the appearance of a number of important ‘civilizations’, including the Celts and Germans, north of the Alps and increasing social and political complexity (*e.g.* Biel 1993; Broodbank 2013, Ch. 10; Champion *et al.* 1984; Collis 1984, 10–20; Milcent 2012, 9–10; Thurston 2009, 351; Wells 1984, Ch. 3). It is a period marked by contact, mobility and ever-increasing interaction between Northwest and Central Europe and the Mediterranean, even in the form of structured trade between far-flung reaches (*e.g.* Collis 1984; Frankenstein/Rowlands 1978; Huth 2012, 12; Kristiansen 1998, Ch. 6; Milcent 2012, 9–10; 2015; Schweizer 2010; Stary 1993; Wells 2008a; 2011). North of the Alps monumental settlement construction starts taking place, and during the 6th and 5th centuries BC the resultant so-called *Fürstensitze* dominate the landscape (Fernández-Götz/Krause 2016ab; Kimmig 1969; Nakoinz 2013, 43–57).

This was a time when new materials such as iron – the very material that lends this age its name – became common in the archeological record (Collis 1984; Kristiansen 1998, 211–9; Thurston 2009, 350–1). Tools and weapons now were not only made in bronze but also of iron, a substance that requires a different way of making and using. In contrast to the ores required to make bronze, iron ores generally are spread widely and available in most areas (Collis 1984, 28–32; Kristiansen 1998, 211; Thurston 2009, 350–1; Wells 2011, 410). The adoption, exploitation and use of iron (and other new materials and technologies) resulted in (or from) changes in the trade and contact networks crisscrossing Europe during the Bronze–Iron Age transition (Cunliffe 1997; Geselowitz 1988; Huth 2012, 14; Kristiansen 1998, Ch. 6; Taylor 1989; Thurston 2009, 350–1). These developments are thought to have involved profound social change and a new social order (Cunliffe 1997; Kristiansen 1998, 210; Rieckhof/Biel 2001; Wells 1984; 2011). A novel elite way of burying arose through which a select number of individuals were laid to rest with extravagant grave goods and their burials marked with impressive monuments. Variations of this burial rite are found in large parts of Northwest and Central Europe (Collis 1984; Fernández-Götz/Arnold 2017; Hansen 2011; Kossack 1974; Kristiansen 1998, Ch. 6; Makarová 2017; Pare 1992, 203; Tremblay Cormier 2017; Wells 2011).

1.1 Early Iron Age elites and their burials

In this research the last aspect of Early Iron Age developments listed above is considered – the results of the elite burial rite: the Hallstatt C/D chieftain’s burial. The term ‘chieftain’s burial’ and its equivalents (princely burial, *Fürstengrab* in German, *tombe de chef* in French or *vorstengraf* in Dutch) are used to refer to an archeological type of Early Iron Age grave in which specific types of objects are found (Section 2.2.1.1; Fernández-Götz/Arnold 2017; Fontijn/Fokkens 2007, 354; Krauß 2006; Müller

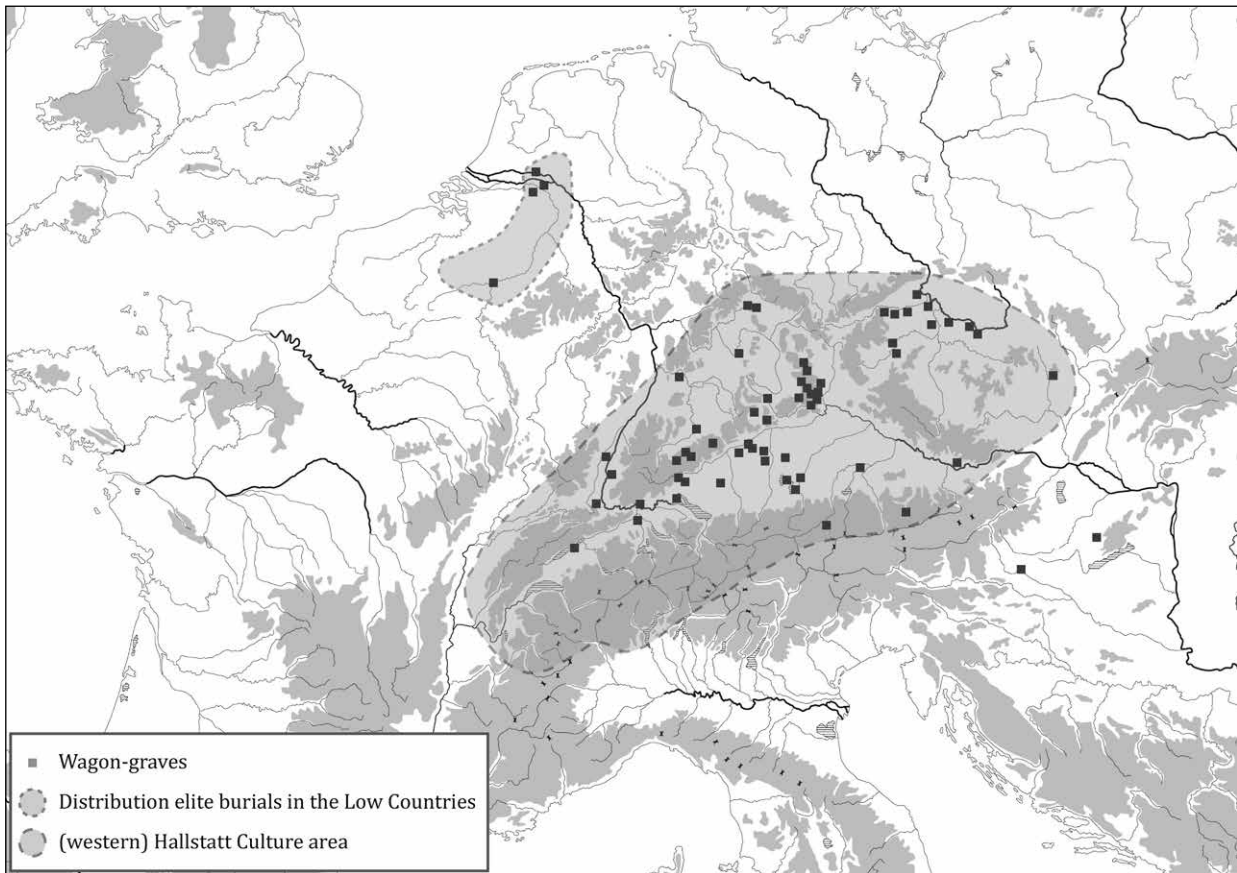


Fig. 1.1 Distribution of the elite burials of the Low Countries and the (western) Hallstatt Culture area, with wagon-graves marked. Figure after Karl 2010, fig. 2.3; Pare 1992, fig. 4; Schumann 2015, fig. 8.1.

2012).¹ The grave goods include sophisticated weaponry such as swords and daggers, richly decorated horse-gear and (ceremonial) wagons, bronze drinking and feasting vessels, tools such as knives and axes, toiletries, ornaments and sometimes even luxurious cloth survives (Augstein 2017; Diepeveen-Jansen 2001; Fernández-Götz/Arnold 2017; Kossack 1974; Krauß 2006; Schumann 2015, 269–70; Schumann/Van der Vaart-Verschoof 2017). During the Late Bronze Age a relatively ‘egalitarian’ burial rite dominated in Europe through which the general population was buried in ‘collective’ urnfields (Childe 1950, 200; Gerritsen 2003, 243; Harding 2000, Ch. 3; Kristiansen 1998, 113; Roymans 1991; Roymans/Kortlang 1999). The development of an ostentatious and aberrant burial rite during the Early Iron Age in parts of Northwest and Central Europe by which a select few were

buried so very differently (the so-called princely graves) therefore can be considered remarkable as it involved a break with previous customs (*e.g.* Hansen 2011; Metzner-Nebelsick 2003, 108; Pare 2003, 76), especially as this new rite involved not only a novel way of dealing with the dead, but also these specific grave goods.

Some of the objects found in these exceptional burials were newly introduced innovations in certain areas during this period (*e.g.* the horse-gear and the wagons in the present-day Low Countries). Others, like swords and axes, were already in use during the Late Bronze Age and continued to develop in shape, form and even material. The striking difference is that these very objects that are so defining of the Early Iron Age princely burials, seem to have been deliberately kept out of graves during (most of) the Late Bronze Age (*e.g.* Fontijn 2002, Ch. 8; Kristiansen 1998, 88; Milcent 2015). It is as if during this earlier period there was a cultural rule which dictated that these objects should not accompany the dead to their final resting place but should be deposited, for example in hoards.

The archeologically visible shift from river and hoard deposition to burial deposition is often linked to the rise of

1 In this research I use the terms chieftain’s burial and princely grave interchangeably for the sake of readability. I use these words purely to indicate this archeological phenomenon. It is a term that has evolved historically, and though recently contested in the Low Countries (see Jansen 2011; Roymans 2011), I find no problem in using it in its descriptive sense (see also Section 2.2.1.1).

the (traditional Hallstatt C/D chieftain's) elite burial and has been interpreted as one of the ways that elites affirmed and expressed their social position (Fontijn/Fokkens 2007, 354–5; 369–70; Frankenstein/ Rowlands 1978; Huth 2003a; Kristiansen 1989; Roymans 1991, 30–2; 56). To some scholars this signals a change of setting for the 'conspicuous consumption' of valuables (Kristiansen 1989; Roymans 1991), while others take the burials as evidence of a new cosmology shared throughout Europe (e.g. Huth 2003a). The people buried in these strikingly new and different graves are thought to have formed an elite stratum that stood at the apex of a hierarchical society that revolved around and was controlled by these elites (Biel 1987; Frankenstein/ Rowlands 1978; Kimmig 1969; Sangmeister 1994; Sievers 1982; Zurn 1970; though see Biel 2007; Jung 2005).

In Central Europe (during the 6th and 5th centuries BC) these elites supposedly lived in the large fortified and monumental settlements known as *Fürstensitze*, which are interpreted as their royal residences (Biel 2007; Fernández-Götz/Krause 2016ab; Kimmig 1969; Nakoinz 2013). They supposedly strove to emulate Mediterranean lifestyles and habits as another way of legitimizing their social positions (Fischer 1973; Huth 2012, 122; see also Jung 2007; Schweizer 2012). To this end ostentatious drinking and feasting vessels and other goods were imported and acquired from that region and their use allegedly was controlled and restricted (e.g. Arnold 1999; Dietler 1990; Frankenstein/Rowlands 1978; Jung 2007; Kimmig 1969; see also Section 6.1).

The Early Iron Age elite graves primarily belong to the Hallstatt Culture and are concentrated in southern Germany though they are found from Burgundy in the west to Moravia and parts of Hungary and Slovenia in the east (e.g. Augstein 2017; Fernández-Götz/Arnold 2017; Hansen 2011; Huth 2012, 10; Karl 2010; Kossack 1974; Makarová 2017; Metzner-Nebelsick 2017; Milcent 2015; 2017; Tremblay Cormier 2017; Wells 2011) and have been intensely researched for over a century (e.g. Kossack 1954; 1959; see Krauß 2006 for an overview). This research focuses on one of the more mystifying aspects of the European Early Iron Age elite burial phenomenon – a small cluster of comparable burials found far removed from the Hallstatt Culture: the elite graves of the Low Countries (Fig. 1.1).

1.1.1 Elite graves in the Low Countries

The Chieftain's grave of Oss (Fig. 4.7) was the first such burial in the Low Countries to be excavated professionally by archeologists, though similar complexes had been found by chance. It was, however, the study and publication of Oss by J.H. Holwerda (1934) that triggered academic interest in these special burials in the Low Countries. He recognized the similarity between some of the Oss

objects and those found in Central Europe, and justifiably asserted the importance of this Chieftain's grave on a European scale (see also Chapter 7). In the next 30 years older discoveries containing similar objects started attracting attention. M.-E. Mariën (1958) studied and published the exceptional cemetery of Court-St-Etienne. A few years later P.J.R. Modderman studied the wagon-grave of Wijchen together with G. Kossack, though they never published their results. The former did publish his study of Oss, which is when its English name *Chieftain's grave of Oss* first appeared in print (Modderman 1964). Since then, many more graves containing similar objects have been discovered. At present there are a handful of burials known as chieftains' graves in the Low Countries, and several dozen related (probable²) graves. Even though the latter are not actually labeled 'chieftains' graves', due to their resemblance they frequently are included in the elite burial debate (and are therefore a part of the present research; see also below and Section 2.2.1.1).

1.1.1.1 Connections between the Low Countries and the Hallstatt Culture

As already recognized by Holwerda (1934), in terms of (sets of) grave goods, the Dutch and Belgian graves resemble the *Fürstengräber* of the Hallstatt Culture found in Central Europe. They contain weaponry, horse-gear and (ceremonial) wagons, bronze vessels, tools, toiletries and ornaments in various configurations. In Central Europe these objects are found alongside the inhumated remains of the dead in massive wooden chambers underneath monumental barrows (though they also are found in other kinds of burials), while in the Low Countries they are found in cremation burials. These graves, the Dutch and Belgian chieftains' graves and the Central European *Fürstengräber*, represent unprecedentedly monumental and elaborate burials. The richness of the grave goods and the immense burial structures that cover the graves are in striking contrast with the earlier and in the Low Countries contemporary, 'egalitarian' urnfield burial custom (cf. Gerritsen 2003, 243; Roymans 1991; Roymans/Kortlang 1999) in which grave goods are sparse, if present at all. Not only do the Low Countries chieftains' graves and Central European *Fürstengräber* contain a similar grave set, most of the objects found in the Dutch and Belgian graves are likely imports from southern Germany and Upper Austria (some possibly even from Eastern Europe). Their presence in the Low Countries showcases that there was contact between these areas and that somehow elite objects made their way several hundred kilometers across Europe. The nature of this contact, however, is a matter of long-

2 Some of the finds discussed in the Catalogue are believed to be burials but no human remains survive, making their identification as 'burials' conjecture (see Section 1.2.1.2).

standing discussion and continues to fascinate (Fokkens/Jansen 2004, 73–87; Fontijn/Fokkens 2007; Fontijn/Van der Vaart-Verschoof 2016; Huth 2003a; Roymans 1991, 56–61; Van der Vaart-Verschoof/Schumann 2017).

As there appear to be (almost) no similar, typical Hallstatt Culture finds in the areas between these regions (Fokkens/Jansen 2004, 77; Pare 1992, Fig. 135; Roymans 1991, 47–50; figs. 10; 16), an intriguing question remains whether the people living in these areas shared social customs, cultural habits and a similar belief system, which some believe are reflected in the burials (*e.g.* Huth 2003a; Roymans 1991, 57). How should we envisage the contact that existed between the distant Early Iron Age societies that involved not only the sharing of objects, but also certain social customs over such a large area, while the lack of such finds and burials in the area in between suggest that we are not dealing with simple diffusion or down-the-line exchange?

Despite their many similarities to Central European burials, the Chieftain's grave of Oss and others like it in the Low Countries traditionally are perceived as peripheral manifestations (Fokkens/Jansen 2004, 84; Gerritsen 2003, 10–3; Huth 2003a) as are those in northern and western France during the Early Iron Age (Milcent 2015, 23). For years archeologists have seen the people buried in these Dutch and Belgian graves as local leaders who attained status and wealth (in part) through their ability to maintain contacts with the Hallstatt 'core area' (Fokkens/Jansen 2004, 84–5; Roymans 1991; *cf.* Frankenstein/Rowlands 1978). Scholars have explained this contact by attempting to identify the commercial export that the inhabitants of the Low Countries had to offer in trade for these exotic imports (Pare 1992, 171; Roymans 1991, 50–4). In recent years new excavations and new research have started to topple reigning interpretations (Fokkens *et al.* 2009; Fontijn *et al.* 2013a; Fontijn/Van der Vaart-Verschoof 2016; Jansen in prep.; Jansen *et al.* 2011; Van der Vaart 2011), and the idea that the combination of grave goods found in the Low Countries elite burials reflect Central European influence has been challenged, with many arguing for an Atlantic influence or predecessor (*e.g.* De Mulder/Bourgeois 2011, 309; Milcent 2004, 108–12; 2012; 2015; Warmenbol 2015).

1.1.1.2 How the elite burials were studied in the past and present thinking

In the past research mainly focused on the (types of) objects interred with the (elite) dead. The current research argues that a better understanding can be achieved by studying the grave goods and human remains in detail and in doing so consider how the objects and the dead were treated and what kinds of acts were incorporated into the burial rituals. By embracing practice theory (Section 2.2.2) and studying the burial practice it is possible to consider how

(differently) people were represented in death. A case study of a select number of chieftains' burials involving examination of the grave goods as a medium for examining the burial practice yielded very promising results (Van der Vaart 2011), and this research aims to do the same on a larger scale. It has been over half a century since anyone has studied the actual objects found in these graves, and the case study showed that detailed study of the grave goods from these burials can provide unexpected insights. The current research therefore returns to the primary data and artifacts in order to understand the burial practice (see below).

A comprehensive study of the Dutch and Belgian elite burials is needed in order to study the elite burials of the Low Countries and explore the connection that existed between this area and the rest of Northwest and Central Europe. Even though the chieftains' burials belong to the top finds of the Low Countries and are the star attractions in many museums and special exhibitions (Fig. 1), knowledge about their actual content and context is poor. Most such graves were found by chance at the end of the 19th or the first half of the 20th century and neither were excavated properly nor extensively published. Apart from the most eye-catching finds like the *situlae* (Holwerda 1934; see Fig. 6.1), the sword of Oss (Modderman 1964; see Figs. 6.3, 6.5 and C26.4) and the linchpins of Wijchen (Pare 1992; see Fig. 4.12), most of the objects recovered from these burials have never been studied or published in detail. In many cases there is not even a published overview of all the objects found in a famous grave or such overviews have turned out to be incomplete (see the Catalogue), making past statements regarding grave contents rather suspect. The elite burials, however, cannot be understood in isolation. One must consider how the new practice of identifying individuals as high status members of society in graves could come about by reflecting on why some people's swords were deposited while others took their elite paraphernalia to the grave. Moreover, these burials represent a fraction of the graves from this period, and one must therefore also consider how they differ from the urnfield burials.

Lastly, the Dutch and Belgian graves cannot be understood without considering the area where the objects found in them come from and how they were treated there. Again, by focusing on the burial practice, on what people were actually doing with these objects, we in time will be able to better comprehend the connection that existed between the Low Countries and Central Europe (Sections 2.4 and 7.3). This research therefore not only contributes to the very local understanding of the Early Iron Age Low Countries, but also touches upon wider research themes such as mobility and contact in later prehistoric Europe and problems of culture contact.

It forms a step towards understanding how individuals living in the Low Countries and the Central European Hallstatt Culture interacted (see also Fontijn/Van der Vaart-Verschoof 2016; Van der Vaart-Verschoof 2017).

1.2 Research questions and methodology

The above discussed how new research and excavations indicate that we need to review our understanding of the Low Countries' elite burials and their role in Early Iron Age society. In the past the focus has been on the (larger) grave goods, but a comprehensive understanding of these burials can only be achieved by considering the elite burial practice. This research therefore seeks to identify and understand *the burial practice through which the Early Iron Age elite burials (some of which are known as chieftains' graves) in the Low Countries were created.*

This understanding is achieved by conducting research on several different levels, focusing on the artifacts and the actions fossilized in them, the individual burial complexes and burial rituals, and by comparing Early Iron Age burial practices in the Low Countries with those of the Hallstatt Culture of Central Europe. To this end the following research questions were formulated (deriving in part from what was discussed in Section 1.1.1.2):

1. *What was the social and cultural significance of the objects selected for burial?*
2. *How did the elite burial practice develop?*
3. *How was the elite burial ritual practiced and what was its social, cultural and ideological significance?*
4. *How does the elite burial practice in the Low Countries compare with contemporaneous burial practices in the Low Countries and Central Europe?*

Each of these questions requires its own approach to answer. The following describes the methodology employed and the research conducted, giving also the motivation and reasoning behind both, and how these answer a specific research question or contribute towards answering one, listing also where the results of the research described are given.

1.2.1 Elite burials: definition, inventory and examination

In order to study the elite funerary practice and answer the research questions this research first had to establish how many elite burials there are in the Low Countries, for which it needed to determine what an elite (burial) is and how they may be recognizable archeologically. This was approached from two angles, namely by considering which Early Iron Age Dutch and Belgian burials (traditionally) are identified as elite burials, what was found in them and what can be

defined or recognized as elite from a more theoretical perspective.

1.2.1.1 Identifying elites and their graves

In the past, attempts to understand the elite burials were based primarily on the Prestige Goods model (*e.g.* Friedman/Rowlands 1977; Kristiansen 1998, Ch. 6; Roymans 1991), which does not consider what elites actually are and can be. How they can function or might become archeologically visible has rarely been addressed in relation to Early Iron Age burials (with a few exceptions, *e.g.* Schumann 2015). In order to identify the deceased found in these burials as elite and discuss what role they may have played in society, one must first establish what elites are and how such a social class may be recognizable in the archeological record (see Section 2.1). Rareness of burials and objects or the size of burial monuments is not solid grounds for labeling the buried dead and presumed owners of the extravagant grave goods as elites (*cf.* Krauß 2006, 66–8; Müller 2012, 12). This research therefore considered what can be defined and recognized as an elite burial by examining what traditionally is defined as such, what an elite is and whether we can recognize them in the Late Bronze–Early Iron Age burials of the Low Countries traditionally labeled elite graves. An extensive literature research into elite sociology was conducted, resulting in the theory of elites discussed in Section 2.2, focusing on how the burials generally identified as those of elites relate to how elites are theoretically defined. This was of necessity a somewhat paradoxical, circular way of working that could not be avoided, as the decision to study elite theory flowed from a pre-selection of graves and that theory was then applied to that same selection.

1.2.1.2 Creating a Catalogue

In most cases, the artifacts from the elite graves are all that survive. Context information tends to be lacking as most of the burials are old (chance) discoveries. It is therefore mainly through the objects and the actions they reflect that these graves can be understood. Prior to this research, however, there was no overview of all such burials nor of what they contain. A complete inventory of chieftains' graves and otherwise rich or elite graves and their contents therefore was created, including information regarding how the grave goods were used and treated before and during the burial rituals. Such a comprehensive overview is also intended to make possible future comparisons between the elite burials of France and Central Europe and the so-called peripheral Low Countries. This overview was created through literature research and by visiting museums and depots in order to inventory (and analyze, see below) artifacts. An extensive literature research was conducted, and note was made of every mention of Hallstatt Culture imports or rich

grave goods. The overview works of rich Early Iron Age burials in the Low Countries, such as those by Mariën (1958) and Roymans (1991) formed the starting point for the inventory. Experts working on Early Iron Age burial practices in this area were consulted, likely journals and series were searched and the Archis 2 database³ was consulted for recent excavations with relevant finds. The original publications of all sites were consulted.

Graves were selected for study based on a number of factors. All burials known as chieftains' graves or elite burials in the Low Countries were studied, as were graves containing at least one of the objects considered 'chiefly' or elite (such as bronze vessels, weaponry, horse-gear and/or wagon components; see Section 2.1.2 and Chapter 6), including also such burials that appear to be chronologically Late Bronze Age. Any burials described as rich in literature were included (I use the problematic term 'rich' to refer to graves that contain more or other grave goods than the usual urnfield burials). I stress that this division between 'rich' and 'simple' burials is the product of the current paradigm and one of necessity in terms of what is possible to study within a PhD-research, and that I reexamine and reassess this in Section 8.1 in the hope of creating nuance in our understanding of Early Iron Age funerary practice (see also Louwen in prep.). I also selected burials that are used in literature as parallels for specific finds from elite burials. Any graves with metal finds like toiletries from sites that also yielded elite burials were incorporated to give an overview of said sites. Any such finds that are believed to be from graves were included, even though in some cases no (record of) human remains survive.

All information was recorded for each site and (probable) grave selected for study, with a particular focus on find circumstances, burial context and information regarding the objects and human remains. The post-excavation history of the objects and burials was considered as well, as this is often crucial to understanding these (old) finds (see Chapter C3). Any available information regarding restoration work on the artifacts and existing interpretations was noted, documented and also included in the Catalogue (see below). Most published descriptions of grave goods were not detailed enough for the purpose of this research. In those cases the current location of the grave goods was determined and access arranged. The objects then were studied in detail and photographed. In many cases it was only through this combination of literature research and

examination of objects in museums and depots that a complete overview of the contents of a grave could be established.

While actual examination of all artifacts from the selected burials was preferred, many unfortunately have been lost and in those cases literature study had to suffice. As part of the inventory process every artifact (fragment) was given a unique number that consists of a site code (listed in Appendix A1.3), burial number and sequential number. The sword from Basse-Wavre Tombelle 5, for example, is identified by the number *BW.T5.3*. When such an identifying number is followed by an asterisk, this means that I did not examine the artifact (because it was lost, inaccessible or adequately published). The lost pin fragments from the same grave, for example, are identified by the number *BW.T5.5**. In the Catalogue the current location (when known) of finds and other numbers used in literature or museums and depots are given so that in future the artifacts can be located more easily.

Once inventoried, integral and comparative analyses of the objects as a whole were conducted with a particular focus on recognizing human action. The result of this research phase can be found in the accompanying *Fragmenting the Chieftain – Catalogue. Late Bronze and Early Iron Age elite burials in the Low Countries*. In this Catalogue the terminology and typology of the various types of grave goods (Chapter C2) are given and the dataset of burials is described in detail. This volume forms the first comprehensive overview of rich Late Bronze–Early Iron Age elite burials – with Hallstatt Culture imports or otherwise – in the Low Countries (note also that all photographs taken will be available freely for researchers through Data Archiving and Networked Services; DANS EASY). The dataset presented in the Catalogue is summarized in Chapter 4. The Catalogue is intended not only to facilitate the current research, but also to assist studies and considerations of these graves and objects by other (future) scholars interested in the primary data regarding the burials discussed. For many graves this is their first (detailed) publication in English. Chapters, figures, sections and tables in the Catalogue all start with 'C' to indicate that they can be found in that volume. For more information on Basse-Wavre, for example, the reader is referred to Chapter C5 (in the Catalogue), while Chapter 5 (in this volume) discusses the (development) of the elite burial practice.

1.2.2 Why these grave goods

The selection of objects interred as grave goods likely was significant and meaningful (Huth 2003a; Pare 1992). How an object was used and treated (its cultural biography; Kopytoff 1986) can provide insights into the meaning it may have had and why it was selected for deposition (*cf.* Fontijn 2002; see also Section 2.3). To

3 Archis is the automated Archeological Information System (my translation) of the Netherlands, managed by the Cultural Heritage Agency, in which archeological sites and finds from all time periods are recorded.

understand why certain (types of) objects were selected for burial, this research considers what their social and cultural significance may have been (research question 1) by looking at use-wear, iconography, early texts and published works on how bronze vessels, swords, wagons and horse-gear, tools, and items of self-adornment were used and buried. The results of this phase are discussed in Chapter 6.

1.2.3 The development of the elite burial practice

In order to consider how the elite burial practice developed (research question 2), this research first established the dating of the inventoried graves (to see which might be early and which late) and secondly considered how the elite burial practice arose and then developed through time.

1.2.3.1 Dating the burials

In the past the elite burials in the Low Countries were dated almost exclusively on typochronological grounds, even though most available typochronological schemes are based on Central Europe. ¹⁴C-dating of the Dutch and Belgian burials became possible with the introduction of AMS-dating (only small fragments of datable material survive) but was not attempted until some 20 years ago due to the calibration difficulties of the Hallstatt plateau. The result is that different scholars sometimes give different dates for the same burial (see Section 3.2). Better dating of the burials was needed to understand how this practice evolved and compares to other regions (see below). New ¹⁴C-datings therefore were conducted on find material from the key site the Chieftain's burial of Oss and combined with new typochronologies that do take the Dutch and Belgian finds into account to create a new chronology of these burials. The results are discussed in Chapter 3.

1.2.3.2 The rise of the elite grave

The research phases described above and below are intended to establish what the elite graves are and what their role was within the Early Iron Age Low Countries and Europe. An important question, however, is how this burial practice evolved and whether it was a sudden occurrence or a more gradual process rooted in earlier customs (Fontijn/Fokkens 2007, 365). Elite objects that were kept out of the burial sphere in the Late Bronze Age suddenly were deemed suited to deposition in graves, thereby identifying the deceased as elite (see Section 2.1 and Chapter 5) – something that was avoided before. How could such a shift in social customs come about? The rise of the elite burial practice was examined by considering the overlap and shift that existed in social customs relating to the representation of elites during the Late Bronze–Early Iron Age transition. In particular, the research looked at how the types of objects

that end up in the elite burials during the Early Iron Age were treated during the preceding Late Bronze Age and whether the objects found in the elite burials also were deposited elsewhere during the Early Iron Age. The results of this research phase are discussed in Chapter 5.

1.2.4 Reconstructing elite burial practice

The detailed examinations of grave goods and (when possible) their find context cannot only reveal how objects were used in life, but also can shed light on how they were treated during the burial ritual and by extension on the elite burial practice. By studying this social practice more can be learned about the people buried in these graves *and* the mourners who did the burying. The choices made and customs upheld in terms of the objects deposited, the treatment of the dead and their grave goods and the places where they were buried all needed to be considered. By reconstructing the burial practice through which these special people were laid to rest, this research aims to get a step closer to understanding their role within the Early Iron Age Low Countries. This phase considered how the elite burial ritual was practiced and its social, cultural and ideological significance (research question 3).

A comprehensive understanding of the funerary ritual and the complex treatments of the grave goods was created by charting the life-paths of the grave goods (and all fragments) with a particular focus on recognizing the way objects were manipulated (disassembling, folding, breaking, incomplete deposition) during burial rituals. This was done through the detailed examination of objects, both macroscopically and using low-power magnification by which traces of use can be recognized on a microscopic level. For certain analyses specialists were consulted. Once detailed information on the individual artifacts was collected, the burials were 'reassembled' to reconstruct the individual funerary rituals in as much detail as possible. While this occasionally was limited by their (sometimes very poor) find circumstances and differences in conservation and documentation, a lot was revealed by taking advantage of each burial's unique history. Through comprehensive analysis of the individual funerary rituals the burial practice was reconstructed. The results of this research phase are described both in the Catalogue and in Chapters 4, 5 and 7.

1.2.5 The elite graves within the spectrum of local and Central European burial practices

The examination of only the chieftains' and other exceptional burials of the Low Countries would give a very one-dimensional view of Early Iron Age mortuary ritual and this research therefore puts this elite burial practice in perspective by comparing it to contemporary burial practices, both locally and farther afield (research question 4). This is of necessity a summary comparison as

it was not feasible to study the whole spectrum of burial practices that occur in the archeological record of the Early Iron Age in as much detail as the elite burials of the Low Countries, but it is hoped that it will be possible to elaborate on these issues in the near future (see also Louwen in prep.).

1.2.5.1 The local burial practices spectrum

The Early Iron Age elite burials of the Low Countries are very much the exception – the majority of the population in the Low Countries was interred through (variations of) the urnfield burial practice in which each individual was buried in an urn under a very small mound with little to no grave goods, at most small personal dress items like pins (*cf.* De Mulder 2011; Desittere 1968; Fontijn 2002; Kooi 1979; Theuws/Roymans 1999). The elite burial practice therefore was compared with the ‘urnfield burial practice’, in so far as was possible within the current research. For this research phase I relied on literature and research of others, in particular A.J. Louwen’s (in prep.) ongoing work into the contemporaneous urnfield burial practice(s). The results of this research phase are considered in Chapter 5.

1.2.5.2 The Low Countries elite on a European scale

One of the most fascinating and intriguing aspects of these elite burials is that many of the objects deposited in them were imported from far away, and any attempt to comprehensively understand the Dutch and Belgian elite graves needs to address their connection with the rest of (Northwest and Central) Europe. Many researchers have considered how the objects made their way to the Low Countries (*i.e.* through down-the-line or direct exchange) and what kind

of relationship existed between the Low Countries elites and those living elsewhere in Northwest and Central Europe (Fontijn/Fokkens 2007; Huth 2003a; Milcent 2015; Van der Vaart-Verschoof/Schumann 2017). Were the objects all that were imported or did the Low Countries elites take over customs and belief systems (or even people) from Central Europe? In this research, the elite burials of the Low Countries therefore are considered on a European scale, in particular the contacts that existed with the Hallstatt Culture of Central Europe, in so far as this is possible within the scope of this research and the current (poor) availability of data and information. A number of the characteristic features of the Low Countries elite burial practice as established in this research are compared with burial practices of the Hallstatt Culture. The results of this research phase are discussed in Chapter 7.

1.2.6 Conclusion: fulfilling the main research goal

The results of the research phases and answers to the research questions described above are combined in Chapter 7 in order to comprehensively understand *the burial practice through which the Early Iron Age elite burials (some of which are known as chieftains’ graves) in the Low Countries were created*. In the final chapter questions raised by the current research and possibilities for future research are discussed, and the manner in which the current research was conducted is reviewed. This research forms a step towards the comprehensive understanding of the Early Iron Age burial practices in the Low Countries and in turn could help move forward our understanding of Early Iron Age elites in Europe.