

**Review of: Wentink, K. (2020). *Stereotype. The role of grave sets in Corded Ware and Bell Beaker funerary practices*. Leiden: Sidestone Press. Softcover, 296 pages. ISBN 978-90-8890-938-2. Open access: <https://www.sidestone.com/books/stereotype>**

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The book "*Stereotype. The role of grave sets in Corded Ware and Bell Beaker funerary practices*", written by Karsten Wentink, focusses on the significance and meaning of Late Neolithic graves in the Netherlands. This book is the first of its kind to perform in-depth analyses of all individual grave goods from Dutch graves, including wear analysis and experiments, and to explore the biography of grave goods. The result is a novel and comprehensive interpretation of how grave goods were associated with travel, drinking ceremonies, and the maintenance of long-distance relationships. The author's research asks why people were buried in seemingly standardized ways, what this meant, and what it reveals about these individuals, their role in society, their cultural identity, and the people who buried them. The book was originally written as a Ph.D. dissertation and successfully defended at Leiden University in 2020. This research was part of the 'Ancestral Mounds' project funded by the Dutch Organization for Scientific Research (NWO). Karsten Wentink focuses his research on data from the Netherlands. The results give answers that may be specific to the Netherlands, but many results have a much wider applicability.

Karsten Wentink describes two main methodological approaches that are central to this research. The first focuses on data collection and is used to answer questions about the composition of grave goods. The second focuses on the empirical study of objects from graves from a biographical perspective, including the analysis of usage. In order to find out exactly which objects were placed in graves, in which combinations and in which quantities, a comprehensive database of Late Neolithic graves was compiled. The core of this dataset was based on the barrow database compiled by my research colleague Quentin Bourgeois (2013). The author explains why the Netherlands is well suited for Late Neolithic research. One reason is the fact that Late Neolithic burial mounds are plentiful in this area, another is that they have a long history of research because they are clearly visible in the landscape. In addition, the Netherlands are quite unique in having a cultural chronology with funnel beakers, cord-

ed ware, all over ornamented and bell beakers (LANTING & VAN DER WAALS, 1976). The presence of a complete sequence of beakers has even led to the postulation of the so-called "*Dutch model*", which suggests that the Bell Beaker culture developed in the Netherlands.

After the introductory chapter (1), chapters 2 and 3 of his study present the theoretical framework and provide a general introduction to the 3rd millennium BC. Chapter 2, entitled "*Presentation and Perception*", deals with the complex ways in which individuals present themselves to others in the context of social interaction. Chapter 3 sets the stage with a brief introduction to the 3rd millennium BC in north-western Europe, with a special focus on the Netherlands. In Dutch prehistory, the 3rd millennium BC is usually referred to as the Late Neolithic, which is subdivided into the Late Neolithic A (LNA, ca. 2800-2450 BC), which includes both the Corded Ware (CW) culture and the All-Over Ornamented (AOO) phase, and the Late Neolithic B (LNB, ca. 2450-2000 BC), which is the era of the Bell Beaker (BB) complex (LOUWE KOOIJMANS ET AL., 2005).

In chapters 4, 5, and 6 the data are discussed by object category. Since beakers are the common thread throughout the Late Neolithic grave assemblages, they are discussed in a separate chapter (4), while the other grave goods are discussed separately for each period in chapters 5 (LNA) and 6 (LNB).

Chapter 4 is dedicated to the beaker in an excellent and detailed way. The author emphasizes that beakers may have served more as a symbol of social cohesion and sharing than as the preferred drinking vessel of the deceased. In addition, Wentink highlights the chronological difference in style of decoration and shape. Until about 2400 BC, beakers were made and decorated in a very international style. This may indicate that the "*drinking ritual*" in which these beakers were used was extremely widespread. On the other hand, later beaker traditions not only become a medium for displaying an international style but are also increasingly used to display regional styles.

Chapter 5 focuses on the non-ceramic grave goods from LNA burials. During the LNA, the additional grave goods consist of a very specific and limited set of objects. In addition to beakers, the LNA graves in the research database contained flint blades/daggers, flint and/or stone axes, stone battle axes, and flint flakes; items related to woodworking.

Chapter 6 is focused on the items that predominate in LNB graves. The author points out that LNA items (axes, flint blades/daggers, battle axes)

are largely absent. Instead, the LNB graves contain several items such as archery equipment and ornaments, which must have been part of a type of dress that clearly signalled a particular identity.

Overall, chapters 4-6 also discuss the life cycle of objects, how they were made, used, and discarded. In some cases, the results of functional analysis can be used to refute long-held interpretations of certain types of objects.

Chapter 7 examines the nature of the graves themselves as contexts of deposition. On the one hand, the author asks how they were constructed and how this evolved over time. On the other hand, Wentink asks whether changes in burial assemblages are linked to changes in grave structure and how practices of placing bodies and graves in specific positions and orientations relate to the associated burial assemblages. Chapter 7 further examines the combinations of objects placed in graves and the concept of grave sets. It explores how seemingly standardized grave sets were used to connect people across great distances by adhering to a common practice, while at the same time preserving expressions of individual identity.

In chapter 8, the author examines patterns that may reflect differences in gender, status, age group, persona, etc. Chapter 9 focuses on the role of social fronts (cf. GOFFMAN, 1959). That is, the way people present themselves to others in social situations and their role in mediating social contact and interaction between individuals and groups. For the LNA, the author argues that the objects in the graves were not part of a personal front. These objects can all be interpreted as playing a role in establishing and maintaining social contacts. At first glance, the objects selected in the LNB seem to indicate a radical break with the LNA. However, the objects in the Bell Beaker graves also point to a social front – but on a much wider scale. For the author, the apparent ‘break’ in grave goods is all the more curious because all other aspects of the funerary ritual show so much cohesion and continued tradition. According to the author, this ‘break’ can be explained as merely a change in the material idiom used to express the same values.

Chapter 10 presents a comprehensive interpretation of the BB grave goods in particular. The objects from LNB graves are associated with travel, drinking ceremonies, and the maintenance of long-distance relationships. According to the author, the objects found in Bell Beaker graves are the material remnants of a standardized and widely shared social front and drinking ceremony that played a central structuring role in this system of hospitality. The role of these objects in life was

to connect people across great distances in space. Through their inclusion in the grave, they served a similar purpose, connecting the living and the dead and the recently deceased to their ancestors far removed in time. In addition to the results of this research, corroborating evidence from the fields of genetics and linguistics is presented.

The various results and discussions presented in the thesis are brought together in a final concluding chapter 11. In this chapter, the author returns to the title of his book. Stereotypes, just as stereotypical behaviour, are designed to be easily shared, they become a “*collective representation*” (GOFFMAN, 1959, 27). This results in a perceived notion of being part of a community that shares symbols and makes sense of things in a similar way (COHEN, 1985, 15; WENTINK, 2023, 252). At the end of this outstanding research, Wentink concludes that traveling was important, and that this activity is reflected in Late Neolithic funerary traditions. Whether it was by adorning the dead with items that reflected a widely shared social front, providing them with the tools to clear the land and build carts, or aligning their grave pits with the sun as it moved across the sky. In life, the people who travelled the world were the people through whom local communities were connected to distant others in space. In death, these people were chosen to forge and maintain relationships between local communities and the world of spirits and ancestors, the distant others in time. To become time travellers.

In general, the author is in line with the current state of research. The text is largely descriptive, with statistics and diagrams, mainly bar charts, illustrating the research. The wear and functional analyses of the stone tools are outstanding within this research. What is special about Karsten Wentink’s work is the abundance of data and analyses. The wealth of results and findings almost overwhelms the reader. It is also special that the whole Late Neolithic, both the Corded Ware phenomenon and the Bell Beaker phenomenon, find their place in this treatise and are compared with each other.

The book has a pleasant format (B4), is immaculately produced and fits in any travel bag. The illustrations are of very high quality. The beautiful cover and the excellent illustrations of beakers and stone tools are outstanding.

The study would have benefited from a broader comparative view beyond the region studied and from the inclusion of other areas of life beyond burial rituals, such as settlement patterns, but this would have gone beyond the scope of the already extensive work, which consists of many sub-items.

In summary, the author has succeeded in producing a clearly structured work and a milestone for the Dutch Late Neolithic and beyond. The attempt at an interpretation and summary, in which the stereotypical burial customs are linked to the phenomenon of travel, is extremely inspiring.

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