

ANALECTA
PRAEHISTORICA
LEIDENSIA



2000



ANALECTA PRAEHISTORICA LEIDENSIA

PUBLICATION OF THE FACULTY OF ARCHAEOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF LEIDEN

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NATIVE NEIGHBOURS

LOCAL SETTLEMENT SYSTEM AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE IN THE ROMAN
PERIOD AT OSS (THE NETHERLANDS)



UNIVERSITY OF LEIDEN 2000

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Copy editors of this volume: Dieke Wesselingh / Harry Fokkens

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ISSN 0169-7447

ISBN 90-73368-17-0

Also appeared as doctorate thesis, Leiden, November 9, 2000.

Subscriptions to the series *Analecta Praehistorica Leidensia*
and single volumes can be ordered exclusively at:

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6.

Oss in the Roman period

In order to be able to fit the settlements from Ussen into an analysis of the micro-region Oss, several other elements will be described in this chapter. These include the cemetery at Ussen, other Roman period sites at Oss, and various isolated finds. Furthermore, a picture is sketched of the areas between and around the settlements. In the final paragraph I will give a chronological overview of the occupation at Oss during the last phase of the Late Iron Age and the Roman period.

6.1 THE ROMAN PERIOD CEMETERY (by W.A.M. Hessing)¹

Introduction

In 1976, while excavating the Zomerhof settlement, archaeologists from the IPL discovered the first traces of what turned out to be a large cemetery from the Late Iron Age and the Roman period (figs.1 and 203). Between 1976 and 1980 it was excavated, a task encumbered by the advanced building activities. Approximately 80% of the area that was used for burials could be unearthed, the remaining 20% was already disturbed by road and cable trenches. Since these unexcavated parts are distributed fairly evenly over the burial area, it is unlikely that they contained structures or clusters of burials that could considerably change the overall picture of the cemetery. A larger problem in this respect is the disturbance of the surface of the excavated area, caused by later human activity and soil processes. What was left of the original barrows and other grave monuments were removed, and the top 20-30 cm of the features was disturbed by medieval digging activities (see 1.2.2 and 1.3). Since the cremation remains were placed on top of the original surface or in a very shallow pit (c. 25-40 cm), in many cases the graves were severely disturbed. Almost one-third of the central burials were not present anymore, while the remaining grave pits showed depths of 10-20 cm only. The (quality of the) evidence was further affected by natural influences such as root- and mole-tracks and the activities of larger animals. The latter prove that barrows were indeed present: rabbits and badgers made their homes in these elevated structures.

Unfortunately information was also lost as a result of the excavation method. This was partly due to the fact that the

first years at Oss-Ussen can be characterised as a rescue-excavation with only a small group of archaeologists and little time. Furthermore, research into Roman period cemeteries like this had only just started: knowledge about what could be expected and which type of observations would be needed for analysis was scarce. Thus, the method of interment was not documented consequently, and the contents of (possible) grave pits were not always sieved. Shortly after the excavation the analysis of the cemetery was started, and fortunately certain omissions could be reconstructed then. The work carried out by A.-B. Döbken (1982) has been of great value in this respect. A preliminary report on the Roman period cemetery of Oss was published by W.A.B. van der Sanden (1987e).

Archaeological landscape

Prior to its use as a cemetery the area was inhabited. From the second half of the Middle Iron Age (phases E - H, c. 375 - 250 BC) farmhouses were present on the edges of the area, with outbuildings, pits and wells situated nearer to the centre. Between these features, the area which was to become the centre of the cemetery remained relatively empty: it might have been in use as a field or pasture. Several hundred metres to the north and northwest was a possible cult site, combined with a small cluster of cremation graves (Van der Sanden 1998). Somewhere around the end of the 3rd or the start of the 2nd century BC a new cemetery with cremation graves is laid out further south. It is one of four small clusters started around this period; the other three also contain burials from the Late Iron Age but cease to be used in the Roman period. This fourth cluster of graves seems to be the starting point, both in time and in location, for what is to become the Roman period cemetery. Spatially it develops southwards and especially to the north. From the start, a northeast-southwest orientated axis seems to play a part, and may have originated from a route or path that connected two of the Iron Age settlements.

Burial ritual

Approximately 321 features that could be associated with funerary activities were documented within the area of the cemetery. These include 110 square or rectangular and 90



Figure 203. The Roman period cemetery.

circular grave monuments, in most cases with a primary and sometimes with a secondary burial still present. Furthermore, there were 61 flat graves and c. 54 pits with the remains of funeral pyres. In all cases the deceased had been cremated, probably on a newly erected funeral pyre. As far as the documentation allows conclusions in this respect, the cremation remains seem to have been sieved carefully from the remains of the pyre and deposited separately in the grave pit.² In some cases a small alcove or hollow was dug out in the wall or the bottom of the actual pit for this purpose.

The mean weight of the cremation remains in Oss is exceptionally low. This is partly caused by the above-mentioned disturbances, but even when the remains were on the very bottom of a pit the weight seldom exceeds 200-400 g. Next to that the degree of fragmentation is high; apparently after the actual cremation the remains were handled in such a way that they became more fragmented. It seems therefore that only part of the total cremated body has ended up in the grave pit.³

Most of the cremation remains were found as compact 'blocks', pointing to a container made of perishable organic material (such as leather sacks, woven cloths or wicker baskets). In one case only (grave 042) the remains had been packed into a small wooden chest, while in two other graves (226 and 283) urns made of handmade pottery were found. After the cremation remains were placed in the pit this was filled up with debris from the funeral pyre, which could contain fragments of burnt grave goods. The back-filled pit was covered with a small barrow, marked by a circular or rectangular ditch, sometimes combined with posts. If a barrow is lacking the grave (a so-called flat grave) could have been marked otherwise.

The presence of a number of large, relatively deep pits with a lot of charcoal could point to the location of the funerary pyres. These pits are mostly rectangular, sometimes circular or oval, and often situated just next to a grave-ditch. The majority contain charcoal only, but sometimes a fragment of burnt pottery is present. The most likely interpretation is that after the cremation remains had been picked out, the debris that remained from the pyre was deposited in these pits. Graves of the *Bustum* type, where the pyre is erected above an already dug grave pit, were not found in Oss.

In only a few cases exceptions to the above-mentioned burial ritual were found. Some of the larger monuments are further accentuated by a post setting, while three monuments are marked by posts only. All these graves are on the edges of the northernmost part of the cemetery. The largest monument is in the middle of the cemetery, and has an exceptional keyhole-shape. As far as the interments are concerned there are a few graves of the *Brandgruben* type (Bechert 1980), which means the cremation remains were not

separated from the remains of the pyre, but deposited as a whole. In one or two cases the pit was not filled up with debris from the funeral pyre. The number of exceptions is small enough to assume that the burial ritual remained unaltered and highly uniform during the use-period of this cemetery. Nevertheless it is possible that there have been inhumation graves at Oss. These are usually only present in very small numbers (Hessing 1993; in prep.), and the chances of discovering them at Oss are greatly reduced by the sandy soil and the (sub)recent disturbances.

Grave contents

Finds material from the graves can be categorised according to function: remains of the funeral pyre itself, clothing accessories and jewellery, pottery and glass vessels, and finally remains of food and drink. Next to these groups there are a small number of other objects, such as tools and weapons.

In Oss, 14 different kinds of wood were found in the graves, but the majority of the wood was either *Alnus* (alder) or *Quercus* (oak).⁴ In most cases it was a combination of these two, supplemented with one or more other kinds. Some of the wood was used timber, which is proved by iron nails still embedded in some pieces of (oak) charcoal. There is no apparent connection between certain kinds of wood and other aspects of the burial ritual.

Remains of clothing or personal jewellery are scarce. Only one grave (002) yielded a possible fragment of a brooch. The only other bronze object was a small disc, identified as a possible belt fitting. Three graves contained hobnails used on leather shoes. Grave 027 yielded a small, pierced bone plate, of a kind that has been associated with the decoration of clothing. All these finds point to a ritual where the deceased was dressed before being cremated. The conclusion that clothing was thus simple and mostly unadorned is a hasty one, as is proved by a find from grave 004. This consists of the skull of a small predator, possibly a marten, which may have been part of a flamboyant piece of fur clothing.

Pottery is the largest find group, consisting of burnt fragments from the funeral pyre and complete grave gifts that were placed next to the cremation remains in the pit. The latter category is relatively small: only 18% of the pottery shows no signs of burning. Both groups of pottery have the same composition: most of it was tableware or was designed to hold the food for the deceased. The amount of handmade pottery is 70%, which is exceptionally high. In other cemeteries north of the river Meuse this percentage seldom exceeds 10%. This might point to less contact or trade with Romans, though it might also be due to the use-period. But even if we take an early start into account, the number of handmade vessels is still relatively large. There seems to have been a preference for small and medium-sized

biconical cups, possibly used for drinking. The wheel-thrown ware also mostly consists of vessels associated with drinking: smooth-walled jugs and beakers in colour-coated and Belgic ware, some small bowls in *terra sigillata*. Other parts of the table-service, such as plates and dishes, are only few in number. Coarse-ware cooking pots are present in somewhat larger numbers. Typical Roman kitchenware such as *mortaria*, *dolia* and cork-urns are absent or very scarce. Only *amphorae*, including type Dressel 20, were used more frequently. Bottles and drinking bowls are the only types of glass vessel found.

In ten graves burnt animal bone was found mixed in with the human cremation remains, indicating a meal for the dead. It includes mostly bones of suckling-pigs, and only occasionally remains of birds (possibly chicken), sheep and cattle. Other objects include knives (3 times), metal parts of horse equipment (1-2 times), clay sling pellets (several in one grave), whetstones (2-3 times), a fragment of an oil-lamp, flint (3 times) and fragments of quernstones (2 times).

Chronology and spatial development

Pottery is the most important dating instrument, although graves that contain only handmade pottery are difficult to date precisely. Wheel-thrown ware can be dated more precisely, but this is encumbered by the fact that only a small number of graves contains more than two grave goods. Fifteen graves were dated with the aid of ¹⁴C-dating. These dates support the basic chronology supplied by the pottery, but caution is necessary when dating an individual grave in this way. Just as in other native-Roman cemeteries it seems that ¹⁴C-dates tend to be slightly earlier than those indicated by other archaeological evidence. A possible explanation could be the use of old timbers for the funeral pyre.

On the basis of pottery, ¹⁴C-dating, or a combination of both, together with the horizontal stratigraphic sequence, a total of 116 graves and charcoal-pits can be dated. These dates have led to six overlapping phases (table 55), ranging from the Late Iron Age to the period AD 150-240. For the length of this last phase it is important to note that typical 3rd-century pottery, such as *terra sigillata* plates type Dragendorff 32 or colour-coated beakers types Stuart 3, Oelmann 33 and 53b, does not occur in the cemetery. Taking into account the small number of graves in the last phase, it is likely that the use of the cemetery ended earlier, perhaps even around AD 200.

The earliest graves can be dated to the Late Iron Age (graves 231, 241, 260, 261, 262, 272, 288). They are in the same area as the first graves that contain wheel-thrown pottery (mostly Belgic beakers), dated between AD 25 and 40. Continuity between phase 1 and 2 is possible, since earlier wheel-thrown pottery would have been very exceptional. However, there may have been a short period during which the cemetery was not in use at the end of the Late Iron Age. The perception of the ritual meaning of the location remained intact though, and could have been the reason why the Roman period cemetery was laid out in the same area.⁵

The oldest graves seem to have been laid out along a path or route west of the cemetery.⁶ Until the middle of the first century AD the cemetery expands to the northeast only, then the path is 'crossed' and more graves are laid out west of it. A possible reason for the fact that there was no more expansion to the east could be the remains or the memory of the settlements from the Middle Iron Age in that area. All through the use and expansion of the cemetery the location of older farmyards are avoided/respected. After crossing the path the cemetery develops in a northeasterly direction and graves start

phase	number of burials (N)	percentage	N if total=300	N if total=400
1: Late Iron Age	8	6.9%	21	28
2: AD 25-70	10	8.6%	26	34
3: AD 40-120	38	32.8%	98	131
4: AD 90-150	22	19.0%	57	76
5: AD 120-180	23	19.8%	59	79
6: AD 150-240	15	12.9%	39	52
total	116	100%	300	400

Table 55. Number of dated burials, percentage and average total number of burials per phase.

to be laid out further away from the original path. Somewhere around the last quarter of the 1st century AD this development comes to a halt: a row of monumental graves (003, 004, 005, and later 001, 002, 006 and possibly 007) is laid out to mark the northern edge of the cemetery. A new path may have been running either north of the large graves or between these and the rest of the cemetery. During the 2nd century AD the area between the graves 001-007 and the old path gradually becomes filled in. The edges of the northern side of the cemetery seem to be reserved for the larger and exceptional grave monuments. Only one large grave is in the middle of the cemetery: it has a keyhole-shape and dates from the middle of the 2nd century AD. This grave (070) might have to be regarded as the successor of graves 001-007. There is also a shift in orientation: the earlier grave ditches, along the path, were laid out in a northeast-southwest direction, while the row of large graves showed a north-south orientation. With the keyhole-shaped grave this changes to northwest-southeast. During phase 5, somewhere between AD 150 and 175, the cemetery covers its maximum surface, and graves are laid out all over the area. In phase 6 there are only a few burials north of the old path.

Cemetery population

Physical-anthropological analysis of the cremated remains from c. 100 graves was carried out in 1989.⁷ Due to the low mean weight of the remains the results were not always satisfying. In 39 cases the approximate age of the deceased could be established, while for 21 individuals the sex could be determined. This is a meagre base from which to draw conclusions on the physical population, but a few general remarks can be made.

In most graves only one individual has been buried. Only in two cases there is a double interment: grave 003 contains

a juvenile person with an adult, grave 027 an adult woman with a child. Men, women and children were cremated and buried here. As in most cremation cemeteries graves of (very young) children are scarce, which could point to a different burial ritual (Hessing 1993). The mean age of the deceased lies somewhere between 25 and 30 years. More women (N = 14-16) than grown men (N = 2-5) could be identified. This tendency towards a 'surplus' of women is present in other cemeteries in rural areas. No clear connections can be established between age or sex and the shape of the monument.

The number of documented interments is 265. If we take into account the unexcavated 20% (53 graves) the minimum number of interments would have been 318. Several shallow interments may have been disturbed and thus not have been noticed though, which could bring the original number of graves to 350 or even 400. Table 56 shows the development of the population that has been buried in this cemetery, based on the method by Ascadi and Nemeskeri (1970). The population seems to grow from one or two families during the Late Iron Age to a maximum of ten families during the first decades of the 2nd century AD, after which it diminishes to three or four families. This development is very similar to what is known from other rural cemeteries in the Dutch River Area (Hessing in prep.). The size of the population is rather large, comparable to the cemetery at Tiel-Passewaaij only. As at Tiel, it is possible that this cemetery was used by the inhabitants of more than one settlement.

Variation in the burial ritual can point to vertical or horizontal stratification. The cluster of graves from phase 1 shows a high degree of uniformity, comparable to another group of Iron Age graves, R3-R8 (Van der Sanden 1998, 317). A parallel in both clusters is one slightly larger grave

phase	duration	population size if N total=300	population size if N total=400
1: Late Iron Age	150 years	4	5
2: AD 25-70	45 years	14-26	19-34
3: AD 40-120	80 years	31-50	41-68
4: AD 90-150	60 years	20-45	27-59
5: AD 120-180	60 years	25-39	33-50
6: AD 150-240	90 years	11-24	14-31

Table 56. Reconstructed size of the population at Oss-Ussen, based on an average life expectancy of 25 years.

with a post setting, although the one in the 'pre-Roman' cluster (grave 234) cannot be dated precisely. In phase 2 there is only one grave (266) that is different from the rest, containing a sling pellet and iron objects that may have been parts of horse equipment. This grave might have to be dated after AD 50 though. From phase 3 onwards there are clear signs of social stratification. The special location of graves 001-007 was already mentioned. These monuments are also larger and in five cases the ditches are combined with post settings. Seen in the context of Oss, the grave goods in these monuments are exceptional: four of them contain one or more glass vessels, five times animal bones were found and four graves contain clothing accessories. The mean number of grave goods (almost six) is conspicuously higher than elsewhere in the cemetery, and they include some special objects such as a tripod bowl in Belgic ware and the skull of a small predator.

The oldest of the large monuments is 004, which was laid out shortly after the middle of the 1st century AD. The youngest is grave 001, which is probably dated around the middle of the 2nd century AD. Thus during a period of 100 years a special monument was erected every 10-15 years, pointing to a very small selection of the population. Even if these deceased belonged to the same family, only one or two persons from each generation were buried in these monuments. If there was indeed a local elite family at Oss, only the leader himself and his wife or son and heir would have qualified. With that in mind it is interesting to note that in the oldest of the large graves the remains of a young child (4-8 years old) were buried, while the other graves contain another juvenile and at least two females.⁸ The presence of women and children in these large monuments point to a family-bound vertical stratification, and possibly a specific role for women from leading families in social and economic activities (Hessing in prep.). The relatively low number of male dead might be caused by men joining the Roman auxiliaries and not returning.

The largest grave (070, keyhole-shaped) dates to shortly after AD 150 and might be regarded as the successor of the seven special monuments. It was laid-out on top of an earlier grave, something that was usually avoided. Unfortunately the central burial was not present anymore and thus the status of the deceased in this grave remains unclear. Even in the last phases of the cemetery there is a group of graves with deviating sizes and shapes. They are situated on the eastern and western edges of the northern part and may point to a kind of subgroup in the social hierarchy, closely related to the local leader. Such a group seems to have been present during all phases of the cemetery, but is more prominent in phases 5 and 6, when the true elite is not visible anymore.

6.1.1 Cemetery and settlements

A number of conclusions derived from the study of the cemetery can be compared with what we have seen in the settlements. First, there is the type of find material. Although grave goods always differ from 'normal' refuse, it is important to note that both the cemetery and the settlements yield a relatively high amount of handmade ware, even in the later phases. A difference is the occurrence of early imports: in the Westerveld settlement we see a small range of early goods which apparently do not end up in the graves. This is unusual, since precious materials and vessels such as early terra sigillata are often used in burial rituals first (Van Enckevort/Huisman 1998, 72). The same goes for objects such as brooches, which are present in quite large numbers in the settlements, but scarce in the graves.

A second comparison concerns the chronology. Although the dates for the graves seem to suggest a gap between the Iron Age and the Roman period, this might be caused by the same dating problem that we encounter in the settlements (see 1.3.2). Other cemeteries in the Dutch River Area do not start before the Augustean period, but since occupation is thought to show continuity in Oss I will consider the cemetery to be continuous from the Late Iron Age onwards. This does not mean however that there were no changes during the first few decades of the Christian era. It seems that especially the *spatial* definition of the cemetery only took shape after AD 25/40, when the first graves with wheel-thrown pottery were laid out. I will return to this in chapter 8.

The last element is the question of who is buried in this cemetery. If we consider the original number of graves to have been *c.* 400, the population that used the cemetery goes from 5 individuals during the Late Iron Age (when there were at least three more clusters of graves) to a maximum of nearly 70 people between AD 40 and 120. After that it slowly diminishes to 15-20 individuals towards the end of the 2nd century AD. Hessing considers the size of this population large enough to assume that the inhabitants of more than one settlement were buried here. This is contrary to the preliminary reports, in which the finds, size and layout of the cemetery were thought to suggest that only the inhabitants of the large Westerveld settlement were buried here (Van der Sanden 1987e, 127). The vertical stratification that is so clear in the cemetery certainly seems to fit in with the local elite emerging from the Westerveld settlement (see chapter 8). But the size of the cemetery population does not preclude that at least some inhabitants from other settlements were buried here too.

When each farm is assumed to house a family of six, the maximum population sizes from the settlements and the cemetery do match reasonably well (fig. 204). Westerveld peaks earlier, with a maximum of 66 inhabitants between AD

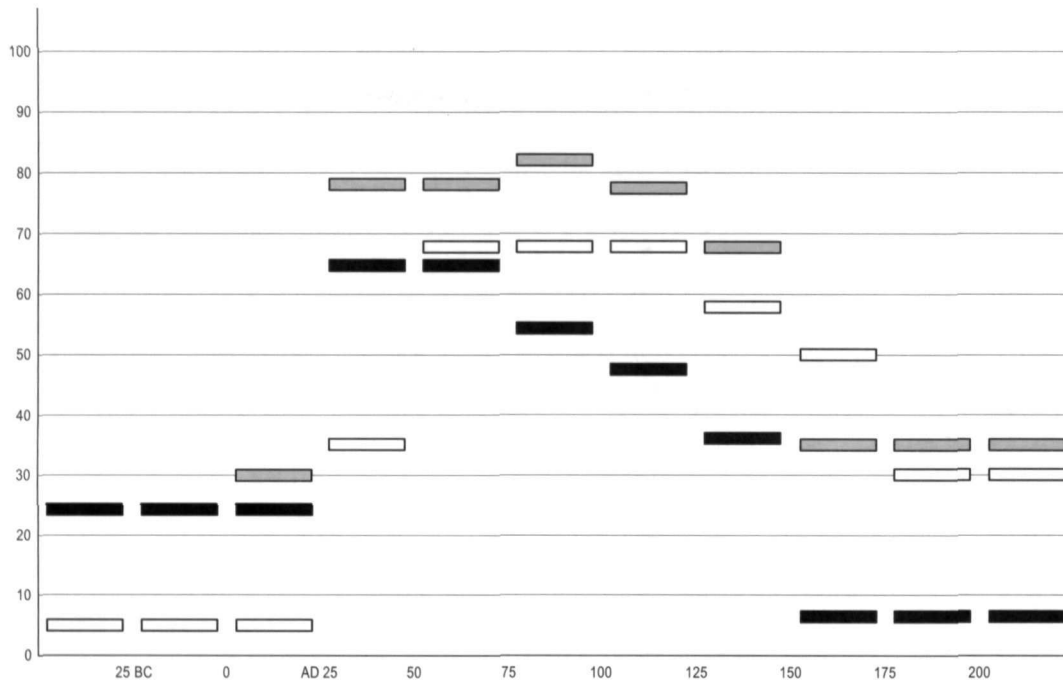


Figure 204. Graph depicting maximum population sizes from settlement and cemetery. White: cemetery, black: Westerveld, grey: Westerveld + Zomerhof + Vijver.

25 and AD 75, but it should be kept in mind that the house plans were probably dated slightly too early (see 1.3.2 and 4.8.2). Apart from that early phase the cemetery population is larger than the population of the Westerveld settlement alone. But since not all of the large settlement could be excavated, both populations are probably comparable in size. Adding the inhabitants from Zomerhof and Vijver, the settlement population is consistently about 10 persons greater than the cemetery population. This number will have been higher, since none of the settlements were excavated completely. However, the cemetery having fewer graves than there were inhabitants in the settlements seems to be a common phenomenon.

Taking into account the assumption that not every inhabitant ended up in a grave in this cemetery (for instance small children and soldiers), it is still possible that farmers from three settlements buried (some of) their dead here. The fact that the area of the cemetery is more or less enclosed by the farms of these three settlements fits in with that thought. Since it is clear from the large monuments that the local elite had a place in this cemetery, it might have been only a selection of other inhabitants that shared this graveyard. Whether the cemetery was used by the Westerveld settlement exclusively or by the inhabitants of three settlements, there must have been at least one more cemetery in the area, or

perhaps several smaller clusters of graves. The grave near the Schalkskamp settlement points to other burials, but a true cemetery has not been discovered yet.

6.2 ROMAN PERIOD SITES OUTSIDE USSEN

In addition to the excavations in the Usсен area, several other sites from the Roman period were discovered in the municipality of Oss (fig. 205). The majority of the find spots were documented by local (amateur) archaeologists through fieldwalking or the monitoring of building activities. In six cases the finds resulted in (rescue) excavations, sometimes with the aid of the Leiden Institute. The six excavated sites are listed below.⁹

Oss-IJsselstraat¹⁰

During two consecutive campaigns (1974 and 1975), the IPL¹¹ carried out a rescue excavation at the IJsselstraat, situated in an industrial area to the northeast of the town of Oss. Besides a small urnfield from the Early/Middle Iron Age, the larger part of a native-Roman settlement was excavated (fig. 206). It consisted of at least three contemporaneous compounds, each with a farm, several granaries and a well. In two cases houses were rebuilt on the same spot. Furthermore, ditches and palisades were present, one of which may have enclosed the settlement. The

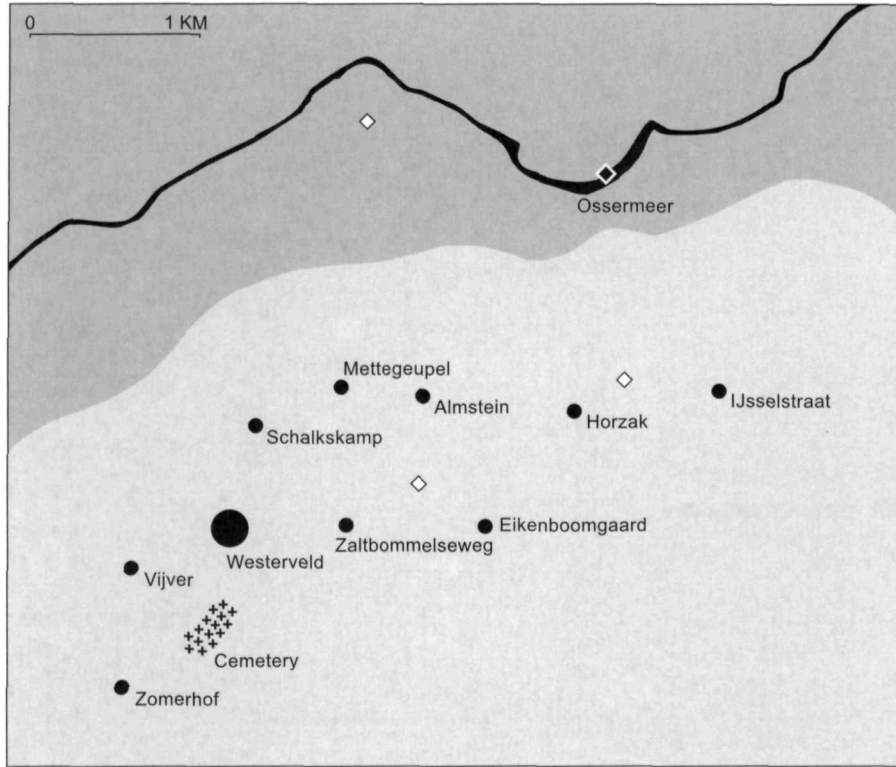


Figure 205. Map with all sites and stray finds (diamond symbol)) from the Oss region. The coversand area is indicated in light grey.

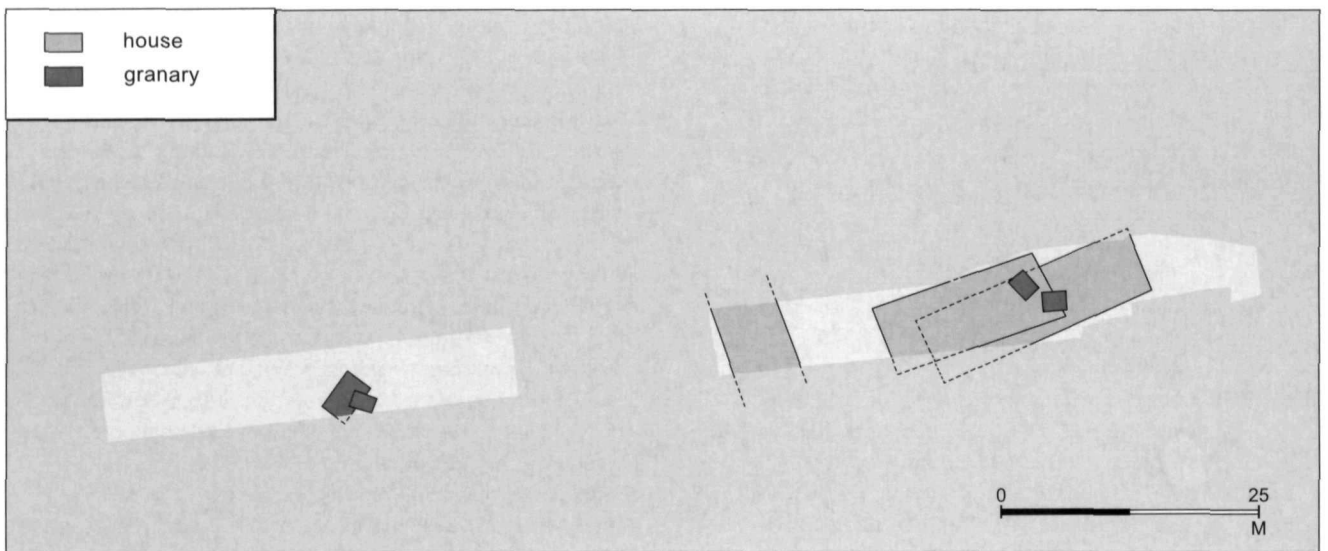


Figure 207. The Zaltbommelseweg settlement.

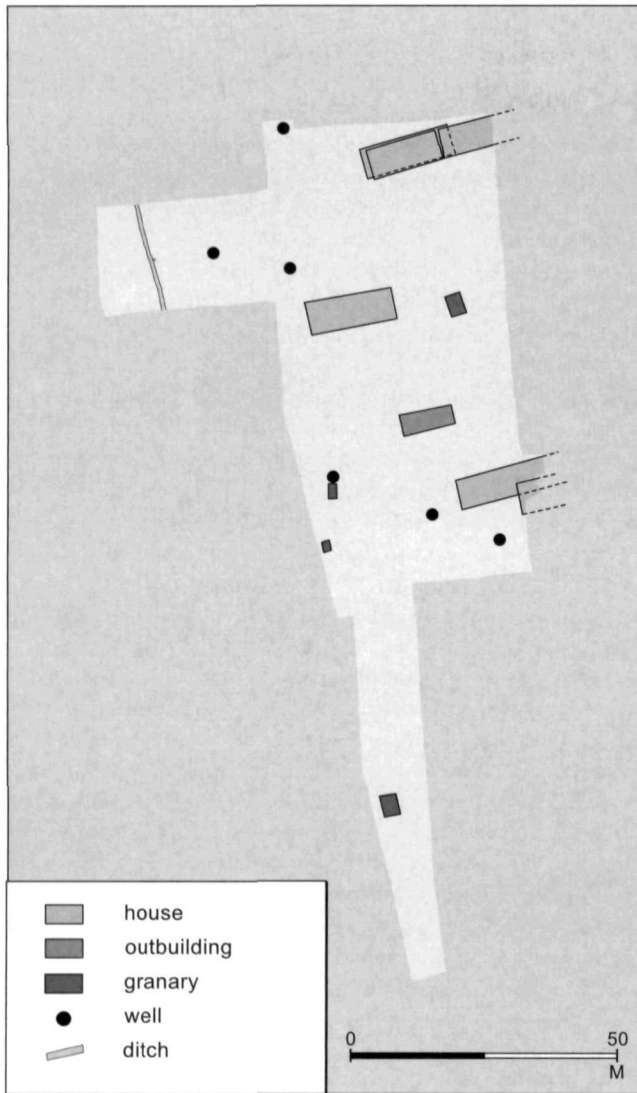


Figure 206. The IJsselstraat settlement.

settlement was in use between AD 50 and 250, a date which is based on the wheel-thrown pottery. No Roman building materials or early pottery imports were found. In 1986 and 1994, building activities took place directly to the south of the IJsselstraat site. The rescue excavations, known as Borgo I and II, carried out by members of the *Archeologische Werkgroep Oss*¹², revealed the southern limits of the settlement.

Oss-Eikenboomgaard¹³

In April 1979 members of the *Archeologische Werkgroep Oss*¹⁴ discovered and excavated 26 wells and over 300 pits and postholes during building activities around the Eikenboomgaard in Oss. Among the features, which dated

from the Iron Age to recent times, were a number of wells and pits from the Roman period. One of these wells, with a square lining made of timber beams, yielded *c.* 20 handmade and *c.* 50 Roman wheel-thrown pottery fragments. The wheel-thrown ware dates the well to the second half of the second century AD. Five other wells yielded rather small quantities of find material, and could therefore only tentatively be dated to the Roman period (first and second century AD). The linings of these wells included a hollowed-out tree trunk, wattlework, and a combination of vertical posts and planks. Finally, two wells with vertical posts and wattlework linings, probably date to the Late Roman Period. The pits and postholes, from which no buildings could be reconstructed, contained pottery from the first and second as well as from the fourth century AD. It should be noted that fourth-century material is completely absent in Ussen.

Oss-Zaltbommelseweg¹⁵

In 1984, a small team¹⁶ from the IPL documented Roman period traces in two road trenches of the Zaltbommelseweg. Besides four granaries from the Early and Late Iron Age, three house plans were partially excavated (fig. 207). The pottery found in the features provides the buildings with three consecutive dates in the Roman period (I, I/II and II/III). The two youngest buildings were built on the same spot, one succeeding the other. The *c.* 400 pottery fragments (15% wheel-thrown) from the buildings do not show any early imports or exceptional types, nor were any Roman building materials found.

Oss-Horzak-I¹⁷

From 1987 to 1989, during the construction of the 'Horzak' housing estate, members of the *Archeologische Werkgroep Oss*¹⁸ made observations in building trenches and road trenches. In some cases they carried out small excavations. Occupation traces from the Late Iron Age, the Roman period, and Late Medieval Period were found. A row of posts may have formed the wall of a house, from which the scarce finds date it to the Late Iron Age or the Roman period. In another building trench one half of a well could be excavated (fig. 208). It had a diameter of 250 cm and a depth of 150 cm. The construction consisted of two vertically split posts, one of which was stuck through the bottom of the pit (Oss-Ussen type C, see Schinkel 1994, part II, 183).¹⁹ Besides a fragment of a colour-coated beaker the well yielded another, more unusual find. A set of bronze kitchen utensils was found, consisting of a basin with a matching dipper and strainer placed in it (dated AD 150-250). Earlier first-century examples were part of the drinking service, used to ladle and strain undiluted or spiced wine. Later versions, like the one from Horzak, are often found in third-century

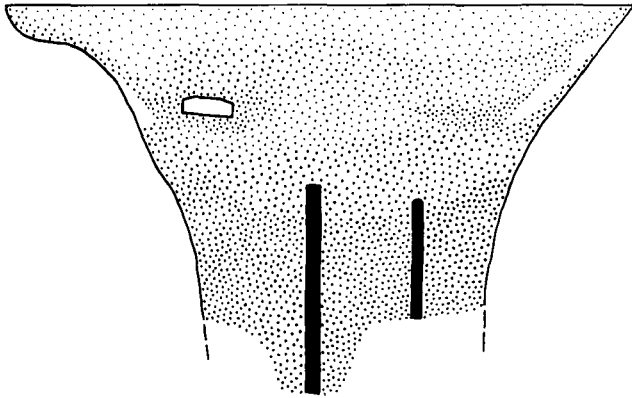


Figure 208. Well from the Horzak settlement. Scale 1:30.

bronze hoards in which kitchen utensils predominate. They may have served different purposes, such as straining stock (Koster 1997, 46).

Oss-Horzak-II²⁰

In 1997 the Leiden Faculty of Archaeology carried out a survey in the Horzak area, c. 400 m to the east of the building trenches where Roman period features had been found. In 1998, 1999 and 2000 the survey was followed by a regular excavation, revealing a Roman period settlement with at least four house plans, enclosed by a ditch.

Oss-Mettegeupel/Almstein²¹

From 1993 to 1995, an area c. 250 m to the north-east of the Schalkskamp settlement was excavated as part of the IPL regular excavation program. No features belonging to houses or other buildings from the Roman period were found²², but there are number of indications for Roman period activity in the area. A type-A2 well, containing only five fragments of handmade pottery, was ¹⁴C-dated to the third or fourth century AD.²³ The section showed it to be one of the few good examples of a well-construction built to reach the original surface. Furthermore, a number of ditches and palisades were thought to date to the Roman period. This hypothesis was based on the scarce finds, relative dates derived from intersecting features, and the orientation of the ditches which is similar to that of the Schalkskamp enclosure. It is thought that these ditches represent a field system, indicating that the area was used as arable land (Fokkens 1996, 209; in press). The well could have been dug for agricultural purposes. The small number of finds from the well might be a result of the fact that there was no occupation nearby.

In addition to the excavations there are several locations from which local archaeologists collected Roman period pottery. Even though it is not at all certain whether these isolated finds

represent occupation or even activity, they will be mentioned here to complete the dataset.²⁴ A single fragment of *terra sigillata* was picked up from a field in the south of Oss, at a distance of c. 2.5 km to the south-east of the Ussen settlements. During building activities in northern Oss a fragment of a coarse-ware vessel (type Brunsting 9) was retrieved. The find spot is situated roughly between the sites Zaltbommelseweg and Horzak, just 250 m north-west of Eikenboomgaard. Two sherds of handmade pottery and 12 fragments of Belgic ware were found in a Roman period pit documented in a building trench. This was situated between the sites Horzak and IJsselstraat, slightly further to the north. Some sherds of handmade ware and two possible fragments of *terra sigillata* were picked up from a field c. 250 m to the south-west of this spot. A single sherd (coarse ware type Stuart 201) was found on the northern edge of the municipality of Oss, c. 500 m north of the *Ossermeer* (lake of Oss).

Finally, the finds from the lake itself should be mentioned here. They were collected over the years by local archaeologists after dredging activities. As well as handmade pottery the finds also included wheel-thrown ware (Belgic ware and coarse ware) and net-sinkers made from Roman roof-tiles (see Verwers/Beex 1978, 32-33 for some of the earlier finds). The supposed Roman period wooden barge found in 1949 turned out to be of medieval date (see 1.2.2, note 17).

Of the excavated sites, Zaltbommelseweg and IJsselstraat represent rural settlements comparable to the smaller ones from Ussen. The sites at Eikenboomgaard and Horzak-I did not yield any buildings from the Roman period, but the presence of postholes and wells can be regarded as an indication for occupation. Even though excavations at Oss-Mettegeupel show that wells were not necessarily situated close to farmsteads, the reasonable amount of debris in the wells at Eikenboomgaard points to nearby occupation. The nature of the settlement cannot be reconstructed, but this is one of the few indirect indications for fourth-century occupation in Oss. At Horzak the situation is different, since the well found there only contained what should possibly be regarded as a bronze hoard. In this case it is the presence of several features that together may indicate settlement. Again the character of the occupation is unknown, but the bronzes would have been an exceptional possession. The house plans found at Horzak-II could be part of the same settlement, which would then have been rather large. In the case of the isolated finds the evidence for occupation is weaker still, especially when only a single sherd is found. Only the pit situated between Horzak and IJsselstraat is a certain indication for activities during the Roman period. The results from Ussen, the other excavations and the isolated finds yield a settlement pattern with at least eight clusters of farms, situated between 500 and 1000 m apart.

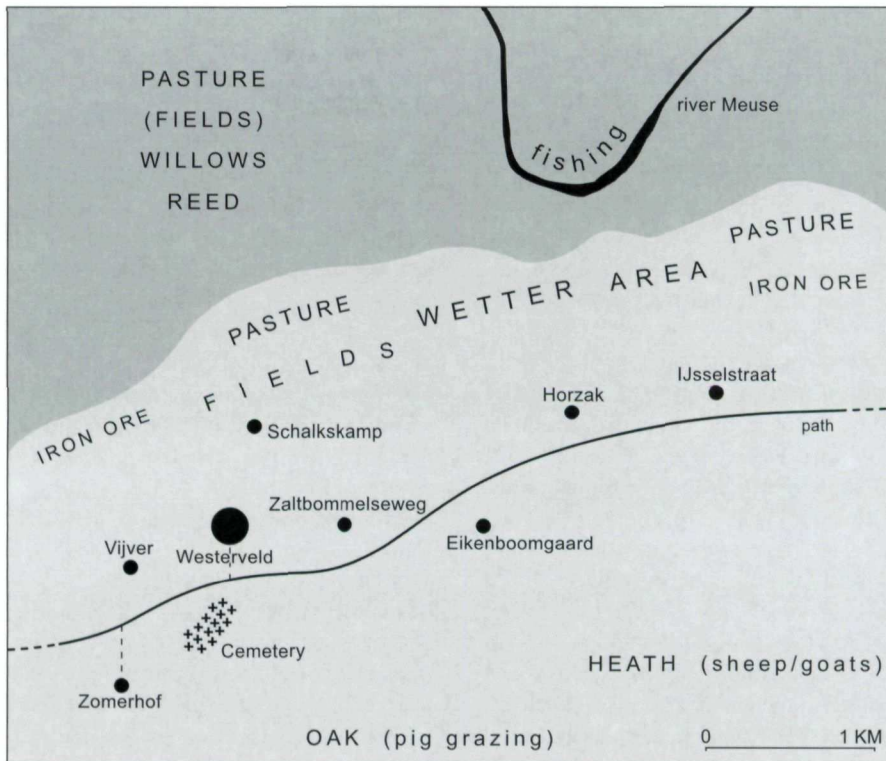


Figure 209. Oss in a micro-region. The coversand area is indicated in light grey.

6.3 THE AREA BETWEEN AND AROUND THE SETTLEMENTS

The excavations at Ussen were aimed primarily at uncovering settlements, graves and other recognisable groups of structures. Due to these priorities and the limited time available, the areas between and outside the settlements and the cemetery were not excavated as intensively. Observations from building trenches and excavation trenches, dug to document prehistoric features, have yielded some information however. Outside Ussen the situation is even less clear: all other known sites in Oss were documented during rescue campaigns, which often lasted no more than a few weeks.²⁵ Starting just outside the settlements themselves and gradually working towards the outer areas, I will give an impression of what the space around the settlements looked like, how it was structured and which activities might have taken place in it (fig. 209). This is partly based on features and partly on stray finds.

Buildings and structures near settlements

Even though compounds were clearly clustering during the Roman period, the areas outside the settlements were probably not devoid of structures. Indication for this is found

at the settlements Westerveld and Schalkskamp, where outbuildings are situated just outside the settlement enclosure. One nine-post granary lies c.10 m outside the north-east corner of the Schalkskamp settlement. At Westerveld, buildings are outside the enclosure in two locations: outbuilding B5 is c. 8 m away from the south-west corner, while there is a group of granaries (S453-S457, S467-468) situated outside the northern edge of the settlement. In all cases fragments of smaller ditches and palisades are present near the buildings, suggesting a delimited area (see below). None of the buildings in question can be dated to the Roman period with certainty. Since they were relatively near the enclosure (between 4 and 20 meters), one could argue that they were part of the actual settlement. In that case the fact that they are outside the enclosure is significant. The function of these buildings is unknown: possibilities are (extra) storage room or craft activities.

In addition to outbuildings there are also three occasions where wells have been dug outside the settlement enclosures. At the Zomerhof settlement well P17 is situated near the northern 'entrance', while wells P207 and P231 are close to outbuilding B5 near the south-west corner of the Westerveld enclosure. The Zomerhof enclosure could have been out of

use already when P17 (dated IId-IIIc) was dug. P207 however, is dated to the end of the first century AD, when the ditched boundary around the Westerveld settlement was still in use. Apparently enclosure ditches marked the limits of the actual settlement, i.e. the clustered compounds, but several activities could cross these boundaries.

Ditches and palisades

The plan of the Westerveld settlement shows several ditches linked to the enclosure, stretching outwards from the settlement (see 4.5). In two cases bends and corners are visible, and the majority of the ditches continue outside the excavated area. At least four of them seem to be connected with the entrances to the settlement, forming a droveway that might have been used by cattle and people. One set of ditches could even be directly linked to the enclosure around the Schalkskamp settlement.

It is possible and even likely that such ditches and perhaps palisades were present all over the area between the settlements. Shallow and narrow ditches are easily missed or, when excavated only fragmentarily, not included in the final settlement plan. Moreover, they are difficult to date since they often contain only small amounts of pottery.²⁶ In an area where several settlements are set close together the space between them will have been frequently and intensively used: some form of structuring could have marked this use. Even though there seems to have been no need for drainage in Oss, ditches could have led up to entrances or they could have flanked paths. It is often supposed that the inhabitants grew vegetables and herbs in small gardens near their farms (Bakels 1994, 232). These 'kitchen gardens' might have been situated (directly) outside the settlements, especially in the case of the densely populated Westerveld settlement. Ditches or fences could have marked these plots and kept animals out of them. Other areas might have been delimited for various activities, such as the cultivation of crops (see below), animal pens, the tanning of hides, or cremating the deceased near the cemetery.

Paths and routes

No traces of routes or paths were excavated in Oss. Even though no major (Roman) roads ran through the area (see 7.1.), paths passing and leading up to the settlements and the cemetery were undoubtedly present. The layout of the cemetery suggests a path along the north side, where six large grave monuments were lined up with their entrances facing north (Van der Sanden 1987e, 77; Hessing in prep.). The direction of this path would have been east-south-east to west-south-west, which is parallel to the edge of the coversand area. Since the Oss settlements are arranged along a similar line (see 6.4), this route could have functioned as a through road, passing most of the settlements. Smaller paths

could have branched off this road, leading up to the settlements. Both the southern Westerveld entrance and the northern Zomerhof entrance could have been linked up in this way. Whether the Schalkskamp settlement was reached along the ditch connecting it with Westerveld or directly from the 'main' road is uncertain.²⁷

Botanical research yielded an indirect indication for the existence of paths in the settlements themselves. In all three settlements that were analysed seeds from tread plants were found in pits and wells (Van Amen 1995). These included annual meadow-grass (*Poa annua*), knotgrass (*Polygonum aviculare*), ribwort plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*), greater plantain (*Plantago major*) and pearlwort (*Sagina* cf. *procumbens*). Of course, these plants could have grown on the farmyards themselves.

Location of fields and pastures

The excavations at Oss did not yield direct traces of agriculture, such as plough marks or (Celtic) field boundaries. However, on the basis of the geological characteristics of the direct surroundings of the settlements some suggestions as to where crops were sown and cattle were grazed can be made. The lower parts of the river area towards the Meuse were not suitable for agriculture: the flood basins were too wet and the clay was too heavy. But in certain parts cattle could have grazed when the groundwater was low in summer (Kooistra 1994, 126; 1996, 58). In these same areas reeds and willow for thatching and wattlework could be collected. At the foot of the flank of the coversand the vegetation was marshy. This area may have been a source of iron ore, although most of the iron ore would have been collected as bog iron in the Peel marshes. The strip of sandy soil between the settlements and the river area was approximately 1.5 km wide. It is unclear how much of this northern strip was dry enough for agriculture. Wetter areas could have served as pasture and hayfields.

One of the few indirect indications for the location of fields are the ditches excavated at Oss-Mettegeupel/Almstein (see 6.2). They are thought to be part of a *parcellation system, indicating agricultural activities*. A well and an outbuilding found nearby might have served agricultural purposes too. This would mean that fields were not only present in the higher area south of the settlements (Van der Sanden 1987f, 88), but also on the northern strip of land. Possibly these grounds were brought into use when more land was needed for agriculture. This might have been one of the reasons why the Schalkskamp settlement literally had to give ground. More fields will have been present south of the settlements and perhaps even in between, alternating with small wooded areas. Pigs grazed in these groves near the settlements and in the larger mixed oak forests further south. Sheep and goats could be herded on the southern

heathlands. More pasture for cattle, which could be grazed in wetter areas, was present west of the settlements.

Other activities

Next to agriculture several other activities took place in the areas around the settlements. The winning of bog iron (ore) in the marshy southern zone has already been mentioned. Hunting and fishing did not play a part in the food economy (Lauwerier/IJzereef 1994, 240), but occasionally fish could have been caught in the river Meuse (see 1.1.2). Fruits, nuts and various edible wild plants were probably collected in the forests south of Oss. Fruit farming is a Roman introduction (Van Zeist 1991), and although there are indications of higher fruit consumption in the Roman period (Van Amen 1995; Bakels/Wesselingh/Van Amen 1997) it is unlikely that orchards were laid out in or near the settlements at Oss. The majority of the consumed fruit consisted of forest fruits (raspberry, blackberry) and wild species (apple). Cultivated species such as plums, pears or cherries were not found. Various crafts will have been practised in the area around the settlements, such as the fabrication of ceramics, the tanning

of hides, iron extraction, and bronze casting. Apart from the possible Roman period forge in the Schalkskamp settlement (see 5.3), no traces of any of these activities have been discovered.

6.4 OCCUPATION AT OSS FROM 100 BC TO AD 225
After having discussed the settlements in chapters 2-5, with the cemetery and the areas between being described in the previous paragraphs, an overview of all of Oss from the Late Iron Age through to the Roman period can be given. Unfortunately the majority of the structures from the Late Iron Age could not be dated to a specific phase within the period (Schinkel 1994, part I, 179). A sketch of the situation directly preceding the Roman period is thus based on data from a period of *c.* 250 years, although I have tried to distinguish between the phases I-J and K-L. Moreover it is largely based on information from Ussen only, with some additional data from the excavations at Schalkskamp and Mettegeupel/Almstein. Although Schinkel did not make an inventory of surface finds from the whole of Oss, we know that (Late) Iron Age material was found in several places.²⁸



Figure 210. Features (houseplans and ditches) from the last phase of the Late Iron Age.

During the first half of the first century BC the Ussen area is occupied intensively by around 50 people (fig. 210). At least four settlements are in use at the same time, three of which consist of more than one contemporaneous compound. In the southwest, settlement XVI comprises two compounds, each containing a farmhouse with a slender, light construction. The farms have been built in compounds that were used before. North of XVI lies settlement XVII, which also comprises two compounds. However, since these are more than 250 meters apart they might be two single-farm settlements. In the northern of the two the farmhouse has been built on a previously occupied farmyard. The southern compound contains a farmhouse with a different type of construction, with foundation ditches for the walls.

Directly east of XVII the large settlement XVIII is situated. Around 100-50 BC it consists of three to four compounds. This settlement differs from its neighbours not only in size but in several other aspects. At least one farmhouse has a west-east orientation instead of the usual southwest-northeast or west-north-west/east-south-east. In the centre of the settlement one or two farms have been built

with foundation ditches for the walls. The builders of one house (H81) have combined the new orientation with a new construction: the central roof-bearing posts are founded in large deep postholes, while the foundation ditch is also deep. Most farms have been built in the same compounds as their predecessors. In the northernmost settlement, Iron Age Schalkskamp, stands a single farm. Its compound is enclosed by a shallow ditch: a novelty in the area.

Burials are situated in an area that is more or less enclosed by the three southern settlements. The cremation graves are scattered in small groups and sometimes surrounded by circular or rectangular ditches. The 50 inhabitants of Ussen live off the practice of mixed farming, carried out on fields and pastures that are situated near the settlements.

Outside Ussen several other places are occupied during the last phases of the Late Iron Age. At a distance of c. 350 m east of the Schalkskamp settlement two compounds are still inhabited or about to go out of use (Mettegeupel, see Fokkens 1996, 208-209; Jansen 1997). They are separated from one another by shallow ditches. Further to the south-east (Almstein) at least two other compounds are situated.

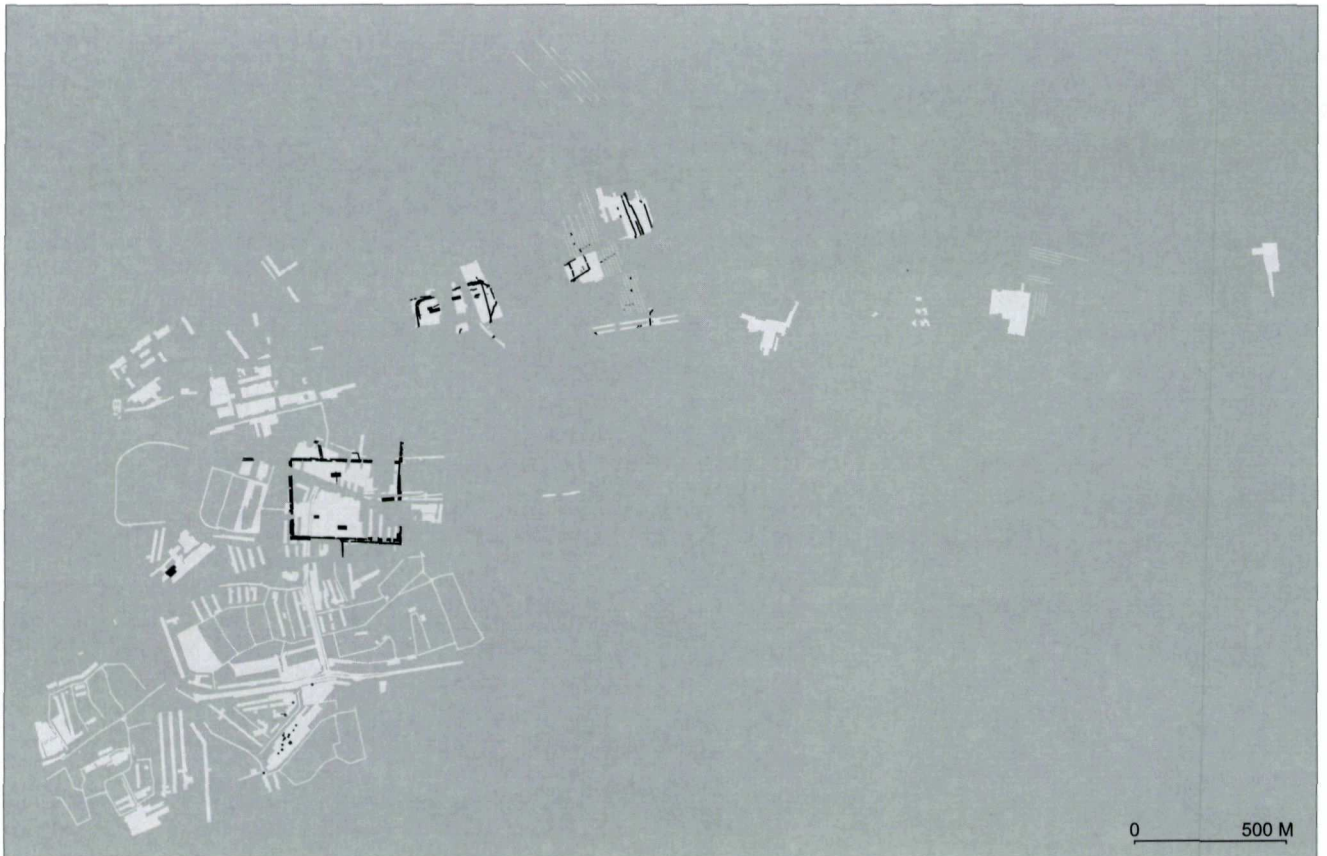


Figure 211. Features (houseplans and ditches) from the Roman period (first decades AD).

The houses in this settlement have been built in the same yards as their predecessors, and they have a construction that originated centuries earlier (Oss-Ussen type 4). Like their neighbours, the inhabitants of these farmsteads have dug shallow ditches to enclose the settlement (Van der Beek 1996). Other settlements are situated further south and east (Zaltbommelseweg and Horzak).

During the last phases of the Late Iron Age the first indications for a new type of settlement are just surfacing, such as the clustering of houses, frequent rebuilding in the same compound, the enclosed northern settlement, and the differences in settlement size and house construction. These changes seem to culminate in the Roman period. Unfortunately the process of change cannot be followed, because the last half of the first century BC is virtually undetectable in the archaeological data.

After 50 BC the population density in Ussen remains stable at first. At least two of the four settlements continue to be inhabited, the others shift or become re-occupied after several decades. In the Mettegeupel/Almstein area there is no settlement continuity after the Late Iron Age. Around the

start of the Christian era three settlements are clearly distinguishable (fig. 211). In the area of the former settlement XVII, one or two farmhouses are present; at least one is built with the light construction used in the Iron Age. In fact, this settlement (Vijver) has not changed much, and is still rather unstructured. South of here the former settlement XVIII is nearly deserted. The large settlement (Westerveld) is still in the same location, although the compounds have clustered even more. The farms still number three to four, but some new elements have been added. The group of farmsteads and some additional ground have been enclosed by a double ditched enclosure. One of the enclosure ditches extends to the north, meeting up with a smaller enclosed settlement (Schalkskamp). This contains one or two compounds.

The graves are no longer scattered, but concentrate in the area south of the Westerveld settlement. It is only a single, small group of burials; some of them covered by small mounds surrounded by circular or rectangular ditches. The area to the northeast of Ussen has been divided by ditches and seems to be in use as arable land.

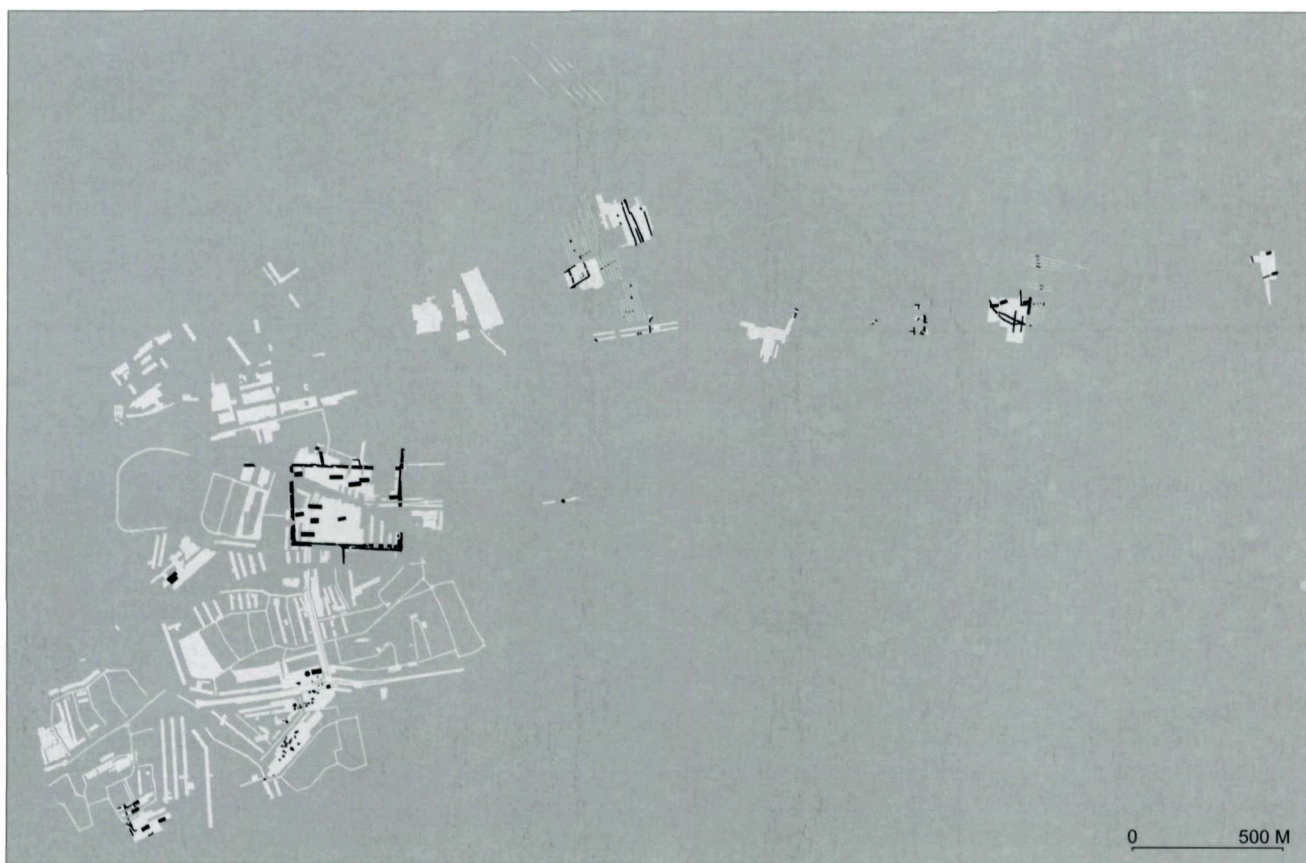


Figure 212. Features (houseplans and ditches) from the Roman period (after AD 70).

Shortly after AD 70 several changes have occurred (fig. 212). The Schalkskamp settlement in the north is no longer occupied: it is possibly replaced by fields. In the south the new Zomerhof settlement is now in use, comprising at least three compounds enclosed by a shallow ditch. One of the farms is slightly larger. The Vijver settlement remains basically the same, but the Westerveld settlement has quickly increased in size. Although the enclosure is not enlarged, the area within it is now occupied by approximately ten compounds. Some of the farms were built with a new north-south orientation, and the length of the farmhouses has increased. On the northern edge of the large cemetery at least two grave monuments have been constructed that are conspicuously larger than the others, containing special grave goods. Outside Ussen several other settlements are inhabited, possibly even continuously since the Late Iron Age. One of these is situated *c.* 700 m east of the Westerveld settlement, and comprises at least one compound (Zaltbommelseweg). Further along the route to the east we find the settlements at Horzak and at the IJsselstraat. The latter has been built in a previously unoccupied area, used as a cemetery 500 years

before. It comprises at least three compounds and is enclosed by a shallow ditch.

Around AD 100 the growth and prosperity of the preceding phase are still present (fig. 213). Although the Vijver settlement structure shows no outward signs of this, the inhabitants now have more access to imported Roman goods. The largest farm of the Zomerhof settlement has been extended and is situated on the edge of an open area. At the Westerveld settlement several changes have occurred. The enclosure is still present, but the entrance in the north side has been closed off. One of the compounds is exceptionally large. This yard has been marked off with ditches and palisades, and comprises almost one fifth of the total settlement. The timber farmhouse inside, although not extremely large, has a new construction, resembling a *porticus*. This one house has usurped a space that was formerly used by at least four farms. Outside Ussen the other settlements are still thriving, although no conspicuous changes have occurred. Settlements and cemetery show a regular spatial patterning: they are separated by intervals of 500-1000 m, and orientated along the edge of the coversand.



Figure 213. Features (houseplans and ditches) from the Roman period (around AD 100).



Figure 214. Features (houseplans and ditches) from the Roman period (around AD 150).

A path, following the same east-south-east/west-south-west direction, weaves through the settlements and past the northern edge of the cemetery, where more large grave monuments have been erected.

Towards the second half of the second century the population increase and growing prosperity seem to come to an end (fig. 214). At the Zomerhof settlement houses are rebuilt on the same compounds, but the buildings are smaller. The Vijver settlement is still inhabited, but after AD 150 no new farms are built. At Westerveld the inner ditch of the enclosure is invisible while the outer ditch is slowly filling up, and the large compound has been deserted. Only four farms are present in the settlement, and they are all smaller than their predecessors were. The cemetery is still in use, but after AD 150 no more large grave monuments are built. Not much is known about the settlements outside Ussen, but towards the end of the century someone at Horzak deposits (hides?) a set of bronze kitchen utensils in a well. It could be an indication that the situation in the area is becoming less stable and

unsafe. Around AD 225-250 the settlements in Oss are no longer inhabited.

notes

- 1 This contribution is a summary of a more comprehensive analysis of the Oss cemetery, which is to appear in Hessing in prep.
- 2 Bechert (1980) describes this type of grave as a *Brandschuttung* (Dutch: *brandrestengraf*).
- 3 Haalebos (1990, 189) observed the same at Nijmegen – Hatert.
- 4 Charcoal from 94 graves was analysed by I. Stuijts (Biological Archaeological Institute, Groningen University). *Alnus* was found in 77 cases and *Quercus* in 73. Other types of wood included *Fraxinus*, *Salix*, *Fagus*, *Acer* and *Betula*, and only occasionally *Tilia*, *Rhammus*, *Corylus*, *Populus*, *Ulmus*, *Ilex* and *Pyrus/Malus* were found.
- 5 See Roymans 1995b and Fontijn 1996. Comparable examples, but with a clearer break between Iron Age and Roman period, can be

found at Wijk bij Duurstede – De Horden, Geldermalsen – Bostesteijn and Cuijk – Heeswijkse Kampen (Hessing in prep.).

6 It is assumed here that a number of paths and routes partly determined the layout of the cemetery, but their existence cannot be proved. However, there are a number of medieval ditches and cart tracks that follow the same directions. They can be dated before the development of the *plaggen* soil and it is not unlikely that there is a connection with the way in which the Roman period landscape was structured.

7 The analysis was carried out by M. Hoogland (Leiden).

8 None of the skeletons from the six graves show enough morphological characteristics to be determined as male.

9 In the original set-up for this study, Oss-Elzenburg was included as another Roman period site. However, apart from one possible pottery fragment, this find spot has only yielded material from the Bronze Age and the Iron Age.

10 Co-ordinates 165.83/421.10 (Topographical map of the Netherlands, sheet 45E). Literature: G.J. Verwers 1978a; Wesselingh 1993.

11 Supervision by prof.dr. P.J.R. Modderman and dr. G.J. Verwers. Part of the work was carried out by members of the *Heemkundekring Maasland*.

12 G. van Alphen, P. Haane and H. Pennings. Literature: Van Alphen 1986.

13 Co-ordinates 164.50/420.30 (Topographical map of the Netherlands, sheet 45E). Literature: Van Alphen 1980; Bakels 1984; Hagensnaars 1981; G.J. Verwers 1983; W.J.H. Verwers 1984.

14 G. van Alphen, H. den Brok, M. van Eerd, P. Haane, G. de Haer, P. van Lijssel, L. Pinkse, P. de Poot and G. Smits.

15 Co-ordinates 163.66/420.22 (Topographical map of the Netherlands, sheet 45E). This site has been published by Van der Sanden (1990).

16 Supervision by A.-B. Döbken.

17 Co-ordinates 164.74/420.78 (Topographical map of the Netherlands, sheet 45E). Literature: Van Alphen/Datema 1987; Van Alphen/Hiep 1989; Koster 1993; Verwers 1990; Verwers 1991.

18 G. van Alphen and H. Hiep.

19 Even though Schinkel has included this type of well in the catalogue, its functionality is disputable. Schinkel himself dug an

experimental version of a type-C well in Oss, but the water did not rise as expected. Oss type C should thus be regarded as a purely descriptive type of pit with a post stuck through the bottom.

20 Co-ordinates 165.10/420.95 (Topographical map of the Netherlands, sheet 45E). Survey and excavation were carried out under supervision of H. Fokkens and R. Jansen, with the aid of E. Ball and D. Schiltmans (1998). Although these campaigns are mentioned here, the results of *Horzak-II* will not be part of this study. References: Jansen/Fokkens 1997; 1999a; 1999b.

21 Co-ordinates 163.90/420.90 (Topographical map of the Netherlands, sheet 45E). Known as *Mettegeupel* 1993 and 1994, and *Almstein* 1995, these IPL excavations were carried out under the supervision of H. Fokkens, D. Fontijn (1994) and Z. van der Beek (1994 and 1995). Analysis includes Van der Beek 1995; Jansen 1997; Mietes 1998; see also Fokkens 1996; in press.

22 Fokkens (1996, fig. 5) situates a Roman period house plan in the *Almstein* area. However, this plan is of an unknown type, resembling types 8B and 8C. Only one possible Roman period sherd was found in the features belonging to this plan, and thus it cannot be dated to the Roman period with certainty. Even if the building dates from the Roman period, it is probably not a house but rather an outbuilding situated in a area used as arable land.

23 GrN-21508. Calibrated (CAL20, Van der Plicht 1993) with a probability of 95.4% (2) this is cal. AD 240 - 384, with a probability of 68.3% (1) this is cal. AD 250 - 306 / 310 - 336.

24 Most of this information was retrieved from ARCHIS, other finds were reported to the IPL by local archaeologists.

25 *IJsselstraat* is an exception, having been excavated during two summer campaigns. However, it was also the first excavation in Oss, and in the early 1970s 'off-site' archaeology was completely non-existent.

26 Indeed many ditch fragments, situated between the settlements, are visible on the original field drawings. However, none of these could be dated to the Roman period (or any other period for that matter). The majority of these ditches were not numbered.

27 Kok (1994, 114-115) suggests a path along the east side of the cemetery, which would bend off past the east side of the *Westerveld* enclosure and then run north to the *Schalkskamp* settlement. This would account for the oblong form of the cemetery which stretches alongside this second path. However, there are no indications for this apart from the shape of the cemetery.

28 An inventory of finds from the northern part of the *Maaskant* (between Oss and the river *Meuse*) was made as part of a student project (Ball/Schiltmans 1998).