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NATIVE NEIGHBOURS

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



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Most of the everyday life of the farmers at Oss took place in the structured world of the settlements and the adjacent areas (the 'micro-region'). This includes the cemetery, fields, and pastures as described in chapter 6. Oss is situated in the Maaskant region. In the Roman period this larger area was probably well known to and visited by at least some of the inhabitants of Oss. It included other settlement clusters with cemeteries and fields, roads, and some regionally orientated sites such as sanctuaries. In order to place the settlement system at Oss in a larger perspective I will take a closer look at the Maaskant region. Finally a picture is sketched of the wider region around the Maaskant, which offers the opportunity to consider Oss against the background of (provincial-)Roman history.

7.1. RESEARCH HISTORY AND PHYSICAL BOUNDARIES OF THE MAASKANT REGION

In 1992, when the present study started, the Maaskant region was defined as 'the area south of the river Meuse, roughly bordered by the small rivers Aa and Dieze in the west, the Graafsche Raam in the east and the now reclaimed Peel peat areas in the south'.¹ Originally, the name 'Maaskant' indicated only the zone of river clays and silts directly south of the river Meuse, between the villages of Ravenstein and Crèvecoeur. The sandy soils of Brabant were seen as the southern border. In this sense, the term 'Maaskant region' was used by Modderman (1950, 92) who, following the soil research by Van Diepen in 1948 (Van Diepen 1952), carried out an extensive archaeological survey of the whole area. But in 1979, when Verwers started the 'Maaskant project' (Verwers 1981, 38), its boundaries were interpreted differently. The Maaskant now comprised the area south of the Meuse and to the north of the line 's-Hertogenbosch - Oss - Herpen (Van der Sanden 1988, 100). In order to include the excavations near Oss, which were meant to be the key-site of the area, the Maaskant had been slightly enlarged to the south. It included part of the Heikant, which is the name for the sandy area south of the actual Maaskant. During the following 15 years when the Maaskant project was being carried out, the boundaries of the region changed gradually, along with various project leaders and research goals (see Fokkens 1996). The present-day study area is the

one outlined at the start of this chapter, i.e. with the former Peel marshes as the southern boundary (fig. 215).²

Whether the Maaskant was also considered a separate region in Roman times is disputable. Obviously, both the river Meuse and the Peel marshes were physical boundaries of some kind. But the Meuse was probably also used as a route for travel and trade, and as such could have been a link with other areas instead of a boundary.³ Moreover, the course of the river was different in the Roman period, which means that it was not on the edge of the area now called the Maaskant, but slightly more to the south (see 1.2.2.). Modderman (1950) has already demonstrated that even though the clay zones around the Meuse were wet, there were several drier outcrops where traces of habitation were found. Some of these places, such as Megen, Macharen and Oijen, were originally situated north of the river but are part of the present-day Maaskant study area. In the Roman period, the Peel was a large raised bog area. West of it, directly south of Oss, were extensive heathlands, with the occasional pool. Both heath and marshes were only sparsely inhabited because of the lack of good soil for living and arable farming, and possibly because of a (positive) connotation with ritual and myths (see Roymans 1995b). As such the southern 'border' of the Maaskant was probably a true boundary as far as settlement was concerned, but the area south of it certainly played a part in the ideological world of the inhabitants.

7.1.1 Sites from the Maaskant

The first inventory of the Maaskant area (the northern clay zone only) was carried out by Modderman (1950). Finds (mainly pottery) were collected on what Van Diepen (1952) had classified as ancient settlement soils (Dutch: *oude woongronden*). Roman 'influence' and occupation, characterised as 'native', was found in the whole area. Imported (wheel-thrown) pottery could be dated to the second century and to the first half of the third century only. The Late Iron Age pottery could not be distinguished from that of earlier Iron Age periods or from native-Roman material (Modderman 1950, 95-96). Only in the eastern half of the region, in a secondary stream-ridge landscape, occasional fourth-century material was found. Because they are based on surface material only, Modderman's sites are

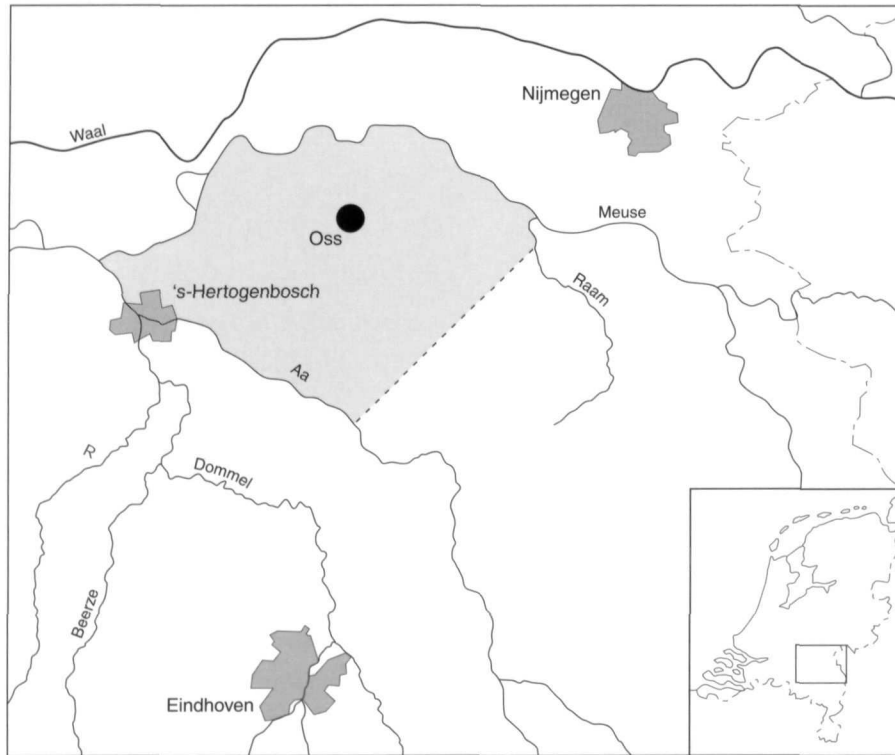


Figure 215. The (present-day) Maaskant with the study region in light grey.

difficult to classify. Since the inventory in 1948, only one of the 23 Roman period sites mentioned was excavated.⁴ In the meantime numerous new surface finds were collected, especially by local (amateur) archaeologists.⁵ The map of Roman period sites in the Maaskant was completed further by Beex (1973). His inventory covered the whole of the province of North-Brabant, including the southern part of the Maaskant, which fell outside the scope of Modderman's research. In his 1973 article, Beex gave a new overview this time taking into account the nature of the finds, which resulted in a (broad) classification of the sites. According to his map, mostly settlements and a small number of burials occur in the Maaskant. Besides the sites from Modderman 1950, Beex lists a large number of new sites, some of which were partly excavated.⁶ The Eastern River Area (ERA) includes a small part of the Maaskant region, but no further information on the sites could be supplied at the time this regional project was carried out by the State Service for Archaeological Investigations (Willems 1986, 14 and 129, note 25). The only new site mentioned, next to the ones from Modderman and Beex, is Oss – IJsselstraat⁷ (G.J. Verwers 1978a; Wesselingh 1993; see 6.2). Finally Verwers presented an overview of the whole of North-Brabant, based on Beex with a few alterations (Verwers 1998, 16/17).

For the purpose of this study I have constructed a map of the Maaskant region with the sites from all known inventories depicted on it (fig. 216). The majority can be found in Beex's article, although I have left out and combined a few sites. Several new sites found after 1973 have been added, including the excavations in and around Oss and finds by local archaeologists.⁸

Distribution

The distribution of the sites in the region (fig. 216) is largely determined by the geological situation: the Maaskant area is a mix of wet and dry, covered and uncovered areas.⁹ This has influenced both the actual occupation during the Roman period and the chances of finding the archaeological remains of these activities. Modderman (1950, 94) already noted that no sites were found on the flood-basin deposits to the southwest of Lith. On Verwers' map this is also an empty area, but he suggests that the erosive power of the Meuse may have removed some traces of settlement (Verwers 1998, 102). During the Roman period, the heathlands (and peat moors) started south of Heesch, which would account for the lack of sites in that area. The small transitional area between sand and clay (just north of Oss) which would have been marshy too, is also nearly devoid of

finds. The majority of sites are situated on the sandy outcrops near Empel, the edge of the coversand area (Oss, Berghem, Heesch) and the north-eastern part of the river area, which is a stream-ridge landscape containing various sandy elevations.

Settlements

Following Beex's and Willems' classifications I have distinguished settlements, burial sites and other (special) sites. The majority of sites in the Maaskant can only be classified as 'traces of habitation' (see Beex 1973). They consist of surface finds only: in most cases pottery, sometimes combined with coins, brooches, metal objects, *La Tène* glass bangles or roof-tiles. On the basis of the character of these finds some subdivisions can be made, but the size of the settlements or the period during which they were in use is often unknown. Unless the finds gave rise to suspicion of a burial or a special site, these find spots were all classified as settlements.

Besides the sites at Oss-Ussen, only nine other settlements were partly excavated. Five of these were also located in Oss: IJsselstraat (six house plans), Horzak-I (one well), Horzak-II (at least four house plans), Eikenboomgaard (one well, possibly more) and Zaltbommelseweg (three house plans) (see 6.2). The other four are Grave - De Zitterd (three wells), Berghem - De Lallenberg (two house plans), Nuland - Kepkensdonk (one house plan) and Teeffelen - Noord ('features').¹⁰ The house plans from Berghem and the one from Nuland cannot be dated to the Roman period with certainty. In Nuland local (amateur) archaeologists could excavate only a fragment of a house plan with a foundation ditch. Excavations by the State Service for Archaeological Investigations (ROB) yielded a second house plan, but this one dated from the Late Bronze Age or the Early Iron Age (Van Zogel 1988). The plans from Berghem were accompanied by a well and (hearth) pits, but only handmade pottery was found. The house plans themselves cannot be ascribed to any of the Oss-Ussen types. Two-aisled, with single rows of posts, they look more like large outbuildings or granaries of type IIB. However, a Roman period grave was discovered nearby (Beex 1955; Bogaers 1970).

Most of the find material from the settlement sites, excavated or unexcavated, points to small settlements of a native character. However, some (unexcavated) sites comprised material that may indicate occupation of a different nature. Among these is Lith -Tussen de Stegen (see Modderman 1950, no.14 and Beex 1973, 176), where a 3rd century bronze enamelled brooch was found (Verwers 1990b, 150/151). Macharen - De Hoge Morgen (also called Harens Broek, see Modderman 1950, no.34 and Beex 1973, 176) is a site that yielded large quantities of (wheel-thrown) pottery, including 4th century *terra sigillata*, together with iron nails,

bronze keys and brooches, glass ware, perforated slate and roof-tiles. The earliest wheel-thrown pottery dates from the beginning of the 1st century AD. Even when taking into account the fact that this settlement was in use longer than any of the Oss settlements, and thus occupied during a period when wheel-thrown pottery was widely available, it still seems that its inhabitants possessed a certain wealth, comparable to that of the Westerveld settlement. Finally at Teeffelen - Noord large quantities of pottery were found, including 4th century material. From the same site came many coins and brooches, two of which were early types (Verwers 1990a, 55). A special find from this site is a silver *triquetrum stater* (Verwers 1986, 34). In the Maaskant a large number of these coins, thought to be associated with the Batavians (Roymans/Van der Sanden 1980), were found at the river junction near Rossum/Lith. In nearly all cases, the coins turned up as a result of dredging activities, and the *stater* from Teeffelen is an exception in this respect.¹¹

Burial sites

Burial sites are scarce in the Maaskant. This is partly caused by the fact that this type of site is almost impossible to detect without excavation (see Groenewoudt 1994, 20). The graves that are known were all excavated. Besides the large cemetery at Oss-Ussen, evidence for burial is present at Schaijk - Gaalsche Heide, Uden - Slabroekse Heide and at Berghem - De Lallenberg. At Berghem one relatively richly furnished grave was found (Beex 1955; Bogaers 1970). A wooden construction had been placed inside a pit, and within this framework a small wooden chest with bronze mounting and key was found. The chest contained glass perfume bottles, bronze rings and a pair of iron shears. Next to the cremated remains, which were mixed with green glass beads, three fragments of pottery and a glass beaker were found. Surface finds from the same field included *terra sigillata* and a fragment of a terracotta statuette. Bogaers (1970, 67) dates the whole complex between AD 180/190 and 270, and suggests that the surface finds derive from other graves.

At Uden, one of the barrows in an Iron Age urnfield could be dated to the Roman period on the basis of pottery and four bronze brooches (Remouchamps 1924). In Schaijk a group of 63 cremation burials was found, some of which were marked by a shallow circular or rectangular ditch. Grave goods consisted of pottery sherds or one or more complete pots, mostly smooth-walled jugs. Furthermore, fragments of three bronze brooches and some iron nails were found. The cemetery, which was only partly excavated, was dated Id - III (Modderman/Isings 1960/1961).

Special sites

Next to settlements and graves there is one excavated site with a different character in the Maaskant: the sanctuary at

Empel. At this cult place, which has a Late Iron Age origin, a Romano-Celtic temple was built around the end of the 1st century AD, functioning until c. AD 235. The 'temple of Empel' is considered one of the important sanctuaries for the god Hercules Magusanus, the principal deity of the Batavians (Roymans/Derks 1993; 1994; Derks 1998). The cult place lay next to the confluence of the rivers Dieze and Meuse.

A possible second sanctuary might have been situated near Kessel, in the area between Alem and Lith, where during the Roman period the rivers Meuse and Waal effectively converged (Verhulst/Blok 1981, 141; Henderikx 1986, 453, note 1). During dredging operations and sand extractions a large number of Late *La Tène* and Early Roman finds turned up here, including building materials (column fragments), a limestone votive altar and many metal objects such as coins and weapons (Roymans/Van der Sanden 1980, 191-203; Roymans 1990, 85 ff.; Van der Sanden 1983; Verwers 1988, 35-36; 1990, 152 and 155; 1998, 154-157; Bogaers 1991). Although the temple fragments might have been moved to be re-used as *spolia* in the Late Roman *castellum*, the original cult place was probably not far from Kessel.

Routes

In 1952, Modderman remarked that no traces of Roman roads had been found in the Dutch river area, but looking at the *Tabula Peutingeriana* it seems likely that main roads were situated along some of the large rivers (Modderman 1952, 21). Since then archaeologists have proved this by excavating stretches of road at Valkenburg and Vleuten-De Meern, while revetments and milestones were found in several other locations.¹² No roads have been discovered along the Meuse yet, but it is likely that they were present there too. What does this mean for the Maaskant? According to the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, two roads head for the coast from Nijmegen, one following the Rhine (the *limes* road) and one along the rivers Waal and Meuse. Another road from the Peutinger map that might be of interest for the region is the one that comes from the south (Maastricht) along the Meuse, crossing the river at Cuijk (Mioulet/Barten 1994) and continuing towards Nijmegen. According to the majority of the reconstructions, the Waal/Meuse road crossed the Cuijk-Nijmegen route, ran towards Wijchen and from there followed the northern bank of the northern Meuse branch, joining the Waal at Rossum (*Grinnes*) (Van Es 1981, 106-107; Modderman 1952, 27-28; Stolte 1960, 61, fig. 3; Willems 1986, 66 and fig. 22). Even though this road did not cross the Maaskant, its existence may have had some influence on the area.

Routes that are not on the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, but were deduced from archaeological and geological data¹³ include two that are near the Maaskant. One route came from Belgium (Tongres) and went north, possibly all the way to

Wijk bij Duurstede, going through the river area past Rossum (Bogaers 1964, 41). There is only one supposed route that possibly ran through the Maaskant itself. Willems (1986, 69 and fig. 22) gives only a suggestion but does not indicate the exact course of this route. Bogaers (1964, 41) mentions possible routes along both the northern ('Wijchens Maasje') and the southern branch of the Meuse. According to Beex, the road that ran from the south (Maastricht) towards Cuijk continued westwards along the southern Meuse branch. Either it went directly along the river, sometimes crossing it to cut corners, or it left the Meuse at Grave, following the edge of the coversand area past Schaijk, Berghem and Oss, through to Alem and Empel (Beex 1953, 127). In that case, Oss would have been linked directly with both the rural centre at Cuijk (see 7.2) and the sanctuary at Empel.

Whether a road ran along the southern branch of the Meuse or not, the river itself may have been a route for travel and especially trade. Already during the Iron Age salt and briquetage from the North Sea coast came into the Maaskant area via the river (Van den Broeke 1986; 1987c, 24). Large quantities of so-called *Waa-slants* pottery point to a connection during the Roman period with the area around the Meuse estuary (Brouwer 1986).

7.1.2 Analysis

During the Roman period, the Maaskant region shows two different areas as far as occupation is concerned. The coversand area south of Oss consists of heathlands with only a few settlements, whereas the northern river clay area is densely populated.¹⁴ Oss itself is situated in between; just on the edge of the coversand but close to the Meuse and the settlements in the river area.

Though the excavated evidence is scarce, most of the occupation in the Maaskant region seems to have a pattern comparable to what we have seen at Oss. A number of settlements (this can range from two to ten) are more or less grouped together, the distance between the settlements is roughly between 500 and 1000 m. Within this pattern a settlement can either be a single compound or a cluster of compounds. On the basis of this broad inventory a minimum of eight of these settlement clusters can be distinguished in the Maaskant (including Oss). Next to these clusters there are at least four sites where finds seem to point to a single settlement, possibly even a single farm, but this conclusion is based on scarce material. All these supposed single farms are situated on the sandy soils. It would mean that the settlement pattern in the whole region is dispersed, with a few distinct clusters in the northern half. Very few indications for burials are present, but if Oss can be regarded as a standard, each group of settlements will have had (at least) one cemetery.

Southwards there is an occupation cluster at Heesch and (single?) settlements at Nistelrode, Rosmalen and near

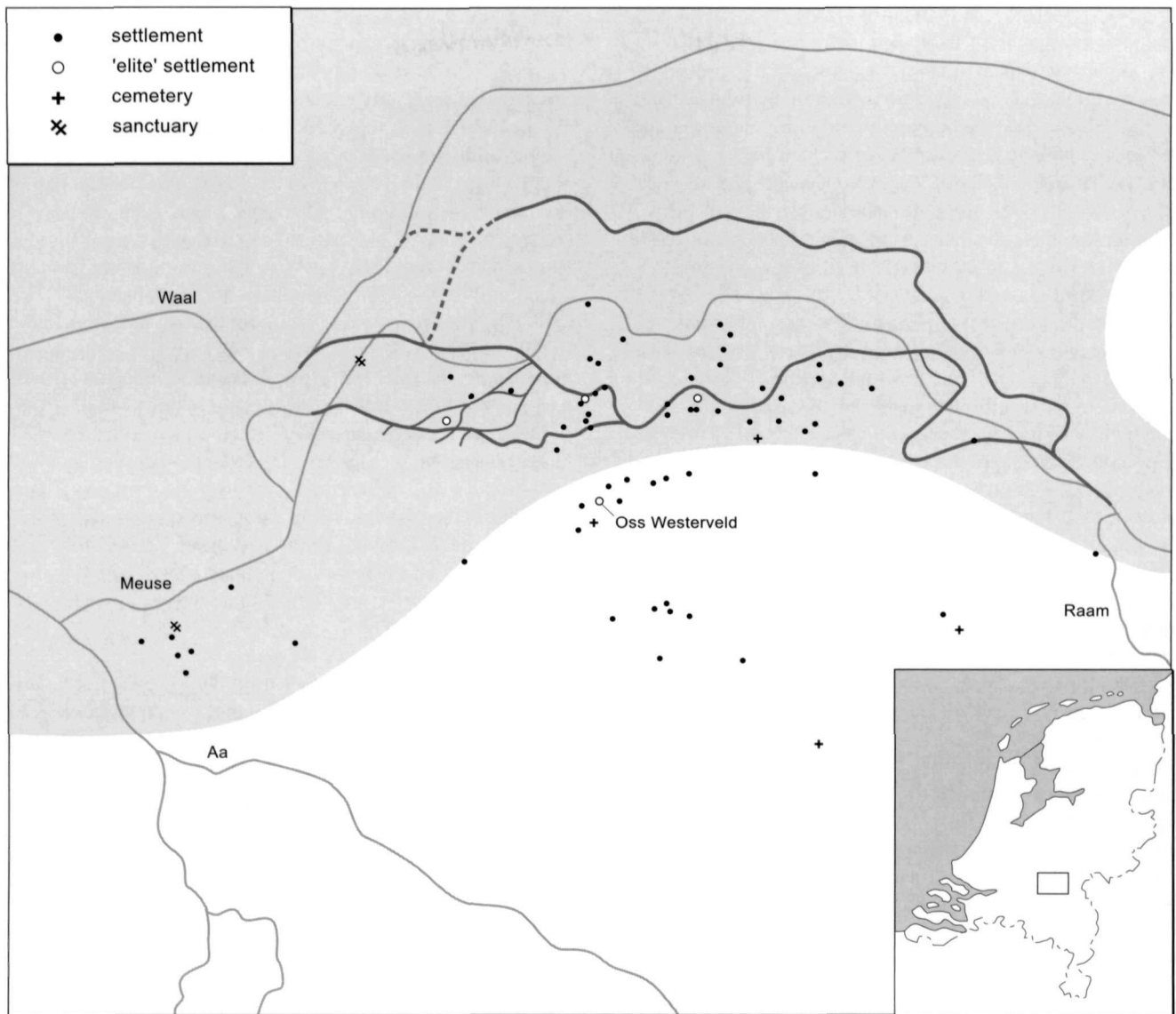


Figure 216. The reconstructed Maaskant region with sites. The supposed Roman period course of the river Meuse is indicated in dark grey, the coversand area is indicated in light grey.

Nuland. At Schaijk there is a cemetery and probably at least one settlement. Near Uden there is a cemetery. To the north there are several settlement clusters: one near Lith/Lithoijen, a group of settlements around Teeffelen/Oijen and a large cluster at Macharen/Megen. Close to Oss there is occupation at Berghem/Haren, and further east at Ravenstein. The distance between each of these clusters is approximately 2-3 kilometres. Fields and pastures are probably situated in the areas between the settlement clusters. The (southern branch of the) river Meuse runs through the area, possibly just between Oss/Berghem and the other clusters. Oss could thus

be in a special position as the only large settlement cluster directly south of the Meuse. The Maaskant is also cut through by at least one road, which is situated close to or through the settlement cluster at Oss. This regional route, running from Grave in the east through to Empel in the west, is a branch off the Roman road between the cities Maastricht and Nijmegen. The region has two locations of regional (and possibly supra-regional) importance: the sanctuaries at Empel and near Kessel. Empel is probably visited by Batavians from a larger area, especially during religious feasts.

In some of the occupation clusters there is one settlement that distinguishes itself from the rest, comparable to the Westerveld settlement at Oss. This conclusion is based on (surface) find material only, but it is likely that this distinction was also visible in the size of the settlement and its internal structure. Finds point to such an 'elite' settlement at Lith (Tussen de Stegen), Teeffelen (Noord) and at Macharen (De Hoge Morgen), and possibly in some of the other groups of settlements. At Macharen, occupation at De Hoge Morgen is also present during the 4th century AD, although continuity is not certain.

Within the Maaskant region (some of the) inhabitants of these larger settlements comprise the highest level of hierarchy. There may have been quite a few of these local 'men of importance' in the area, each the head of a community of farmers living in a cluster of settlements. In Oss, around the end of the first century AD, the community totals at least 100 persons. Contact between the inhabitants of the various clusters is probably largely maintained by these local leaders, residing in the larger settlements. They meet at the sanctuaries at Empel and Kessel, and possibly travel to places outside the Maaskant, where they experience Roman culture. It is first of all the men of these families who leave the farming community to serve as auxiliaries in the Roman army.

Higher levels of settlement, such as villas, rural centres, towns, or military sites such as forts with adjoining *vici*, are absent in the Maaskant region.¹⁵ Therefore a wider scope is necessary as a background for the settlement system at Oss.

7.2 BEYOND THE MAASKANT

In 1985 Van der Sanden, formulating his research of the settlement system¹⁶, proposed a larger region as a context for Oss: besides the Maaskant as it was then seen (i.e. including Oss), this so-called macro-region would also incorporate the Land van Maas en Waal (north of the Maaskant, between Meuse and Waal) and the Land van Cuijk (east of the Maaskant, directly west of the Meuse). But his research was not completed, and so far the only larger regional project in which the data from Oss were incorporated has been the Meuse-Demer-Scheldt (MDS) area, as used by the Amsterdam *Pionier* research group (see Slofstra 1991, 131-133).

Slofstra (1991, 135-136) argues that the military Rhine zone and the hinterland between Meuse and Demer should be regarded as one large frontier zone, at least in the 1st century AD. However, since his study does not incorporate the Rhine zone, Oss is grouped and compared with the southern settlements only. Towards the end of the 1st century, when the Maaskant becomes part of *Germania inferior*, the southern part of the MDS area falls within *Gallia Belgica*, and it is on this province and the relation of

the MDS area with its capital *Atuatuca Tungrorum* (Tongres) that Slofstra's study focuses.¹⁷

Another larger region that the Maaskant is part of is the *civitas Batavorum*. Although the Batavians themselves and the area where they supposedly lived have been a popular subject of discussion (Bogaers 1960/61; 1972; Rüger 1968; Van Es 1981; 1994; Willems 1983; 1986), no attempt has been made so far to study all archaeological evidence from the *civitas*. Part of the Maaskant fell within the scope of the Eastern River Area (ERA) project, but unfortunately the data from the IPL Maaskant project were not available yet, although "it was thought to be useful to have at least a first link between [the frontier] area and the regions [...] in the hinterland" (Willems 1986, 14). In both larger regions (MDS area and ERA) Oss and the Maaskant are in the same position: that of a border area, situated on the edge of the larger region. As a transition zone, not only between clay and sand, but also between the military zone (between Rhine and Meuse) and the hinterland, the area is worth looking at in its own right. The well-researched frontier zone and hinterland can be used as a backdrop and for detailed comparisons.

7.2.1 Sites from a larger region

To compare and place the data from the Maaskant, a larger region will be used that roughly comprises the northern part of the MDS area, most of the Land van Maas en Waal, as well as the eastern part of the Tielerswaard and part of the Land van Cuijk (fig. 217). This is the central area of the supposed *civitas Batavorum*, and includes parts of both the Eastern River Area and the MDS area. Of this macro-region, no inventory such as the one of the Maaskant will be made. Published data on sanctuaries, rural centres, villas, towns and roads from the whole area will be used to create a general picture of the world around the Ussen settlements.

Rural centres¹⁸

In the larger region around the Maaskant six rural centres were excavated: settlements of some size fulfilling a diverse set of functions (Hiddink 1991, 201). Of these, Cuijk is the only one that can be called a rural centre with certainty. Elst and Halder are likely to be rural centres, while the information about Rossum, Wijchen and Blerick is scarce. At Cuijk (*Ceuclum* on the Peutinger map) there is evidence for pottery kilns, producing mica-dusted Belgic ware and grey pottery during the Claudian period, while later a temple complex is built. Grey ware and Belgic ware were also manufactured at Halder, between AD 65 and 80. A large Gallo-Roman temple and several other stone buildings were present at Elst. Rossum is thought to be the location of *Grinnes*, known from the Peutinger map, while Blerick

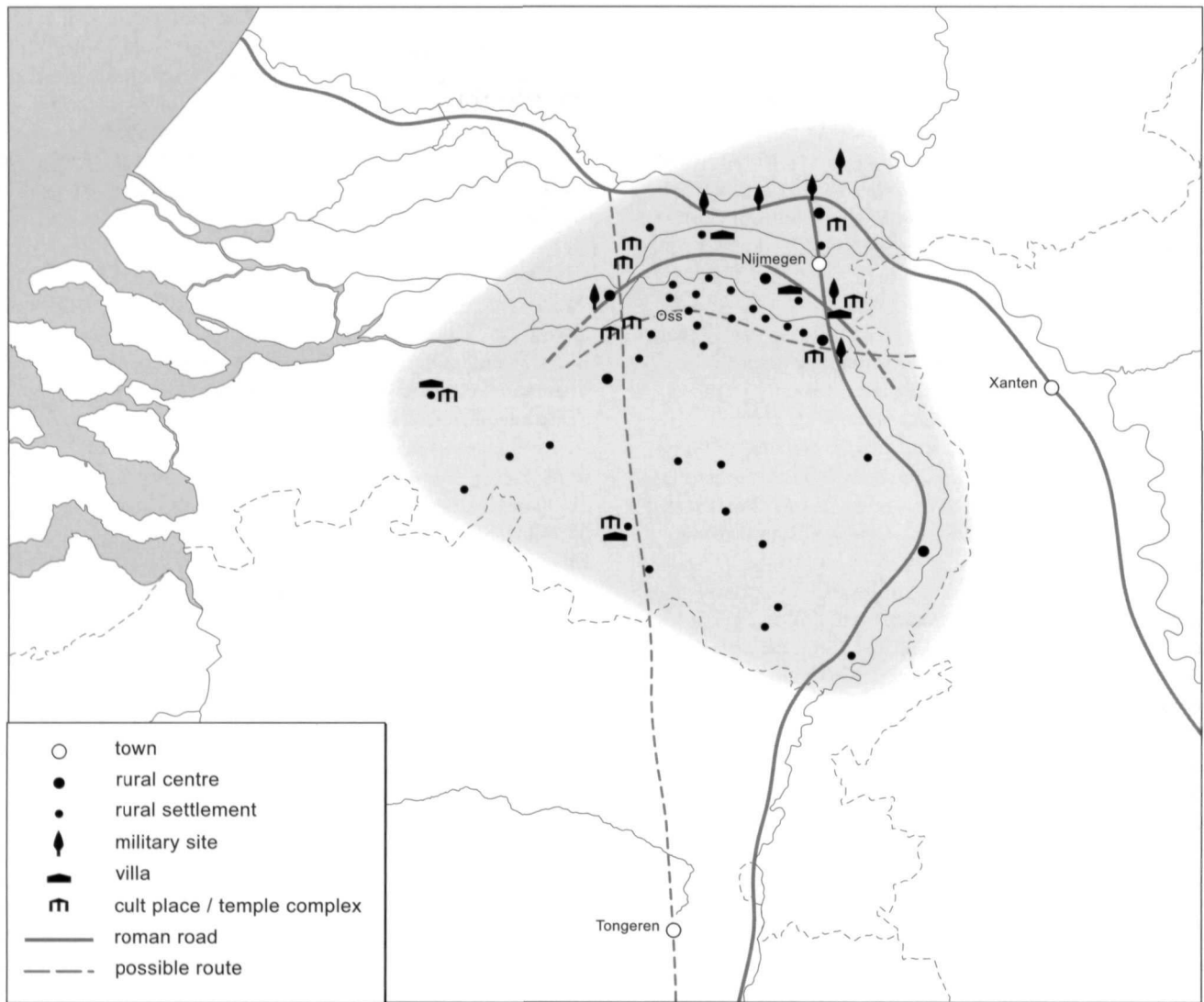


Figure 217. Macro-region with the sites and routes mentioned in the text.

corresponds with *Blariacum*. Wijchen was not excavated, but large quantities of surface finds may indicate a rural centre.¹⁹

Military sites²⁰

Early Roman camps in the wider region were present at Arnhem-Meinerswijk and at Driel. After AD 47 these became *castella* on the *limes*, while from that period onwards there may have been *limes* forts at Kesteren and at Randwijk too. Whether Cuijk was an early Roman military post is disputable (see Verwers 1998), but after AD 47 it became a *castellum* in the hinterland, just like Rossum/*Grinnes* after AD 69. Cuijk stayed in use after AD 270. The largest military site in the macro-region is Nijmegen, with early

legionary camps, including a *castra* where several legions stayed until the last quarter of the second century AD.

Villas²¹

In the larger region around the Maaskant there is little (excavated) evidence for villas, i.e. market-oriented farms with romanised domestic buildings.²² In the southern area Hoogeloo is an exception, as the only villa (so far) on the southern sandy soils. Along the river Waal lies the settlement at Druten-Klepperhei, with a *porticus* and a stone-built bathhouse. This could be called a villa, but has also been interpreted as a large rural settlement with an elite compound (Slofstra 1991, 163, note 85). The same goes for Oosterhout

(North Brabant), where part of a house with a *porticus* was excavated, and also possibly for Overasselt which is situated just north of the river Meuse. A large romanised building was certainly present high on the slopes at Mook (Groesbeek-Plasmolen), although the socio-economic context of this villa is less clear. Willems (1986, 118-121) mentions several other sites that could have been villas, but none of these were excavated. Further south on the banks of the river Meuse more villas can be expected.

Towns

In the wider area around the Maaskant there is one Roman town: Nijmegen. This was the location of a supposed Batavian centre in the Early Roman period (*Oppidum Batavorum*) and later, as *Ulpia Noviomagus*, the administrative and economic capital of the *civitas Batavorum*.²³ The capitals of the *civitas Tungrorum* (Tongres/*Atuatuca Tungrorum*) and the *civitas Cugernorum* (Xanten/*Colonia Ulpia Traianensis*) were situated much further away.

Cult places and temple complexes²⁴

The Gallo-Roman temples at Elst and Cuijk have already been mentioned under rural centres. At Nijmegen (*Ulpia Noviomagus*) there was at least one temple complex. At Zennewijnen there is evidence for a temple in the form of a building inscription. An open-air cult place was found at Hoogeloon. Finally there are find complexes that could be interpreted as having a 'sacred' character (Derks 1998, 158 note 105). In the macro-region these were documented at Groesbeek, Ophemert and Oosterhout (North Brabant).

Routes

The major Roman roads and other routes in the wider region were already mentioned when discussing the Maaskant. Summarised, they comprise the north-south roads Maastricht – Cuijk – Nijmegen (along the west bank of the river Meuse) and Tongres – Wijk bij Duurstede (past Rossum), the first one visible on the *Tabula Peutingeriana*. Also on the Peutinger map is the west-east road from Nijmegen to Rossum (a branch of the *limes* road which follows the Rhine further to the north). A supposed route runs through the Maaskant itself.

Rural settlements

A broad overview of excavated rural settlements in the macro-region around Oss shows that occupation is concentrated in a few areas. Further south along the river Meuse and to the southwest on the coversand islets of Brabant there are several settlement clusters. The majority of these were included in Slofstra's study (1991). These include the sites in the Kempen (Hoogeloon and Riethoven), and a

selection of other excavated settlements in Brabant and Limburg (Gassel, Beers, Moergestel, Goirle, Den Dungen, Alphen, Mierlo-Hout, Oosterhout, Nederweert, Venray and Beegden).²⁵ Not yet included in his inventory are, amongst others, Weert (Roymans 1995a; Roymans/Tol 1996; Roymans/Tol/Hiddink 1998), Someren (Roymans/Theuws 1993), Lieshout (JROB 1992, 52; Verwers 1998, 68/69) and Son en Breugel (Verwers 1998, 72).

In the river area to the north of Oss there is a large string of settlements on the coversands and river dunes between Meuse and Waal. Most of these were mentioned by Willems (1986). Excavated ones include Druten and Overasselt. Worth mentioning is the recently excavated settlement at Oosterhout (Gelderland), just north of the Waal at Nijmegen (Haarhuis 1996; Van den Broeke 1999). Of the Tielerswaard no inventory has been made (yet), but near Tiel there is evidence for a settlement cluster with a cemetery (Kortlang/Stafleu 1998).

Willems, Slofstra and Verwers have compared and classified most of the rural settlements in the area. Whenever Oss was included, it usually played an important role because of the presence of a cluster of settlements with signs of social stratification. Oss-Westerveld is the classic example of a large enclosed settlement and as such was grouped with sites like Hoogeloon, Riethoven, Druten and Oosterhout (North Brabant). Most of the characteristics of this level of 'proto-villas' were actually derived from Oss. The subject of settlement hierarchy will be discussed in chapter 8. New research on rural settlement patterns in a wider region will take place outside the scope of this study (Roymans in prep.), and occupation in the larger Batavian area is the subject of a new project (Roymans 1998a).

7.2.2 A wider scope: Oss and the events of the Roman period

By looking at a wider region, various aspects of the Roman period and even of the Roman Empire come into view that were not distinguishable as such in Oss or in the Maaskant. The historical events starting with the Gallic wars may have had their effects on the inhabitants at Oss, but sometimes more direct influences are visible in the archaeological record of the wider region. This may help to bridge the gap between Rome and a group of farms just south of the river Meuse.

As for most of the Netherlands, Caesar's military efforts between 57 and 51 BC and the events during the following decades are invisible in the archaeological record from Oss. Occupation around this period consists of dispersed farmsteads with a tendency towards a more organised and structured landscape. The settlement structure shows no signs of hierarchy. In the wider area there are probably several comparable local communities, practising mixed farming on

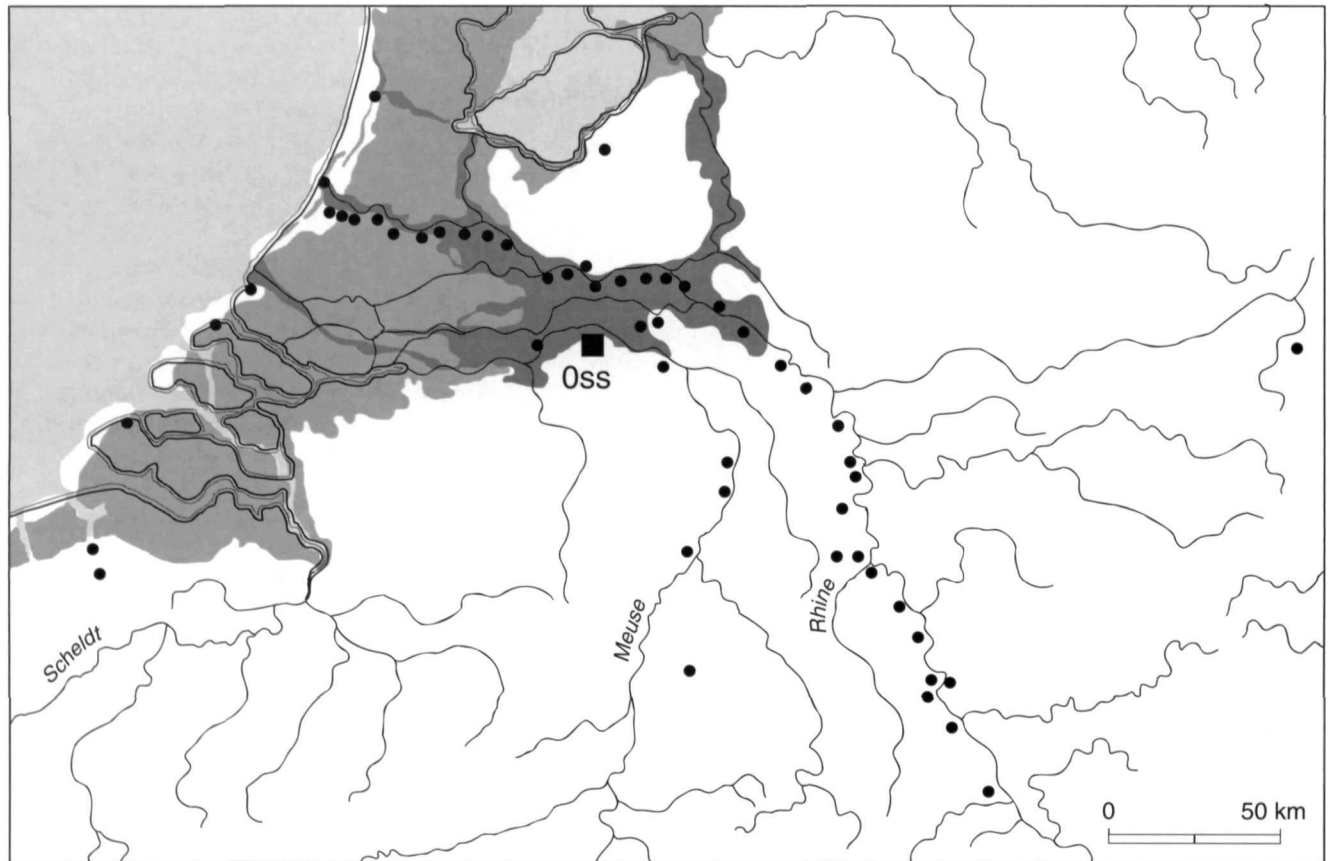


Figure 218. Location of Oss with respect to the Roman *limes*. 1. fluviate deposits; 2. peat and clay; 3. water; 4. coastal barriers and Pleistocene deposits; 5. military camps.

a self-sufficient basis. Social stratification, which is present on a low level, is mainly based on land-ownership and local warfare (Roymans/Theuws 1999, 16/17). There are some cult places with a regional significance.

It is unknown which tribe the inhabitants of Oss belonged to at the time of Caesar's conquest. Historical sources hardly mention the Maaskant region and, if they do, the exact locations of tribes and their associated areas are uncertain. Some sort of relation to the Eburones seems most likely.²⁶ But somewhere around 50 BC (Roymans 1998b, 30) the Batavians, a branch of the Chatti who lived in the Middle Rhine area, moved across the river and settled in the Rhine Delta. Probably helped along by the Romans, they were assigned to a place somewhere near Rossum (Van Es 1994a, 24). Archaeological remains of the arrival and first decades of settlement of this elite group are scarce. The most

important indication is the distribution of silver (and bronze) *triquetrum* coins, notably of the Lith-type. These coins are derived from gold coins of the same type from the area where the Chatti lived (Roymans/Van der Sanden 1980). The majority of these coins were found around Kessel/Lith, with a concentration at the sanctuary at Empel (Roymans 1998b, fig. 6). In Oss no *triquetrum* coins were found, the closest find is from Teeffelen (de Honig). No other changes directly related to the settling of the Batavians can be seen in the Maaskant or beyond.

In 12 BC Drusus, as commander-in-chief, uses the Batavian 'island' as a base to try and conquer the other parts of Germania. The first signs of the new era in the region are the military camps. On the Hunerberg at Nijmegen a large *castra* is erected, and work on it was probably already beginning in 15 BC. Shortly after, it is replaced by a smaller

camp at the Kops Plateau. At Meinerswijk and possibly Driel, smaller *castella* are built. What about the Maaskant, and Oss? Did the presence of thousands of soldiers in Nijmegen have any influence upon them? The development of settlement structure continues seemingly uninterrupted. One very early find that could be related to this period is a fragment of a Dressel 1 *amphora*. Although the Italian wine trade with Gaul had started as early as the 2nd century BC, the number of imports must have risen as a result of an increased demand for supplies by the army (Haselgrove 1996, 169). Around this time the original Batavians, who maintain a special alliance with the Romans, have mixed with the local inhabitants and as a result, spread over a wider area. At the start of the Christian era, possibly as a Roman initiative, the centre of the Batavian area is established at Nijmegen: *Oppidum Batavorum*. As part of the alliance the Batavians supply soldiers for the Roman auxiliaries.

The transition from BC to AD has not left specific archaeological traces at Oss, although the development of a more structured form of settlement is now in full swing. Farms have been built in clusters and are surrounded by ditched enclosures. The one around the large Westerveld settlement stands out, and the start of this phase of the settlement is possibly marked by ritual. During the first decades of the first century AD Roman imports start to enter the settlements, quite early and in relatively numerous amounts. Amongst these is some rare tableware, originally from Italy and France. More tableware comes from Belgium, there is wine in casks and in *amphorae*, olive oil, the odd coin and some brooches and other metalwork. In the Westerveld settlement the imports cluster in the south-western corner of the settlement. A fragment of horse mounting ends up in the small but enclosed Schalkskamp hamlet, and other small bits of military equipment are found in the settlements. Since Oss is now part of the wider Batavian region, it is possible that around this time men from the settlements at Oss are joining the Roman auxiliaries. They could account for the accumulation of Roman imports, although some of it is probably acquired through contacts between the local elite and the Romans.

In AD 47 Claudius calls back Corbulo and starts to establish the *limes* along the Rhine. At the same time the development towards a formal *civitas* structure is speeded up. At Nijmegen the large *castra* on the Hunerberg is out of use, but there is still a military camp on the Kops Plateau and the Batavian centre is thriving. But before it can become the true capital of the *civitas Batavorum* the Batavian revolt starts in AD 69. Because of the large Batavian network (Roymans 1998b, 22-25) many other tribes join Iulius Civilis against the Romans. The Batavian city is burnt down together with the *limes* forts.

When the northern border of the Empire is set along the Rhine, the settlements at Oss do quite well. The number of farms is rapidly expanding, although the Schalkskamp settlement is given up, possibly for arable land. Roman goods become more numerous, and this in a period when they are still not regarded as common possessions. The cemetery is laid-out clearly now and the first graves with Roman imports appear. Shortly after AD 50 a young child from the local elite family dies, and is buried on the very north side of the cemetery under a large mound with some unusual grave gifts. In the wider region other changes are taking place: at Elst a small temple is built with a timber frame, and the same type of building replaces the open-air sanctuary at Empel. It is during this period that roads are being constructed, the number of inhabitants in the area increases and natural resources are being exploited to a growing extent. Next to the ones at Nijmegen, Driel and Meinerswijk new auxiliary forts are built in the *limes* hinterland at Cuijk (?) and at Rossum. During the Batavian revolt the Roman forts, the temple at Elst and the 'Roman' *Oppidum Batavorum* are demolished, but the native occupation in the Maaskant remains untouched. In fact, there is nothing in the archaeological record that marks this event, which must have had its impact on the inhabitants of Oss. Did the farmers identify strongly with Civilis and his men? Did their sons fight against the Romans? Did the local elite from the Westerveld settlement take part in the conspiracy? There are no indications, but it is unlikely that the event passed unnoticed. All we know is that not too long after the revolt, a new farm is built in the Westerveld settlement with a romanised construction and a large farmyard around it. This is located in the south-western corner of the settlement, where imports were present before. Apparently things are going well and the local leader feels a stronger need to express his status spatially. More large grave monuments are erected in a conspicuous location on the northern edge of the cemetery.

The revolt is suppressed and although relations between Romans and Batavians are restored, the conditions for the Batavians cannot be the same anymore. The days of their relative independence as a client tribe are definitely over, and with that the widespread Batavian identity is reduced to the core area again (Roymans 1998b, 25). The time of peace, the *Pax Romana* has come. The Romans quickly build a new capital at Nijmegen and after AD 83 the *civitas Batavorum* and its province *Germania inferior* are officially established. In the meantime the *limes* forts are restored, including a new large *castra* at Nijmegen, used by the *Legio X Gemina* from AD 71 onwards. The demolished temple at Elst is replaced by a larger building in stone.

The inhabitants of Oss seem to be prosperous as before. Whatever impact the revolt has had, after AD 70 life seems

to go on, with the farming community accumulating more Roman goods and the settlements and the space around them becoming more fixed and organised. The house with the Roman-style *porticus* is in use now, and a new group of farms is built at Zomerhof. Farms are becoming larger, the cemetery is expanding. In the Maaskant a few changes are taking place, such as the appearance of a new monumental temple building at Empel, comparable to the one at Elst.

Shortly after AD 100 the capital at Nijmegen acquires market privilege and the name *Ulpia Noviomagus Batavorum*. All the elements of a town are present, including a Gallo-Roman temple, Roman baths and several areas with industrial activities. But the departure of the Tenth Legion in AD 104 is a blow for the thriving new centre. Although *Ulpia* receives municipal rights around AD 150, the diminishing number of soldiers causes economic problems.

Between AD 100 and 125, the upward movements in Oss are slowing down somewhat. The number of farms in the Westerveld settlement slightly decreases and the individual buildings are diminishing in size. The *porticus* farm does not get a comparable follow-up. Wheel-thrown pottery is abundant, but the relative amount of more luxurious tableware is smaller. Around AD 150 the last of the large grave monuments is laid out. Is this development the same all over the Maaskant? Unfortunately none of the other settlement clusters have been excavated. The sanctuary at Empel seems to be in use as before, and only at the end of the 2nd century AD are there indications that part of the complex has burnt down.²⁷

The *Pax Romana* officially lasts until at least AD 235 when the *limes* succumbs to the incessant pressure. Barbarian attacks combined with withdrawing soldiers cause the border to lose its status as a line of forward defence (Bechert/Willems 1995). Although there are periods of relative peace after that, the *limes* is not restored to its original state until AD 293. Perhaps the river Waal functioned as a border for a while. Cuijk, Wijchen and Rossum seem to be still in use in the later period. In AD 406 the crossing of the Rhine at Mainz marks the official end of central Roman authority in our area.

In Oss, decline set in long before AD 235. Occupation quickly diminishes at the end of the 2nd century. Someone buries a set of bronze kitchenware in a well, which may signify unrest. Although there is some evidence for activity in the 3rd century, the area is definitely abandoned by AD 225-250. Shortly after that the sanctuary at Empel is out of use too, and not many settlements are left in the Maaskant. Further away the cemetery at Tiel goes out of use around AD 250. Still the situation seems unstable: around AD 285 someone at Tiel hides coins in the former cemetery. Perhaps there is a short revival of occupation in the 4th century, but those inhabitants may have been new tribes from outside the

area. Empel is visited in that period, although apparently not for ritual activities. Perhaps some farmers are still living on a dry outcrop in the clay area near Macharen. At Oss there is one well from this period, but whether there are settlements too is uncertain.

notes

1 Research application NWO, file No. 250-51-260.

2 Since both Maaskant and Heikant are included in this area, the name of the project should really be altered. *Maasland*, as most of the area was called from the Middle Ages onwards, would be more fitting. However, since the project has been known for so long as the Maaskant project, its original name has been retained, even though it has covered more than the actual Maaskant from the start.

3 Meffert (1998, 63) assumes the same for the occupation in the former Oer-IJ region.

4 Empel-De Werf (Roymans/Derks 1993; 1994; Derks 1998).

5 The collection of G. Smits (Oss) is one of the largest. His activities resulted in a number of newly discovered sites, some of which are on the map. Most of this information was retrieved from the site list used by Van den Dries (Van den Dries 1990, catalogue unpublished).

6 Excavated sites were Berghem - De Lallenberg (Beex 1955; Bogaers 1970), Schaijk - Gaalsche Heide (Modderman/Isings 1960/1961; NKNOB 1971) and Uden - Slabroekse Heide (Remouchamps 1924).

7 Because Oss-Ussen is situated just outside the Eastern River Area, the sites from Ussen were not included.

8 It should be noted that the main aim of the present study is not an inventory. The map of the Maaskant only serves to give an indication of the habitation in the region. The new information (gathered from finds reports, local archaeologists, ARCHIS, Verwers 1998 and Ball/Schiltmans 1998) can by no means be regarded as exhaustive.

9 De Bont (1993, 68) has plotted Roman period sites on a map with potentially habitable (drier) areas in Brabant around AD 800. Unfortunately the sites at Oss are not indicated, but the dry coversand area on which they are situated is clearly visible. For the stream-ridge area north of Oss this map is less useful, since the increased sedimentation of the river must have changed the pattern a great deal (see 1.2.2). Verwers uses De Bont's map and concludes that most of the stream ridges and silted-over Pleistocene dunes are not indicated on it (Verwers 1998, 102).

10 Grave - De Zitterd: Louwe Kooijmans 1986; Verwers 1988, 33. Berghem - De Lallenberg: Beex 1955; 1973; BKNOB 1956, 23; Bogaers 1970. Nuland - Kepkensdonk: Van Zogel 1988; JROB 1979. Teeffelen - Noord: W.J.H. Verwers 1981, 49-53; 1986, 34; 1990a, 55; 1990b, 143; JROB 1983, 152.

11 A bronze AVAVCIA coin (often associated with the Roman army) was also found in a field at Teeffelen - De Honig (Roymans/Van der Sanden 1980, 199).

- 12 See for an overview and references Hessing 1999.
- 13 See for a discussion of this topic Modderman 1952 and Willems 1986, 63-70.
- 14 For the southern Maaskant the picture will not be complete, since most of the area is overbuilt.
- 15 Although the sanctuary at Empel may have been part of a rural centre (see Slofstra 1991, 155).
- 16 Research application ZWO, file No. 280-151-85/02.
- 17 The southern border of the *civitas Batavorum* has often been a point of discussion. Since no (historical or archaeological) information on the exact boundaries of the *civitas* is available, they are usually indicated by means of Thiessen polygons. The southern border then conforms to the natural border formed by the watershed between the basins of the rivers Meuse and Scheldt (Willems 1986, 15). Slofstra (1991, 168, footnote 99) follows Rüger (1968), who situates the southern border of *Germania inferior*, and thus of the *civitas Batavorum*, just above the peat areas of the Peel (i.e. the same border as that of the IPL Maaskant region). That way, after AD 84, most of the MDS area remains part of *Gallia Belgica*, while the Maaskant is incorporated in *Germania inferior*.
- 18 Cuijk: Bogaers 1966; Hiddink 1991, 213-214. Halder: Willems 1986, 111; Hiddink 1991, 214. Elst: Hiddink 1991, 218-219; Bogaers 1955. Wijchen: Willems 1986, 110. Blerick: Slofstra 1991, 166.
- 19 Excavations in 1999 revealed the presence of a villa at Wijchen.
- 20 Cuijk: Bogaers/Rüger 1974; Bogaers 1966; Willems 1986, 98; Verwers 1998, 114. Rossum: Van Enkevort/Zee 1996, 54. Kesteren: Bogaers/Rüger 1974, 70; Willems 1986, 90. Randwijk: Willems 1986, 90/91. Driel: Willems 1986, 92-95. Meinerswijk: Willems 1986, 169-196. Nijmegen: Willems 1986, 89; Van Enkevort/Zee 1996.
- 21 Hoogeloon: Slofstra 1987; 1991, 161. Druten: Hulst 1978; Van Es 1981, 171-172; Willems 1986, 113-115. Oosterhout: JROB 1985, 69; Verwers 1988; Verwers/Kooistra 1990. Overasselt: Braat 1934; Van Es 1981, 182-183. Mook/Groesbeek-Plasmolen: Braat 1934.
- 22 For a discussion on the definition of a villa, see Slofstra 1991, 179 and note 136. Here I will use a combination of the archaeological and the socio-economic definition.
- 23 For Roman Nijmegen, see Willems 1986; 1990; Van Enkevort/Thijssen 1996, 47-93.
- 24 Cuijk: Bogaers 1966. Elst: Bogaers 1955. Nijmegen: Van Enkevort/Thijssen 1996, 77-80. Zennewijnen: see Derks 1998, 262-263 for further references. Hoogeloon: Slofstra/Van der Sanden 1987, 127 ff. Groesbeek, Ophemert and Oosterhout: see Derks 1998, 267 for further references.
- 25 See Slofstra 1991 for further references. On some of the sites mentioned in his study new information has become available. As well as Oss these include Venray (Stoepker 1997; Van Enkevort in press), Riethoven (Vossen 1997), Beers/Gassel (Koolen 1989; Verwers 1991, 133-138), Boxtel (Verwers/Kooistra 1990) and Oosterhout (Verwers/Kooistra 1990).
- 26 See Willems 1986, 197-199; Van Es 1994a, 22; Slofstra 1991, 171.
- 27 Although there is no historical evidence for this some authors suggest a possible combination of the attacks by the Chauki and some regional/local problems as a cause for trouble in our region around AD 170 (Van Enkevort/Thijssen 1996, 73/74).