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Central places in the 1st and 2nd century AD in the Maaskant-region (Southern Netherlands). Reinterpreting the Roman settlement of Oss-Westerveld

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Central places of the 1st and 2nd century AD in the Maaskant region (Southern Netherlands)

Zentralplätze des 1. und 2. Jh. n. Chr. in der Maaskant-Region (Südliche Niederlande)

Richard Jansen and Harry Fokkens

With 1 Table and 10 Figures

Abstract: During the Pre-Roman Iron Age and the first centuries AD the Maaskant region, just south of the river Meuse near the town of Oss, was densely settled. Extensive excavations enable us to see how, in the late Pre-Roman Iron Age and the early Roman period, the settlement system changes from *wandering* or *shifting farmsteads* to *stable settlements*. Notably at the end of the 1st and in the 2nd century AD the character of the settlements changes dramatically. For the first time, houses appear that can be interpreted without doubt as the residences of local leaders or *Herrenhöfe* (chiefly farms). Here, we discuss how *Herrenhöfe* in general can be identified in the Roman rural landscape in our research region, whether we can discern central places and how they functioned within the Roman socio-economic system. In the Maaskant region, *Herrenhöfe* have been well-known for several decades already and have been discussed by several authors. The settlement at Oss-Westerveld, in particular, of which more than 50 % was excavated in the 1970s, has been a focus of analysis.

Key words: Southern Netherlands, Roman period, *Civitas Batavorum*, Central places, Chiefly farm, *Porticus* house.

Inhalt: Während der Vorrömischen Eisenzeit und in den ersten nachchristlichen Jahrhunderten war der unmittelbar südlich der Maas nahe der Stadt Oss gelegene Teil der Maaskant-Region dicht besiedelt. Dort durchgeführte großflächige Ausgrabungen erlauben es, zu erkennen, wie sich das Siedlungssystem während der späten Vorrömischen Eisenzeit und der älteren Römischen Kaiserzeit von *wandernden Siedlungen* zu *platzkonstanten Siedlungen* verändert hat. Vor allem am Ende des 1. und im 2. Jh. n. Chr. sind dramatische Veränderungen der Siedlungsstrukturen zu verzeichnen. In dieser Zeit können zum ersten Mal Gebäude nachgewiesen werden, die eindeutig als *Herrenhöfe* interpretiert werden können und in denen die Residenzen der lokalen Eliten zu sehen sind. In diesem Aufsatz wird diskutiert, wie diese *Herrenhöfe* innerhalb des ländlichen römischen Siedlungsraums der Maaskant-Region zu interpretieren sind, welche von ihnen zentralörtliche Funktionen innehatten und in welcher Weise sie innerhalb des römischen sozio-ökonomischen Systems funktioniert haben. In der Maaskant-Region sind kaiserzeitliche *Herrenhöfe* bereits seit mehreren Jahrzehnten gut bekannt und von mehreren Autoren diskutiert worden. Insbesondere die Siedlung Oss-Westerveld, die zu mehr als 50 % in den 1970er-Jahren ausgegraben worden ist, stand im Mittelpunkt der Analysen.

Schlüsselwörter: Südliche Niederlande, Römische Kaiserzeit, *Civitas Batavorum*, Zentralplätze, Herrenhof, *Porticus*-Haus.

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1 Introduction

The Maaskant region has a long history of archaeological research. Since the first rescue excavations were carried out in 1974 at Oss-IJsselstraat (WESSELINGH 1993), the region has been “adopted” by archaeologists from Leiden. The excavations became integrated in the Maaskant Project, still one of the main research projects of Leiden University (FOKKENS 1996). The Maaskant Project currently focuses on the long-term development of the farming economy, social structures

and hierarchies, ideology and burial rituals, settlement systems and the perception of the landscape. These aspects are studied diachronically from the late Neolithic through the Roman period, both within the study area and in relation to the wider region of the southern Netherlands and northern Belgium (FOKKENS 1996).

Due to continuous building development, almost 70 ha have already been excavated, including settlements,



Fig. 1. Overview of all the excavations carried out in the northern part of Oss, Prov. Noord-Brabant (The Netherlands), between 1974 and 2008 (Graphics: R. Jansen & H. Fokkens).

burial sites, field systems and activity areas, dating from the late Neolithic to the Middle Ages. From the Roman period, ten settlements and two cemeteries have been (partly) excavated in a research area of approximately 12.5 km². A dozen more settlements of the Roman period are known from surface finds. Fig. 1

shows an overview of all the excavations carried out up to 2008. The three decades of research make the Maaskant one of the most intensely researched areas in the Netherlands, providing a sound basis for models of the way in which local farming communities used and structured the landscape.

2 Excavations at Oss-Ussen 1976-1986: the settlement at Oss-Westerveld

2.1 Oss-Westerveld

The excavations at Oss-Ussen lasted from 1976 to 1986, during which time road trenches were surveyed and larger excavations of settlements and cemeteries were carried out (VAN DER SANDEN & VAN DEN BROEKE 1987). The results were published in two PhD dissertations, one on the prehistoric and one on the Roman-period features (SCHINKEL 1998; WESSELINGH 2000). At Oss-Ussen, the remains of three Roman-period settlements were discovered: at Oss-Vijver, Oss-Zomerhof and Oss-Westerveld. The last is noticeably the largest of the three with a layout and material culture that places it at the top of the local settlement hierarchy.

The settlement at Westerveld has a rectangular layout extending over 7.5 ha, surrounded by an enclosure of two or sometimes three parallel ditches that are, at most, 1 m deep. This enclosure was constructed in the early Roman period and was in use during several habitation phases (Fig. 2). It encloses at least thirty farmhouses with outbuildings and wells (VAN DER SANDEN 1987; WESSELINGH 2000, 71-169). According to WESSELINGH (2000, 159-160), the individual farms existed over several phases in the first two centuries AD. Given their modest dimensions, it is not likely the ditches had a defensive function. They display, rather, the characteristics of a clearly structured settlement of a Roman type (WESSELINGH 2000, 214).

From the first phase onwards, we can “perceive” the presence of a local “leader” in an enclosed yard in the southwest corner. This is evidenced, for instance, by the presence of early Roman pottery, two Roman wine casks re-used as water wells (WESSELINGH 2000). Plant remains, too, emphasize some kind of Roman way of life: as well as “normal” crops, such as barley, emmer, spelt, flax, millet and beet, the botanical samples from Westerveld contained Roman herbs like coriander, poppy, savory, celery and dill (BAKELS, VAN AMEN & WESSELINGH 1997). In the last quarter of the 1st century AD, a so-called *porticus* house was built in this compound. Unlike the traditional house plans, a *porticus* house has roof-supporting posts at a relatively large distance outside the walls of the house, reminiscent of a *porticus* (Fig. 3). Fragments of tiles found in the

immediate vicinity of the house indicate that the *porticus* had been covered by a tiled roof (WESSELINGH 2000, 78-82). Undoubtedly, this *porticus* house was intended to express the elite status of the family living there.

2.2 *Proto-villae*

In his seminal article of 1991, Slofstra characterized the Westerveld settlement as an enclosed rural settlement (SLOFSTRA 1991). In a hierarchical scheme of settlement levels, the enclosed rural settlement is the second level, after small rural settlements. The two highest levels are rural centres and towns. In socio-economic terms the settlement was interpreted as a so-called *proto-villa*. Here lived the local leader, whose power was based on “old” tribal and kin-determined leadership. He controlled the contacts with the Roman authorities, but as a second-rank chief. The *porticus* was inspired by *villa* architecture, but the resources of the owners were insufficient to build a real *villa* (SLOFSTRA 1991, 163). Slofstra referred to the status of these farmers as peasants; farmers on the margin of the Roman political and economic systems (SLOFSTRA 1991, 186).

Other settlements with *porticus* houses in the Meuse-Demer-Scheldt (MDS) and adjacent Eastern River areas have been interpreted in the same way. From this perspective, especially in the period from AD 70 onwards, the sandy area of the southern Netherlands, including the Maaskant, differed from surrounding areas. Under the influence of Roman policy in the loess zones of northern France, Belgium and the southern Netherlands, a *villa* system and *civitas* structure with urban centres and infrastructure developed (SLOFSTRA 1991, 182). The Maaskant region, therefore, was situated between a rapidly urbanised zone to the south, and the military zone of the *Limes* to the north. The Roman political authorities’ interest in the region was minimal due to the fact that the economic opportunities of the sandy area were less favourable. Contacts consisted mainly of tax collection and the recruitment of auxiliary troops. Consequently, the whole Meuse-Demer-Scheldt area had a peripheral position in the political and (agrarian) economic geography of the Roman Empire and was characterised by the absence of an elaborate *villa* economy.

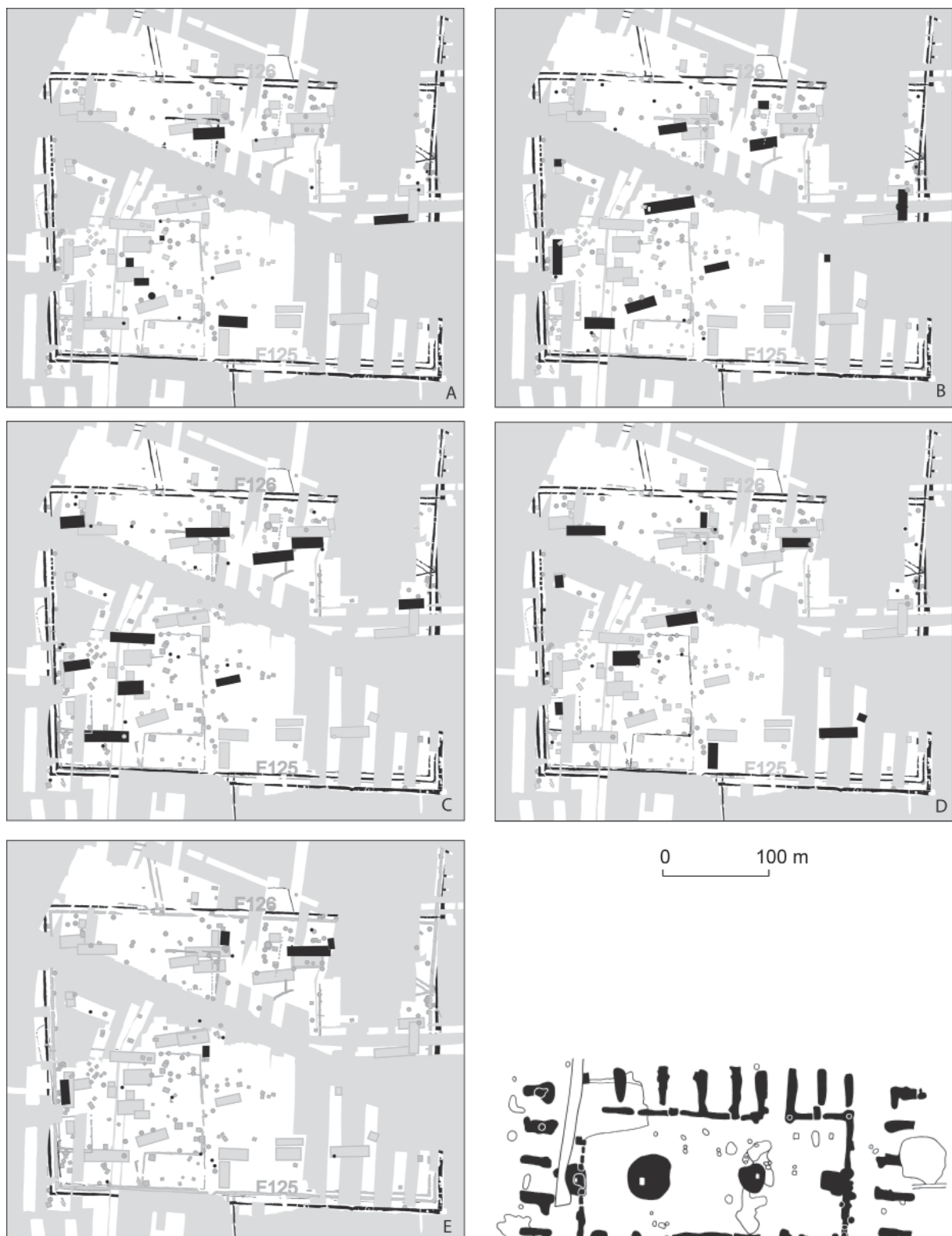


Fig. 2. Phases of the Roman settlement at Oss-Westerveld.
 A: 25 BC - AD 25 – B: AD 25-70 – C: AD 70-100 –
 D: AD 70-125 – E: AD 100-150.

The five phases are dated provisionally
 and probably overlapped and were not of equal duration
 (after WESSELINGH 2000, Fig. 187-191).

Fig. 3. The *porticus* house at Oss-Westerveld.
 Sc. 1:200 (after WESSELINGH 2000, Fig. 82a).

3 Excavations at Oss-Noord 1987-2008: new evidence

Even though Slofstra himself has abandoned the concept of the *proto-villa* (SLOFSTRA 2003), his model is still used to describe Roman period rural settlement landscapes. It has not been replaced by any alternative model despite the fact that new evidence gathered over the last two decades would justify modifications. In Oss, several excavations have followed those at Westerveld and in the neighbouring areas. They have provided us with a large set of new data that enables us to modify Slofstra's model. It shows that the model is too limited and not consistent with a much greater diversity of house ground-plans and settlement lay-outs.

3.1 Oss-Schalkskamp: an enclosed settlement related to Oss-Westerveld

Originally it was thought that Westerveld was the only enclosed settlement in the Oss region, but it is now clear that more settlements were enclosed. One of these is the Schalkskamp settlement situated some 400 m to the north of Westerveld (Fig. 4). It was possible to excavate the settlement fairly completely: it includes three house ground-plans, several granaries, pits and wells. The plans probably represent only two contemporaneous farmsteads within a sub-rectangular ditched enclosure



Fig. 4. The small enclosed settlement at Oss-Schalkskamp (modified after WESSELINGH 2000, Fig. 193).

that surrounds an area of at least 2.6 ha (WESSELINGH 2000, 172-182). Based on a dendrochronological date, a small number of datable finds and the few houses it has been concluded that the settlement was used only during the first half of the 1st century AD (WESSELINGH 2000, 180). It was, therefore, in part contemporaneous with the construction of the rectangular enclosure at Westerveld.

3.2 Oss-Horzak

A few hundred meters to the west of the previously mentioned IJsselstraat settlement, large-scale excavations between 1997 and 2008 revealed house ground-plans dating from the first centuries BC to the first centuries AD. The Roman period settlement at Horzak began as a stable settlement in the 1st century BC and developed



Fig. 5. The Roman period enclosed settlement at Oss-Horzak, including all the house ground-plans (Graphics: R. Jansen).

from a loosely structured settlement surrounded by a large irregular ditch system to a rectangular enclosed settlement. The later ditch system appears to have been laid out in the second half of the 1st century AD without paying much attention to the existing settled landscape (PRUYSEN 2007; JANSEN in prep. – Fig. 5). It is associated with a cemetery and a few other, smaller, settlements: Oss-IJsselstraat, Oss-De Geer Oudenhofstraat and Oss-De Geer Achterschajkstraat (WESSELINGH 1993; JANSEN & VAN HOOFF 2003). Ditches around the settlements that belong to a field system are orientated in the same way as the enclosure. A ditch to the west of the settlement at IJsselstraat, and 400 m east of Horzak, also has the same orientation, thus illustrating the parcellation of large parts of the landscape.

3.3 Oss-De Geer Oudenhofstraat and Achterschajkstraat

The settlement at Oudenhofstraat can be described as a solitary farmstead surrounded by a large irregular ditch system (Fig. 6a). Within the compound, a farmhouse, an outbuilding and three small water wells were found (JANSEN & VAN HOOFF 2003). Due to the good state of preservation of the remains of several wooden posts, the felling of the trees can be dated to the spring of cal. AD 96. It would appear that in addition to enclosed settlements with several farmsteads within the enclosure, there were also enclosed solitary farmsteads. The enclosed settlement at De Geer Oudenhofstraat makes it difficult to consider all

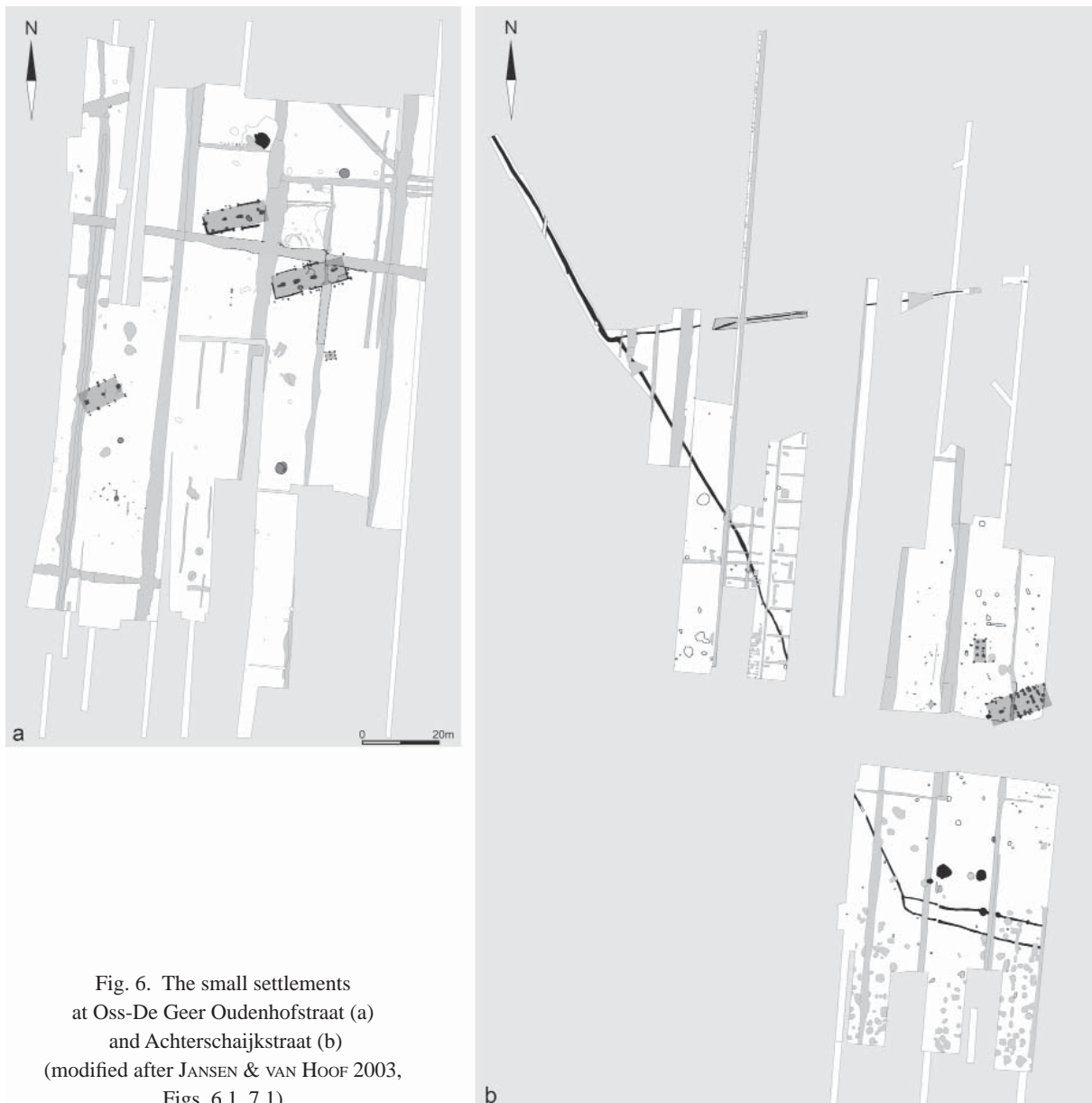


Fig. 6. The small settlements at Oss-De Geer Oudenhofstraat (a) and Achterschajkstraat (b) (modified after JANSEN & VAN HOOFF 2003, Figs. 6.1, 7.1)

enclosed rural settlements as a single level in the settlement hierarchy.

The nearby settlement at Achterschajkstraat is also a small settlement in which three house ground-plans, a well and an outbuilding were excavated (Fig. 6b). The

ground-plans have been interpreted as chronologically successive houses (JANSSEN & VAN HOOFF 2003) but this is not certain. Like the Vijver settlement in nearby Westerveld, De Geer Achterschajkstraat may have been a solitary farmstead that existed for several generations at almost the same location.

4 A re-evaluation of Oss-Westerveld

4.1 Ditch systems and structures – introductory remarks

The excavations at Oss-Schalkskamp, Oss-Horzak and Oss-De Geer supplied good reasons for a re-evaluation of the Westerveld settlement, its position within the local settlement system and its socio-economic significance. In the original model, the Westerveld settlement stood alone at the top of the settlement hierarchy in the Maaskant region, based on the *porticus* house, the enclosure and the material culture. The Horzak settlement also has a rectangular enclosed layout although, so far, it lacks a *porticus* house. Around Horzak, too, there are smaller, often not enclosed, settlements. This makes clear that such clusters of enclosed settlements with several satellite settlements probably existed every 3-5 km along the river Meuse. As at Horzak, the area between the Westerveld, Vijver, Zomerhof and Schalkskamp settlements is not uninhabited. Between the settlements many (fragments of) ditches were

recorded that could not be dated to any specific period by finds or stratigraphy (WESSELINGH 2000, note 26). Based on the excavations at Oss-Horzak, where many ditches could be dated to the Roman Period, it can be assumed that the majority of the ditches in Oss-Ussen were dug during the Roman period. If this is true, the ditches structure and connect the areas between the settlements. It appears that the structured layout of the settlements continues into the surrounding countryside with an identical orientation.

Comparable extensive ditch systems have also been excavated at the Roman settlement in Wijk bij Duurstede-De Horden. The settlement enclosures and the individual compounds have the same orientation as the ditches outside the settlement, which are interpreted as parcellation of land or drainage channels (Vos 2002, 63-66). Also in the coastal zone of the province of Zuid-Holland – in Roman times part of the *civitas Cananefatum* with its capital *Forum Hadriani* – are

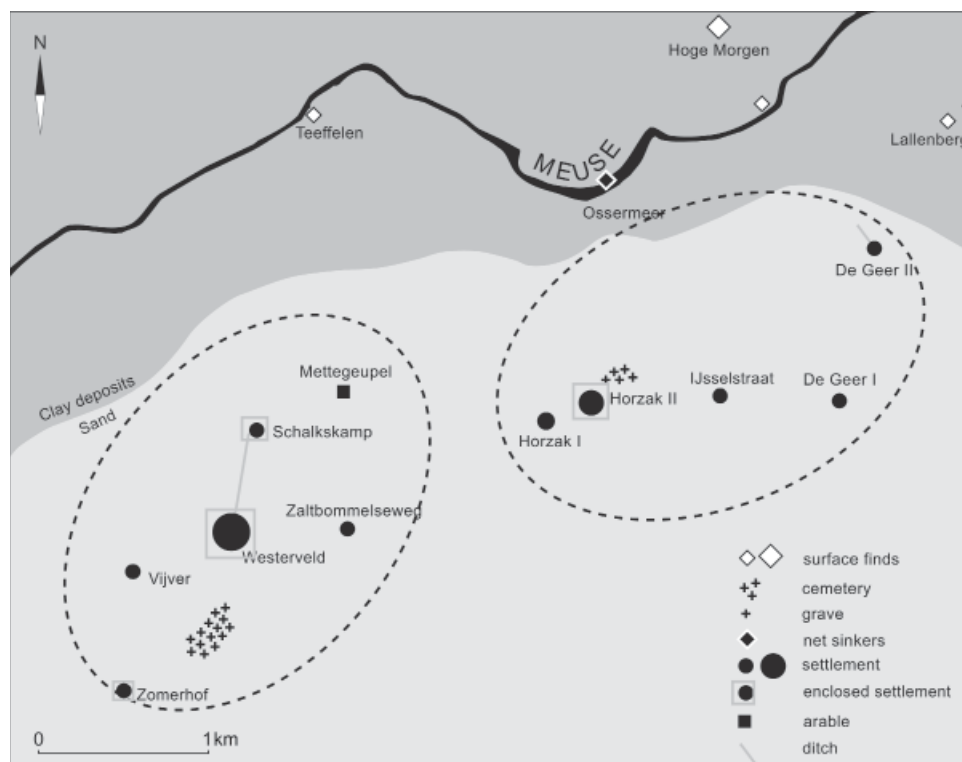


Fig. 7. Settlement clusters in the Maaskant region (Graphics: R. Jansen).

settlement enclosures and surrounding ditch systems. The ditches are interpreted as a field system, sometimes (also) functioning as an irrigation system (VAN LONDEN 2003, 183-222). This development, including the layout of extensive field systems, was most likely instigated by Roman policy (VAN LONDEN 2003; BLOEMERS 1978) and can also be expected to be the case in the Maaskant region.

4.2 Settlement clusters

It is now clear that to the north of Oss there are at least two large clusters around two sizable settlements (Fig. 7). In addition to Oss-Westerveld, 3 km to the east, there is another cluster of settlements with the Horzak settlement as its central place. Between the two clusters, there is little evidence of settlement in the Roman period. The features found here indicate ditch systems that can be related to arable land, but no house ground-plans or

other settlement structures. For the moment, therefore, we assume that this area between the two clusters was indeed used as arable land and grazing grounds.

Furthermore, each settlement cluster appears to have its own cemetery. The Roman cemetery to the south of the Westerveld settlement contains 261 grave monuments and 54 pits with the remains of funeral pyres (HESSING 2000, 183-188). A clear social ranking is visible in the cemetery, with a few “chiefly” burials at the northern edge. Compared to the other burials they differ in their monumentality and relatively rich grave goods. It is suggested that those buried here were once the inhabitants of the exceptional *porticus* house (JANSEN & FOKKENS 1999, 51). At Horzak, part of a cemetery 200 m to the north of the settlement has also been excavated. The 27 known graves are probably only a fraction of the total, so we do not know whether its layout is comparable to the cemetery near Westerveld (JANSEN & FOKKENS 2002; BRUINEBERG 2004).

5 Settlement developments in the Maaskant region: a re-appraisal

Using all the data available from three decades of excavation, we can re-model the settlement system proposed by Slofstra. In order to be able to see the developments that occurred during the Roman period more precisely, we begin by describing the settlement system in the late Pre-Roman Iron Age.

5.1 The late Pre-Roman Iron Age

The Pre-Roman Iron Age is generally characterised by a settlement system of wandering or shifting farmsteads, i.e. the individual farms belonging to the members of the local community were moved around a territory and not rebuilt generation after generation at the same place (e.g. SCHINKEL 1998). Only rarely do farms seem to have been rebuilt on the same spot and the settlements were loose agglomerations of small groups of farms. The traditional interpretation was that houses were relocated when the posts decayed and the house had to be rebuilt but, more recently, it has been argued that social aspects were (also) an important factor in the regular abandonment of the houses (GERRITSEN 2003, 105 ff., Fig. 3.36; but see ARNOLDUSSEN 2008 for critical comments on this model).

This wandering- or shifting-farmstead system is remarkably different from the settlement system in the early centuries AD. The immediate suggestion is that the differences can be ascribed to Roman influence. However, the extensive excavations in the Oss area demonstrate that this is not the case. It is true that until the first half

of the late Pre-Roman Iron Age hardly any differentiation can be perceived in the settlements or in the dozens of house ground-plans found in the Maaskant region. After approximately 150 BC, the first differences become apparent. From then on, a clustering of the houses, rebuilding on the same spot and differences in the size and layout of the settlements are visible. From then on, some farmsteads and settlements are enclosed or separated from the surrounding countryside by ditches (JANSEN & FOKKENS 1999).

In the late Pre-Roman Iron Age, we can observe the development of clustering and the first enclosing ditches, sometimes quite substantial, at Oss-Schalkskamp (WESSELINGH 2000, 172-182), Oss-Almstein (Fig. 8 – JANSEN & FOKKENS 1999) and Oss-Horzak. In these settlements, houses are rebuilt on the same spot, close to the remains of earlier houses. In the Meuse-Demer-Scheldt area, this transition to late Pre-Roman Iron Age clustered settlements with ditch systems is a more general development. The Weert-Kampershoek settlement is a prominent example (ROYMANS & TOL 1996).

A remarkable late Pre-Roman Iron Age feature was found at Oss-Horzak (JANSEN in prep.). Two rectilinear parallel ditches, 300 metres long, seem to divide the Late Iron Age landscape. Between the two ditches, at an average distance of 5 m, is what was perhaps an embankment. To the north and south of the ditch system, similarly orientated farmhouses of the same period were found. The purpose of this ditch system is

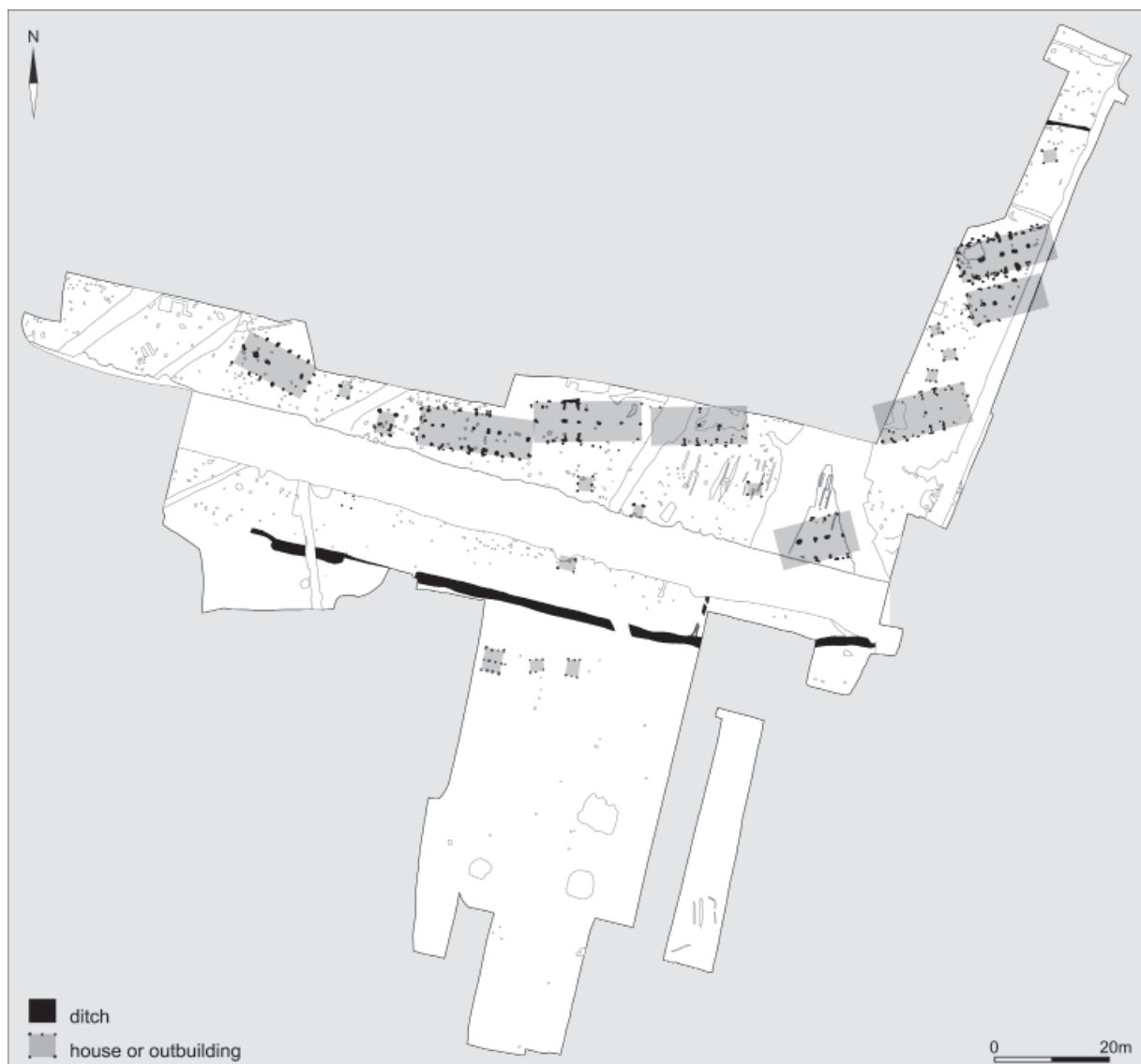


Fig. 8. The late Pre-Roman Iron Age settlement at Oss-Almstein with clustered farmsteads, houses rebuilt on the same spot and ditches to the north and south (Graphics: H. Fokkens).

as yet unknown. One hypothesis is that it constituted a demarcation zone between two communities.

It is apparent from these examples that already before the end of the late Pre-Roman Iron Age the dynamic settlement system of wandering or shifting farmsteads was gradually replaced by a more stable system with clustered farmsteads: houses were rebuilt close to their predecessors on the same plot, farms and settlements were enclosed and the landscape appears to have become more structured. This process thus started at least a hundred years before the Maaskant region was officially integrated into the Roman Empire.

The changes in the settlement system during the late Pre-Roman Iron Age were not, therefore, the direct result of Roman policy. We have to view these changes from

another perspective, as part of 2000 years of habitation history characterised by continuous gradual change. The causes of these changes are difficult to identify. The use of (more) permanent agricultural fields is seen as an important factor (ROYMANS & GERRITSEN 2002). Nevertheless, it is clear that incorporation in the Roman Empire accelerated these developments, with an enlargement of the settlements, increasing hierarchization, the founding of new settlements, expanding cultivation of the landscape and the rise of central settlements.

5.2 The Roman period

The change to an ever more structured landscape with central settlements at Westerveld and Horzak did not occur until a hundred years after the arrival of Roman

Type	Characteristics	Settlements Oss
<i>Einzelhöfe</i>	solitary farmyard, one of more phases, sometimes enclosed	De Geer I; De Geer II; Schalkskamp?
small rural settlement	2-3 farmhouses, several phases, sometimes enclosed	Schalkskamp?; Vijver; IJsselstraat; Zaltbommelseweg; Horzak I
large rural settlement	4-5 farmhouses, several phases, sometimes enclosed	Zomerhof; Horzak II?
central settlement	>4-5 (farm)houses, several phases, sometimes enclosed, <i>porticus</i> house, local chief, designed layout	Westerveld; Horzak II?

Tab. 1. Types of settlements in the rural landscape of the Maaskant-region.

troops. Most settlements in the Roman period can still be classified as rural but differences in size and layout increased, especially in the middle of the Roman period. Both Slofstra and Wesselinh make a distinction between the period up to AD 70 and the period between AD 70 and 260/270. The pre-Flavian period was strongly rooted in the late Pre-Roman Iron Age with relatively small settlements and a continuity of habitation on Pre-Roman Iron Age sites. The length of the houses increased, however, as did the amount of wheel-thrown pottery (WESSELINGH 2000, 218).

From AD 70 onwards, the situation changed drastically. Most noticeable are the restructuring of certain settled areas in a new rectangular layout and architectural innovations like the *porticus* house. It is as though the previous loose agglomeration of settlements was deliberately abandoned and replaced by a new organisation of the entire landscape, which itself was used even more intensively. Unoccupied land was reclaimed and cultivated. Individual farms (*Einzelhöfe*) of the Oss-De Geer type were established and central places like Westerveld and Horzak were founded. These new developments may well have been instigated by Roman policies aimed at pacifying and controlling this part of the Batavian territory. Roman influence is also visible in other aspects of the material culture: a clay face mask, the use of roof tiles and other building materials, glass vessels, terracotta figurines and Roman foodstuffs

(WESSELINGH 2000, 220-221; BAKELS, VAN AMEN & WESSELINGH 1997).

In earlier analyses, Westerveld was thought to be located at the centre of the settled area, surrounded by smaller (satellite) settlements. Today, it still is at the top of the ladder but with greater nuance (Tab. 1). We now distinguish four settlement levels, with little difference between them (cf. also WESSELINGH 2000, 221). The central places at Oss-Westerveld and Oss-Horzak are placed at the top of the hierarchy.

A similar position is suggested for the settlement at Nistelrode-Zwarte Molen, a few kilometres to the south of the town of Oss (JANSEN 2008). Prominent features of this Roman-period settlement are the pre-meditated lay-out of the settlement with a surrounding ditch system and, again, a *porticus* house dating to the same period as the one at Oss-Westerveld (JANSEN & VAN ENCKEVORT 2008). Detailed studies of the ceramics indicate that the settlement was established immediately after the Batavian Revolt, around AD 70 (VAN ENCKEVORT 2008). The material culture illustrates the Roman background of its inhabitants: thousands of Roman pottery sherds; thirty coins, including a small hoard of eleven *sestertii* and *asses*; dozens of metal objects and hundreds of roof-tile fragments. At least two smaller settlements and a cemetery are known in the immediate vicinity.

6 Concluding remarks

From AD 70 onwards, after the Batavian Revolt, the rural landscape of the Maaskant, which in Roman times formed the southern part of the *civitas Batavorum*, underwent reorganisation. During this period, extensive military and administrative changes modified the settlement system dramatically, with the development of elite residences that lasted for several generations.

These settlements stood at the top of the rural settlement hierarchy, which otherwise consisted of dispersed farmsteads and small (enclosed) clusters of farms.

Within this newly developed system, deliberately installed by the Roman authorities, one settlement was always seen as the central place and residence of the

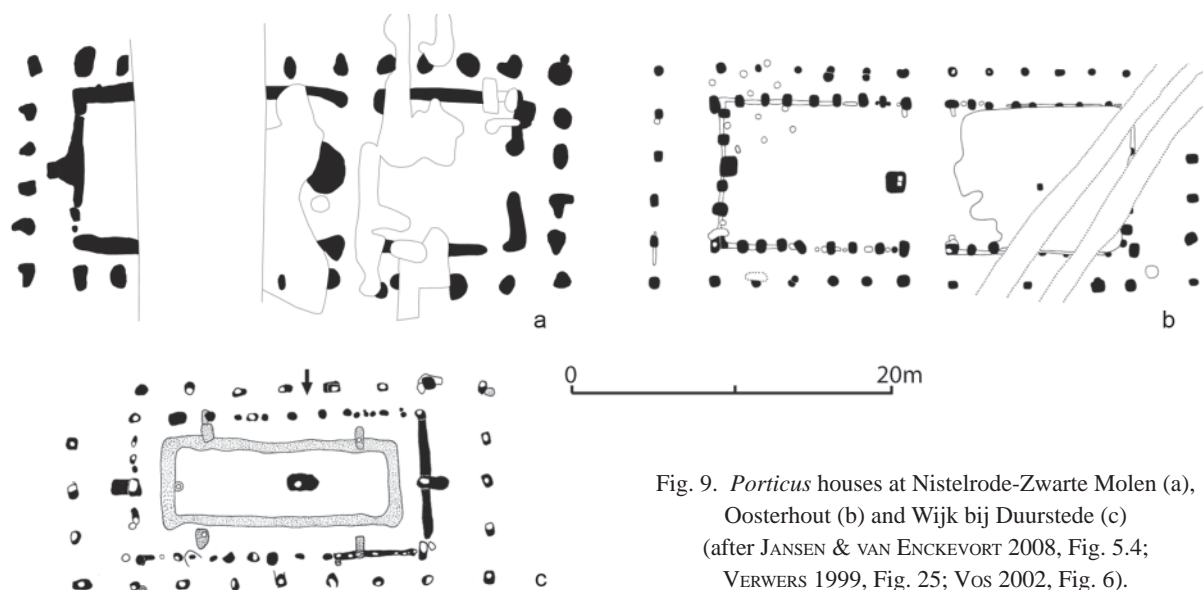


Fig. 9. *Porticus* houses at Nistelrode-Zwarte Molen (a), Oosterhout (b) and Wijk bij Duurstede (c) (after JANSEN & VAN ENCKEVORT 2008, Fig. 5.4; VERWERS 1999, Fig. 25; Vos 2002, Fig. 6).

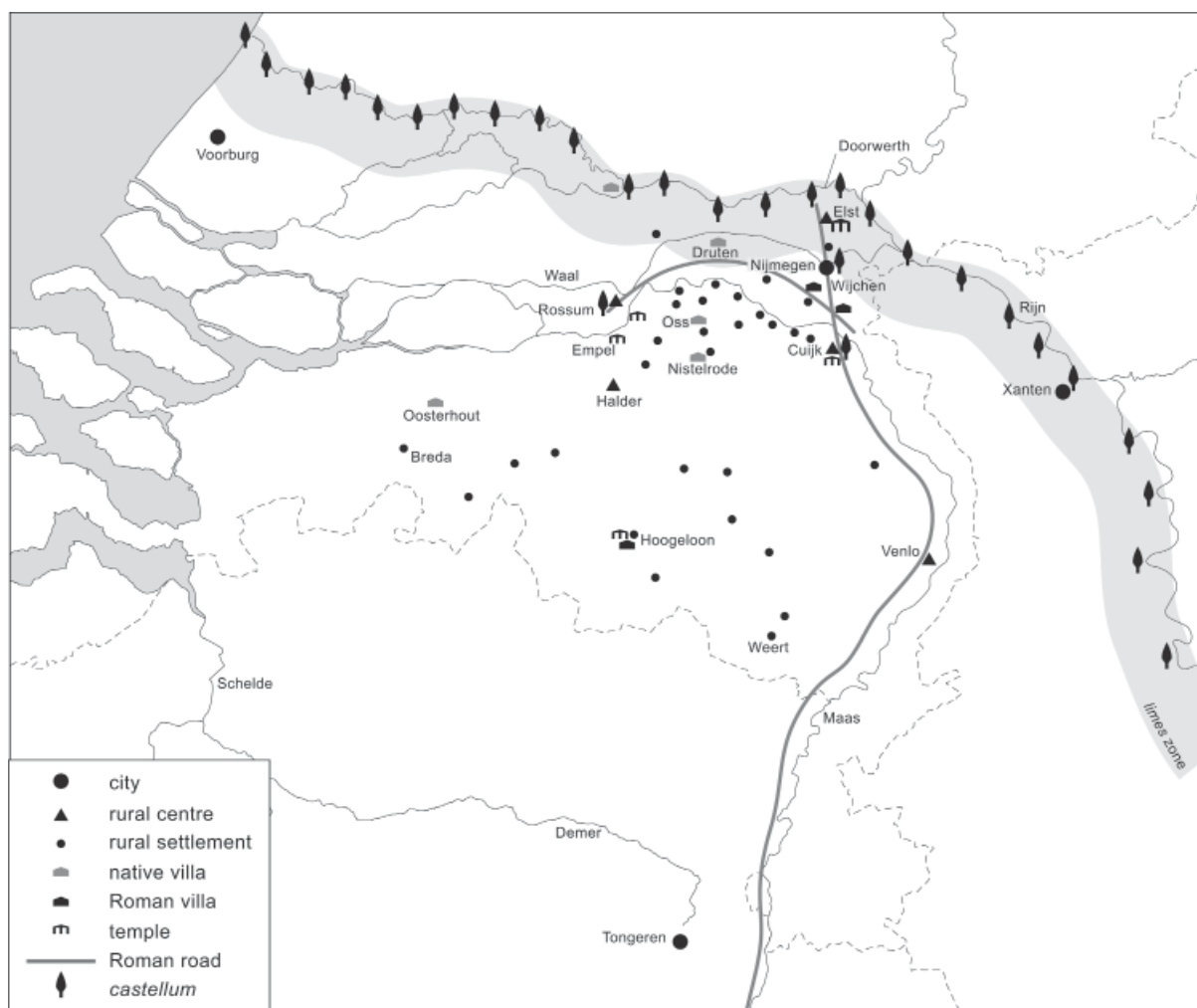


Fig. 10. Distribution of Roman period settlements with indigenous *villae* (*porticus* houses) in the southern Netherlands (Graphics: R. Jansen).

local elite (Tab. 1). The settlements at Oss-Westerveld, Oss-Horzak and Nistelrode-Zwarte Molen are, in our opinion, such central places in the rural landscape of the Maaskant region. Here, one can speak of *Herrenhöfe* in the true sense of the word. Maybe they should be interpreted as indigenous or rural *villae* in the economic sense of the concept, with the *porticus* house as the central building. The inhabitants were the local elite, possibly army veterans or other officials, who built and lived in the Roman style, cooked Roman food and buried their dead in the Roman manner. They had the power to restructure the whole rural landscape.

A prominent element is the *porticus* house, of which we have examples at Oss, Nistelrode and Druten; all of these date to the last quarter of the 1st century AD. *Porticus* houses at Wijk bij Duurstede and Oosterhout date to the middle of the 2nd century AD (Fig. 9). Their distribution appears to be restricted to the southern part of the *civitas Batavorum*, an area characterized by the

absence of “classical” stone-built Roman *villae* (Fig. 10). We do not suggest that settlements like Oss-Westerveld are comparable to the stone-built *villae* and the *villa* system of the loess zone, but nor is the sandy MDS area as underdeveloped as earlier interpretations suggested. The available data suggest the existence of a strong socio-economic relationship between the Roman authorities and the rural Batavian countryside in the Maaskant. From this perspective, we are convinced that the Maaskant region was fully integrated in the Roman Empire from the first centuries AD onwards, and was controlled, politically and economically, by chiefs of the highest rank.

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7 References

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