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# TUMULI AT THE ZEVENBERGEN NEAR OSS GEM. BERGHEM PROV. NOORD-BRABANT

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*In the hamlet of "Zevenbergen" (Seven Hills) two out of the seven tumuli were investigated. The first one was built over an extended inhumation without grave goods. Later an urn of the Hilversum/Drakenstein group and a deliberately roughened urn were buried in this monument. The second tumulus lay on top of an oval enclosure, bordered by a ditch and rows of postholes.*

The 'Maaskant' knows how to honour its antiquities: along Paalgravenlaan and Keltenweg one reaches Bursch's tumuli, whilst the Vorstengraflaan will bring you to the 'beautiful barrow of Oss'. One is tempted to place the name Zevenbergen also in this series. In the hamlet of Zevenbergen, on the boundaries between the municipalities of Berghem, Oss, Schayk, and Nistelrode, on a small plot of forest north of the road from 's-Hertogenbosch to Nijmegen, a group of seven little hills is situated. Driftsand or tumulus?, was a question which stood for a

long time, but was never answered. The proposals for enlarging the road at the expense of this forest made excavation necessary. Therefore two of the seven hills were investigated. By the fact that it will be recommended to place the 'Zeven Bergen' on the register of ancient monuments, one may guess the result of these investigations.

## *Tumulus I*

The phenomena shown by sections and plans in three quadrants of this tumulus (the NW. quadrant was left untouched) indicate that it was built of sods (fig. 2). The height and diameter are 60 cm and about 12 m respectively. The tumulus covers a rectangular grave which was dug through the podzolised sub-soil into yellow sand. Part of the thrown-out sand has been preserved as a thin layer on the old surface, visible in the C-W. section. On the bottom of the 40 cm deep grave, a body had been buried. The outline showed the following details: the body was placed extended on the back, head oriented ENE., the arms beside the body, and the hands probably on the pelvis (fig. 2). Calculations of the total height on the basis of the lengths of femur and tibia resulted in an average of 185 cm while those based on humerus and ulna/radius gave 186 cm. The length of

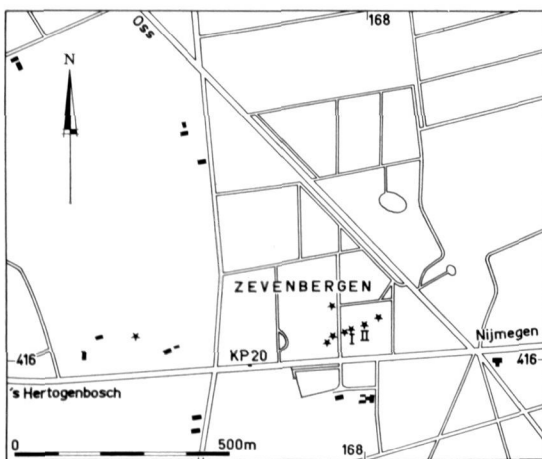


Fig. 1. Geographic location of the Tumuli at the Zevenbergen.

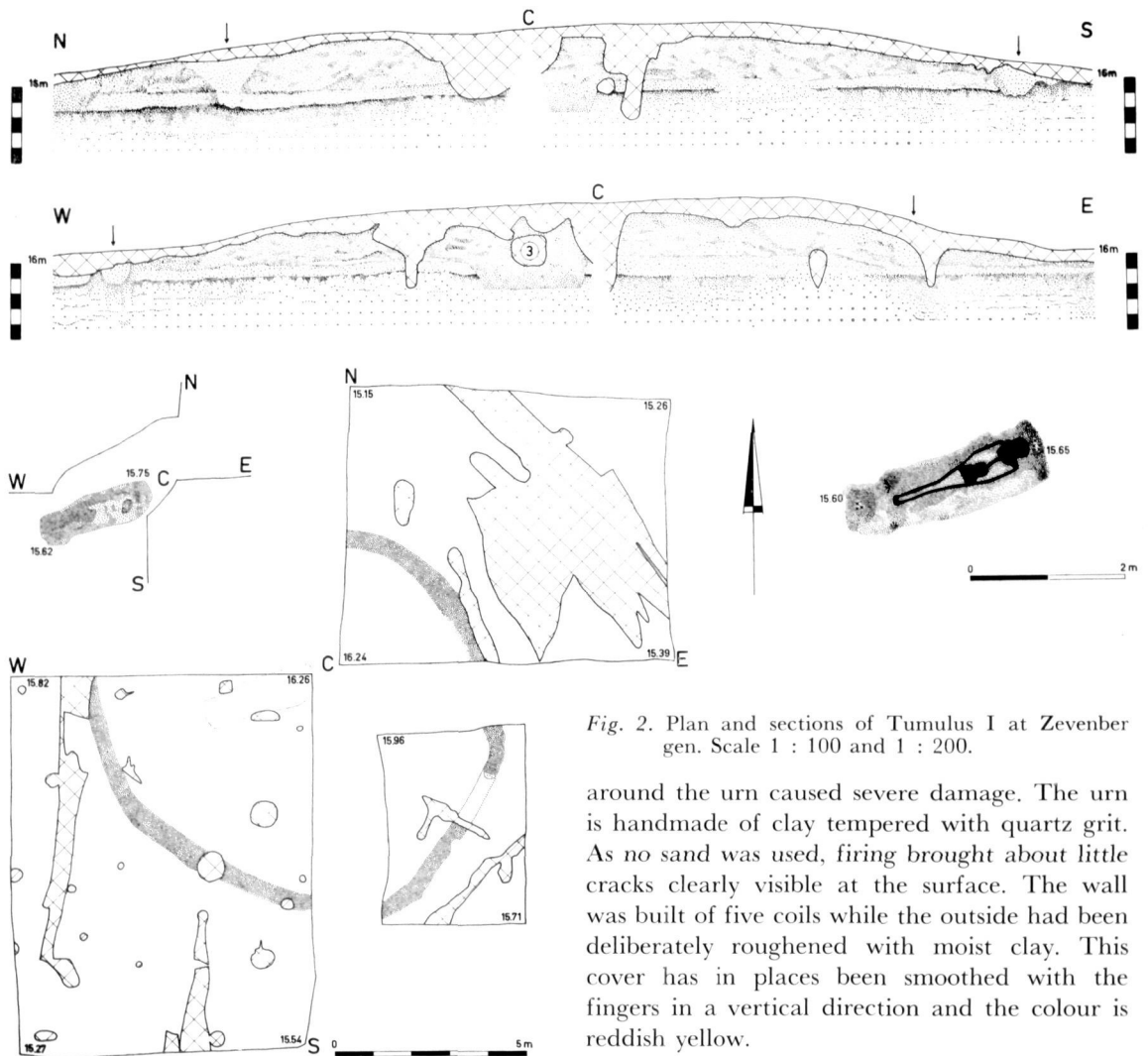


Fig. 2. Plan and sections of Tumulus I at Zevenbergen. Scale 1 : 100 and 1 : 200.

the complete outline was 188-190 cm. For this reason  $187 \pm 2$  cm might be considered as the most probable height of the deceased<sup>1</sup>.

The grave was filled with sods. The custom of burying the dead in a rectangular grave, supine, in an extended position, suggests a dating in the Early or Middle Bronze Age.

An *ante quem* date was provided by an urn, (figs. 3 and 4, no. 3), which was found in the barrow above the grave. Several mole-tracks

1. We are indebted to Mr. E. Zondag for his calculations and his consent to publish the results.

around the urn caused severe damage. The urn is handmade of clay tempered with quartz grit. As no sand was used, firing brought about little cracks clearly visible at the surface. The wall was built of five coils while the outside had been deliberately roughened with moist clay. This cover has in places been smoothed with the fingers in a vertical direction and the colour is reddish yellow.

The urn contained a large quantity of cremated bones. Among them were pieces with incised decorations; the circle and point motif occurred a few times (fig. 5). This motif has been used in many regions for many centuries, therefore it does not offer any date.

The shape and material of the urn point toward the Hilversum/Drakenstein-ceramics but atypical to that group is the roughened surface of the Berghem pot. This however cannot persuade us to depart from the current dating in the Middle or Late Bronze Age.

Clearly visible in all sections is a circular ditch, dug not into the foot but into the sides of the

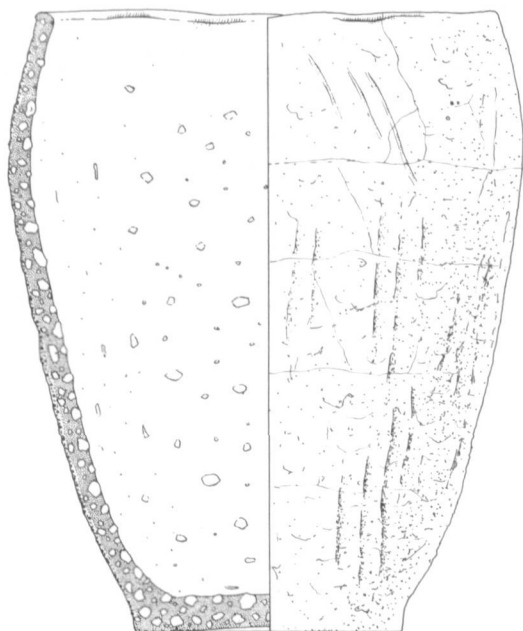


Fig. 3. Urn no. 3 found in Tumulus I at the Zevenbergen. Scale 1 : 4.



Fig. 4. Urn no. 3 found in Tumulus I at the Zevenbergen.

tumulus (see e.g. N-C.section). The plans (fig. 2) of the three quadrants also showed this ditch. It might be interrupted in the southeast. Being secondary, relative to the barrow, its relation with the urn described above seems possible. From the fill of a recent disturbance in the centre of the tumulus came some fragments of cremated bone and two sherds of thick pottery with a deliberately roughened surface (unlike urn 3, fig. 3). They perhaps indicate a third interment which offers another possible dating for the circular ditch.

By way of summary, it may be stated that Tumulus I was constructed in the Early or Middle Bronze Age over an extended burial. It was reused in the Middle or Late Bronze Age, according to the deposition of an urn of the Hilversum/Drakenstein group. A final interment was accompanied by a vessel of thick pottery with deliberately roughened surface, probably belonging to the HaC/D period.

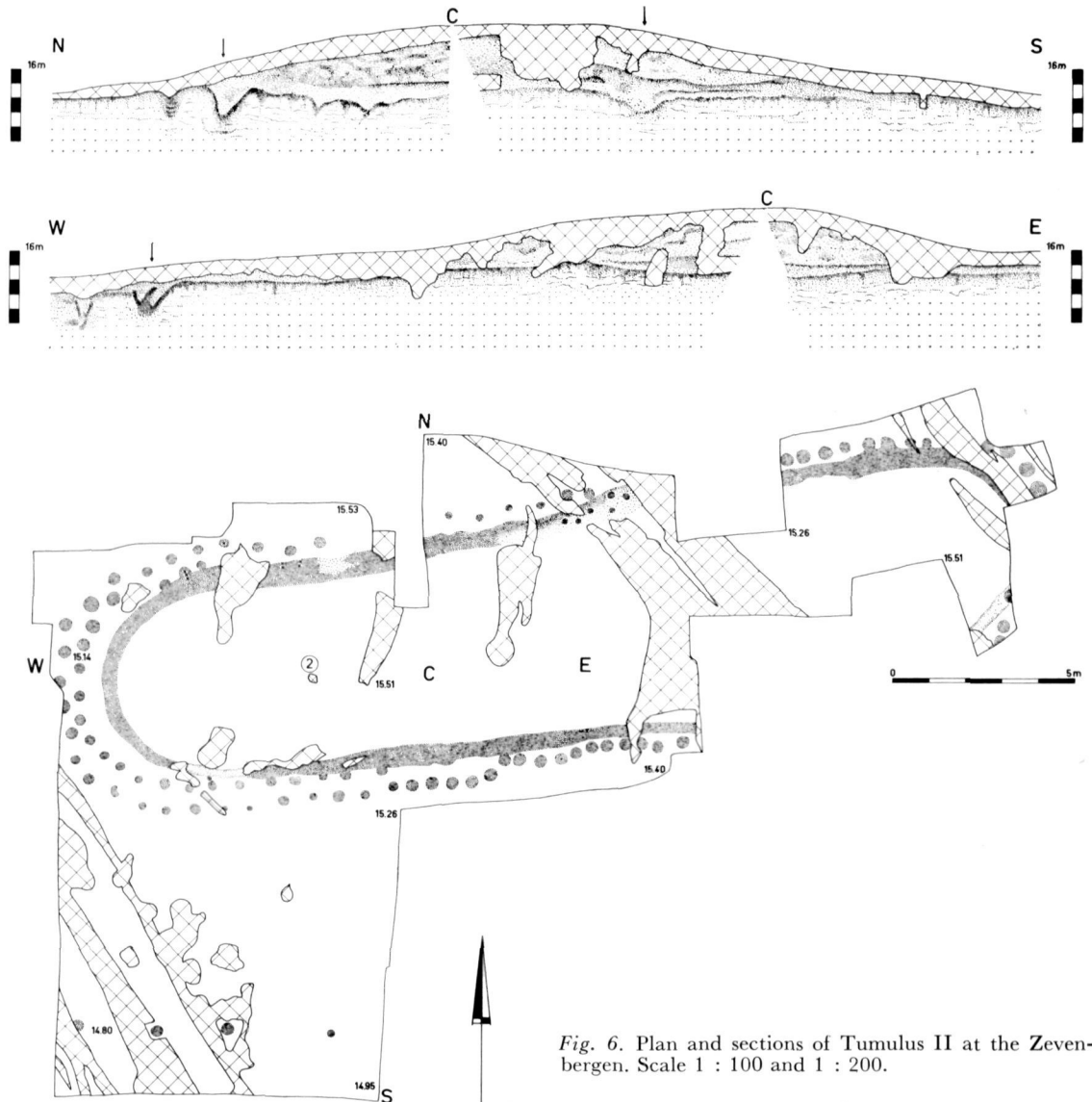
#### *Tumulus II*

During the investigations of this asymmetrical tumulus it was especially the plan that offered interesting information (fig. 6). Below the barrow, which was built from sods on a podzolised sub-soil, an oval brown ditch was outlined against the yellow sand. The C-S. section shows this ditch to be older than the tumulus, this fact being supported by the difference in shape of tumulus and ditch.

In the NW. and SW. quadrants, two rows of post-holes ran parallel to the oval ditch (fig. 7). Elsewhere only one row is visible and the posts have been spaced more closely. The chronologi-



Fig. 5. Fragments of decorated bone from the contents of urn no. 3. Tumulus I at the Zevenbergen. Scale 1 : 1.



*Fig. 6.* Plan and sections of Tumulus II at the Zevenbergen. Scale 1 : 100 and 1 : 200.

cal relation between ditch and posts is unknown.

Close to the SW. baulk in the SW. quadrant some sherds and cremated bones were found between tree roots. The sherds were made from clay tempered with pottery-grit. They had been polished on the outside and were well-fired. Three fragments show a decoration of incised triangles but this motif offers no exact dating evidence (fig. 8). There is no information as to

the shape of this pottery. The findspot is eccentric in respect to the tumulus as it is situated on the long axis of the oval monument. Unfortunately the tree roots negate the possibility of certainty as to whether the sherds and cremation were still in their original positions; thus we are left in doubt as to their relation to one of the monuments described.

Other finds are lacking; nor were additional

interments or a gravepit observed. Therefore a dating of the tumulus and the oval construction is difficult.<sup>2</sup>

An exactly comparable combination of a round and an oval monument is unknown to us. Distant resemblances are present at the urnfield at Knegsel. In several urnfields oval monuments of similar shape have been recorded, surrounded either by posts or by a ditch. They were constructed during the whole of the southern Dutch 'urnenvelden' period, i.e. HaB to HaC/D. This group is described in one of the following articles.

At the foot of both tumuli, sub-recent disturbances in narrow parallel strips were noticed. They have been interpreted as cart tracks. A

2. Dr. J. C. Vogel at Groningen informed us that a charcoal sample from the fill of the oval ditch had been analysed. As a preliminary dating we are allowed to publish  $580 \pm 50$  B.C. This date agrees very well with that of the unpublished oval monument of Haps, which on archaeological grounds belongs to the HaC/D period (see p. 55).

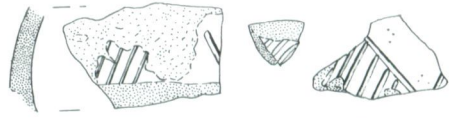


Fig. 8. Decorated sherds (no. 2) from Tumulus II at the Zevenbergen. Scale 1 : 2.

coin found at the bottom of one of these tracks bore the year 1827. The tracks are parallel to the Zevenbergseweg and possibly form a forerunner of the modern asphalt road.

The investigations proved, that at least two of the seven hills were tumuli. It therefore seems acceptable to regard this area as a Bronze Age/Iron Age cemetery. Whether any relations to the nearby HaC 'Vorstengraf' are present, might be indicated by further investigations. These have been scheduled for the near future.

The excavations at the Zevenbergen took place in two periods: in October of 1964, the SW. quadrants of both tumuli were investigated.



Fig. 7. Part of the oval ditch and the two rows of postholes below Tumulus II at the Zevenbergen, viewing west.

Miss B. Sira and Mr. L. P. Louwe Kooijmans, students of the Institute for Prehistory had the daily supervision. Professor Modderman directed a training-course for students in April 1965. During that period, the remaining quadrants (except the NW. one in Tumulus I) were excavated. In the field the drawings were made by

Mr. J. P. Boogerd and Mr. B. C. Dekker made them ready for publication. Mr. R. R. Newell kindly corrected the English manuscript. We are greatly indebted to the municipal authorities of Berghem and to Mr. H. Teunissen, medical doctor at Berghem, for the indispensable help offered to us.