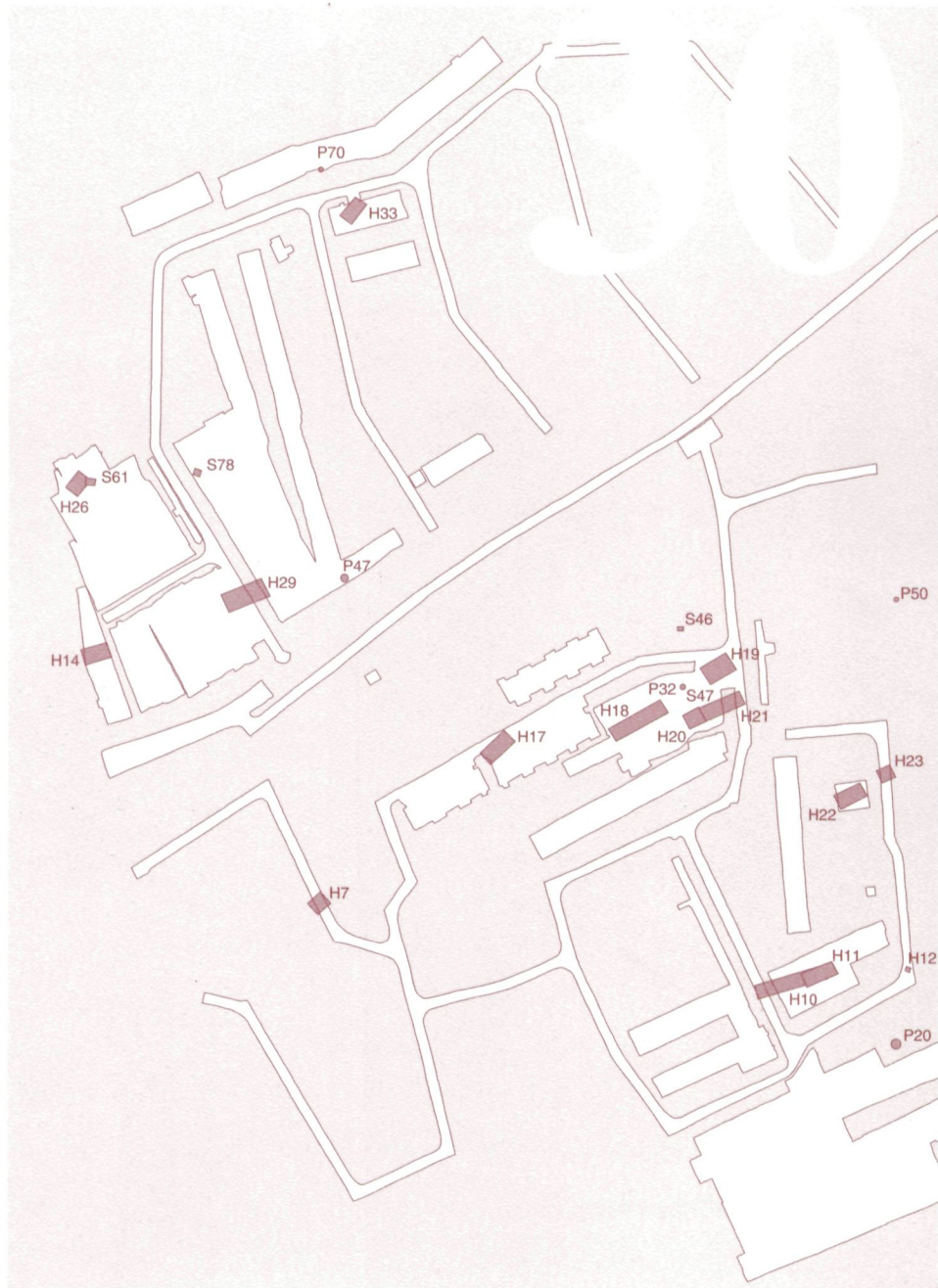


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THE USSEN PROJECT

THE FIRST DECADE OF EXCAVATIONS AT OSS

EDITED BY HARRY FOKKENS



LEIDEN UNIVERSITY 1998

To the local archaeologists who were our ears, eyes and hands:
Gerard van Alphen, Henk den Brok, Gerrit van Duuren, Mien van Eerd, Piet Haane,
Piet van Lijssel, Wil Megens, Ans Otten, Lex Pinkse, Piet de Poot and Gerard Smits.

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The Ussen project: the first decade of excavations at Oss

1. A short history of the project

The archaeological research that Leiden University is conducting at Oss has a long history. The title of this book suggests at least two decades of excavations. Indeed, in 1999 Leiden University will be celebrating its 25th anniversary of research at Oss. Why such a lengthy project? First of all it should be made clear that all the research carried out at Oss falls under the heading of rescue archaeology, but of a very special kind. Oss is a rapidly expanding town situated a short distance to the south of the river Meuse. The municipal authorities are building new housing estates especially on the northern and western sides of the town, where there is still room for expansion (*fig. 1*). In these building projects, a very extensive prehistoric landscape, densely inhabited from the Bronze Age until the Roman period, is gradually being destroyed. So far, an area of approximately 2.5 km² has been built over, of which 45 ha (18%) have in the meantime been excavated. This is not a substantial area in relation to that which has been destroyed, and an enormous area in terms of archaeological coverage. The Ussen area in particular, which is the focus of this volume, has been intensively investigated. Here alone, 33 of the 126 ha that have been built over have been excavated. We therefore believe we are justified in claiming that at Oss we are investigating a prehistoric landscape and its dynamics (Fokkens 1996).

The Oss project was started in 1974 by dr. Jan Verwers of the Institute of Prehistory of Leiden University, IPL for short. Although IPL has remained the 'call sign' of the Leiden archaeologists, the institute as such no longer exists. It was transformed first into the Faculty of Prehistory, and more recently the Faculty of Archaeology. Not only the name of the institute changed, but so did the leaders of the excavations and of the Oss project itself. Wijnand van der Sanden headed the project from 1981 until 1985 and was responsible for the Ussen excavations. Harry Fokkens has been supervising the Oss project since 1986, and is now focusing on the northern part of Oss (*fig. 1*).

Apart from numerous chronicles and preliminary reports, a few more comprehensive publications have in the meantime appeared, but they were all written in Dutch. One of the reasons for this is that the public has the first right to be informed about the results of the excavations because the municipal

authorities of Oss and the provincial authorities of Noord-Brabant are providing most of the funds for the excavations. Van der Sanden and Van den Broeke therefore wrote *Getekend Zand* (1987), and Fokkens *Oss, verleden aan het licht* (1993). So far, only a few articles have been published in English (Van der Sanden 1987i, Fokkens 1996), so English-speaking colleagues have had limited access to the information. The present volume of *Analecta Praehistorica Leidensia* should to some extent atone for this deficiency. It contains a final report on the prehistoric (Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age) data obtained in the Ussen project. The information on the Roman period will be presented in two separate publications discussing the settlements (Wesselingh in prep.) and the cemetery (Hessning in prep.).

The fact that not Wijnand van der Sanden, but Kees Schinkel has written the final report on the Ussen excavations requires some explanation. As is usually the case in archaeology, the indoor work, the processing of all the gathered evidence, has proceeded a lot less smoothly than the fieldwork. Jan Verwers started the indoor work, but it was only in 1981, when Peter van den Broeke started working on the native pottery and Wijnand van der Sanden on the features and other find categories, that the analysis of the features and finds really got under way. This analysis was an impressive task, which had to be started virtually from scrap and therefore took several years. By 1987 the analysis of the prehistoric and Roman-period data gathered in the Ussen excavations had reached an advanced stage, but the information still had to be presented in writing. By that time, Van Der Sanden was offered a job as head of the Archaeological Department of the Drents Museum at Assen, and his work had been taken over by Kees Schinkel, who, in turn, had had to acquaint himself with the vast amount of information. In 1994 Schinkel completed his thesis on the prehistoric period, incorporating even the results of the 1986 Bronze Age campaign supervised by Fokkens. The trenches dug in 1986 constituted the northern limits of the Ussen excavation.

Schinkel wrote his thesis in Dutch, but the Faculty of Archaeology felt that his work deserved publication in English because it was the report of ten years of faculty research. Moreover, the report describes one of the most intensively researched micro-regions in our country, and as such may

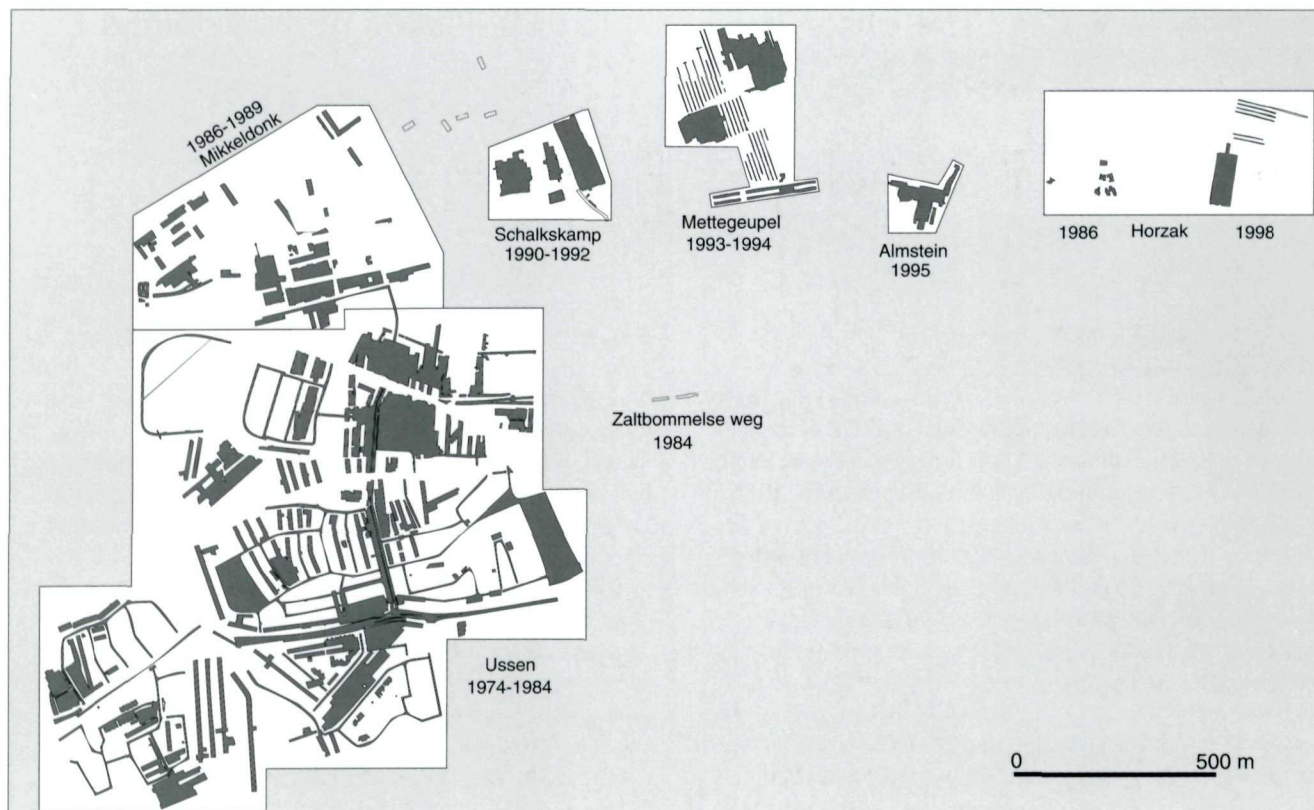


Figure 1. Survey of all areas excavated between 1976 and 1998 (shaded black) in Oss- Ussen and Oss-North. The white areas and the names indicate the building estates that formed the context for the rescue excavations.

serve as a starting point for future analyses of Iron Age habitation in the southern Netherlands. A translation grant was awarded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) in 1997, but Schinkel himself could not undertake the task of supervising the publication of his work, because he had in the meantime become a small-scale farmer - like the prehistoric people he studied - somewhere in France. So the present author took on the task of supervising the translation and preparing the manuscript and the drawings for publication - with Schinkel's consent. Susan Mellor¹ translated the Dutch text. She really did a terrific job.

Out of practical reasons, Schinkel's text has been left practically unaltered, except that a few sentences have been formulated a little differently, and hopefully more clearly. The result is a fairly descriptive work that presents the data of the Ussen excavations in a systematic manner. Part 1 contains an analysis of the data, split up into five descriptive chapters (sections 4 to 8) and a synthesis. Part 2 contains a catalogue of houses, outbuildings, granaries, pits and palisades. This part also contained the Roman-period house plans originally, but they have been omitted from the present catalogue and will be

published separately by Wesselingh (in prep.). The typological sections of Part 2 still extend into the Roman period because Schinkel proposed general typological sequences that will be used in other work on Oss.

The contributions by Bakels, Lauwerier/IJzereef and Van Der Sanden were originally incorporated in Schinkel's thesis as separate sections. They have now been corrected by the authors concerned and are here published as separate articles. This gives the authors full credit for their work.

2. Some comments on Schinkel's settlement models

In his paper, Schinkel describes the prehistoric settlements of Oss-Ussen as unsettled settlements, or - in a more literal translation of the Dutch *Zwervende erven* - 'wandering farmyards'. His 'unsettled settlement' model is now widely supported. More controversial is his spatial interpretation of this concept with respect to the Ussen settlements. His interpretations are visualised in figures 18, 59, 60, 95, 99, 143 and 144. The discussion focuses on the boundaries of his settlements, and on which yards should be associated with which settlements.

Schinkel presents his settlements as if they were solid units; they were even presented as areas bordered by solid lines originally. During the discussion of his dissertation this interpretation was heavily criticised by Wijnand van der Sanden, who is of course intimately acquainted with the data. Dr. Van Der Sanden pointed out that we cannot be so sure about the proposed boundaries of the settlements, partly because large areas of land (75% of the total area) have not been excavated. On the basis of his suggestions I have therefore adjusted the figures concerned by fading the boundaries of the proposed settlements. The result however remains a model which can, and will, be disputed.

Following Van der Sanden's comments, I have also added a few things to the figures. Van Der Sanden pointed out that the areas that were used for funerary or ritual practices were open spaces at practically all times. These areas appear to be totally devoid of settlement features, which probably implies that they were respected as 'historical' and ritual spaces. This aspect of the cultural biography of the landscape has been omitted in Schinkel's analysis, but in our opinion the Ussen data illustrate this point very well, and it should therefore be made visible.

Another figure that has been changed to accommodate the more cautionary approach favoured by Van Der Sanden and myself is figure 145. Here Schinkel had drawn arrows to demonstrate how in his opinion the various houses succeeded one another: the ultimate model of the wandering farmstead. But as Van Der Sanden put it: *if we know one thing for sure, it is that this is not how it was*. Schinkel's arguments can still be followed because the description of his model has been left unaltered in section 9, but I have removed the arrows from figure 145 and have at the same time added the numbers of the houses, to make it easier for the reader to follow Schinkel's proposed house movements. Similar criticism can be levelled at the model presented in figure 157. Here the arrows have however been left in place, because the settlements are much more generalised.

A different aspect was brought forward by Nico Roymans. Prof. Roymans pointed out that the concept of prehistoric settlement cannot be defined exclusively in spatial terms, as Schinkel does in section 3 of his article. Social aspects are equally important. He therefore also doubts it is indeed possible to draw lines around settlements as has been done in the aforementioned figures.

Such considerations have led us to avoid a spatially oriented approach to settlement in our second decade of research. I now use the concept of a *local community*, to refer to a group of people who inhabit and exploit the same area, share tools, cooperate in building houses, bury their dead in the same cemetery and share ritual places, myths, history, etc. (Fokkens 1996).

3. The maps and figures

It is difficult to explain to outsiders why, in 1989, when Schinkel started his work, no survey map of the excavated

features was available. Over the years, Van Der Sanden and Van Den Broeke had acquired intimate knowledge of the distribution of all the features and finds, but survey maps had not yet been produced. The entire analysis was carried out before the beginning of the computer era. The most easily accessible map was a set of 125 ink drawings, each measuring 1 x 1 m on a scale of 1:100, made by Jan Boogerd. It was only in 1991, by which time Schinkel had manually reduced these drawings to a scale of 1:1000 and subsequently digitised them, that the prehistoric cultural landscape of Oss-Ussen really became visible.

The production of the drawings, especially the large 1:550 fold-outs, has been one of the many lion's tasks of the present publication. Jan Boogerd invested several years of work in them, but his product was still not suitable for publication as his task had been to produce the 1:100 maps required for the primary analysis. They had to be reduced once again, this time to scales of 1:500 and 1:2500, to obtain survey maps fit for publication. This task was almost impossible to undertake in the traditional manner using pen and ink. Fortunately, personal computers made their way into archaeology just in time. I had already started using them successfully in 1987 during the excavations in Oss-North, and it was the only possible solution for the Ussen-maps. From 1991 onwards all the 125 1:100 base maps were digitised with the aid of (paid) students. The most consistent workers who should be mentioned here are Michiel Kappers and Jan-Albert Schenk. The work was completed by Okke Doorenbos, who also produced the first versions of many other maps published in this volume (see the acknowledgements for the figures for a survey).

All the figures published in this book were prepared by Schinkel. Most have been included without alterations, though quite a few - including the scale 1:550 fold-out maps - have been digitally redrawn in accordance with the present standards of the Oss project. One of these standards is that unexcavated areas are always shaded in drawings. The digital maps already available have been updated by Petra de Jong of the Leiden Faculty of Archaeology.

4. The fieldwork

Fieldworkers play a very important role in any excavation project. Since fieldwork was carried out throughout the year, the Leiden archaeologists were away from home for months at a time. Several project leaders and field technicians, notably Joost Assendorp, Jan Boogerd, Rob Datema, Annebert Döbken, Henny Groenendijk, and Glenn Tak, invested a good deal of energy in the project.

In all the years of research they were supported and guided by the very active group of local archaeologists, united in the *Heemkundekring Maasland*. Gerard van Alphen, Henk den Brok, Gerrit van Duuren, Mien van Eerd, Piet Haane, Piet van Lijssel, Wil Megens, Ans Otten, Lex Pinkse, Piet de Poot and

Gerard Smits excavated and documented the largest number of wells ever. Many of them are still active today, 25 years after the start of the excavations. They play a very important role in monitoring building operations, helping out in the field, providing building maps, maintaining local contacts, etc. It is therefore to them that I would like to dedicate this volume of *Analecta Praehistorica Leidensia*.

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