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Breaking and making the ancestors. piecing together the urnfield mortuary process in the Lower-Rhine-Basin, ca. 1300–400 BC

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Ancestral landscapes

8.1 The first holistic approach to urnfields

In the Low Countries, during the 1990's a renewed interest in urnfield research arose that boosted the theorisation of the social structuration of the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age landscape. Barely within the time-span of a single decade a holistic approach was developed, bringing together a huge corpus of burial sites, settlement data and deposition practices (Roymans 1991; Roymans/Fokkens 1991; Fontijn 1996a; Fokkens 1997; Roymans/Kortlang 1999; Fontijn 2002; Gerritsen 2003). Ideas developed in this decade still shape the current discourse about the role of the urnfields in relation to the social organisation of the landscape and found their culmination in the quintessential book chapter by Roymans and Kortlang (1999).

Important elements in the model by Roymans and Kortlang in fact revolve around notions of territoriality and a growing pressure on the available land (Roymans/Kortlang 1999). The basis for this model was introduced by Roymans and Fokkens several years earlier (1991) with the initial thesis that urnfields formed important focal points structuring the movement of settlements across the landscape (Fig. 8.1). This in contrast to the dispersed character and relatively short lived use lives of Middle Bronze Age barrows (Roymans/Fokkens 1991, fig. 7). The dichotomy of "stable" urnfields in contrast to "dynamic" settlements is also evident in this model (Van Beek/Louwen 2013, 84) and is for an important part based on the so-called 'wandering farmsteads model' that was being developed simultaneously (Schinkel 1994; 1998) with the renewed interest in urnfields. The latter model tries to explain the open and dispersed character of later Bronze Age and Iron Age settlements on the Pleistocene sands in the south of the Netherlands. It builds upon the assumption that the dozens of late prehistoric farm houses that can be found in relatively small areas actually only reflect one or two contemporaneous farmsteads that regularly, even cyclically, shifted location for no apparent economic reason (Schinkel 1998, 167). This in contrast to urnfields that could be in use for centuries in a row (Roymans/Fokkens 1991, 13). To provide an explanation for the seemingly different way in which the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age landscape was organised when compared to the Middle Bronze Age (Roymans/Fokkens 1991, fig. 7), the initial model was refined in the course of the 1990's. It was done so with the additional notion that in the course of the Middle Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age settlement territories become more fixed and decreased drastically in size (Fig. 8.1). The principal argument behind these assumptions is essentially based on the apparent *increase* in the number of burial sites over the same

period (Roymans/Kortlang 1999, fig. 2), which, according to Roymans and Kortlang, is indicative for demographical expansion (Roymans/Kortlang 1999, 39). They argue that the increased pressure on land went hand in hand with a changing relationship with the land in the sense that throughout the course of the Middle Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age, claims on land would have gotten more strictly controlled and restricted by kinship-ideology (*ibid.*, 40):

> *"…The cemetery, with its compact and monumental shape and stable location, symbolised the collective identity of each local group. In the small communities living in dispersed farmsteads, the urnfields provided a long-term community focus. They were a fixed reference point providing continuity and stability to the local group, and as such forming a counterbalance to the discontinuities that frequently occurred in the domestic sphere because of the practice of abandonment and small-scale displacement of farmhouses. Moreover, the monumental urnfields functioned as territorial markers. Because of their physical appearance in the rather open landscape at that time, as well as the oral traditions attached to them, the urnfields symbolised the transcendental claim of a local community and its ancestors on a certain territory. This in a period in which the population density increased and in which territoriality became an important principle. As such, the cemeteries played an active role in the territorial ordering of the landscape…"* Roymans/Kortlang 1999, 40.

With their model Roymans and Kortlang were able to bring together decades of settlement and urnfield research and tie in several complex strands of social cosmologic elements of the late prehistoric landscape and explain how these developed on the long term, ranging from settlement dynamics to the role of the ancestors. It is therefore with good reason the model has become so widely accepted. However, it has been more than 20 years since the inception of the original model and many new excavation data as well as new analyses of old excavation data have become available since. Whereas Roymans and Kortlang had to base themselves predominantly on pre-Malta rescue excavations with almost no budgets for analyses such as radiocarbon dating of cremated remains, at present we have large scale excavations at our disposal covering areas the size of which have not been met before (*e.g.* Roessingh/Blom 2012; Blom/Van der Velde 2015) as well as cemeteries of which substantial shares of graves have been radiocarbon dated (*e.g.* Tol 2009; Dyselinck 2013; Mousch 2016). Together these new data begin to sketch a slightly different picture of the long term developments so effectively tied into the model by Roymans and Kortlang (1999). Essential elements in the model such as the pivotal role of burial grounds and the role of the ancestors in structuring the landscape remain, but as will be argued in the following, the time depth of these funerary landscapes, as they will be called, is much deeper, less contrasting in character with preceding and following periods and above all, their very structure suggests these burial grounds transcended notions of territoriality.

8.2 On the longevity of late prehistoric farmsteads

Starting with the non-funerary evidence, an important element of the model by Roymans and Kortlang concerns the dynamic and open character of late prehistoric settlements. As argued, the farmhouses themselves are presumed to have been inhabited for relatively short periods of time. Suggested time spans before 1999 vary between 20-40 years

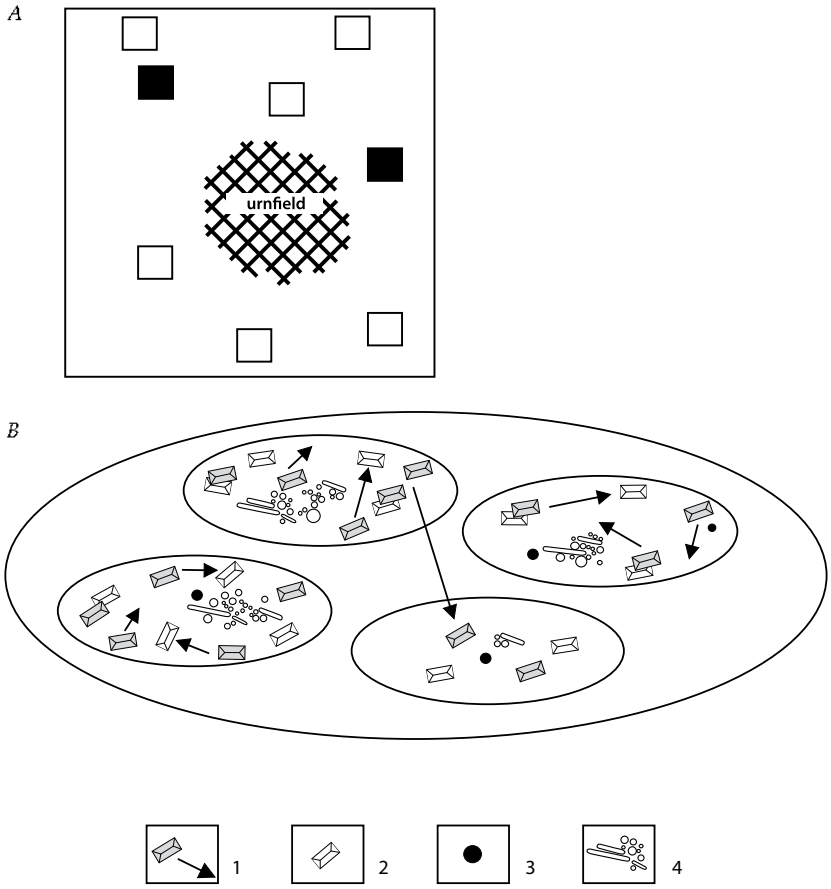

Fig. 8.1: Models by (A.) Roymans/Fokkens (1991) and (B.) Roymans/Kortlang (1999) explaining the relation between urnfields, settlements and territories for the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age. The black squares in figure A represent occupied farmsteads (households) while the empty squares represent abandoned farmsteads. In figure B the occupied farmsteads (households) are represented by the grey farmhouses (1.), the white ones (2.) again represent farmsteads of an earlier phase. The black dots (3.) represent so-called 'Middle Bronze Age family barrows' while the urnfields are represented by the agglomerates of longmounds and small round mounds (4.). The ellipses in this figure represent the territories of local groups (Roymans/Kortlang 1999, fig. 10). Figure 8.1 has been published before in Van Beek/Louwen 2013 (fig. 2).

(*e.g.* Roymans/Fokkens 1991, 11; Arnoldussen 2008, table 3.7) and are predominantly based on modern experiments of unsheltered wood (Arnoldussen 2008, 89). Moreover, many houses excavated at Oss-Ussen, the site where the 'wandering farmsteads model' is principally based upon (Schinkel 1994; 1998), are in fact poorly dated by stray pottery sherds in post holes and the resolution required to make any statements on the longevity of the houses concerned simply lack (Jansen *in prep.*). Additionally, recent extensive radiocarbon dating programmes and dendrochronological analyses of post stumps from Bronze Age houses in the Dutch riverine area suggest that even in these damp soils figures of five decades approaching a century for the life span of late prehistoric houses appear

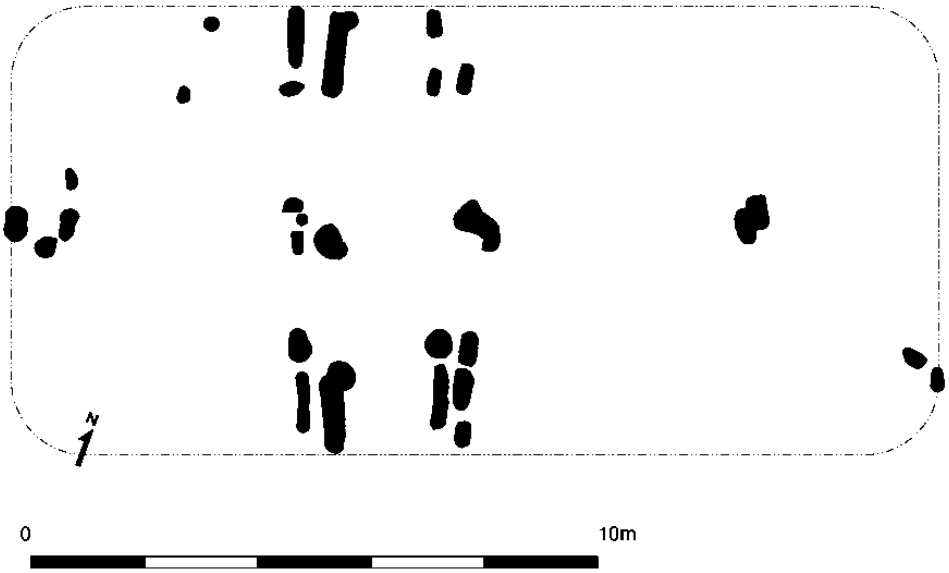

Fig. 8.2: A Middle Iron Age house (structure 173) of the Haps/Oss-Ussen 4 type from the site of Best – Aerle (Southern Netherlands, province of Brabant). As this plan shows all central posts as well as the posts of the entrance have been replaced at a certain point in time. It is also possible that the entire structure was rebuild at the exact same spot as the former house (After: Tol *et al.* 2017, fig. 6.5).

very reasonable (Arnoldussen 2008, 92). Evidence from the same area suggests that people invested in the restoration of their homes (Arnoldussen 2008, 91) and there seems to be no good reason why this would have been different in the Iron Age. Also, for the Middle Bronze Age there are ample examples of houses being rebuilt on the same farmyard (Modderman 1955a, fig. 7; Fokkens 2005, fig. 18.6; Meurkens 2014, fig. 7.20). For the Iron Age too examples exist for the restoration of houses or the rebuilding of houses on the exact same location (Fig. 8.2; Tol *et al.* 2017, 217). All the here mentioned evidence suggests that late prehistoric houses along with the farmyards they were located on were durable places and considered worth investing in. It therefore challenges the current view of later Bronze Age and Iron Age settlements being highly dynamic from a socio-cosmologic point of view (see Jansen *in prep.* for an extensive evaluation of the 'wandering farmsteads model').

8.3 The 'population increase thesis' revisited

Did a substantial increase of the population indeed take place in the course of Middle Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age, and with it, a growing pressure on available land? That is the next question that needs to be addressed before returning to the funerary evidence entirely. To answer this question, it is necessary to examine the model of Roymans and Kortlang in more detail. In the introduction of their model they pose the following (major) assumption:

"…We start with the assumption that there is a territorial structure in Urnfield societies in the Northwest European Plain. Each local community of c. 3 to 6 families has its own territory, which includes an urnfield, a celtic-field complex (in which the dispersed farmsteads are situated), and a peripheral zone of uncultivated land, used for grazing cattle, collecting wood, etc. In the sandy landscapes the urnfields can be used for quantifying and mapping these territories…" Roymans/Kortlang 1999, 37.

As can be read, their assumption is in fact built up from two sub-assumptions. Starting with the last one, the idea of using urnfields as a proxy for defining territories stems from the work of Waterbolk (1987)[140] who sees a correlation between late prehistoric territories and the well documented (late) medieval '*marken.*' These were small collectives of local farmers that jointly governed their communal grounds. The word '*marke*' literally means 'border' or 'divide.'[141] As in the province of Drenthe (northern Netherlands) urnfields and celtic fields seem to cooccur within more or less the same areas as these (late) Medieval *marken*, Waterbolk suspects a certain continuum between the two (Waterbolk 1987).

The next sub-assumption concerns the presumed size of 3-6 families for the communities inhabiting these territories. This thesis is not elaborated upon by Roymans and Kortlang, but we can see these numbers reappear in many a report when population sizes are estimated on basis of urnfield graves (*e.g.* Roymans/Hoogland 1999, 78; Kortlang 1999, 166-167; Schabbink/Tol 2000, 47; Tol 2000, 128) by applying the formula Ascádi and Nemeskéri (1970) developed:

$$P = k \times (D \times e)/t.$$

In this formula '*P*' represent the average population size. '*k*' is a correction factor that can be employed to make up for any uncertainties such as the underrepresentation of specific age or sex categories as well as for taphonomic processes. '*D*' stands for the number of interments while '*e*' represents the average life expectancy for the population under study. Finally, '*t*' represents the number of years the cemetery of study was in use (*cf.* Ascádi/Nemeskéri 1970).

Having stated their initial assumption concerning Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age territory sizes, Roymans and Kortlang continue with a comparison with the preceding Middle Bronze Age. Since extensive settlement data for this period lack in the Meuse-Demer-Scheldt region, the area the original model was based upon, Roymans and Kortlang use Middle Bronze Age barrows as a proxy to approach the respective territory sizes. They consider barrows less than 1.5 kilometres apart that are not separated by valleys, streams and moors as being part of the same cemetery (Roymans/Kortlang 1999, 38). When the total number of Middle Bronze Age cemeteries is subsequently compared to the number of cemeteries being founded in respectively the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age, the Early Iron Age exhibits figures of thrice as many new cemeteries being founded when compared to the Middle Bronze Age. It are these numbers Roymans and Kortlang eventually explain as the evidence for demographical expansion taking

140 Kooi (1979) already operates within the same spirit (See Kooi 1979, 173).

141 English translation by author from the etymology explained in 'Het Drenthe Boek' (Gerding/Hillenga 2007).

place towards the Early Iron Age and as the gradual filling in of the preceding larger and loosely defined open territories of the Middle Bronze Age (*ibid.*, 38).

Even though the model is handsomely crafted, as Roymans and Kortlang indicate themselves, the underlying (sub-)assumptions are in fact based on broad brush survey data (*ibid.*, 39). In the light of new insights concerning the representativeness of the barrow record, the time-depth covered by cemeteries known as urnfields and late prehistoric habitation patterns it is however necessary to critically evaluate the assumptions underlying the model.

Starting with the settlement evidence, an extensive inventory of late prehistoric settlement sites and a critical review of existing chrono-typological schemes of house plans substantiated by extensive radiocarbon evidence has yet to be performed (Jansen *in prep*.). This is not only necessary because the thesis of Roymans and Kortlang is predominantly based on funerary evidence, but also in the light of the above mentioned arguments in favour of late prehistoric houses being much more durable structures than was until recently presumed. Next, though the apparent coinciding of (late) Medieval *marken* with the presence of late prehistoric features such as cemeteries and celtic fields might indeed be striking, the strong anachronism between the respective periods remains evident. Especially since the Medieval *marken* originate in an already Christianised landscape the two periods can hardly be compared. Moving to the number of families that supposedly inhabited an urnfield territory, applying the formula of Ascásdi and Nemeskéri (1970) in calculating the original population that would have made use of an urnfield is highly problematic as each and every factor of the formula is dependent on substantial uncertainties. In Section 6.2 the problems involved in approaching the average life expectancy at birth (factor '*e*') on basis of cremation graves have already been discussed. Subsequently, in Section 3.4.1 it was argued that in the Low Countries many parts of the prehistoric landscape have been erased in the last 150 years and that the number of graves we encounter in our excavations almost never reflect the original number of graves (factor '*D*'). Nineteenth century accounts on reclamation activities report hundreds of urns being destroyed (*e.g.* Hermans 1865; Ort 1882) in areas that would only yield modest amounts of graves when excavated in the twentyfirst century (Hakvoort/Van der Meij 2010). Finally, as argued in the above, new radiocarbon dates that have become available in the last 20 years force us to evaluate our ideas about the duration of these cemeteries (factor '*t*'). Though the original formula by Ascádi and Nemeskéri includes a correction factor (factor 'k'), with regards to the urnfields the many uncertainties involved in fact turn this formula into nothing more than a shot in the dark. Overall, assumptions made by Roymans and Kortlang that regard the settlement evidence underlying their model do not seem to hold in the light of these new insights.

Shifting the attention to the funerary evidence, it was already argued that the present barrow record for the Low Countries is hardly representative for the original situation. As mentioned, Bourgeois estimates that our current record probably only includes about 30% of the original amount of barrows that once dotted the Lower-Rhine-Basin (Bourgeois 2013, 40). Recent analysis of LiDAR[142] data for the ice-pushed ridge of the Veluwe in the Central Netherlands seems to prove this thesis since by this pilot study alone the number

142 Light Detection And Ranging.

of barrows for this particular area was almost doubled (Lambers *et al.* 2019). Using Middle Bronze Age barrows as a proxy for the calculation of territory sizes is therefore highly problematic. Also, as the presented radiocarbon dates show (Fig. 7.1; Appendix II), a substantial amount of the Middle Bronze Age dead were actually buried in urnfields.

The need to substantiate the presumed duration of cemeteries with radiocarbon dates also extends to the dataset used by Roymans and Kortlang in approaching the numbers of newly founded urnfields in the Meuse-Demer-Scheldt region. Their (impressive) initial inventory of urnfields yielded almost 400 sites, 210 of which also provided (rough) chronological evidence as to their foundation and duration (Roymans/Kortlang 1999, fig. 1). However, the evidence concerned predominantly consists of typo-chronologic analyses of urns, grave goods and funerary structures. Though it was illustrated in Sections 5.2 and 6.3 that these might indeed be used to give a rough indication for the age of specific graves, these graves often find themselves surrounded by structureless and objectless graves for which these markers are not present. The latter are often "lumped" with the former, unintentionally creating a bias for both the age as well as for the duration of the cemeteries they were retrieved from. Therefore, as the research by Roymans and Kortlang merely concerned a broad brush inventory of known cemeteries, some severe caution is ushered with the assumed age and duration of these cemeteries.

A case in point concerns the cemetery of Sittard-Hoogveld that was initially believed to be an Early Iron Age cemetery based on the high numbers of *Harpstedt*- and *Schräghals*-urns (Tol 2000, 125). After a critical evaluation of the grave goods by the excavator himself it turned out that a portion of the graves not dated to the Early Iron Age, but the Late Iron Age instead (*ibid.*, 131-132). Eventually, the cemetery has been published as an Early Iron Age cemetery that was abandoned only to be reused again in the Late Iron Age (*ibid.*, 131). However, of the 113 graves from this cemetery that have been included in the present study, still 34 graves did not yield any clear typo-chronologic markers as to their relative age. Also, radiocarbon dates associated with *Harpstedt*-urns indicate this kind of urn was used way into the fifth century BC.[143] Moreover, the *cista a cordoni* that was found in this cemetery (Section 5.2) was dated between 450 and 350 BC (Tol 2000, 113), which is in fact exactly in the presumed time gap between the Early Iron Age and Late Iron Age. Additionally, a series of radiocarbon dates specifically targeted at the Late Iron Age graves (Lanting/Van der Plicht 2005, 366) fall within the period between the fourth and first century BC. When the here presented evidence is added up, it seems more likely that the cemetery of Sittard-Hoogveld in fact continued to be used from the Early Iron Age onwards until at least the beginning of the Late Iron Age.

It is argued here that the case of Sittard-Hoogveld is in fact symptomatic for our relatively poor understanding of the duration of cemeteries known as urnfields. Returning to the dataset that formed the basis for the model by Roymans and Kortlang, of the 210 sites included, for only 24 cemeteries are radiocarbon dates available, most of them published after 1999. These radiocarbon dates alone already indicate highly variate time-spans when the duration of these cemeteries is concerned (Appendix II), ranging from the Middle Bronze Age, all the way to the Roman Period. It is not argued here that typo-chronologic markers may not be used as an indication for the age of specific cemeteries as well as for their duration, on the contrary. Neither is it argued here that no new cemeteries

143 It should be noted here that these dates also fall within the Hallstatt-plateau.

were founded in the Early- and Middle Iron Age. What *is* argued here however, is that graves that lack clear typo-chronologic markers may not simply be lumped under the graves that do as this creates a huge bias for both the age as well as the duration of these cemeteries. Radiocarbon dates included in Appendix II show that not only much earlier graves find themselves among the urnfields, but also that these cemeteries can continue much longer than was until recently presumed. The steep decline in the number of new cemeteries being founded in the Middle Iron Age in the figure presented by Roymans and Kortlang (1999, fig. 2) therefore not so much reflects a sudden abandonment of 'the urnfield tradition,' but perhaps a continuation of burial grounds already established in the minds of people as the resting (or dwelling) places of their ancestors. This latter thesis seems to be confirmed by more recent studies into Middle Iron Age cemeteries in relation to older funerary sites (Van Beek/De Mulder 2014, 303-306; Van den Dikkenberg 2018, 43-46).

Returning to the question this section started with, the thesis that the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age marks a period of powerful demographic expansion (Roymans/Kortlang 1999, 38) that prompted changing relationships with- and organisation of the land(scape) does not seem to hold in the light of new archaeological evidence. Based on an ever growing corpus of radiocarbon dates, new insights in the durability of (farm)houses and the duration of cemeteries start to sketch less contrasting views when the Middle Bronze Age is compared to the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age and the two respective periods seem practice-wise much more intertwined. Especially with regards to funerary practices, many elements considered as typical for the Late Bronze Age (and Early Iron Age) already find their origin (early) in the Middle Bronze Age. Also, not uncommonly do urnfields seem to have grown out of burial grounds already established in the Middle Bronze Age. This latter observation certainly not counts for all Late Bronze Age cemeteries. Roymans and Kortlang therefore still have a strong point that throughout the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age new cemeteries are being founded. Though these new cemeteries can still reflect new communities that establish themselves within the landscape or fissions of communities already present (Roymans/Kortlang 1999, 40), in the following it will be argued that the filling in of the landscape with (new) burial grounds transcended notions of territoriality.

8.4 The open structure of late prehistoric burial grounds

An interesting notion in the earlier cited definitions of urnfields (Section 7.2) is the fact these would have concerned *open* cemeteries. "Open," in this definition, was used to indicate these cemeteries have no clear boundaries in the form of enclosures. As an affirmation of this statement, at present in the Low Countries no enclosed cemeteries are known that date to the period of the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age. In this sense it is remarkable that the open character of the settlements typical for this period also seems to have extended to the structure of the associated burial grounds.

When the association of specific settlements with specific burial grounds is concerned, in the Low Countries there are some good examples available where both features have been excavated in close proximity to each other and a relation between the two seems evident. For the present dataset Someren-Waterdael I (Kortlang 1999), Wijk bij Duurstede-De Horden (Hessing 1989) and the Colmschate area east of Deventer (Van Beek 2009) are good examples of such cases. Though it was argued in the above that the calculation of population sizes remains highly problematic on basis of arguably incomplete urnfield

records, for the here mentioned examples the image sketched by Roymans and Kortlang of relatively small communities burying their dead in these cemeteries seems not unfeasible. But how do cemeteries like Weert-Boshoverheide, that are estimated to have contained thousands rather than hundreds of individual graves (Hissel *et al.* 2012, 142) tie into this picture? Especially when is added that within a few kilometres distance from this vast late prehistoric burial ground, several other urnfields are known, some of which more than 300 graves in size (Tol 1998; Hiddink 2010). The sheer amount of graves unearthed in micro-regions like the Weert-area simply do not fit the model of relatively small territories consisting of three to six households.

It must be mentioned here that at the time Roymans and Kortlang published their model, the cemetery of Weert-Boshoverheide was an exceptional case and estimates about its original size were not as high (Bloemers 1993, 14; Van Ginkel 1982, 50-51; Kremer 1996, 15) as the current estimates (Hissel *et al.* 2012, 142). However, the average amount of square metres covered in current excavations has grown substantially in the last two decades and some substantial fragments of late prehistoric cemeteries have been unearthed since. Together these projects start to reveal alternatives to our current perception of how these late prehistoric burial grounds were organised and begin to suspect the cemetery of Weert- Boshoverheide was no exception at all when the size and extent of these burial grounds are concerned. As an illustration, in the following two examples of recent projects will be presented where urnfields ever more take the form of open funerary landscapes.

8.4.1 A funerary landscape at Someren-Waterdael

Throughout this dissertation, the site of Someren-Waterdael I (province of Brabant; Southern Netherlands) has already passed in review several times (Sections 5.2; 5.3; 7.1.3). Excavated in the 1990's it was an exemplary case of the extent of late prehistoric burial sites that could be discovered underneath the (late) Medieval *essen.* The cemetery dates to the Early- and Middle Iron Age (Kortlang 1999, 161-163) and has several remarkable characteristics, the first being the fact that this particular urnfield did not produce one single urn at all. All graves concern (tight) depositions of cremated remains that originally seem to have been placed in separate clusters that over time gradually developed into one large cemetery (*ibid.*, fig. 16). Another remarkable feature of this cemetery seems to have played an important part in this latter narrative. With its impressive length of 145 metres (Kortlang 1999, 145), a monumental long mound links up a small cluster of larger Iron Age mounds in the south to a dense cluster of smaller mounds in the north of the area (Fig. 8.3).

In 2007, less than 400 metres south of the cemetery of Someren-Waterdael I, another cemetery was excavated. The cemetery of Someren-Waterdael III, like that of Waterdael I, must have started in the course of the Early Iron Age and continued well into the Middle Iron Age (Hiddink/De Boer 2011, 130). The latter period certainly not marked the end of the area of Waterdael III to function as burial ground as in western direction a cemetery developed that in time covers the entire period between the late Middle Iron Age to at least the third century AD (Hiddink/De Boer 2011, 154). Even though the Early- to Middle Iron Age cluster and the late Middle Iron Age-Roman Period cluster have been published as two distinct cemeteries, it is remarkable the younger cluster developed adjacent to- and in sight of the older cluster of graves and a slight overlap in time exists between the two clusters. It seems therefore more than justified that the various clusters of graves that can be distinguished for the area of Waterdael III (see Hiddink/De Boer 2011, figs. 6.7 and 7.16)

Fig. 8.3: The funerary landscape at Someren-Waterdael I/III. (After: Kortlang/Van Ginkel 2016, p. 23).

have as a whole been labelled as being part of a *landscape of the dead* (Hiddink/De Boer 2011, 243). Though ebbs and flows in the duration of this funerary landscape will certainly have taken place, the (impressive) series of radiocarbon dated graves cover the entire time-span between ca. 650 BC-400 AD (Hiddink/De Boer 2011, fig. 5.2; table 5.2; 243).

Additionally, the cemetery of Someren-Waterdael I, contemporary with the early phase of Waterdael III, is only located at a minimal distance to the north, about the length of three modern soccer pitches. No graves have been unearthed in the extensively excavated area in between (Kortlang/Van Ginkel 2016, fig. x), suggesting these indeed concerned two separate clusters of graves. However, how must we then interpret the presence of two contemporary and monumental burial sites within such a small area that practically find themselves within

shouting distance? And how does this distribution of graves across the landscape relate to notions of territoriality? A remarkable observation with regards to the latter question is again the directionality of the monumental long mound in the cemetery of Someren- Waterdael I (Kortlang 1999, 145). It not only links up clusters of graves within the space of Waterdael I, but when its orientation is followed in southern direction, it directly leads to the contemporary cluster of graves at Waterdael III (Fig. 8.3). Here, it seems that the very orientation of the most monumental structure of the Waterdael I site was designed in such a way, not for the purpose of demarcation, but rather as a link with- and reference to other locations of the dead.

In the next case-study it will become clear that the distances bridged between clusters of graves in the funerary landscape of Someren-Waterdael were not only unexceptional, but that the extent of these funerary landscapes seems unending.

8.4.2 A funerary landscape of Boxmeer-Sterkwijck

Some 40 kilometres northeast of Someren, as the crow flies, between 2007 and 2008 one of the largest late prehistoric funerary sites in the Low Countries was excavated near the village of Boxmeer. By then it was already clear that the site of Boxmeer-Sterkwijck was part of a larger funerary landscape that extended several kilometres along an old branch of the river Meuse (Van der Velde 1998; Blom/Van der Velde 2015, figs. 1.7 and 1.8). The excavation itself covered a length of 1.2 kilometres (Fig. 8.4). Spread out over several clusters 421 cremation graves were unearthed that dated between the Middle Bronze Age and the Roman Period. Attracted by the presence of Middle Bronze Age barrows (Vermue *et al.* 2015, 197-199; fig. 4.12), Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age graves have been found in all respective clusters (Fig. 8.4).

It is believed that due to various site formation processes the excavated graves still only represent a modest reflection of the original amount of graves that were once located in this particular landscape (Vermue *et al.* 2015, 189). The same notion springs from the prefixed limits of the excavated area. Only in eastern direction could the borders of this funerary landscape be established as here it was once flanked by the river Meuse. For the remaining directions, especially towards the north and south, it was clear the distribution of graves continued well beyond the borders of the excavation. Though the restricted number of radiocarbon dated graves does not allow for affirmation yet, it is likely this landscape zone along the river Meuse was continuously used as burial ground from the Middle Bronze Age onwards well into the Roman Period (*ibid.*, 179).

The sheer size and time-depth are not the only remarkable features of the site of Boxmeer-Sterckwijk as this excavation also provides an unique insight into the very fabric of these funerary landscapes. Starting with its orientation, the distribution of graves seems to follow the course of the river Meuse, that at the time was located closer to the site itself (*ibid.*, 187). It can therefore be argued that the river Meuse provided a certain directionality to the funerary landscape. The role of rivers, streams and valleys as natural routes across the landscape and as important focal points (lines) of orientation is universal and it is not unthinkable these even functioned as infrastructural arteries in the late prehistoric landscape. With intervals of several hundred metres, in the Middle Bronze Age burial mounds were erected along the ancient course of the river Meuse, forming the oldest funerary features in the landscape. From the Late Bronze Age onwards dense clusters of cremation graves developed around these monumental structures, gradually filling in the spaces in between the barrows. Viewing the excavated area as whole, the funerary landscape revealed seems to consist of a repetitional pattern of Middle Bronze

Fig. 8.4: Excavation plan of Boxmeer-Sterckwijk showing all late prehistoric and Roman graves (left) and cut outs (right) of the locations where Middle Bronze Age graves/ structures were found (Vermue *et al.* 2015, figs. 4.3 and 4.12).

Age barrows surrounded by dense clusters of younger cremation graves that over time gradually grew closer together (Fig. 8.4). The various clusters of graves still reflect clear notions of which dead belonged together, but one cannot escape the impression that the gradual fusion of these various clusters and the seemingly never ending pattern of repetition indeed transcended notions of territoriality. It is if the new dead were joined in in an overarching community of ancestors. Ancestors, that towards the end of the last millennium BC, must have been overwhelmingly present in the landscape.

8.4.2 Old excavations, "new" funerary landscapes

The directionality of urnfields and their broader connection with the landscape is not an altogether new research theme. The notion of urnfields being located along roads and trackways has been around for a century already (Holwerda 1914; Kooi 1979; Roymans/Hoogland 1999) and even the existence of broader funerary landscapes has been opted on a micro-regional scale (Van Beek 2009). Cases like Someren and Boxmeer seem to confirm this latter thesis and painfully reveal that our image of the past is in fact largely generated by the extent of excavated areas. Projects like Someren and Boxmeer have until recently not been matched in size and their results force us to reconsider excavations of urnfields in the past. Especially since the vast majority of them took place before the Second World War and were completely carried out by hand (Section 3.4.2). It is not argued here that small sized or isolated cemeteries did not occur in later prehistory. However, regarding the fact that most of the 689 cemeteries included in the present inventory are only known by old find reports or stray urns retrieved in reclamation activities (Section 3.4.2; Fig. 3.16), the possibility should be considered that these dots on the map not stand on themselves but were part of larger funerary landscapes.

For example, when the 1920's excavations at Wessinghuizen (Province of Groningen, northern Netherlands) are re-evaluated with the scale of sites like Boxmeer-Sterckwijk in mind, it is very well possible that at the time unknowingly comparable distributions of graves were unearthed. Like at Boxmeer, at Wessinghuizen clusters of Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age graves were excavated that found themselves about 150 metres apart (Van Giffen 1928; Willems 1935). As at the time the means were restricted, the clusters themselves have not even been investigated entirely, let alone the area in between both respective clusters (Fig. 8.5). But what can still be established is that at Wessinghuizen too, clusters of Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age graves developed around Middle Bronze Age barrows already present in the landscape, possibly indicating comparable notions of directionality and repetition as was the case at Boxmeer (Fig. 8.4).

Another impressive example of hidden late prehistoric funerary landscapes concerns the Nijmegen area (Province of Gelderland, Central Netherlands). North of the river Waal, at the village of Lent the dense distribution of funerary sites is already striking (Van den Broeke 2002b; 2014), but the present example will focus on the ice-pushed ridge on the Nijmegen side of the river (Fig. 8.6). At the south bank of the river Waal, the ice-pushed ridge of Nijmegen towers impressively above the surrounding landscape. It is therefore no surprise the Romans picked this specific location (Hunnerberg) for the construction of a *castra* as soon as they arrived in 15 BC. After the Batavian revolt in 69 AD, the castra was rebuilt, first in wood but soon after in stone and quickly a thriving *vicus* developed around its walls. The Romans did however not arrive in an empty landscape. For the construction of the castra and related features they largely erased a prehistoric landscape

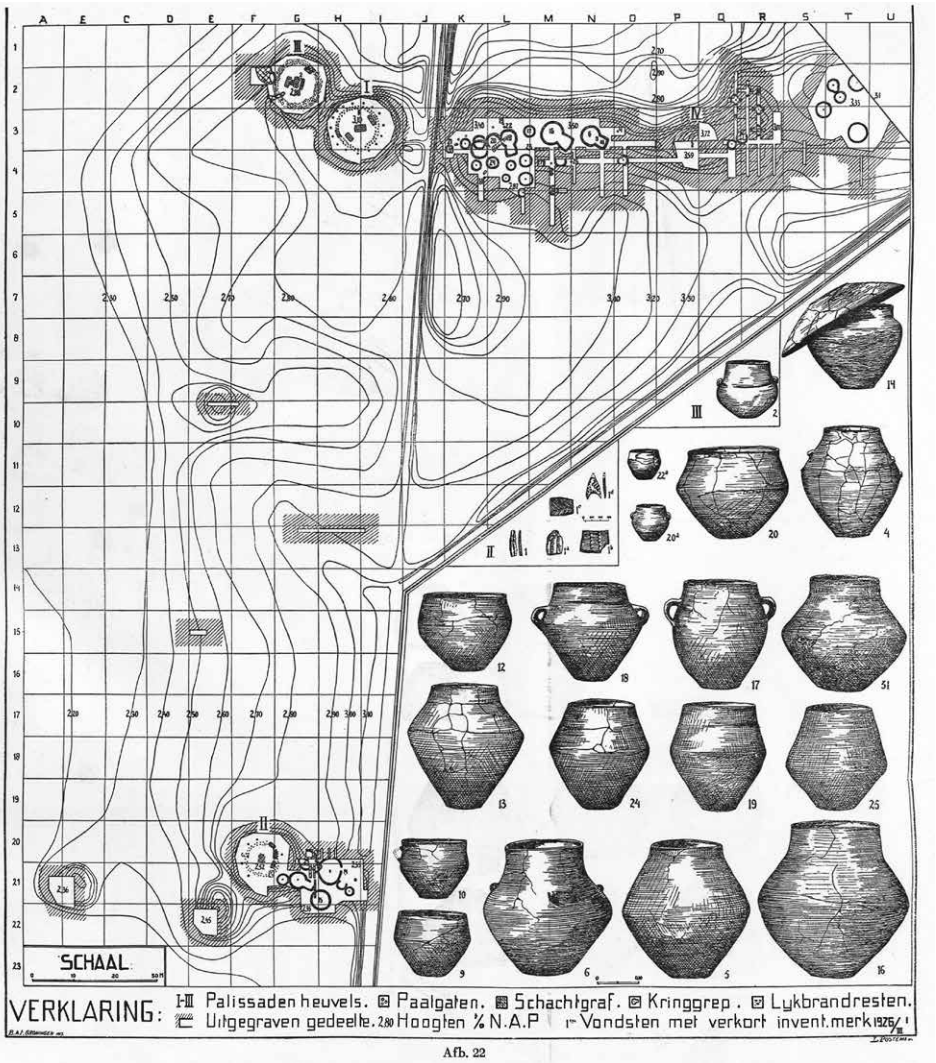

Fig. 8.5: Excavation plan of Wessinghuizen. The grid consists of blocks of 10 x 10 metres. (Willems 1935, fig. 22; © University of Groningen, Groningen Institute of Archaeology).

that consisted of multiple clusters of burial mounds, sitting on the very edge of the ice-pushed ridge. Starting at the present day St.-Maartenskliniek (Gerritsen 2003, no. 292), somewhere in the fifth century BC one could walk down the slope of the ice-pushed ridge towards the modern Valkhof stumbling across some impressive funerary structures every few hundred metres.[144] After an urnfield at St.-Maartenskliniek, one would encounter the stone platforms of Nijmegen-Kops Plateau with additional urnfield (Fontijn 1995; Fontijn/Cuijpers 1999; 2002; Gerritsen 2003, no. 293) followed by the Late Neolithic/ Bronze Age barrows of the Hunnerberg, again with additional urnfield (Louwe-Kooijmans 1973; Gerritsen 2003, no. 294). From there, with a bit of luck regarding the timing of our

144 I am grateful to David Fontijn for pointing me at this landscape and taking me to Nijmegen for the actual walk down the slope of the ice-pushed ridge.

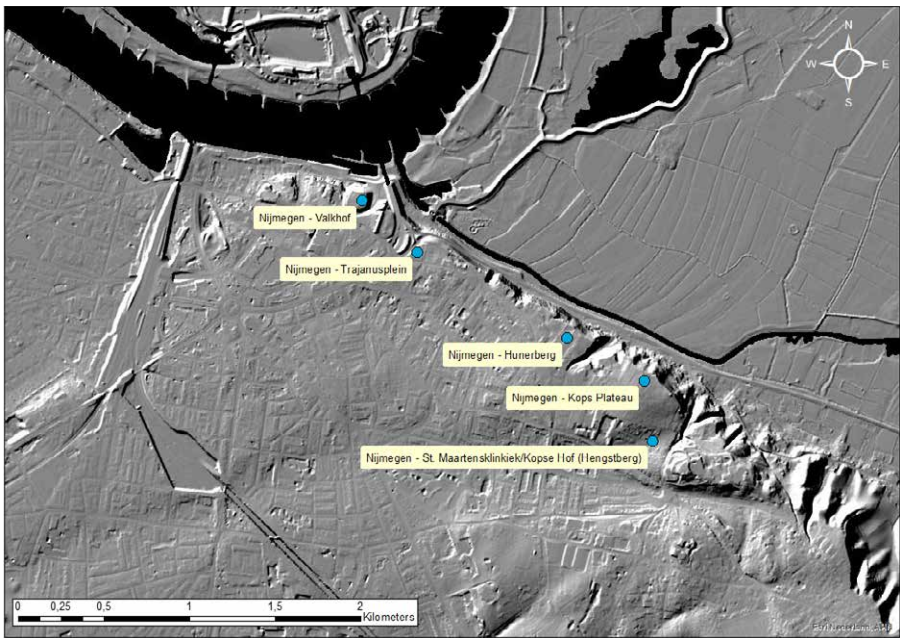

Fig. 8.6: The late prehistoric funerary landscape at Nijmegen. The blue dots all represent locations where over the years graves dating to the period between 1300 and 400 BC have been unearthed (Own work; Background: Esri, HERE, Garmin; Copyright Open StreetMap contributors, and GIS user community).

imaginative walk in the fifth century BC, one would be witnessing the burial of a woman accompanied with wagon parts and weaponry in a small cremation grave cemetery at the modern Trajanusplein (Bloemers 2016). Finally one would arrive down the slope at the modern Valkhof where a Late Bronze Age long mound was located (Fontijn 1996b).

Again, the various burial locations in the Nijmegen example are located so closely together, it is hard to imagine how these various clusters of graves would have functioned as territorial markers. It is true their location(s) at the very edge of the ice-pushed ridge, towering high above the landscape must have been awe-inspiring and probably instilled a certain sense of authority. The question however is to whom such a messaged was directed. Was is to foreign people making their way along the river Waal, or was it more important that the ancestors were granted these seats in the landscape and a more universally recognised sense of ancestral authority was aspired (*cf.* De Coppet 1985)?

8.5 Urnfields as part of ancestral landscapes

New excavation data as well as the substantial amount of radiocarbon dates that have become available over the last two decades force us to review the current discourse about the structuring of the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age landscape. As illustrated, urnfields often find themselves to be part of larger funerary landscapes that could sometimes extend for kilometres in a row. These funerary landscapes not uncommonly found their origin in the course of the Middle Bronze Age and could continue to be used as such well into the Late Iron Age, or even the Roman Period. New burial grounds definitely also continued to be founded throughout the period of the Late Bronze Age to the Late Iron

Age and the appearance of cemeteries in the latter period could substantially differ from those of the former period. However, these new cemeteries were not being founded in empty landscapes or within the confinements of ever more strictly defined territories. The *open* character of both the settlements as well as the burial grounds and the persistency with which both respective places were maintained indicate similar demeanours must have existed in the way in which the living environment was experienced. Funerary landscapes such as in the examples from Someren, Boxmeer and Nijmegen also indicate that the presence of the ancestors in the landscape must have been heartfelt. It is therefore argued that people living in the Lower-Rhine-Basin at the time of the urnfields much sooner would have felt a sense of *belonging* to the land, the land were their ancestors were located, instead of *owning* it (*cf.* De Coppet 1985). It is duly noted that the evidence brought forward in this chapter is still of an anecdotical nature with a strong emphasis on the funerary evidence. Yet still, with regards to the social structuration of the late prehistoric landscape, the here presented observations begin to show the makings of what might best be described as *ancestral landscapes*.