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Verleden als leidraad: ijzertijdbewoning en landschapsinrichting in noord-oostelijk Noord-Brabant in verleden én heden

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A cluster of chieftains' graves in the Netherlands?

Cremating and inhumating elites during Ha C on the Maashorst, NL

Richard Jansen and Sasja van der Vaart-Verschoof

Abstract

An iconic find from Dutch late Prehistory is the famous Chieftain's burial of Oss with its exceptional Mindelheim sword with gold-inlaid hilt. This burial, however, does not lie in isolation. It is but one of several exceptional elite burials found on the Maashorst, a high-lying plateau in the eastern part of the southern Netherlands which has a long history of use for burials, including Ha C elite graves. In this paper four exceptional Early Iron Age elite burials and the cemeteries in which they were created are discussed and brought together. Each grave is unique, but created through burial rituals with many similarities.

Zusammenfassung

Einer der ikonischen Funde der späteren Vorgeschichte in den Neiderlanden ist das berühmte Fürstengrab von Oss mit seinem herausragenden Mindelheim-Schwert mit goldenen Einlagen auf dem Griff. Dieses Grab ist aber kein isolierter Fund, es ist vielmehr eines von mehreren außergewöhnlichen Elitebestattungen auf dem Maashorst. Dieses hochgelegene Plateau im östlichen Teil der südlichen Niederlande hat eine lange Geschichte als Bestattungsplatz, auch für elitäre Bestattungen der älteren Hallstattzeit (Ha C). In diesem Beitrag werden vier ältereisenzeitliche Elitebestattungen und die Bestattungsplätze, in denen diese niedergelegt wurden, vorgestellt und diskutiert. Jedes Grab ist einzigartig, aber die Begräbnisrituale zeigen deutliche Gemeinsamkeiten.

The Maashorst

The Maashorst-area forms the northern zone of the geological formation known as the Peel Blok, a high lying plateau in the eastern part of the southern Netherlands (Fig. 1). Due to tectonic processes this plateau rises several millimeters each year. In the last Ice Age, melt water ran off the flanks, creating large and shallow valleys (Jansen/Van der Linde 2013). Furthermore the area is characterized by fault lines and wet areas where groundwater seeps to the surface (*kwelwater* in Dutch). In general the subsoil on the Maashorst consists of fluvial gravel and coarse sand depositions, locally covered by a thin layer of wind-blown cover sand. The gravel and coarse sand are older Rhine and Meuse deposits which are situated at the surface due to tectonic movement.

Large mounds and (contemporary) cemeteries, dating from the Late Neolithic onwards are situated within this prominent landscape. Several barrow groups

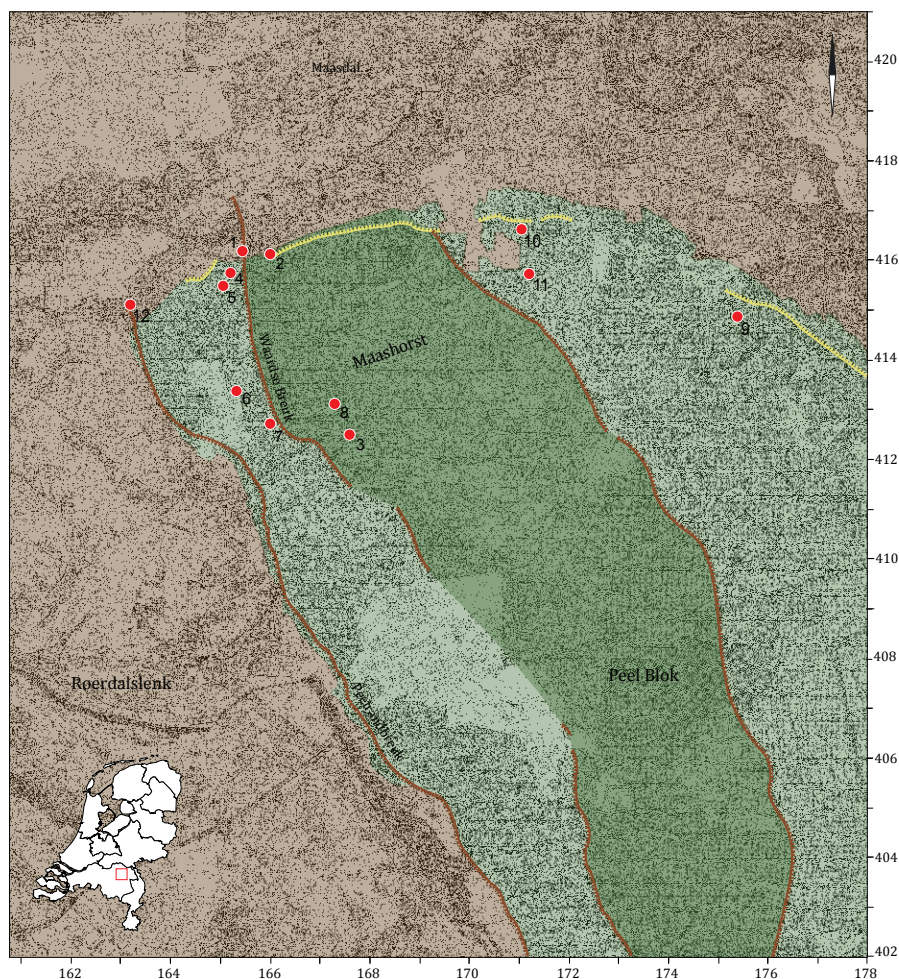


Fig. 1. The geomorphological characteristics of the Maashorst showing the high-lying plateau (green). The fault lines are indicated in brown, the terrace sides in yellow. 1 Oss-Vorstengraf; 2 Oss-Zevenbergen; 3 Uden-Slabroekse Heide; 5-12 other barrow groups/urnfields (after Jansen/Van der Linde 2013, 36 fig. 2.2).

and small urnfields are known on the flanks of the ridges in the northwestern corner of the Maashorst, including the Chieftain's grave of Oss-Vorstengraf and two monumental mounds of Oss-Zevenbergen (Fokkens *et al.* 2009; Fokkens/Jansen 2004; Fontijn *et al.* 2013c; Jansen/Fokkens 2007; Van der Vaart-Verschoof forthcoming). The Early Iron Age urnfield of Slabroekse Heide is located at the center of a ridge in the heart of the Maashorst, approximately 4 km south of Vorstengraf and Zevenbergen (Jansen forthcoming).

The Chieftain's burial of Oss

Probably the most iconic find from Dutch Prehistory – as well as the Netherlands' original claim to Hallstatt fame – is the Chieftain's grave of Oss. Besides a Mindelheim sword with gold inlaid handle, this burial also contains bronze and iron components of two decorated bridles and a yoke, as well as an iron knife and socketed axe, and some kind of stone tool. Two iron razors, three dress pins and a fair amount of high quality textile (see also Grömer this volume) also survived. A number of carved wooden fragments are probably the remains of a ribbed drinking bowl. All this was brought together in the bronze situla that was used as urn.

The Chieftain's burial was discovered in 1933 when two local men encountered a bronze bucket during leveling works at the extensive heaths south of Oss. The

Grave	Date(s)	Human remains	Objects	Mound	Context
Chieftain's grave Oss	Ha C1-2	Cremation (almost complete)	Bronze bucket, iron mindelheim sword with gold-inlaid handle, iron horse-bit (2x), bronze hemispherical sheet-knobs (>12x), bronze tubular cross-shaped object, bronze <i>Tutulus</i> , bronze harness decoration (?), bronze rings (3x), iron ring (fragments; > 12x), bronze yoke rosettes (2x), iron toggle (2x), iron knife with leather and textile remains adhered, iron socketed axe, (whet)stone (?), iron razor (2x), bronze & iron bombenkopf pin (3x), wood, leather, bone, antler and textile fragments	53 m; built with plaggen sods; urn in burial pit	MBA barrows; small EIA urnfield
Oss-Zevenbergen Mound 3	Ha C2 – LTA	One fragment of cremated bone	Bronze sword fragment with plastic decoration, iron pin fragment, iron pin-like object, bronze fragment	30 m; built with plaggen sods; burned planks in center	MBA/LBA barrows; small EIA urnfield
Oss-Zevenbergen Mound 7	Ha C1-2	Cremation (partial deposition)	Schräghals-urn, bronze studs (>1000x), bronze ring (fragments; 4x), decorated bone fragment, iron fragment	36 m; built with plaggen sods; urn sited next to pyre remains	
Uden-Slabroekse Heide	Ha C1-2	Inhumation	Bronze anklet (2x), bronze bracelet (3x), hair rings, bronze tweezers, iron nail-cutter, iron ring, bronze pin, iron pin, amber bead, textile	No mound; inhumation in large and deep 'burial chamber' constructed with charred wood	MBA barrows; large EIA urnfield; Roman Period graves

Table 1. The main characteristics of the four exceptional EIA burials of the Maashorst.

archaeologists J.H. Holwerda and F.C. Bursch from the National Museum of Antiquities were called to Oss, encased the bucket in plaster, lifted it as a block and brought it to the Museum in Leiden. When the objects from the Chieftain's burial were removed from their bronze urn in the Museum in 1933 they were in very poor condition and at that time many were still unrecognizable. Later in the 1960s and 1990s new restorations were undertaken, and each one revealed new objects (Modderman 1964). Recent consideration of a number of fragments that had never been published uncovered a few new items as well. By combining the museum's documentation of this burial through the 80 years that it has been in their collection with detailed study of the objects, restoration notes and X-rays, it was possible to reconstruct (to some extent) the manner in which the objects ended up in the bronze bucket (Van der Vaart 2011). The whole showed that this was a deliberate burial ritual in which the cinerary urn was created in a structured manner and, as such, in a way transformed into a small burial chamber (described below).

A year after the bronze urn was lifted, the Museum returned to Oss to (partly) excavate the remains of the mound. The excavation proved that the Chieftain's burial was covered with an extremely large mound surrounded by a ditch 53 m in diameter (Holwerda 1934). Photographs show that the mound was built of sods placed in a very structured manner. Interesting is a second ditch (diameter 16 m) surrounding the burial and the a-central position of the burial pit (see below). The following year two other Bronze Age mounds were excavated in the direct vicinity, illustrating that the Chieftain's burial of Oss was not a solitary mound (Bursch 1937). The latter was confirmed by later researches in 1972 and 1998 whereby several (contemporary) burials were uncovered (Jaarverslag Heemkundekring Maasland 1975, 23-24; Jansen/Fokkens 2007, 46-54). Also some (Early Iron Age) urns found at this location before the unearthing of the Vorstengraf possibly derive from the larger cemetery (Fokkens/Jansen 2004, 33-35).

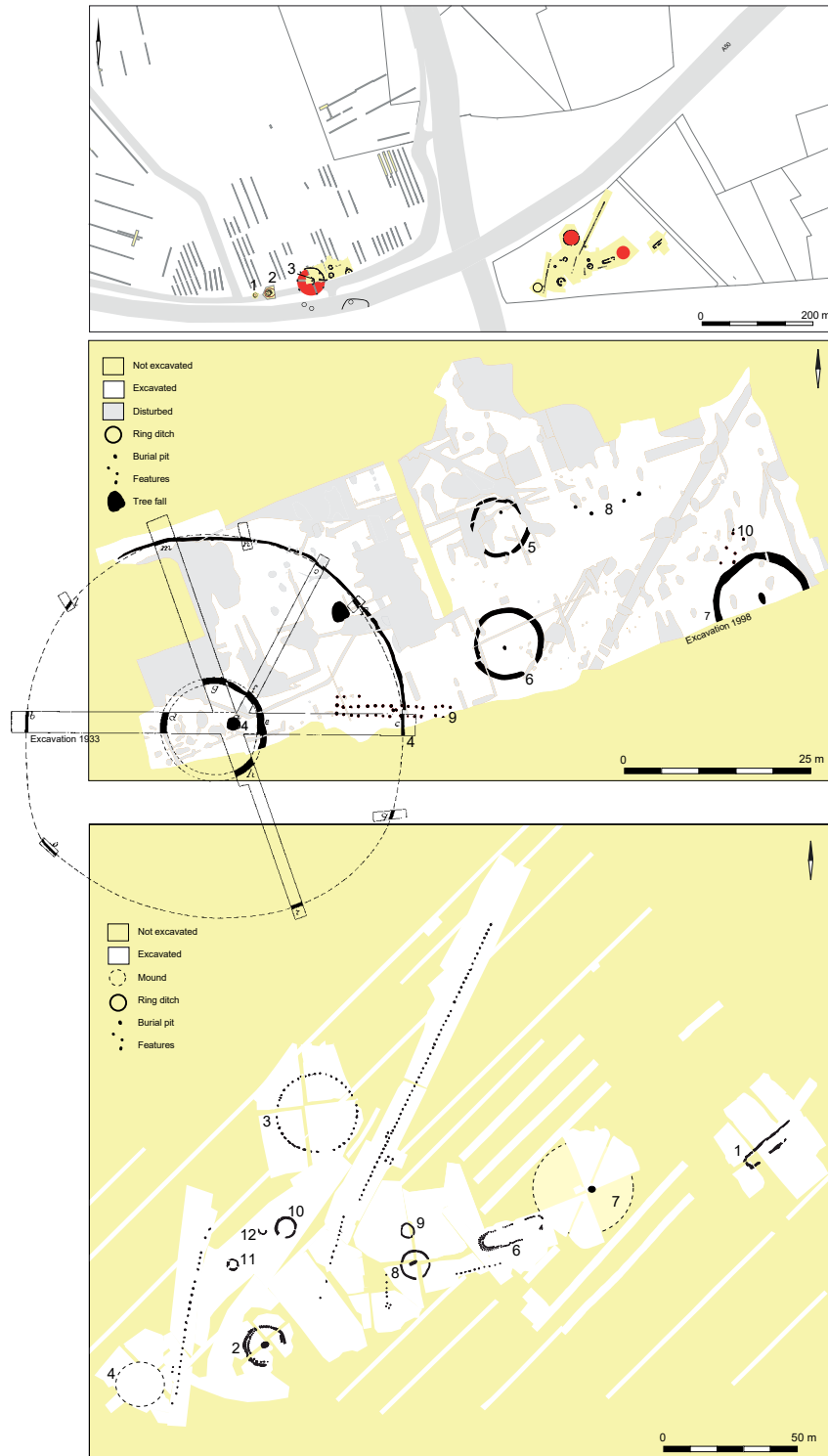


Fig. 2. Top: The barrow group and cemetery of Oss-Vorstengraf (left) and Zevenbergen (right). 2 and 3: Middle Bronze Age burial mounds; – Middle: The excavation plans of the Chieftain's burial of Oss from 1933 and 1997/98 combined. 4: Early Iron Age Ha C Chieftain's mound; 5-7: Early Iron Age graves; 8: Early Iron Age flat graves; 9: post alignment; 10: post structure. For the grave goods see figure 3 in Van der Vaart-Verschoof/Schumann this volume. -Bottom: The barrow group and cemetery of Oss-Zevenbergen. 2, 4 and 8: Middle Bronze Age mounds; 1 and 6: Late Bronze Age-Early Iron Age mounds; 9-12 and internments in 2 and 8: Early Iron Age graves; 3 and 7: Early Iron Age Ha C mounds.

A larger cemetery

The earliest known burial monument at the site is a Middle Bronze Age A barrow that covered an urn placed within a ring ditch (Fokkens *et al.* 2012, 191-192; Jansen/Fokkens 2007, 84). Some 50 m to the west two more barrows (Mounds 8 and 9) were erected and marked by multiple post circles during the Middle Bronze Age B (Bursch 1937) (Fig. 2: Mounds 2 and 3). One of these barrows was re-used already in the Middle Bronze Age for a secondary burial (Jansen/Fokkens 2007, 84). A Bronze Age double and partly triple post alignment some 15 m long (with about one m between the rows) lay oriented more or less east-west on the Middle Bronze Age A barrow, and has been interpreted as a relic of ancestral rituals that may relate to funerary ritual (Fokkens *et al.* 2012, 197). There was also a six-post structure that is interpreted as some kind of funerary structure (*dodenhuisje* in Dutch) but it is unclear how this dates (Jansen/Fokkens 2007, 86-87).

Later, likely during the Early Iron Age, a small urnfield was created to the southeast of the Middle Bronze Age barrows. Six circular ditches and four urns without a structure were found but the extent of the urnfield could not be established. It was noted that it was rather small with an 'open' character, which may be a regional variant. Apparently it had been used selectively over a long period, contrasting with the general layout of contemporaneous urnfields that are continuously used by a local community (Fokkens *et al.* 2012, 197).

The most easterly Middle Bronze Age barrow was selected during the Early Iron Age to bury the Chieftain¹ in – a mound already a thousand years old at the time. They purposefully dug the Chieftain's burial pit off-center – avoiding and respecting the ancient central burial. The Early Iron Age mourners were aware that they were burying the Chieftain in a funerary monument and it appears that this was a deliberate act intended to link the new burial with the ancestral one (Jansen/Fokkens 2007, 86). The Bronze Age barrow was then covered with the largest barrow known in the Low Countries.

Burying the Chieftain of Oss

The Chieftain of Oss was cremated, but it appears that his grave goods did not accompany him on the pyre. His cremated remains were collected from the pyre and eventually placed in the bronze urn. The mourners were extremely thorough in their collecting – not only is there a lot of cremated bone in this burial, just about all skeletal elements are represented (except for his teeth; Lemmers *et al.* 2012; *pers. comm.*). It is one of the most 'complete' prehistoric cremations ever found in the Low Countries.

Iron rings were removed from a wagon or yoke and wrapped up tightly in textile, and the package thus created was placed on the bottom of the bronze urn. Next to it a bridle, incorporating an iron horse-bit and bronze trappings was placed. On top of this an iron knife, probably wrapped in another piece of textile, was placed together with an iron socketed axe. Next to this the second bridle, also with an iron horse-bit and bronze trappings, was placed. The bronze yoke rosettes and iron toggles were removed from the yoke and placed in the bucket at well. Two iron razors were then placed on top of the yoke components.

1 This is a historically evolved name to refer to the individuals buried in these graves and the term is used as such in this paper.

The magnificent iron sword with gold-inlaid handle was bent round, wrapped in yet another piece of cloth, was placed in the bucket, hilt down. Against the wrapped sword lay a packet of extremely high quality imported cloth, a precious and prestigious grave good in its own right (see also Grömer this volume; Grömer in Van der Vaart-Verschoof forthcoming). Lastly, the cremated remains of the Chieftain were placed in the urn, perhaps also wrapped in textile.

The situla-urn thus created was dug into a Bronze Age barrow, and covered with the largest barrow known in the Low Countries, 53 m in diameter. *This is significant* – this barrow is so massive that the mourners could have chosen to bury a complete wagon and yoke or place the sword alongside the bucket in its original straight form. Yet they chose to expend time and effort in getting everything relevant, or at least components of those relevant objects, to fit into this bucket.

Two neighboring monumental mounds: Oss-Zevenbergen

The Chieftain's burial is not the only monumental burial mound at Oss. There are two more Early Iron Age barrows with extraordinary contents some 450 m to the east at Oss-Zevenbergen, known as Mound 3 and Mound 7. This site was also excavated in multiple campaigns (in 1964/65, 2004 and 2007), with the result being that the two Ha C barrows, as well as a number of other mounds *and* the areas in between them were excavated according to modern standards, in total ca. 2 ha (Fokkens *et al.* 2009; Fontijn *et al.* 2013a; 2013c; Verwers 1966). This makes it one of the few Ha C elite burial sites with excellent context information.

Mounds 3 and 7 lay in a structured, ritual landscape with several post-alignments and a long use-history, very similar to Oss-Vorstengraf. The earliest funerary monuments are three Middle Bronze Age A round barrows erected in a row on a sandy ridge. All three were reused for secondary burials, and heightened as well (Fontijn *et al.* 2013b, 286). Two long barrows (Mounds 1 and 6) were erected during the Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age at the northern end of the barrow row, with the latter having two use-phases in which a post circle and ditch were added (Valentijn 2013; Van Wijk *et al.* 2009, 72-74; 115-119; Verwers 1966). Prior to the creation of these long barrows it had likely been quite some time since monuments had been erected at this location (Fontijn *et al.* 2013b, 287). These long mounds flank a natural elevation that would later be incorporated into Mound 7 (see below). By building monuments on either side of this elevation it appears that the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age mourners were respecting and lengthening the barrow row. As has been argued previously (Fontijn *et al.* 2013b, 293), the mourners may have perceived the roundish natural elevation as one of the burial mounds of this already ancient barrow row. At some time prior to the erection of Mound 7, an unusual nine-post structure (two parallel rows of four posts each with a 'blocking' post at one end) was created on the west flank of the natural elevation (Fontijn *et al.* 2013b, 292). This post-structure is strikingly similar in design to the one at Oss-Vorstengraf (Fokkens 2013, 142-145; Fig. 2). A small urnfield was also created at this site, likely during the Early Iron Age. To the north of the barrow row lay four ring ditches ('Mounds' 9-12), of which two yielded Early Iron Age urns. Internments were found in the Bronze Age Mounds 2 and 8. In Mound 8 a circular ditch at the base of the barrow accompanied the interment. In Mound 2 only an urn with cremation remains with a set of grave

goods was found: two fragments of a whetstone, three fragments of bone objects (jewelry) and a piece of siltstone with traces of ochre (Van Wijk *et al.* 2009, 84-86). It is unclear whether these EIA graves were created before or after the exceptional Ha C mounds.

In addition to the graves there are five singular alignments of widely spaced post rows that vary in orientation and in size from eight to 116 m long and are sometimes flanked by small four-post constructions (Fokkens 2013; Fokkens *et al.* 2007, 131-139; Van Wijk *et al.* 2007). The rows are dated to the Early Iron Age phase and based on their spatial orientation they seem to divide the cemetery in compartments (Fokkens 2013, 146-148; Fontijn *et al.* 2013c).

The natural elevation was eventually selected for the cremation and burial of a man during the Early Iron Age. As already noted, it is highly plausible that the Early Iron Age people took this roundish elevation positioned in a barrow row to be an ancient burial mound, and that their intention was to bury the man of Mound 7 in an ancestral mound, similar to what was done with the Chieftain of Oss so close by. Following the cremation ritual, which is described below, a large barrow was erected which incorporated the natural elevation (Fontijn *et al.* 2013c).

Mound 3 was likely built after mound 7 and was erected on a flat spot at the northern edge of the high lying area. It was the only barrow not created on the barrow row, and appears to have been separated from the other barrows by the post rows. It was also marked with a post-circle, which is rather rare for Early Iron Age barrows (Fontijn *et al.* 2013b, 304). This barrow also covered an unusual deposit.

Mound 7 – burying a second Chieftain?

Mound 7 was 36 m in diameter and was erected on top of an existing natural dune. This dune was roundish in appearance and located in a barrow row (Fig. 3). Two opposing quadrants of the mound were excavated, including the central burial. Rather than a straightforward central grave, this barrow covered a massive spread of charcoal, and a complex assemblage of bronzes and other material.

This central find assemblage was so complex and the material so delicate, that the entire assemblage was lifted professionally in blocks and excavated in a lab by restorers (Kempkens 2013). The main component of this assemblage turned out to consist mostly of tiny bronze studs (Fig. 3). Several bronze rings and ring fragments were also found, as well as decorated bone fragments.

Analysis of the blockliftings, the excavation and restorations records (including X-rays of the blocks) revealed a unique burial event whereby a young man was cremated here, on top of a dune in a barrow row, which may have been interpreted as a barrow itself, with a dismantled yoke, decorated with over a thousand tiny bronze studs, located alongside the pyre (Fontijn *et al.* 2013). After cremation the pyre was searched through, with charcoal beams being placed to one side and the stud-decorated yoke components being shoved to the other side. Most of the cremated remains were collected and placed in an urn, and buried by the pyre remains. However, several cremation remains were also deliberately left behind amongst the pyre remain. The same was done with the objects. A bronze ring was broken, and only part was deliberately left behind. The whole complex of charcoal and bronze including the urn with cremation remains was then carefully covered with sods and the mound erected (Fontijn/Van der Vaart 2013).



Fig. 3. Mound 7 in excavation (top) and some of the finds found here (bottom; urn 1:7, others 1:1). The X-ray (middle) shows the block-lifted concentration of studs (X-ray and photographs finds by Restauratieatelier Restaura, Haelen).

We emphasize that by excavating by hand and blocklifting the central complex we can be sure that nothing preserved was missed. The manner of excavation here means that an absence of evidence *is* evidence of absence. So once again we have a burial ritual that involved intentional dismantling, manipulation and very clearly

fragmentation and *pars pro toto* deposition of both grave goods and the deceased. An even more extreme example of this practice was found at nearby Mound 3.

Mound 3 – extreme pars pro toto monument

This large barrow was also built from sods and appears to date slightly later than Mound 7, which itself seems to either be contemporaneous or slightly later than the Chieftain's burial (Van Wijk *et al.* 2009; Van der Vaart-Verschoof forthcoming, Ch. 3). The sod-built barrow Mound 3 was encircled with a post circle, which is uncommon for the Early Iron Age. The singular circle consists of 48 posts with seven double posts encircling a 30 m wide mound carefully constructed with *plaggen* sods (De Leeuwe 2007, 207-208). The mound is built 'within' the post circle. The center had not been disturbed and was completely excavated, together with the mound itself. In the center lay a charred plank, cut from a very old and substantial tree that originally would have had a diameter of at least 2 m (Van Wijk *et al.* 2009, 92-98). Around this plank lay four fragments of metal objects and a single piece of cremated human bone. The objects include two unrecognizable fragments, an iron pin and a deliberately broken fragment of a bronze sword of unknown type. The only conclusion can be that the objects were intentionally deposited in a fragmented state (Fokkens *et al.* 2012, 192).

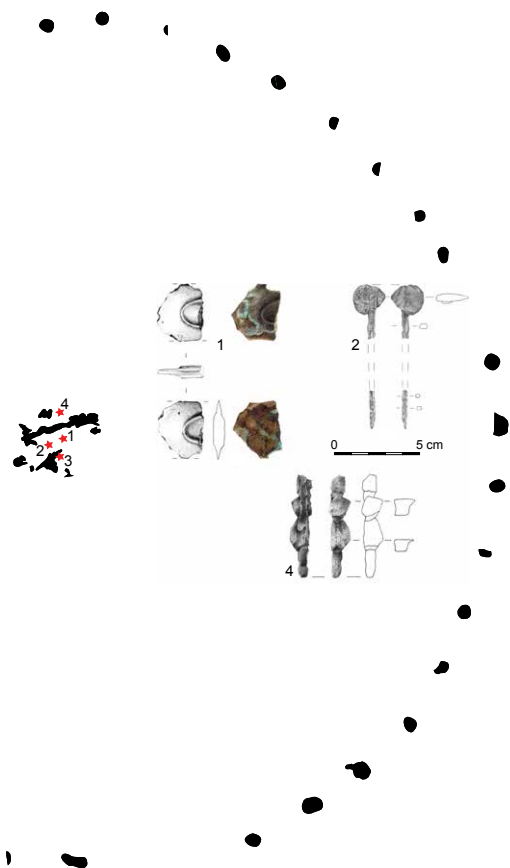
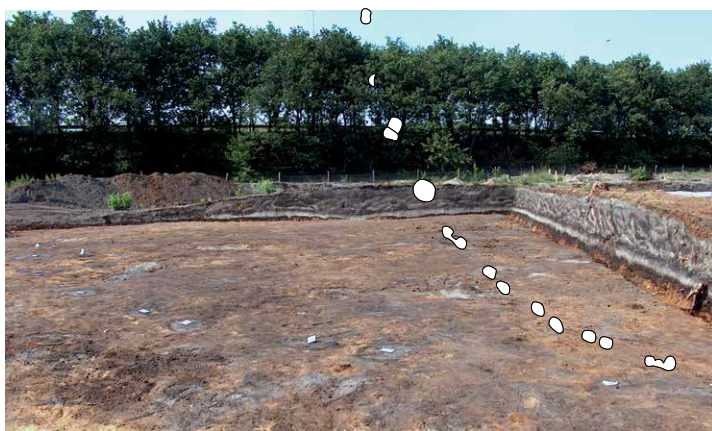
As with Mound 7, in this case the complete excavation means that absence of evidence *is* evidence of absence. This burnt plank, these four object fragments and the single piece of human cremation is all that was deposited. It would seem that here we are dealing with an extreme *pars pro toto* deposition, probably an extreme *pars pro toto* grave.

A barrow landscape

Some 800 m to the south of Oss-Vorstengraf and -Zevenbergen two other barrow groups are known. Of each group one mound has been excavated, dating to the Late Neolithic and Middle Bronze Age B respectively (Bursch 1937; Van Wijk/Jansen forthcoming). Both clusters, however, contain more mounds wherein the possible presence of another Chieftain's grave cannot be excluded beforehand. This extensive barrow landscape, situated at a very prominent and visible location, has been used for burials for many generations. Research in the larger area, especially to the north shows no sign of habitation. To the south the nearest probable Iron Age settlements are located at a distance of app. 800-1000 m (Jansen/Van der Linde 2013). Even further south more cemeteries are known. One of them, the Slabroekse Heide site, contains our fourth Ha C elite burial.

An elite inhumation grave at Slabroekse Heide

The urnfield of Slabroekse Heide, located in the heart of the Maashorst, was discovered and partly excavated in 1923. At that time the mounds were still visible in the extensive early 20th century heath landscape. Archaeologist A.E. Remouchamps of the National Museum of Antiquities (partly) excavated 38 barrows, discovering ca. 22 urns, occasionally with some 'modest' grave goods like small pots (Remouchamps 1924). Photos of the excavation show the excellent preservation of the mounds and features (Fig. 5). The ditches surrounding the mounds are clearly visible in the sandy soil. The profile of one of the mounds



undoubtedly displays the carefully placed sods with which the mounds were constructed (the common practice in this area).

The overall drawing of the urnfield illustrates the specific excavation method. In general small trenches were dug out by hand, which in most cases run through the centers of the mounds (Remouchamps 1924). After the excavation in 1923 the mounds were erased from the landscape as the area was transformed into an agricultural field.

The area was eventually researched again, in 2005 and 2010, as the Dutch Forest State Service was transforming the Maashorst-area (back) into a forest and heath landscape. An important conclusion of the trial trench campaign in 2005 was that the conservation of the features had decreased dramatically (Van Wijk/Jansen 2010). The features were hardly visible anymore. Only the soil activity (*bodemwerking* in Dutch) underneath the features was observable and it looked like the ploughing activities had thoroughly erased the soil archive. Burials were not found.

It was apparent that the remaining features would soon disappear forever, so the decision was made to excavate the last remnants of the urnfield Slabroekse Heide. During the 2 ha excavation in 2010 it soon became clear that Remouchamps in fact did not excavate the whole cemetery. Eight ‘new’ (cremation) burials were unearthed (Jansen *et al.* 2011; Jansen/Louwen forthcoming). In general the Early Iron Age graves were buried in urns or cloths. One grave yielded a large amount

Fig. 4. Mound 3 in excavation with the plank and the object fragments found around it.

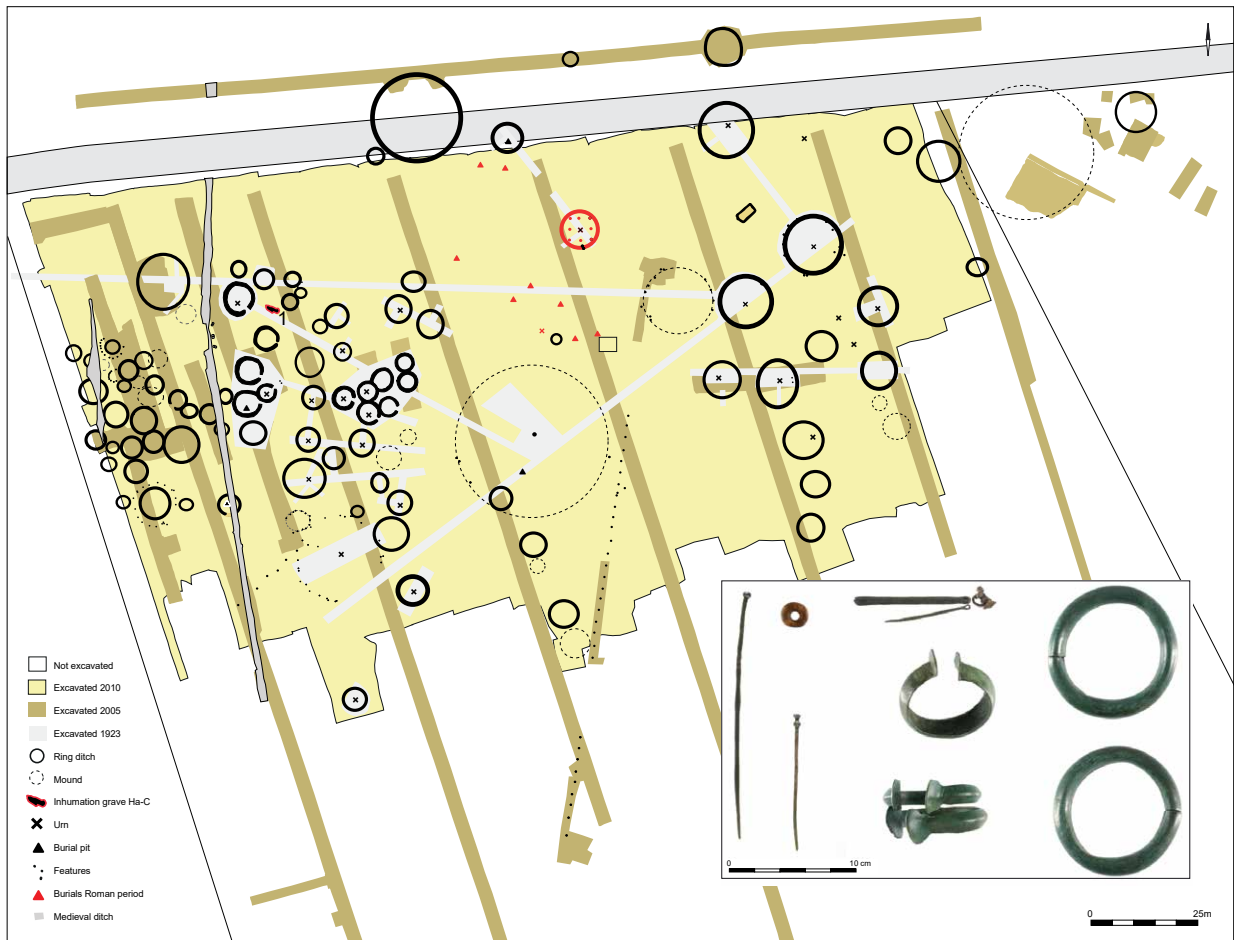


Fig. 5. The barrow group and cemetery of Uden-Slabroekse Heide with inset of the finds from the inhumation burial (nr. 1) (excavation plan by Archol BV and find photographs by Restauratieatelier Restaura, Haelen).

of cremation remains which had probably been placed in a cloth, and a thin iron bracelet. The undecorated jewelry was carefully placed among the cremation remains. Lastly a single line of at least 32 posts was found comparable to those at Oss-Zevenbergen. The post row at Slabroekse Heide runs to one of the larger mounds in the center of the cemetery and (also) seems to divide the cemetery into two compartments, like at Zevenbergen (Jansen/Louwen forthcoming).

It is clear that the cemetery of Uden-Slabroekse Heide was much larger than previously thought with at least 110 known graves (Fig. 5). The cemetery continues to the west (and possibly other directions), though a recent trial trench campaign indicates that the cemetery ends here within a 100 m (Van Wijk/Jansen forthcoming). Comparable to the cemeteries of Oss-Vorstengraf and -Zevenbergen, the Slabroekse Heide urnfield also has a long history of use, with at least one or two Bronze Age barrows as its earliest phase. One of these mounds is still visible and has partly been excavated in 2005. The central grave was not found but pollen analysis and OSL-dating suggests a (Middle) Bronze Age date (De Kort/Van Mourik 2005; Van Wijk/Jansen 2010, 45-50).

Different is the fact that the Early Iron Age urnfield of Slabroekse Heide is significantly larger than the relatively small ones of Oss-Vorstengraf and -Zevenbergen. The latter seem to be used extensively, in contrast to the intensively used urnfield of Slabroekse Heide. Lastly one elite grave contemporaneous with Oss-Vorstengraf and -Zevenbergen diverges from the 'norm' of cremating the dead.

The Ha C inhumation burial of Slabroekse Heide

The inhumation burial of Slabroekse Heide was discovered in a small open area within the urnfield, bordered by several ring ditches. Here we found a rectangular pit with charcoal (Fig. 5). In contrast to the other graves, it was most likely a flat grave, although the lack of overcutting suggests that the burial was somehow marked above ground. The pit was excavated in layers of approximately 10 cm. Each layer was documented – photographed and/or drawn – and, if necessary, sampled. Twelve layers were excavated before we reached the inhumation burial of which only the outline was visible. At the bottom of the pit several metal objects, already indicated by a metal detector, were found. Comparable to the organic remains the metal objects were badly preserved due to the context of coarse sand and gravel. Considering the poor condition of the objects, all of them were lifted in small blocks. X-rays were needed to reveal the extraordinary finds: bracelets and anklets, hair rings, a toilet set, pins and an amber bead.

A unique find was the presence of several fragments of textile. Cloth was preserved around and in some cases within the corrosion of the bronze bracelets and anklets, and underneath a fragment of the bronze pin. Some fragments appear to be part of the deceased's clothes, with a second textile that was probably used to cover the deceased (see also Grömer this volume; Grömer in Van der Vaart-Verschoof forthcoming).

Based on the thorough *top-down* excavation and descriptions we are able to reconstruct a unique burial event from 2700 years ago in detail.

A burial event: a bottom-up reconstruction

As with the burials described above, the elite burial event at Slabroekse Heide can be divided in several 'actions'. After the burial location was selected, a large rectangular pit was dug. This must have taken considerable effort considering the soil conditions and the depth of the pit. Then a small rectangular burial chamber (approximately 3 x 1 m) was created with oaken blocks at each end and planks. All wood had been charred in a controlled manner prior to use (the unburnt parts of the wood had rotted away, only the charcoal lines were visible) (Van Hees forthcoming). In a settlement context wood is charred to make it more sustainable, and this may have been the intention here as well. In any case, the charring of the wood was a deliberate act that required building a fire, probably somewhere in the surroundings.

The deceased was placed between thick oaken blocks at both ends of the burial pit. Unfortunately the sex could not be determined as only a corpse shadow remained in the soil. Human bone fragments were found only within the bronze bracelets and anklets, but these were too fragmented for any analysis (Lemmers forthcoming). It was only possible to measure the length of the deceased in the field. He or she was relatively short, around 1.60 m.

The deceased was buried wearing an extraordinary set of ornaments, representing a specific kind of personal appearance, as well a number of toiletry items. His or her arms were adorned with bronze bracelets with one on the right wrist and two on the left wrist. The bracelets at the left wrist had been worn together so long that they displayed heavy use-wear where they touched. The legs were adorned with bronze anklets.

By the right arm lay an iron pin with a twisted decoration and a small bronze ring. A toilet set was found at the left shoulder. It consisted of an iron nail cutter and tweezers that likely dangled from an iron ring. Close by the set lay an amber bead. The use-wear traces on the bead are consistent with use as a closing for some kind of pouch. Underneath this set a fragmented bronze pin was found. The distribution of these fragments indicates that the pin was broken deliberately prior its placement in the grave. Finally, metal-spiraled rings were found near the head (see also Bourgeois/Van der Vaart-Verschoof this volume).

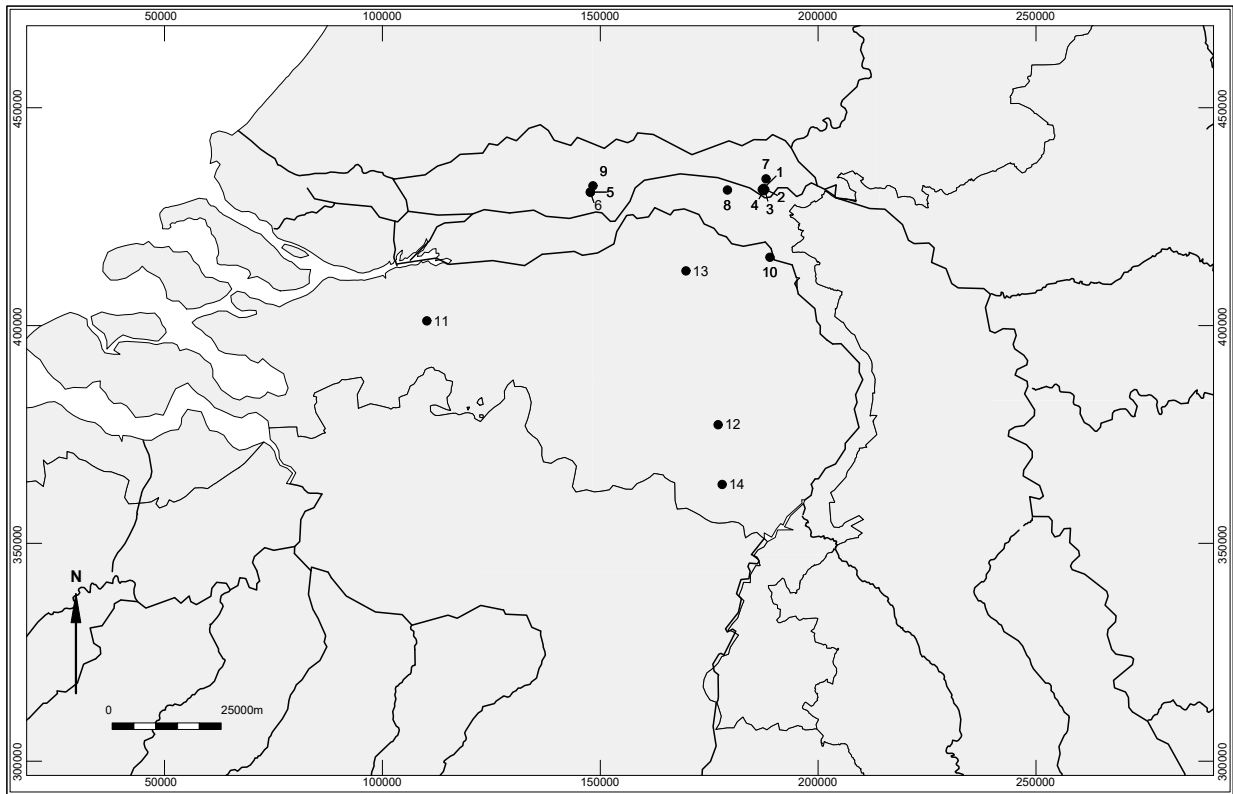
A very special feature of the burial is the preservation of textile. Fragments of woolen cloth survived in the bronze corrosion around the anklets and bracelets, and also inside the bracelets. The textile fragments indicate that the deceased was buried wearing a garment with long sleeves, and that a shroud was placed on top of the body (see also Grömer this volume; Grömer in Van der Vaart-Verschoof forthcoming).

Eventually the entire burial chamber was sealed off with charred planks covering the body. Ultimately the pit from at least 1.5 till 2 m deep was back-filled with soil and more charred oaken branches. Whether the burial was marked above ground is unknown. It can only be said that it was never overbuilt by other grave monuments and/or opened again, until its excavation in 2010.

Inhumation – beyond the norm?

While it can be debated whether the Slabroek elite burial can be referred to as a ‘Chieftain’s burial’ (Jansen 2011 vs. Roymans 2011), an archaeological type of grave generally characterized by the presence of bronze vessels, weaponry, horse-gear and/or wagon components among the grave goods, the perceived ‘difference’ of the Slabroek grave can also not be dismissed by labeling the deceased an import-bride (as done for example by Roymans 2011). When this grave is considered from a more practice-based, rather than only a object-based, approach it conforms in many ways to the Early Iron Age elite burials and customs of the southern Netherlands (see Bourgeois/Van der Vaart-Verschoof this volume). Also the context conforms to the other Maashorst elite graves making the Slabroekse Heide inhumation grave definitely a Ha C elite grave, as suggested before (Jansen 2011; Jansen forthcoming).

Inhumation burials in general are a recently revealed element of Dutch Iron Age burial ritual. Until 20 years ago archaeologists thought the Iron Age urnfields and cemeteries were exclusively the domain of cremation burials. Cremation was the standard ritual for disposal or discarding of the body after death (Hessing/Kooi 2005; Gerritsen 2003, 118-150). Nowadays we know of at least 48 inhumation burials, most of them in the Dutch Central River Area (Jansen forthcoming; Van den Broeke 2008, 166 table 6). Six Early Iron Age cemeteries with cremation burials and inhumations lie around the city of Nijmegen, another cluster more to the west. South of the rivers Rhine and Meuse, on the sand soils, five inhumation burials from the Early Iron Age are known, in all cases one inhumation per urnfield (Fig. 6). The inhumations explicitly date to the Early Iron Age and first part of the Middle Iron Age, more specifically from approximately 700 till 375 BC (Van den Broeke 2008, 172-174). No inhumations are known from Late Bronze Age urnfields. Also after this period inhumation burials are not known until the later Roman Period.



At first sight, considering the known tens of thousands of Early Iron Age urnfield graves in the southern Netherlands, the small number of inhumation graves seems insignificant. However these are meaningful exceptions. In general the inhumation burials show the same variation as contemporaneous cremation burials; they are never more elaborate, in most cases just simple flat graves, some of them contain no grave goods, others do like for example ornaments. It is striking that the ornaments in inhumation graves tend to be rather fragile. It is thinkable that in the case of a cremation where these objects were burned mourners may have overlooked them, or even the excavators may have overlooked them.

A preliminary research of isotopes of inhumations from Nijmegen gives reason to believe that *some* of the deceased that are buried as inhumations are non-local. Perhaps they were buried according the funeral customs of their homeland (Van den Broeke 2008, 176-178). But not every inhumation proved to be non-local. The same is true for cremation burials; we cannot prove that every cremation is local. Therefore we want to state that, until future research proves the opposite, inhumations are *not* by definition immigrants and/or import-brides. We argue that the same is true for the only inhumation Ha C elite grave in the Netherlands known so far (Jansen 2011; Roymans 2011). The inhumation graves are part of Early Iron Age burial ritual norm, and the Slabroekse Heide elite grave inhumation fits within this norm. Perhaps immigrants were integrated in society in such a way that they were buried conform local traditions.

Fig. 6. Distribution of Early and Middle Iron Age inhumation graves in the southern Netherlands.

1: Lent – Lauwerikstraat;
 2: Lent – Steltsestraat;
 3: Lent – Lentseveld;
 4: Oosterhout – De Eeuwige Lente; 5: Meteren – Plantage;
 6: Meteren – De Bogen;
 7: Ewijk – Keizershoeve (Beuningen); 8: Ressen – Zuiderveld; 9: Geldermalsen – Middengebied; 10: Cuijk – Nutricia (Grotestraat);
 11: Breda – Steenakker;
 12: Someren – Waterdael; Uden – Slabroekse Heide; Weert – Raak (figure by Archol BV).

A cluster of chieftain's graves at the Maashorst

In conclusion, it is apparent from the above that the Maashorst region was repeatedly selected as a final resting place during later Prehistory for exceptional individuals who warranted being interred through elaborate burial rituals. There are three monumental Early Iron Age barrows at the northern edge of the Maashorst plateau, each extraordinary and unusual in their own way. All built in an existing barrow landscape with a long history, located no more than a couple hundred meters from each other. All three created through burial rituals that involved fire, dismantling, bending and breaking of objects and/or *pars pro toto* depositions. While we cannot with certainty determine which burial was created first, when the second and third were constructed, people would still have known what happened at the previous ones.

At the same time, someone special was also buried in an exceptional manner some 4 km to the south, further into the heartland of the Maashorst. At first glimpse the Slabroekse Heide inhumation burial appears to deviate from the norm. (S)he has been seen as an example of an immigrant, or even an import-bride, originating from a region where inhumation was a customary funerary practice (Roymans 2011). When considered in more detail, especially the burial practice, it conforms in many ways to the known Early Iron Age burials of the southern Netherlands (see also Bourgeois/Van der Vaart-Verschoof this volume; Jansen forthcoming). In this case not within the inconspicuous majority of urnfield graves, but within the exceptional elite burials – with the Slabroekse Heide as the first example of an elite *inhumation* grave.

Together with the Chieftain's grave of Oss-Vorstengraf and the monumental Oss-Zevenbergen mounds, the Slabroekse Heide inhumation is part of an extraordinary cluster of Hallstatt C elite graves in the Maashorst-region in the Low Countries. These, in turn fit into a larger pattern of elite burials where fire, manipulation and fragmentation were key (see also Bourgeois/Van der Vaart-Verschoof this volume; Van der Vaart-Verschoof forthcoming). Within the dominant burial practice, each burial has its unique, perhaps almost personal character.

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