



# TRANSFORMATION THROUGH DESTRUCTION



A MONUMENTAL AND EXTRAORDINARY EARLY IRON AGE HALLSTATT C  
BARROW FROM THE RITUAL LANDSCAPE OF OSS-ZEVENBERGEN

EDITED BY  
D. FONTIJN, S. VAN DER VAART & R. JANSSEN



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## PRESERVING AND PRESENTING THE MOUNDS AND FINDS OF OSS- ZEVENBERGEN

*Richard Jansen, Luc Amkreutz  
and Sasja van der Vaart*

### 17.1 Introduction

The previous chapters in this book presented the extraordinary results of the excavation of (two of) the mounds of Oss-Zevenbergen and their environment. The story of Oss-Zevenbergen, however, does not end with its scientific publication. This chapter therefore discusses what happened to Oss-Zevenbergen and the finds from this site after excavation. There are several aspects to this that will be addressed in the following.

Firstly, though the 2004 and 2007 excavations have had an enormous impact on our understanding of barrow landscapes throughout different prehistoric and even historic periods, the archaeological site of Oss-Zevenbergen was not researched in its entirety. The profile baulks of five burial monuments (2, 3, 4, 5<sup>101</sup>, and 8) and half of mound 7 were not (completely) excavated. This is also true for the features of the post rows, which were only sectioned. Most of the landscape around the barrow group was likewise only explored through test trenches. We are therefore dealing with archaeological “residual value” (Dutch: *restwaarde*) of a late prehistoric barrow landscape. This “value” has to be protected.

The starting point of this is two-fold: firstly the *in situ* preservation of the physical residual value as a knowledge source. Thereby endeavouring to counteract the degradation of the archaeological values (Jansen, section 17.2). Secondly, a durably laid-out terrain that is accessible to those who are interested is aspired to. A place where people might see and experience something of the past. This last starting point is part of a long term vision, whereby sustainable structural management is important (Jansen, section 17.3).

There, however, is more to Oss-Zevenbergen than just the actual location. Section 17.4 (Amkreutz and van der Vaart) therefore discusses the finds that were excavated, and how they ended up in the collection of and on display at the Dutch National Museum of Antiquities (RMO).

In short, this final chapter discusses how the site itself, the finds, and the results of the excavation are currently being preserved for future generations and presented to the public.

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101 Mound 5 is probably a natural wind blown dune, though an interpretation as barrow cannot be completely excluded (see discussion van Wijk *et al.* 2009, 110-115).



## 17.2 Preserving the barrows for future research

### 17.2.1 The remaining archaeological values

As a result of the excavation technique used, the “quadrants method” (Dutch: *kwadrantenmethode*), (parts of) the central crosses of almost all mounds were preserved for future research.<sup>102</sup> The posthole features surrounding mounds were completely excavated, the posthole features of the linear lines were only sectioned, preserving the second part (Fokkens *et al.* 2009). In addition to the preservation of the profiles, all mound bodies were re-erected based on the excavation results (Fig. 17.1).<sup>103</sup>

Fig. 17.1 Reconstruction of mound 3. The profile baulks were “packed” in root canvas and wire mesh (left). The quadrants were then supplemented and the entire mound covered with an extra layer of sand (right). Figure by R. Datema (© Archeologische Monumentenwacht Nederland).

### Mounds 1 and 6

The (original) mounds of both of these long barrows were already gone or excavated prior to our research, only the surrounding structures were preserved.<sup>104</sup> Subsequently, in 2004 and 2007, these monuments were excavated completely. The location of mound 1 is nowadays overbuilt by highway A59, mound 6 has been reconstructed based on our excavation results.

### Mounds 2, 3, 4, 5, and 8

The profiles of mounds 2, 3, 4, 5, and 8 have been preserved by sealing them off with so-called root canvas (Dutch: *worteldoek*) to prevent the growth of shrubs and trees, and wire mesh to protect against treasure hunters. This gives future generations of archaeologists the opportunity to study and/or sample the profiles again using new research techniques. After the profiles were sealed, the mounds were reconstructed by supplementing the excavated quadrants. Finally the entire mound body was covered with a layer of sand (Datema 2008).

<sup>102</sup> Only mound 1 and 6 were completely excavated.

<sup>103</sup> Preservation and reconstruction work has been done by the *Archeologische Monumentenwacht Nederland* conform protocol Fysiek Beschermen KNA 3.2. The situation prior to restoration and documentation regarding the reconstruction work is described in Datema 2008. The mounds are inspected annually, resulting in a report concerning the physical state of the monuments and their surroundings. In this way the scientific value is protected for the future.

<sup>104</sup> Mound 1 was probably destroyed during the reclamation and/or forestry activities. Mound 6 was completely excavated in 1965 (Verwers 1966a).



## Mound 7

Only the NE- and SW-quadrants and a part of the NW-quadrant of mound 7 were excavated. The other quadrants, including the larger part of a Medieval burial, is still of great scientific interest. Subsequent to the excavation, the excavated parts of the mound were reconstructed. After that the monument was sealed off with root canvas and wire mesh.

## Mounds 9-12

The (original) mounds of these small urnfield barrows were practically invisible prior to our research. The monuments were discovered during the excavation of the area between the mounds, whereby the surrounding structures were excavated completely. The results were used to reconstruct the mounds.

## Posthole features

All posthole features associated with mounds were completely excavated. The posthole traces of the different linear lines were only sectioned, with the second half left unexcavated. The holes were filled in to preserve the second parts of the fill of the postholes for future research.

### *17.2.2 Archaeological perspective on management and ordering*

The following arguments form the starting points for the preservation of the remaining archaeological values. In the first place it concerns a legally protected terrain. The still remaining archaeological values provide opportunities for gaining additional information. It is possible, for example, that in future new methods might allow for a better dating of burial monuments. Secondly the preservation of the spatial coherence is of importance, not only because of the entirety of the burial mounds as a group, but also because of the structures in between, the post rows, which are considered a rare phenomenon. The starting point is to consider the remaining mounds as a single, valuable ensemble. Thirdly, the relation to other sites on the Maashorst is of importance. By physically preserving the barrow landscape, in future it will be possible to make spatial and chronological connections, with visible elements such as the Vorstengraf, as well as less well known burial mounds on the Vossel or the urnfield on the Slabroekse Heide or values as yet unknown (accompanying settlement traces from late prehistory) in the area.

### *17.2.3 Summarizing*

Preserving and protecting the mound(s) for the future is essential. Therefore it is fortunate that the mounds are now situated in a remote area, enclosed by a junction of roads. At the same time the barrow group of Oss-Zevenbergen is still literally visible as a prehistoric element. Visitors should be able to observe and experience the (reconstructed) prehistoric barrows of Zevenbergen and their surroundings, forming a monumental, long-term prehistoric relict situated in a dynamic modern landscape (Fig. 17.3). From this viewpoint it forms a unique opportunity for the municipality of Oss to illustrate her history to residents and visitors. Also, they are the only visible and (partly) original archaeological monuments within the municipality, besides the constructed Vorstengraf monument.



Fig. 17.2 During the excavation of 2004, an open day was organized during which hundreds of people visited the site. Figure by Archol BV.

### 17.3 Oss-Zevenbergen for the public: the archaeological monument *Paalgraven*

An important commitment in Dutch (and European) Monument Law is public participation and/or involvement.<sup>105</sup> Increasingly, professional archaeology is becoming aware of her task to inform people in an accessible way about their (local) heritage. Not only during an excavation with an open day or social media and internet sites, but also *after* an excavation through, for example, information panels, books, and reconstructions (Fig. 17.2). Within the municipality of Oss, to which the Zevenbergen area belongs, a good example is the nearby *Vorstengrafmonument*. On the exact find spot half of the barrow of the chieftain's burial of Oss was (re)constructed. Visitors can walk between the mounds, whereby information is given on information panels or within the popular-scientific publication “Het vorstengraf van Oss. Een archeologische speurtocht naar een prehistorisch grafveld” (Fokkens/Jansen 2004).

Today the Zevenbergen mounds – known as the archaeological monument *Paalgraven* – also are accessible to the public.<sup>106</sup> The area can be entered by foot in the southeast, from where people can walk over the higher lying remnants of the old *Rijksstraatweg* alongside the mounds. From here it is possible to view and experience the monuments and their surroundings. By choosing heath-like vegetation, inspired by the landscape image from prehistory, a rather open landscape comes into existence whereby the physically protected burial monuments and post rows are clearly visible to the visitor. The actual terrain is not accessible, partially to protect the mounds (Fig. 17.3). An information panel tells about the results of the excavation and the ensuing narrative that can be told about this area.

The narrative about these intriguing “mounds” is, besides within this academic book, also presented in an accompanying popular-scientific booklet “Prins onder Plaggen” written by Evert van Ginkel, together with the archaeologists (van Ginkel 2009; Fig. 17.4).

<sup>105</sup> Verdrag van Malta, article 9.

<sup>106</sup> Initiative for the current ordering of the monument *Paalgraven* was taken by the municipality of Oss. The execution was done in association with Rijkswaterstaat, RCE, *Stichting Landschapsbeheer Oss*, *Brabants Kenniscentrum Kunst en Cultuur*, and *Archeologische Monumentenwacht Nederland*.

Fig. 17.3 The Zevenbergen barrow group anno 2012.  
Figure by R. Jansen.



## 17.4 The finds in the National Museum of Antiquities

### 17.4.1 Oss comes to Leiden



Fig. 17.4 The popular-scientific booklet "*Prins onder Plaggen*" written by Evert van Ginkel. Figure by Sidestone Press.

In 1933 the RMO excavated and consolidated the chieftain's burial of Oss. The finds from this burial have formed a centre piece in the collection and displays of the Museum ever since. This was further stressed after the objects were treated and restored for the third time in 1992/1993 by Restaurara, thereby returning them to much of their former glory. The cremated remains of the chieftain were also studied for the second time. This led to new discoveries and ideas concerning the content of the grave and the role of the objects, inspiring new field research to take place.

When the new excavations at Oss-Vorstengraf were conducted in 1997-1998 and at Oss-Zevenbergen in 2004 and 2007, it became the Museum's intent to actively act as the location where all these (expected) finds would be located and preserved, as well as studied and displayed. Dutch law regarding finds done during excavations, however, had changed since the 1960's and, later on, with Malta. Finds are the property of the provinces and so have to be stored in provincial depots. This actively disabled the RMO from consolidating its role as central Museum for most of the (important) finds from Dutch excavations. The Museum was left with a right to claim finds of national importance, but the procedure involved is difficult. It also has a distinct negative connotation as it claims finds of national importance thereby "taking them away" from the region they were found in. Despite this lack of good legislative positioning of the National Museum within these new rules, in 2009 it was attempted to claim the finds from the Zevenbergen excavation with the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science (Dutch: *Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap*). The RACM (currently RCE: Cultural Heritage Agency) at that time responded by suggesting it might be better to seek alternative ways of presenting the finds, for example through loans. This, however, did not take into account the argument that the Zevenbergen and earlier Oss-Vorstengraf finds were part of one complex that should be preserved together.

While the Museum still negotiated to have the Zevenbergen finds displayed in the new permanent exhibition “Archaeology in the Netherlands” (which opened in 2011), and financed the preservation of the pyre feature, the Province of Brabant took the initiative to house the Zevenbergen and later Vorstengraf finds in the RMO collections. They themselves argued that it was in the best interest of the finds and their documentation that they be kept together and accessible for study in the same place since they were integrally part of one and the same funerary landscape. The RMO and the Province of Brabant thereupon signed an agreement that not only the Zevenbergen finds, but the finds from the earlier 2004 campaigns (Fokkens *et al.* 2009) as well as from the 1964-1965 Verwers research campaign at the Zevenbergen were to be handed over to the RMO for inclusion in the Museum collection. In the end the pragmatic disposition of the Brabant province and the good contacts between it and the RMO, ensured the possibilities for access and loans, and enabled the complex to remain intact in one place.

#### 17.4.2 Displaying the finds

Some of the unique finds of Oss-Zevenbergen are currently displayed in the permanent exhibition “Archaeology of the Netherlands” in the RMO. This exhibition was opened in 2011, and shows a complete survey of the archaeological history of the Netherlands. The visitor is taken through 300 000 years of Dutch history, focusing on 75 major archaeological sites. A few places where objects were found are also explored in more detail, Oss-Zevenbergen among them. With Google Earth, you travel back in time and see what the landscape used to look like, and what event(s) occurred there. One of these “zoom-animations” focuses on the burial ritual that took place at Oss-Zevenbergen. By combining information from the excavation reports and talking to the various excavators an artist, Paul Maas, was instructed to come up with a visual interpretation of the ritual. This led to a

Fig. 17.5 The finds of Oss-Vorstengraf (foreground) and Oss-Zevenbergen (background, under the white “ribbon”) within the exhibition Archaeology of the Netherlands in the RMO in Leiden anno 2012. Figure by L. Amkreutz (©RMO).

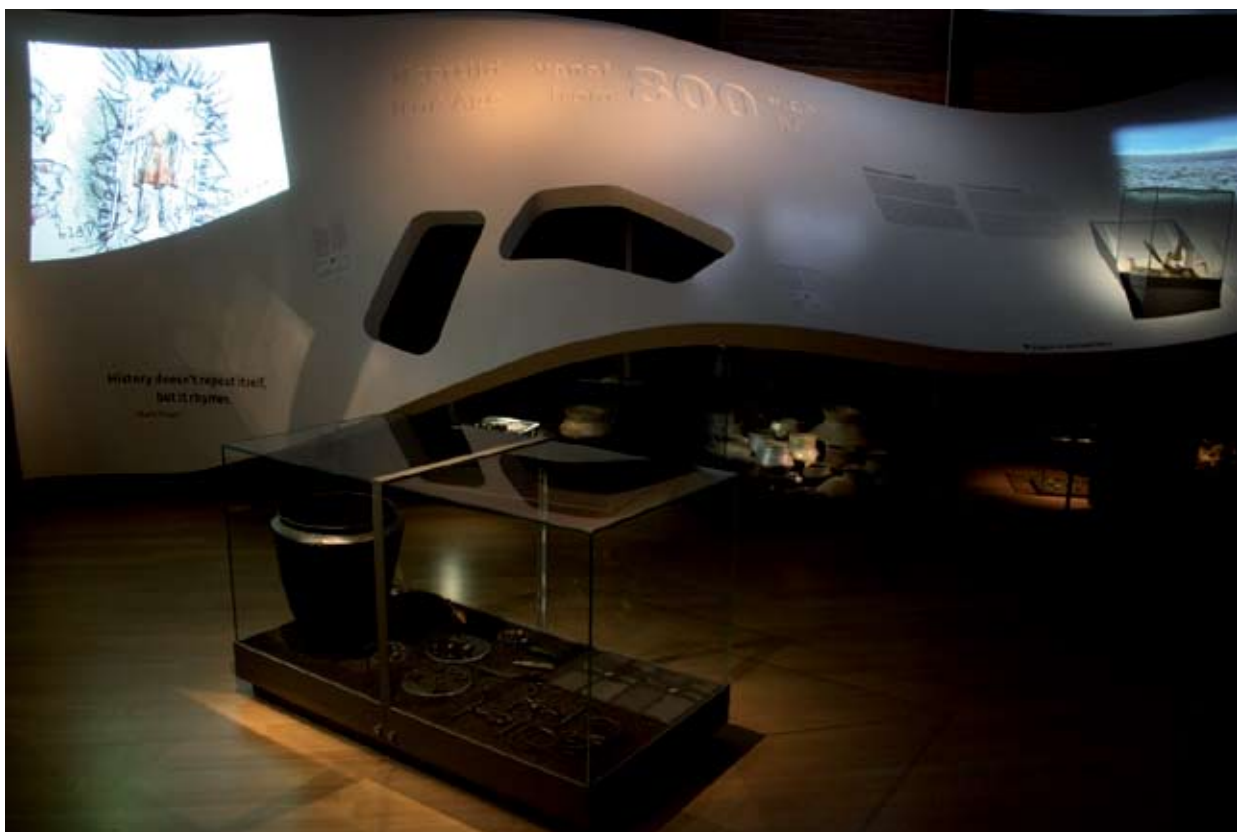






Fig. 17.6 The finds of Oss-Zevenbergen on display on top of the preserved pyre remains.  
Figure by L. Amkreutz (©RMO).

series of interactive drawings that depict the cremation ritual, including some of the finds (Fig. 17.5). The display ends by zooming out and showing the European connections of the Oss burials, first in relation to adjacent Hallstatt burials and subsequently with respect to the central Hallstatt culture zone and its contacts. In this manner both graves are given a context, both their direct relation as well as from a European perspective.

As mentioned in chapter 8, one of the block liftings from the central find assemblage (V 1003) was preserved so that it could be displayed in the exhibit. The find of an Iron Age pyre is so rare that it was deemed worthwhile to present it to the public in such a tangible manner. Kempkens and Lupak therefore uncovered and preserved the charcoal remains in this block *in situ*. They now form the base of the display case of Oss-Zevenbergen (Fig. 17.6). The urn with cremated remains, several bronze rings, and a selection of bronze studs are displayed on top of this pyre base.

The mound 7 finds are located right across from the “original” chieftain’s burial of Oss (Fig. 17.5). As these burials were found not 400 m from each other, it has a striking impact that these finds are displayed so close together. Though only part of the artefacts found in this area is displayed, one can catch a glimpse of the marvels that were once interred in Oss.

While the 1933 finds form a centre piece in the exhibition, the recent Zevenbergen finds are hidden underneath the white display ribbon (see Fig. 17.5). Through a couple of “windows” the visitor can catch a glimpse of this second burial, while at the same time maintaining some of the dignity appropriate for displaying what are in fact the remains of a burial ritual “frozen in time”. The texts in both displays, apart from their physical proximity, indicate that we are dealing with one find complex. While the 1933 finds boast the wealth and status of the