# Transformation through Destruction

A monumental and extraordinary Early Iron Age Hallstatt C barrow from the ritual landscape of Oss-Zevenbergen

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Sidestone Press

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# Conclusion: the seventh mound of seven mounds – long-term history of the Zevenbergen barrow landscape

*David Fontijn, Richard Jansen, Sasja van der Vaart, Harry Fokkens and Ivo van Wijk*

## 16.1 Introduction

In this concluding chapter we will bring together all the evidence discussed in this book and try to answer our central question: what were the role and significance of the last unexplored mounds of the Zevenbergen barrow landscape, mound 6 and 7?

It is the final step on a long avenue of research that started with the excavations at Zevenbergen in 1964-1965 and 2004 and – at least for the foreseeable future – stops here. Although this book focused particularly on the largest mound of all, mound 7, the significance of this barrow and its smaller neighbouring mound 6 can only be understood when the results are fully integrated with those of the previous campaigns. We also built upon many insights in excavation techniques that were first tried out in the previous fieldwork in 2004, and benefitted enormously from these experiences. As the mound 7 excavation was by far the most complex one of all, the fact that it was excavated after the 2004 experiences had sunk in, was a blessing in disguise. In a way, the 2007 excavations with their spectacular finds are the best conclusion thinkable of the entire fieldwork done here. It is for that reason that participants of the previous excavations (Fokkens and van Wijk) are also involved in the writing of this chapter.

In this chapter we try to bring together the various threads of evidence that were discussed in the 15 previous chapters in an accessible way. This means that we will only briefly refer to chapters where crucial evidence is presented and evaluated, leaving out lengthy discussions regarding dating and so on. In what follows, the long-term history of the Zevenbergen site will be sketched with a focus on the question what the specific role and significance of mound 6 and 7 were. All conclusions regarding the other mounds, the Medieval *landweer* and the single post alignments are based on the 2004 fieldwork and an extensive discussion of that evidence and its interpretation can be found in Fokkens *et al.* 2009 and in one more recent publication (Fokkens 2012). When our reading of those data differs, this is explicitly indicated.

Table 16.1 gives a simplified overview of the results of the various excavations.

| No | Phase | Shape of monument | Grave | Size of monument | Dating |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mound 1 | | Long barrow | Not found | 4.7 by > 23.5 m | LBA/EIA |
| Mound 2 | 1 | Round mound w. widely spaced single post circle | Pit filled with sods in centre | D. : 12.5 m | MBA |
| | 2 | Round mound with closely spaced double post circle | Not found | D.: 16 m | MBA |
| | 3 | No addition | Urn grave dug into mound | - | EIA |
| | 4 | No addition | Inhumation graves | - | 13th/14th century AD |
| Mound 3 | | Round mound with single, widely, partly paired spaced post circle | Burned wood, 1 piece of human bone, and pieces of 4 metal artefacts in centre | D.: 30 m | EIA (possible: early MIA) |
| Mound 4 | 1 | (Probably round) mound | Not found | Indet. | MBA (A) |
| | 2 | (Probably round) mound | Not found | 14.5 m | MBA B |
| | 3 | Addition south flank? | Not found | Indet. | |
| | 4 | Probably round) mound – "phase 3" | Not found | Indet. | MBA B |
| Mound 5 | 1 | Interpretation as anthropogenic mound uncertain | Not found | Indet. | Indet. |
| | 2 | Idem | Not found | Indet. | Indet. |
| Mound 6 | 1 | long barrow surrounded by posts | Cremated bones, sherds; position in mound unknown | 28.5 by 8.5 m | MBA B-LBA |
| | 2 | Long barrow with ditch | | 26.5 by 6.5 m | LBA (EIA) |
| Mound 7 | | Round mound without peripheral structure | Urn grave, next to pyre debris, including metal and bone artefacts | D.= 36 m | EIA |
| Mound 8 | 1 | Round mound | Inhumation | D.= 12 m | MBA (A) |
| | 2 | No addition | Urn dug into mound | - | MBA B |
| | 3 | unknown | Sherds, remains of urn? | Indet. | EIA |
| | 4 | Ring ditch | | D. = 9.5 m | EIA |
| "Mound" 9 | | Ring ditch, no true mound recognized | Not found | D. = 5 m | Probably EIA |
| "Mound" 10 | | Ring ditch with opening in southeast, no true mound recognized | Urn | D. = 7.5 m | EIA |
| "Mound" 11 | | Ring ditch, no true mound recognized | Remnants of 2 pots, no crem. bone found | D. = 4 m | LBA/EIA |
| "Mound" 12 | | Ring ditch, no true mound recognized | Not found | D. between 2.5 and 2.8 m | Probably EIA |

*Table 16.1 All excavated burial monuments at Zevenbergen. After Fokkens et al. 2009, Table 13.1 with changes.*
*D. = diameter;*
*MBA= Middle Bronze Age;*
*MBA A= Middle Bronze Age A;*
*LBA= Late Bronze Age;*
*EIA= Early Iron Age;*
*MIA= Middle Iron Age.*

### *16.1.1 Fieldwork methods*

The excavation focused on the southwest (trench 105) and the northeast (trench 106) quadrants of mound 7, incorporating a small part of the NW-quadrant as well (trench 115). The levelled mound 6 was excavated in its entirety. Around both, test trenches were dug following the planning that was set out in 2004, but which could not be completed because of the presence of the badger.

In assessing the results of the 2007 excavation, it is important to note that not much was expected of the results of the excavation of what was a sett – the large number of entrances, the heaps of soil dug out by the badger: in advance, nothing suggested that we would find what we did find. There were financial aids to support an excavation of 17 days, from which only two field workers of Archol BV and material costs such as the mobile excavator could be paid. The project leader (Fontijn) and the fieldwork leader (Jansen) did the work as part of their research track at the Faculty of Archaeology, University of Leiden, and the same is true for the palynological research done by prof. dr. C.C. Bakels, the metallurgical research by the Technical University of Delft, and that done by the RCE. The majority of the fieldwork (mainly manual excavation) was done by (unpaid) students and a number of amateur archaeologists. All this means that financial means were limited which made itself felt when we became confronted with a very complex and time consuming excavation of the centre of mound 7.

The remains of mound 6 – effectively the second excavation of this structure – could be examined with a one level excavation, since there was no longer anything left of the original mound itself. What differed from the excavation in the 1960's is that we also created some deeper levels underneath the traces of disturbances. This strategy was effective, as the lowest parts of many more traces of posts appeared to have been preserved underneath such disturbances.

In the case of mound 7, we clung to the quadrant method where sods would not only be documented in profile sections, but also at the excavation levels. We made a mix between the strategy of 2004, where it was aimed to excavate as much as possible stratigraphically, and the strategy developed in 2006 for the excavation of two barrows in Rhenen-Elst (Fontijn 2010). In the latter case, we chose for manual excavation in horizontal levels, starting from the centre of the barrow, supplemented with sieving of a part of the mound. We also used two extra diagonal profile baulks. In retrospect, this method worked better, particularly because we worked on a very large barrow, and the extra profile baulk made it easier to combine horizontal and vertical stratigraphy. Another new element was the systematic use of photogrammetry and a Robotic Total Station. Both enabled the use of ArcGIS for the later analysis (chapter 5).

It was the choice for manual excavation that led to the discovery of the very small bronzes in the centre (which could not be prospected with a metal detector in advance). The entire central find assemblage was lifted in blocks which were investigated in a laboratory by Restaura (chapter 8). After initial prospection with X-rays, which identified the position of metal and large pieces of charcoal, a detailed excavation in a 10 by 10 cm grid was carried out in each block. It was only in this way that the badly preserved small bronzes could be adequately 3D-documented and restored.

## 16. 2 Before the barrow landscape

### *16.2.1 Outline – a ridge of natural mounds*

The Zevenbergen barrow landscape is situated on a very prominent landscape location, the northern edge of the relatively high lying Peel Blok plateau, a tectonically uplifted area that commands a fine view of a low-lying area that is – in places – rather wet because of ground water forced to the surface by pressure (Dutch: *kwel*). The Zevenbergen area consists of Late Pleistocene loamy cover sand and of coarse gravel-rich sand of Middle Pleistocene fluvial origin. Most barrows of the Zevenbergen lie on a narrow, low cover sand ridge on which we find several small natural elevations. Mound 7 is built on what locally was probably the largest and highest of all. Mound 6 is located immediately to its west, with its easternmost end on the flank of the natural elevation under mound 7. In the location we excavated, a Humus Podzol soil had developed (Dutch: *Haarpodzol*; code Hd30). Research shows that this originally was a Moder Podzol which degraded into a Humus Podzol because of anthropogenic influences (long-term maintenance of heath vegetation; see appendix 2 and chapter 10).

### *16.2.2 Previous activities at the site – Mesolithic*

The Zevenbergen area was used during the Mesolithic, thousands of years before the barrows were built. During the 2004 excavation, 27 flint artefacts were found. In 2007 we found a few more (five). For the 2004 finds, it was concluded that the artefacts could not be dated more precisely than "Mesolithic", and that the thin distribution of material across the Zevenbergen represents the remains of forag-

ing-related activities that were heavily disturbed by later use of the area, preventing us from getting any detailed insight into what it exactly was they were doing here, and in which phase of the Mesolithic (van Hoof 2009). The few additional finds done in 2007 do not help us any further (chapter 14). The area of mound 6 had been deeply damaged because of its location on a much used sand road on the (post-) Medieval heath. The area underneath the sods of mound 7 was relatively better protected, but before mound 7 was raised, the natural elevation had been lying on a heath for centuries. Sods for building the Bronze Age mounds may have been cut there, and the top and parts of the flanks were levelled. The presence of aeolian sediment also indicates that deflation took place locally, long before the barrow was built. The excavated part of mound 7 is 245.31 m². The old surface was excavated manually, of which the block lifted centre in great detail (chapter 8). A zone of 5.5 m² of the mound, including the old surface until the B/C horizon was sieved (2.2%) with a 4 mm grid sieve. This yielded no finds. Three of the five flint artefacts were found in secondary position (as parts of the sods with which the mound was built), two others, a flake and a blade, were found during the shovelling of trench 105 at the transition of sods to the ancient surface covered by the mound. Even for these two artefacts we cannot be sure if they were originally part of the soil beneath the sods, or ended up here as inclusions in the sods.

The Mesolithic artefacts we found were made of the same materials that were used for those found during the 2004 fieldwork (including the light-grey Belgian flint variety). They represent moved and/or heavily disturbed remnants of debris of activities which once took place in this area. As such, the modest flint finds of Oss-Zevenbergen are like many other Mesolithic sites in the province of Noord-Brabant: a thin, heavily disturbed scatter of finds lacking evidence for more precise dating (chapter 14). Their presence here does indicate that this pronounced area at the transition from a high and dry to a lower and wetter zone, was of relevance to people long before it came to be used as a heath and burial zone.

### *16.2.3 Neolithic use of the landscape*

There is no indication at all that people used the Zevenbergen area during the 6th, 5th, or 4th millennium BC. Only for the 3rd millennium BC are there a few traces which indicate that there were activities in this area. Traces of two posts were found underneath the Middle Bronze Age mound 2. C14-dating of charcoal in one of the post traces indicates that it dates to the earlier half of the 3rd millennium BC (the period of the Vlaardingen-culture; Fokkens *et al.* 2009, 209). Another Middle Bronze Age mound, no. 4, was built over ground which had been dug through (van Wijk *et al.* 2009, 103-105). Whether these traces relate to an agricultural field at this location or not is a discussion which need not concern us here (*cf.* Fokkens *et al.* 2009); what is clear is that it evidences that the Zevenbergen locally saw some ground working before the Middle Bronze Age. Another hint in that direction are the aeolian deposits at the northeast side of mound 7 and at its southern flank. Drift sands deposited on an ancient Humus Podzol surface, indicating that parts of the area by that time must have been without covering vegetation and roots to allow the wind to blow away sand and to deposit it elsewhere. Unpublished OSL-analyses of this sediment underneath mound 7 suggest that this might have happened in the Middle Neolithic (chapter 4). If this holds true, it implies that people by that time had already created an open landscape, locally stripping it to the extent that the subsoil became exposed. There are no indications that people built barrows here during the Late Neolithic or the Early Bronze Age (ca. 2500-1800 BC), but only 680 m to the southwest of

mound 2, the remains of a Bell Beaker Period barrow were found (chapter 2; see also Fokkens/Jansen 2004), demonstrating that people started to build barrows in the northern edge of the Peel Blok from that period onwards.

## 16.3 Middle Bronze Age: the formation of a barrow landscape

If we are to identify two elements in the *longue durée* history of the Peel Blok environment, these are the *Calluna* heath and the presence of a group of barrows on it. For a very long period of time, a heath dotted with barrows would be a ubiquitous element in the prehistoric landscape of this part of the Netherlands. For the Zevenbergen, the roots of both have to be looked for in the earlier part of the Middle Bronze Age.

In the period between ca. 1800 to 1400 BC, at least three round barrows were built here, no. 4, 2, and 8 (from west to east; Fig. 16.1). They are positioned on the highest part of the sand ridge, and mound 2 was built on a natural elevation. The analysis of pollen found underneath those mounds, in combination with pollen from the soils underneath mound 7 (chapter 10) give us a good impression what the environment looked like. In the early Middle Bronze Age, but possibly already before that period (De Kort 2009), there was a small heath, partly ringed by an oak-lime forest with hazel growing at its edges. In the wetter parts of the low

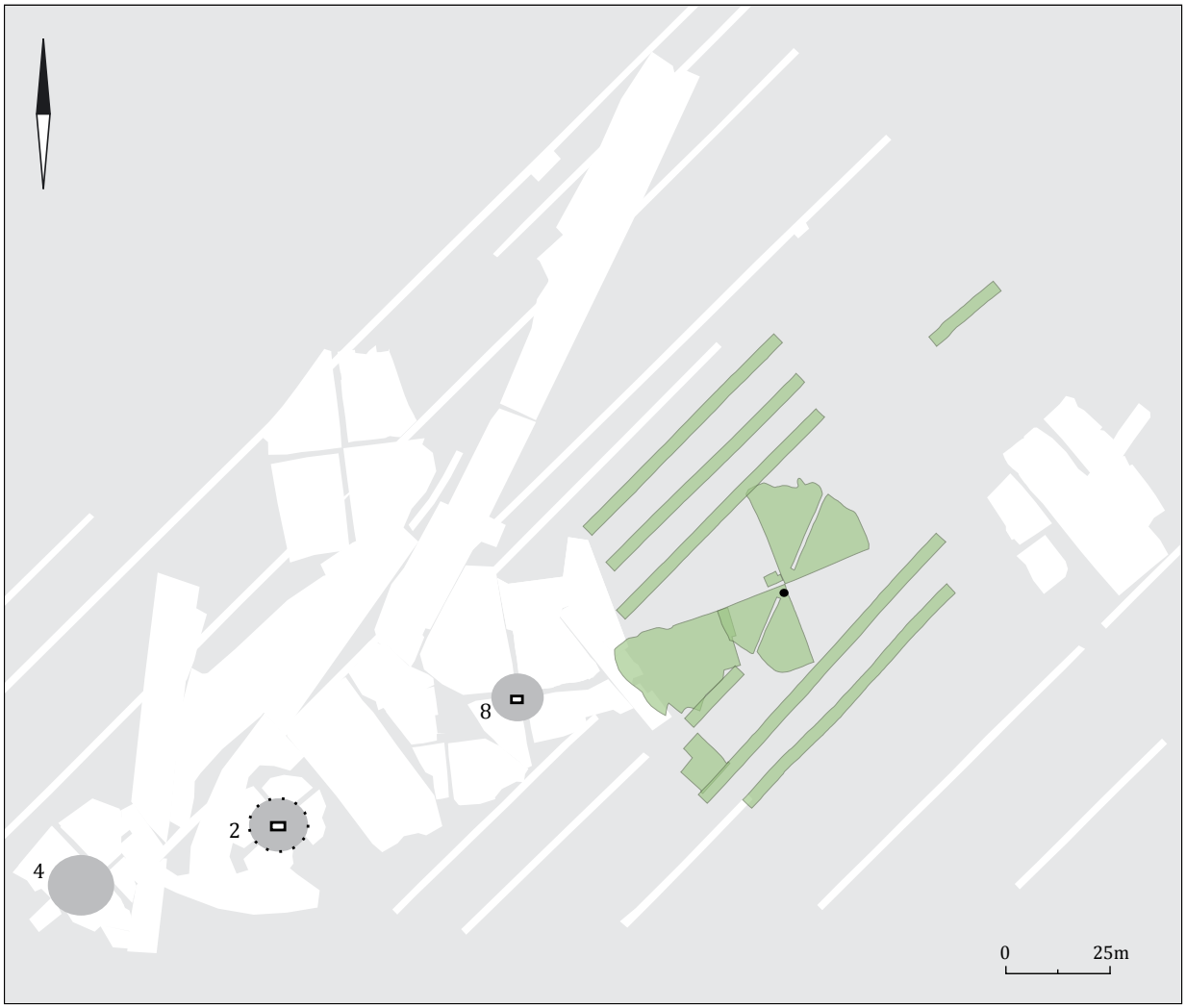


*Fig. 16.1 Zevenbergen in the Middle Bronze Age. The excavation of 2007 is in green. The black dot at the location of the later mound 7 represents a pit dating to this phase. Figure after Fokkens et al. 2009, fig. 13.01b/J. van Donkersgoed/P. Valentijn.*

lying area to the north there was an alder brook forest.[93] Mound 2 may have been constructed on a location that had been cleared of trees not long before the monument was built (De Kort 2009, 160). Heath vegetation must have dominated the area around all Middle Bronze Age mounds at Zevenbergen, a type of landscape that is entirely anthropogenic and can only have been maintained as such by regular grazing (chapter 10). It is not possible to reconstruct which mound was built first, but it is clear that all three barrows were re-used for burial and heightened, and for all later mound additions it could be demonstrated that heather was the environment in which they stood (De Kort 2009; chapter 10). Research by members of the *Ancestral Mounds* project now shows that barrows on a small heath that was used and maintained for a very long time was a very characteristic element of the cultural landscape that developed in the Low Countries since the earlier half of the 3rd millennium BC (Bourgeois in press; Doorenbosch forthcoming). We now also know that the same is true for the ordering of barrows in a row. Research of barrow groups all over the Low Countries shows that Middle Bronze Age barrows are to be found in two types of orderings. The first is as small barrow rows. These consist of a few barrows only (they are not the kilometres long lines as we find them in Epe-Vaassen or Renkum (Bourgeois in press; Fontijn 2011)). A contemporary example from Noord-Brabant is the barrow row of Goirle (van Giffen 1943), another nearby example is a group of four Middle Bronze Age barrows at the Kops Plateau in Nijmegen (Fontijn/Cuijpers 2002). The other variety is the loosely scattered or extensively dispersed barrows. Here, barrows do not seem to cluster and appear to be distributed in a – to our view – haphazard pattern (Fontijn 2010, 16). A famous example of the latter from Noord-Brabant is the barrow group of Toterfout-Halve Mijl (Glasbergen 1954a; Theunissen 1993). Barrow *cemeteries*, tight clusters of graves, do not exist before the Late Bronze Age urnfields. At Zevenbergen, we are clearly dealing with an example of a (small) barrow row[94]. Every barrow was re-used during the Middle Bronze Age (Fig. 16.2; Tab. 16.1).

Research of a representative sample of all Middle Bronze Age barrows in the Low Countries shows that this is the normal pattern. It seems to have been part of the culturally desired life-path of such burial monuments, that they be re-used for new burials not long after their construction (Bourgeois in press; Bourgeois/Fontijn 2008; Theunissen 1999). Another interesting observation that is now better understood than when the first report was written is that all barrows had a different peripheral structure. The use of peripheral structures around Middle Bronze Age barrows appears to vary from site to site. There are examples where a particular type of post circles is used to visually define sub-groups of barrows within one barrow cluster (like at Toterfout-Halve Mijl; Bourgeois/Fontijn 2012), and examples where different structures were used to differentiate individual barrows (like at Goirle; Fontijn 2007; van Giffen 1943). The Zevenbergen mounds seem to be an example of the latter.

At the eastern end of the Middle Bronze Age barrow row lies a large natural elevation. This is the location where mound 7 later would be built on. There are a few indications that this elevation already played a role in the Bronze Age barrow

93 In De Kort 's useful reconstruction (2009, 167; fig. 8.4), we see a fen to the northwest of Zevenbergen. Excavations at this location show that it was a location where ground water was pushed upwards (Dutch: kwel), but there are no indications for the presence of a fen (Fontijn *et al.* 2004). It should be emphasized that the prehistoric roads along the barrows in this same reconstruction are entirely hypothetical.

94 Today, there is a highway immediately to the west of mound 4. If there were originally barrows here as well can no longer be verified. The presence of kwel along the east flanks of the highway suggests that the present road was built through a natural depression. This makes it less likely that barrows were built immediately west of the Zevenbergen.

*Fig. 16.2 Northwest quadrant of mound 2. (top) View on centre of mound. The yellow sand is dug out sand for the central pit underneath the first phase of the mound; (bottom) west profile of the NW-quadrant. A clear separation between two phases of Middle Bronze Age use is visible. Figure after van Wijk et al. 2009, fig. 6.6.*

landscape. We will discuss this below, but first something has to be said about two remarkable monuments that were added to this barrow row during the next phase.

## 16.4 Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age: building long barrows

During the Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age, the existing barrow row was lengthened with two long barrows, monuments that differ in shape from their round predecessors: mound 1 and mound 6. Both were badly damaged in later times. Which one was built first remains unknown. Since we lack positive indications that Zevenbergen was used for burials during the later part of the Middle Bronze Age, it is probable that the long barrows were the first monuments built at this site since a long time.[95] Pollen from these two long barrows indicate that at that time there was still a heath at Zevenbergen (De Kort 2009; chapter 10).

### *16.4.1 Mound 1*

Mound 1 must have been a northeast-southwest oriented long barrow (Dutch: *langbed*), which was badly damaged by recent digging activities by people and rabbits (Fig. 16.3).

95 A synthesis of C14-datings of barrows show that only few date to the MBA B. It has been argued that during this period, the frequency of barrow construction and use of barrows for burials decreased significantly (Arnoldussen/Fontijn 2006; Bourgeois in press; Bourgeois/Arnoldussen 2006).

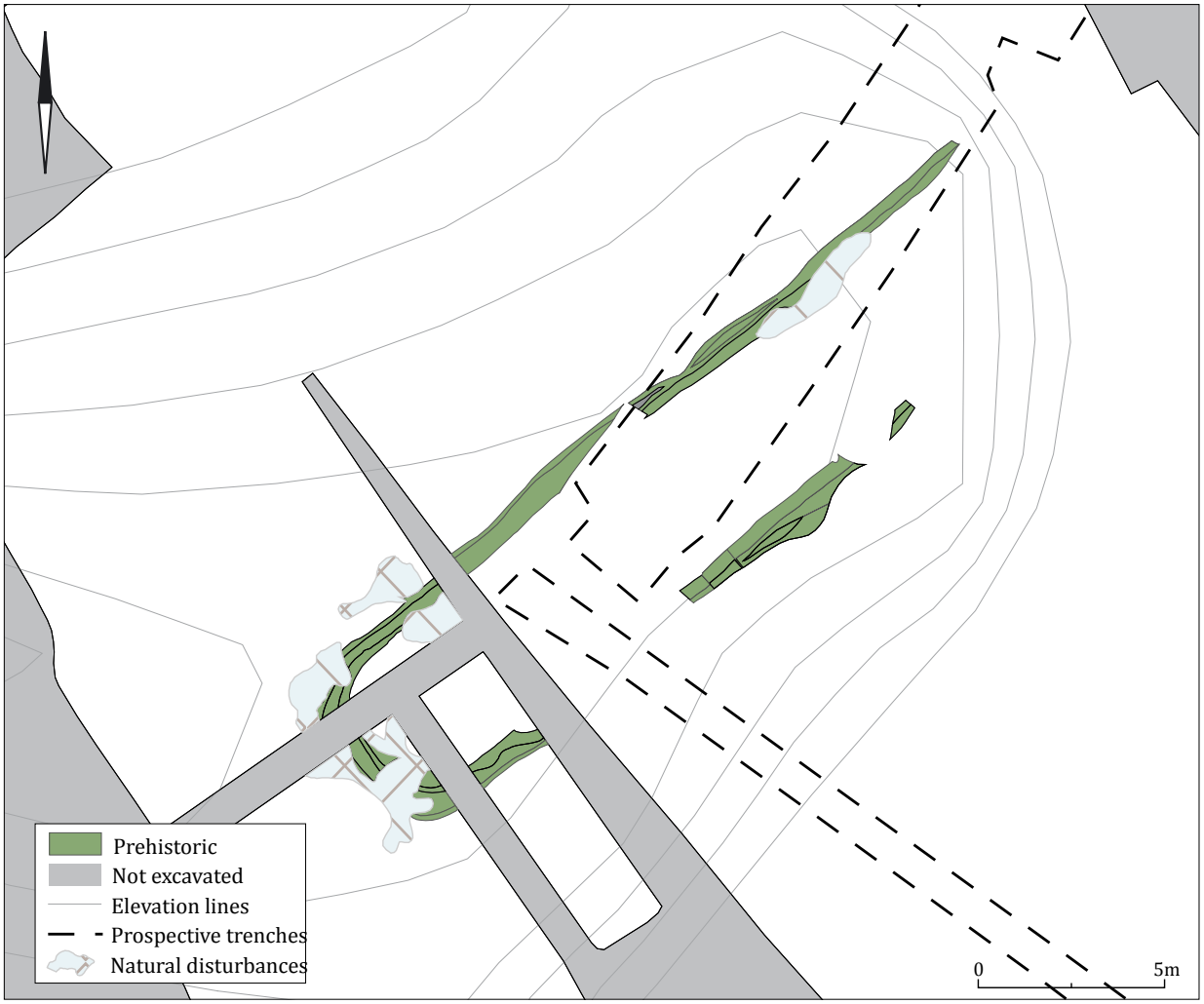


*Fig. 16.3 Ditch of mound 1. Figure after van Wijk et al. 2009, fig. 6.2/J. van Donkersgoed.*

Hardly anything but the fill of the rectangular ditch with rounded corners remained, and no traces of a grave were found. There are indications that the ditches originally indeed surrounded a low mound. The traces can only provisionally be dated to the Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age by the shape of the ditches.[96] By analogy with other such structures, it was argued that we are dealing with the remains of a barrow. When this mound was built, the local relief was elegantly used. The monument uses a small elongated platform that has relatively steep slopes to the northwest, the southeast, and the northeast. Just like would happen later in the case of mound 7, a natural feature is used to give the monument a more prominent position in the landscape. It seems as if the local relief was tailor made for the desired shape of the monument. This is the easternmost natural top of the ridge that dominates the local environment. What was not clear during the 2004 excavation is that there was another natural elevation to its west: this would be the location where mound 7 would be built.

96 Probably those of a so-called *langbed* type Riethoven (Fokkens *et al.* 2009, 73).

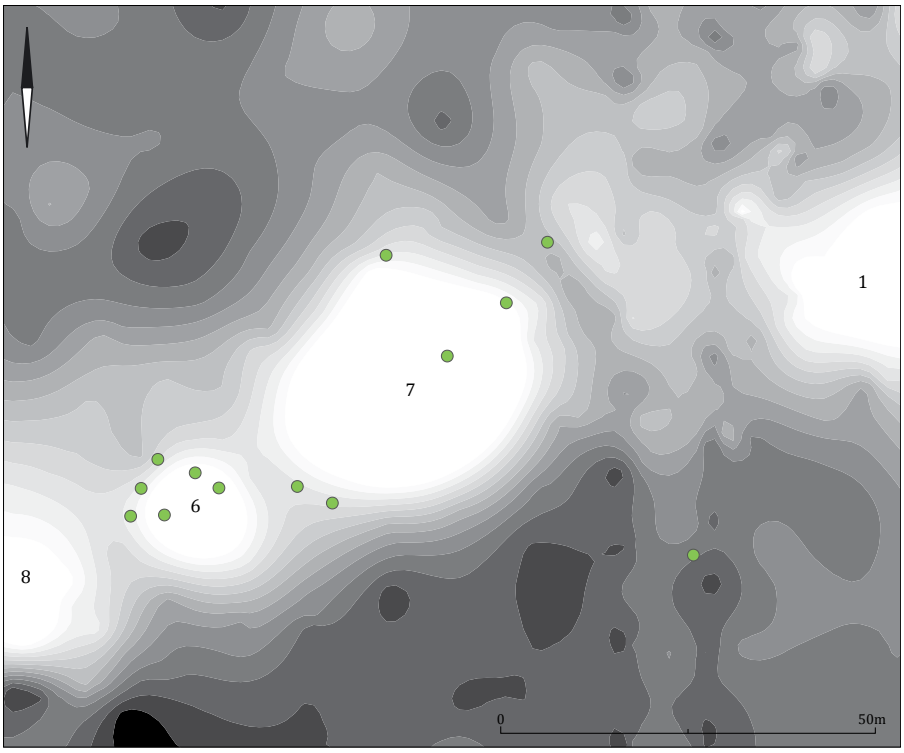


*Fig. 16.4 Entrances of the sett (green dots), based on survey by Taken Landschapsplanning BV. Figure after van Wijk et al. 2009, fig. 6.31/J. van Donkersgoed.*

### *16.4.2 Mound 6*

The 2007 campaign is the third time the features of mound 6 were uncovered and the second time since 1964 -1965 that it was thoroughly investigated. The most recent excavation and the re-interpretation of the old find documentation yielded a number of new insights and in details depart from the previous interpretations (for what follows: *cf.* chapter 3).

It is difficult to unravel the sequence of building events at this location, particularly because the features were badly damaged. Apart from the later cart tracks that eroded a part of the mound here (chapter 15), the more recent digging activities of the badger also had their effect. A number of the entrances to its sett were located here (Fig. 16.4).

There are no indications that mound 6, like in the case of the other long barrow, mound 1, was built on a natural elevation. Rather, its eastern end is situated at the gentle slope of the natural elevation on which mound 7 would be built. However, when mound 7 was built, the monuments were not connected to each other as we thought during the 2004 fieldwork. The monument initially consisted of a mound surrounded by a post-setting. If both existed at the same time, or one preceded the other, cannot be found out anymore. The mound probably had an oblong shape. The round mound reported by the excavators of the 1960's may be the product of selective preservation (erosion of a part of the mound by the more recent dirt roads that cut through it). The mound was partly built of horizontally-placed sods with their vegetation side downwards (like in the centre of mound 7). Loose sand also seems to have been used. Cremation remains found in the mound in the earliest excavations, though in disturbed context, suggest that it indeed was a burial monument. The post-setting can be dated to the Middle Bronze Age B or the Late Bronze Age. The posts were not set out from one location, but their setting may not have been done in a haphazard way. If the double rows of posts at the outer end of the monument are indeed contemporary, then moving about the mound would have created some sort of shutter-effect. From one location


*Fig. 16.5 The Zevenbergen in the Late Bronze Age. The long barrows can also date to the Early Iron Age. The excavation of 2007 is in green. Figure after Fokkens et al. 2009, fig. 13.01c/ P. Valentijn/ J. van Donkersgoed.*

there is a clear paring of posts, from another place, one's view would be entirely blocked (see Fig. 3.7). Our excavation proved that people later dug a ditch around the location: the ditch fill cuts through the traces of a number of the (inner row of) posts. Like in the case of mound 1, this ditched monument can be classified as type Riethoven. C14-dated charcoal from the ditch fill yielded a dating in the Late Bronze Age. Pollen from the ditch fill is comparable to that of mound 7, but without *Fagus* (chapter 10). This suggests that it dates before the Iron Age and is older than mound 7.

We are dealing here with a monument that was re-shaped and probably re-interpreted for a longer period of time. In this respect, it is far more complex than that other long barrow, mound 1. The post-setting indicates that energy was spent in marking out something of which we may assume that it already was visible (a mound). Apparently, it was considered important to mark it out with posts as well. The digging of the ditch at a later stage, which must have taken place after some (or all) of the posts had decayed, indicates a different way of marking a boundary (much less visible from afar, only from nearby and in view of the loose sand texture probably not for decades).[97] Why was it necessary to do this when the monument already existed for quite some time? It is possible that it

97 The ditches that were dug around the reconstructed barrows at Oss-Vorstengraf, for example, are completely overgrown and hardly visible after eight years. Without maintenance, it is unlikely that ditches were visible markers for decades.

went with a new use of the location for a burial, but in view of the damage done to the original mound we cannot be sure of that. The re-interpretation of the original documentation of the parts of the mound in the 1960's does not support the view then held that the mound itself was heightened in several use phases. As to the motivation behind the different use phases of this particular monument, we can only guess, but as will be argued in the next section, there are indications that the natural elevation on which its eastern end was built, which later would become mound 7, had a special significance to Bronze Age communities using the Zevenbergen (Fig. 16.5).

## 16.5 The special significance of the natural elevation that would become the seventh barrow

Imagine someone who would approach the Zevenbergen from the low-lying area to the north of the Zevenbergen around the middle of the Middle Bronze Age. She would walk through an uninhabited area[98], pocked with alder carr and locally watery places. Going upwards (the edge of the tectonically lifted area, a few metres higher), our Bronze Age visitor would enter a small heath, perhaps only 300 m wide, and several hundred metres long. To the south, it was ringed by a mixed oak-lime forest. In places, there might have been small stripped areas where the wind was blowing away the sand. Approaching the Zevenbergen from the north-west, our imaginary visitor would recognize at least three round barrows ordered in a row: mound 4, 2, and 8, of which one (no. 2) may still have been marked with posts by that time. At the eastern end, two more elevations would be visible, one of which stands out by its size and round to oval shape (Fig. 4.34). This is the elevation that would become the basis for mound 7.

Imaginative as this opening may seem, it is based on the environmental research of the Zevenbergen as it is reported in this book (chapter 4 and 10) and on previous research (De Kort 2002; 2009). It is a way to emphasize something that was not – and could not – be appreciated in the 2004 research: the fact that the largest mound of the entire Zevenbergen barrow group is located on what must have been a conspicuous elevation with a shape that is not that different from that of an earlier barrow. During the Middle Bronze Age, visually, the natural basis of mound 7 may have looked like another hump in the landscape after mounds 4, 2 and 8. An important result of the excavations reported in this book, is that we now know that it was also the scenery for a number of activities during that period.

Only two quadrants of mound 7 were excavated, but they do give an impression of what the natural elevation looked like (Fig. 4.13-15 and 4.34). From southeast to northwest, the elevation had a gentle slope, with some highest parts at what is now the flank of the mound (Fig. 4.34; south of S 4 in trench 105). It rose to ca. 1.5 m when approached from the south (cf. Fig. 4.34). The elevation had a rather flat top that stretches out until halfway in the NE-quadrant 106 (Fig. 4.13). At this place there is a marked knick in the profile. This is the original lee side of the ridge, an area that in the Holocene was partly filled in with aeolian deposits (chapter 4). By the Middle Bronze Age, this mound was covered with heath (chapter 10). The entire mound had a somewhat oval to round shape. The southern side had the same form as it has now (though it is now somewhat raised by the sods), but it is particularly the northern side that was much steeper. It is this side that was much changed by the sod stacking.

98 This low-lying area was prospected with trenches but no prehistoric features were found (Fokkens/Jansen 2004).

### *16.5.1 Bronze Age pit*

On the flat plateau, several metres south of what would become the centre of the barrow, a large pit was dug which was filled with soil and a large amount of charcoal. A C14-dating of a charcoal sample yielded a dating that after calibration is Middle Bronze Age A. Other such pits have not been found, although we should bear in mind that there are still two unexcavated quadrants that may conceal more such traces. Apparently, people made a fire here and buried the charcoal in this pit. Characteristic settlement features are wholly absent, so the fire perhaps had something to do with management of the heath, or was the camp fire of a shepherd. It may also have been related to one of the funerals that took place in the Zevenbergen barrow landscape at that time.

### *16.5.2 An eight-post construction at the west flank of the natural elevation.*

Another possibility is that this pit had something to do with a remarkable eight-post corridor that was built at the west flank of the natural elevation. When this was built is unknown, but it must have happened before the construction of the Early Iron Age barrow (section 4.5.8). There were two parallel post rows of four posts each (Fig. 16.5). They may or may not have supported a roof. It is at least possible that they did, for they were dug in rather deep into the ground. They form a corridor that is wide enough to let one man or woman walk through it. An intriguing detail is that there are traces of a ninth post at the east side that blocks the corridor that is formed but the two post rows. This means that the structure was ostentatiously blocked at some time.

In section 4.5.8, we argued that our eight-post construction has close similarities to corridors or *allées* as they are sometimes found at Middle Bronze Age barrows. This includes the blocking post, which already by Glasbergen was seen as an integral element to such structures (1954b, 153-155). It appeared to us that the mound 7 corridor particularly has affinities to a module in the much larger Bronze Age *allée* that was found underneath the nearby mound of the Early Iron Age chieftain's burial of Oss (Fig. 4.32), pre-Iron Age structure that has been interpreted as related to the original Middle Bronze Age mound underneath the chieftain's burial of Oss. In general, these corridors are associated with activities related to funerals or veneration of ancestors. They mark out a prescribed route towards a specific barrow, but usually end a couple of metres in front of it. The blocking post might function as the visual marker indicating that this route was no longer to be taken.

Our structure is much smaller than all others, and – although found underneath a true barrow – it was built at a moment when that barrow did not exist. In a previous popular scientific publication, this structure was interpreted as related to the Early Iron Age funeral of the deceased buried underneath mound 7 (van Ginkel 2009). Although we still do not have decisive dating evidence, we are now of the opinion that it is more likely that the eight-post structure is earlier, and dates to the Bronze Age. Arguments in favour of this view are the similarities in form and structure between our corridor and those that can safely be dated to the Middle Bronze Age, and the fact that our construction does not lead to the centre of the Iron Age mound at all. But where did the corridor lead to then? There are two options. The first is that the corridor leads to the plateau at the top of the natural elevation. In that case, there might have been a relation to the MBA A activities to which the pit with charcoal testifies. The second option is that the

corridor leads down slope to mound 6. It has the same orientation as mound 6 and it is broadly (but not precisely!) aligned to the main axis of that monument (Fig. 16.5).

### *16.5.3 A natural elevation flanked by two long barrows*

An additional observation is that the natural elevation that would become mound 7 became flanked by two long barrows in the course of the Late Bronze/Early Iron Age. Mound 1 cannot be more precisely dated than that, but for mound 6 there are arguments that it predates the building of mound 7 (chapter 3). On the one hand, the construction of two long barrows can be seen as the continuation of a barrow row as it emerged during the earlier part of the Middle Bronze Age. On the other, the forms contrast to the round mounds that stood there for a long time. In the case of mound 1, it seems as if the choice for an elongated instead of round monument has to do with the peculiarities of the local environment (the presence of an elongated, small ridge; Fig. 16.3), but there are no indications that this is also the case for mound 6. For the latter, the decision to build a long instead of a round barrow thus may have been a deliberate choice. On the one hand, this indicates that the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age community saw itself as connected with the older barrows (maintaining the existing order of a barrow row). On the other hand, the choice for extending the row with a monument with a deviant shape suggests that they also defined themselves as different from their forerunners.

In the first publication (Fokkens *et al.* 2009), it was suggested that there was a considerable time in between the construction of the round Bronze Age mounds and the long barrows. The new insights in the general chronology of Bronze Age barrows by Q. Bourgeois (in press) confirm this idea. In the Low Countries as a whole, for the period between ca. 1400 and 1100 BC, barrow building seems to have decreased, only to revive with the start of Late Bronze Age urnfields.

So, somewhere in the last phase of the Bronze Age, or even the start of the Early Iron Age, two long barrows were built. Both are a continuation of the barrow row and both flank a large natural elevation in between. It is hard to think – but impossible to prove! – that the large elevation in between did not play a part in the narrative Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age people had for this by then already ancient barrow row.

In conclusion, we argue that the natural elevation that would become mound 7 may already have been seen as an important place in the barrow landscape by the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age communities, and perhaps even as remains of an ancestral barrow itself.

## 16.6 Events immediately preceding the construction of a monumental burial mound

### *16.6.1 Setting: a natural elevation on a heath*

A pollen diagram made on the basis of pollen sampled from the soil underneath mound 7 shows that the natural elevation had been covered with heather vegetation for some time before the barrow was raised (see chapter 10 and Fig. 10.1). A dip in the heather curve may be ascribed to an intensification of grazing by livestock including cattle, later followed by a lowering of grazing pressure. Before the barrow was built, there was a heath ringed by woodland, the high percentages of hazel suggesting long stretches of forest edge. Whether the heath was an island in a forest or a more open landscape with patches of open forest remains unknown.


*Fig. 16.6 The Zevenbergen in the Early Iron Age. Position of posts in post alignments and in post circle around mound 3 are given in schematized form. Dots represent cremation graves. The attribution of the long mound 1 to this phase is possible, but it can also be older. The same is true for the corridor underneath mound 7. The excavation of 2007 is in green. Figure after Fokkens et al. 2009, fig. 13.01c/P. Valentijn/J. van Donkersgoed.*

A comparable heath was present at only 250 m distance around Oss-Vorstengraf, suggesting a mosaic-like landscape of small heaths alternated by patches of forest. This is a very different kind of heath than the one that grew here during the historical period (see below). The heath is entirely anthropogenic and it has been argued that grazing by cattle and sheep in particular was the best way to maintain it (chapter 10). As the heath existed here for a long period of time (Middle Bronze Age, Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age, and Early Iron Age) it must have been a structural, *longue durée* element in the local landscape, its maintenance must have been among the main tasks of local communities which were shared and organized between different groups (of those whose deceased were buried here?). Although we tend to pay a lot of attention to the role of this area for funeral practices, it was also a structural part of the economic zone of local agrarian societies, whose dwellings and agricultural fields probably have to be looked for in the area immediately to the south and east of the Zevenbergen (chapter 2). The large natural elevation on this heath, flanked by one or two long barrows, was selected for a ritual that would lead to the construction of the monument that is central to our book: mound 7 (Fig. 16.6).

### *16.6.2 Selecting and preparing a ritual location*

Mound 7 was not just the location where a deceased with a specific history, role, and significance was buried. It was also the place where his body was burned (chapter 5). During the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age urnfield period in the southern Netherlands, most of the cremation graves we have do not seem to have been the location where the burned bones were also buried (*cf.* Theuws/Roymans 1999). In this way, mound 7 is an exception.

A pyre could have been constructed on many locations, and the place where they did it in this case – at the northernmost part of the plateau on the top of the natural elevation – may not have been the best choice for purely practical reasons. It was situated at an exposed location. If there was any wind, it could have made the cremation process harder, and would also have hindered the mourners by blowing up the loose sand that was by that time lying at the top (as we will see below, the top was stripped bare of vegetation before the burning; during our excavation we were also hindered by dust and sand blowing in our face if the wind started to blow).

There must therefore have been particular reasons to choose this location for the cremation. We already suggested that it may have had something to do with a special meaning that was attached to this large natural elevation (memory of its previous history, the *allée* or what happened here in relation to mound 6, and/or the fact that it more or less had the shape of a large barrow). Another reason may be the prominent, visual qualities of the location. The pyre was not just located at the top of the mound, but particularly at the northern part of it, in front of a knick in the profile of the elevation. The entire scene of burning would have been visible to a public standing around the mound, or at the top of the older mound 8, or even from much further in the heath.

The location seems to have been prepared for the occasion: the zone where we find the pyre debris was stripped of vegetation. This may have been part of the ritual or something that was done to prevent fire from the pyre from spreading to the (dry?) heather.

We argued that what we have called "the central find assemblage", a large charcoal spread containing (burned) bronzes and burned bones were the remains of the pyre measuring 5 by 2 m. Analyzing the finds and their spatial organization in chapter 5, 6, and 7, we arrived at the following conclusions concerning the preparation of the pyre.

A pyre was built at the northern part of the flat top of the elevation. Charcoal of oak, ash, and one fragment of willow were retrieved, the overwhelming majority being oak (94% in weight). As oak and ash are both calorific and exothermic woods they probably are the most resistant pieces, other wood species may have been used as well but may have been reduced to ashes. Oak and ash are likely to have been collected in the local forest ringing the heath, willow was to be found in the alder brook forest at the lower lying wetter parts just to the north of the Zevenbergen. The large oak beams in V 1001 and V 1003 (Fig. 5.2) were probably foundations of the pyre. We argued that the pyre was built at the location of our block V 1000 and the northern part of block V 1001 (Fig. 5.6, A). A remarkable element among the burned wood is a piece of burr wood. These are not very common and known to be used for making wooden bowls. However, there are no definitive indications that the piece in our pyre debris was worked.

The exact shape of the pyre cannot be reconstructed anymore, but we do know that it was not built over a pit, but on flat unworked ground.

### *16.6.3 Dismantling a wagon/yoke*

The deceased was buried with a number of special artefacts that apparently were seen as inextricably linked to his social role. 1080 small bronze objects were found, at least 538, but probably 983, of them represent small studs (Tab. 7.1). There are nine large bronze studs (section 7.5; Fig. 7.13), at least one bronze hemispherical sheet-knob (section 7.4; Fig. 7.9), two complete bronze rings with round cross-section (section 7.7; Fig. 7.8 and 7.9), and six fragments of bronze rings with square cross-section (section 7.2; Fig. 7.2 and 7.4). In addition to this, one piece of indeterminable iron (section 6.4; Fig. 6.12) was found as well as two small pieces of burned, decorated bone (section 6.3; Fig. 6.8).

An important point for the analysis of those finds is that the central find assemblage was hardly disturbed in later times, and could be lifted in several blocks with soil and all, which were meticulously researched in a lab.

Bronze studs of this type are very rare in Northwest Europe, but are recorded for a number of rich graves of the Hallstatt C period in southern Germany, where they are known to decorate yokes and horse-gear. The majority of our small studs have straight legs, which were used to decorate wood, leather or a combination of both. Our studs were probably produced in series using a rather simple method (section 9.3). Metallurgical research suggests that the whitish colour they have now is due to the fact that they were tinned in order to create a silvery appearance. Residue is preserved in the head of some studs, but unfortunately it could not be determined what is stuck inside them (chapter 11). Although disturbed by the burning and re-shuffling of the pyre debris by the mourners, detailed analysis of remains in blocks shows that most studs decayed while they were still inserted into the organic material. Rows of studs often fossilized together through corrosion, even though the organic material itself almost completely disappeared. Fine-grained analysis of studs *in situ*, particularly of V 173, by far the largest cluster of finds (reported in chapter 7; Fig. 7.22) shows that studs were organized in geometric patterns of straight lines and groups of three, but also in rather arbitrary clusters. Small studs were dominant, but large studs (always with their legs folded) were part of the same decorative pattern. For these decorative patterns, we found parallels in Central European Hallstatt finds. The majority of the small studs have straight legs. V 173 represents a unit that was shoved aside after the burning while the stud-decorated object(s) still had coherence. The two complete ring fragments behind it (V 165 and V 218) must have been part of it. A ring of studs in V 173 (Fig. 7.30) and beyond it (V 176) may have decorated a wooden knob as is known from Hallstatt C yokes (section 7.7). As to the question what it was these studs decorated, we put forward several hypotheses (section 7.8), all of which have their pros and cons. The most likely scenario in our view is that we are dealing with the remains of leather panels of a yoke decorated with many small and a few large bronze studs and with wooden knobs of a yoke, in combination with leather horse-tack that incorporated bronze rings V 165 and V 218. These must have been dismantled from a yoke and horses and carefully placed along the pyre. Of the entire wagon/horse-gear assemblage, only parts were selected to be burned at this location. Missing are wagon decorations, the axle-caps, horse-bits and the like. But there is also no sign of other parts we usually find in association with horse-gear in Hallstatt C graves in the Low Countries, like swords, situlae, axes and personal adornments. Only a very specific selection of elements was placed on the pyre and left there.

### *16.6.4 Burning the deceased*

A few burned bone fragments, one of which is a large fragment of a human fibula, show that the deceased was burned at the location of our block V 1000/the northern part of V 1001. The white colour of the bones shows that he (it was probably a "he", see below) was burned at a temperature of ca. 800 °C (chapter 12). The cremation must have gone well, but the large amount of remaining charcoal chunks make clear that something prevented the pyre from burning to ashes as would normally have happened. Perhaps a wind picked up at the end, or it started to rain. Many bronzes do also show impact of fire. This is particularly the case for those located in V 1000, but much less visible in the case of the huge stud cluster V 173. This coherent unit – studs still affixed into their original component – may therefore have been located along or at the rim of the pyre.

### *16.6.5 Picking things out, leaving things in place*

When the fire was out, the mourners searched through the remains and picked out certain elements: cremated bone remains in the first place, but also bronze elements and parts of the decorated bone. If it was their intention to collect all human bone fragments, they may have overlooked several small bone fragments and the two small fragments of the burned decorated bone object, but it is hard to accept that they simply overlooked the large fibula fragment. The same is true for the fragments of bronze rings with square cross-section. The large fragment V 177 (Fig. 7.2) on top of block V 1000 was broken, but this cannot have been the result of the burning. It must have been broken by people, before or after the cremation. Its missing parts were not found and in this case it can be ruled out that this is because they were overlooked by the excavators or got lost due to later disturbances. The first is unlikely because all soil here was lifted in blocks and X-rayed and searched through in a very detailed way in the Restaura laboratory. The second option can be dismissed because there are no disturbances at this location. So people not only picked out human bones, they also picked out – and broke on the spot? – fragments of other objects.

It is just as important to note that they not only picked things out, they also *left other things in place*: fragments of rings, and a coherent set of what we presume were stud-decorated elements of a yoke and associated horse tack were left. By the time of excavation, the dense cluster of studs V 173 immediately caught the eye after the covering sods were removed and this must only have been stronger when the material still had its original whitish glimmer. By its coherence and position, we reconstructed that V 173 was one intact piece of stud-decorated organic material with associated rings that was shoved aside (for the northern edge, studs were in intact position but lying with their legs up (Fig. 7.40), indicating that the organic sheet here got folded). One large chunk of charcoal seems to have been displaced as well (see Fig. 5.2). A smaller, very comparable piece containing *in situ* studs probably placed on wood is represented by V 176. This one was found ca. 1 m northwest of V 173. The spatial ordering of the burned wood indicates that it was partly displaced and heaped after the searching by the mourners. The southern part of V 1001 represents wood shoved to the south and V 1003 material worked and displaced to the west.

### *16.6.6 Burying the deceased*

Some 30 cm south of the charcoal spread, in a small pit, a complete *Schrägbals*-urn was dug into the decapitated soil in a small rectangular pit that is almost just as deep as the height of the urn (Fig. 4.21 and 6.1). It was half-filled with cremated

bone. Although one side was damaged by bioturbation (probably by the badger tunnelling past it), the main body of cremated bones was intact. These represent the remains of one male individual in the age of 23-40 year (chapter 12; Tab. 12.4-6). There were no pathological conditions recognized and animal bones and grave gifts are absent. The fill of the urn was collected in different levels, but no form of sequencing could be determined. It is remarkable that there were relatively few skull elements. The bones from the urn have the same colour (*i.e.* were exposed to the same temperature) as those from the pyre debris along which it was situated. Also, there are no double elements. Although there is no definitive proof, it seems very likely that this urn contained the remains of the deceased whose body was burned on the pyre. The fact that the urn contained only 640 g of bones cannot be explained by the damage done to the urn but must be due to the fact that only a part of the collected bone was deposited in the urn. Even if we add up the bones from the pyre to those of the urn we still have too few bones to make up an entire skeleton. This means that some bones were picked out of the burned out pyre, whereas other were left lying there, and of those picked out only a part was put into the urn. The mourners must have taken the other (a.o. skull) fragments with them. We can only speculate what they did with it.

The urn was dug in the soil, but very undeep. It is located just outside the pyre debris and almost exactly in the centre of the sod-covered barrow that would be built on top of it. We therefore assume that this was the man whose remains were associated with the special stud-decorated organic material that was deposited along the pyre remains. His remains were placed into an urn that is very similar in fabric and form to urns placed as secondary graves in the Bronze Age mound 2 and probably also in mound 8 (chapter 6), and centrally in a very small urnfield grave elsewhere at Zevenbergen (mound 10). All this must have happened during the Early Iron Age. Arguments for this dating are the type of urn and the small bronze studs, three C14-datings of wood from the pyre debris and one C14-dating of cremated bone from the urn (Fig. 4.36). It is also in accordance with the pollen samples from the surface of the mound, which because of the presence of beech (*Fagus*) date to the Iron Age rather than Bronze Age.

### *16.6.7 Treating things and human remains in the same manner*

When the fire at the top of the mound went out, the funeral ritual went on. The mourners collected the largest parts of the bones, but left a few in places. One part of the pyre more or less haphazardly came to be scattered on the western part of the centre (V 1003 and V 1004). If there were originally any bronzes lying here, all of them must have been taken out. One remarkable thing was left – an unidentifiable piece of iron at the westernmost end of the charcoal spread. This is the only piece of iron found in the entire centre. A coherent and largely intact stud-decorated organic panel(s) (V 173) was shoved aside and came to lie at the western end, with two associated rings (possibly attached to leather horse tack). A smaller part of what probably was also part of it, but which may have been broken or torn due to the fire, came to lie at a heap of material at the northern end (V 176). Bronze was picked from the centre of the debris (V 1000) and at least in one case deliberately broken (V 177). The other fragments of burned rings were also all found here and none of them can represent material in their original setting. So walking from west to east, one would see material scattered in all directions in the west, a heavily searched-through centre, with conspicuous bones and large fragments of rings still in place, to a dense and almost intact cluster of heavily stud-decorated organic material *in situ* in the east. The centre was swept through, but not cleaned up – V 173 and the rings represent material that was deliberately and

carefully put aside: after its transformation by the fire it was meant to stay here, just like a selection of the cremated bone which was left at the pyre and buried in the urn. One could say that after transformation, objects were being treated like the remains of a body or vice versa (*cf.* Brück/Fontijn in press). Of other things we know that they must have been picked out but were not re-deposited, at least not at the location we excavated (like the missing bone fragments or the other fragments of the large ring V 177). We can only guess what people did with them and it is also interesting that although the urn was placed next to an unusually rich assemblage of burned bronzes, not a single piece of bronze was put in the urn.

We conclude that, even though there are many things about these actions we do not understand, every decision to pick things out or leave others lying, might have been meaningful here. The pyre debris was not a bunch of meaningless leftovers, but a collection of material, important in its own right.

## 16.7 Building mound 7

The significance of the pyre remains and the urn also come to the fore in what was the next step in the funeral ritual. The large spread of material (undoubtedly considerably more spread out by the searching and moving of stuff than it was immediately after the burning) was covered with large sods. This process ended up in raising of the original elevation with at least 1 m and smoothing its irregular form into that of an impressive, monumental barrow.

### *16.7.1 Cutting sods*

Sods were cut from the immediate surroundings of the mound. They look very similar to the soil they cover and have the same pollen spectrum as the surface underneath the mound (chapter 10). Analysis of the soils confirms we are dealing with the same soils (appendix 2). Some sods (the alder rich examples) were probably cut nearer to the wet depressions (in the eastern part of the Zevenbergen). As at least 815 $m^2$ of heather had to be cut for building this mound (chapter 10), we expect that heath was cut in alternating strips to prevent serious damage being done to the environment. If this was not the case, one continuous denuded surface must have marked the heath. Such a bared part of the land takes 40 years to recover. In the mean time, further deflation and drift sands may occur. If mound 3 was built not long after (or before) mound 7, it may have become more important to cut the sods in strips. Evidence for aeolian deposits at the Zevenbergen show that sand deflation took place during the Middle Bronze Age (van Wijk *et al.* 2009, 115).

Only in the centre of the mound, sods were placed in such a way (neatly stacked horizontally) that it allows us to see that we are dealing with sods of rectangular shape. Two kinds of sods were recognized: A-E sods and B sods. The former have the black vegetation layer and the eluvial horizon of the Humus Podzol, the latter also have some part of the B horizon underneath the E. The thickness a sod could be cut was determined by how the roots penetrated. A-E sods need not necessarily be thicker than B sods (Fig. 4.25). Most sods are of the A-E variety. All sods were individually drawn both on profile sections and on the horizontal levels. It is usually not so easy to measure length and width exactly, as sods are usually not positioned in such a way that length and width can be exactly determined (section 4.5.5). Measuring their thickness and length shows that there was variation, but lengths are mainly between 50 and 70 cm. Width is very hard to determine, and short "lengths" (20-35 cm) may well represent "widths". Thickness ranges from 10 to 45 cm. Sods must have been heavy; 5 to 10 kg may be a rather normal

weight. Stretchers or planks must have been used to transport them. Spilt sand (from the grey E horizon) found at the original surface underneath the sods might indicate that sods were in these cases handed over with vegetation side upwards, spilling some sand from beneath, only to be turned upside down at the last moment (Fig. 4.23).

### *16.7.2 Stacking sods*

Most sods were stacked with their vegetation side down. This was regular practice in both the Bronze Age and Iron Age, and it has been observed in burial mounds all over the Netherlands (*cf.* van der Linde/Fontijn 2011). On flat parts like at the centre of the mound, sods were stacked horizontally. However, this was very neatly done for the sods that cover the remains of the pyre, and the bronzes, but more irregularly at the flat part south of it (the corner of quadrant 105; Fig. 4.13). As the large chunks of charcoal or the stud decorated material must have created irregularities on the surface to be covered, it is all the more interesting to see how neatly ordered the sods in the centre are. Here, up to four layers of sods stacked horizontally could be recognized. The smallest sods recognized are situated in this part of the mound. It gives the impression that the centre was treated with the utmost care.

### *16.7.3 Organizing the work*

Although only two quadrants were excavated, a rather good impression was gained of how the sod stacking was organized. There are differences between the way of working on the flat top (centre 106 and 105) and the northern slope (106), and the stacking of sods on the western and southern slope (105).

Two actions were essential in creating the smooth mound, and we cannot see which was done first. One is that the depression north of the small knick (the original lee side of the elevation) had to be filled in, in order to create a flat basis for sod stacking from the northern centre to the northern slope. This depression was flattened with sods that were not ordered in a rather arbitrary way (Fig. 4.28). The other action is that the chunks of charcoal and bronze had to be covered with sods. As these also formed irregularities on the otherwise flat surface, a flat basis had to result from it. The neat way in which sods were stacked here in up to four layers shows that they successfully accomplished this. The best way of working seems to have been to first fill in the northern depression, thus "evening out" the irregular surface and creating a flat base layer for further sod building. Then, the base layer of sods was lain at the northern part of the centre, over the pyre debris.

People then went on to raise the sods in the centre and proceeded to stack sods along the northern flank. When they reached the slope, sods were placed slantwise. This must have been done in order to create a gradual, smooth flank, instead of a blockwise transition. We could observe that the horizontally placed sods in the centre and the diagonally placed sods at the slope intersect (Fig. 4.13 and 4.18). Thus, they were built in one session and as part of one system. The height to which the centre was raised with horizontally stacked sods must have served as reference point for the height at which the sods at the flanks were piled up. Apart from their orientation in height (horizontal, diagonal), there are also different ways to place sods alongside each other in the horizontal plane. At the northern slope of the mound, it is clear that the majority of sods were oriented parallel to the radius of the mound. Summing up, it is suggested that, perhaps after an initial levelling of the northern depression, sod stacking proceeded from the centre to the northern slope in one uninterrupted system.

The way of working at the southern and western slope was slightly different, and we have indications that two work systems met here. The southern and western slopes did not have awkward depressions to be filled in, but rather, the original mound already had a gradual surface here. As a matter of fact, most of our trench 105 actually had a rather flat base with even some higher bumps in the south than in the centre (*cf.* Fig. 4.34). Using the preferred height of the barrow in the centre as reference, the southern and western flanks could be gradually filled in, using the already higher basis here. As a matter of fact, we indeed see that much fewer sods were used here to raise the original elevation and a very gradual transition from sods to original flank could be constructed here (Fig. 4.13 and 4.15). Interestingly, at the westernmost end, most sods had their A horizon upwards (Fig. 4.26).

The sequence of activities in our trench 105 was probably as follows. In the corner of the quadrant, sods were still placed more or less horizontally as an extension of the way of working started on top of the pyre debris. Apparently, after the basal layer of sods was laid out, in the southern part sods were less neatly stacked than in the northern part. This somewhat irregular ordering continues until the slope is reached, but then changes. In one location, we see a transition to sods placed slantwise, built against a "core". In one place, we see an irregularity in the sod ordering, where a depression in the built-up sods seems to have been filled in later (Fig. 4.14). This suggests that two ways of working met. What is also interesting to note is that in quadrant 105 sods are much more irregularly ordered in the horizontal plane. Unlike in the NE-quadrant 106, in 105 sods tend to be placed perpendicular to the radius of the mound. In conclusion, the organization of sods in 105 suggests that it was either added at a later stage, or carried out by a different work group.

It is difficult to say anything definitive on the way in which the barrow-building was organized as only 50% of the mound was excavated. The following conclusions can be drawn:

From the first moment, there must have been a generally accepted idea on what the barrow should look like. The sod stacking in the centre must have started first and the height reached there served as a reference for sod stacking at the flanks. There must have been a clear general agreement on how to proceed and one or a few people who saw to it that everything went according to plan.

The desired shape was to create a round mound that followed the original contours of the elevation underneath it, but adjusted to give it an even, smooth shape (infilling the northern depression). The flanks of the barrow were to have a smooth, almost invisible transition to the flanks.

The southern half was built at a later stage or by a different work group. The latter option is the most likely, as otherwise the work would have taken quite some time.

Once finished, the barrow must have been somewhat higher than it is now (at least 30 cm was lost during more recent disturbances like forest ploughing). It was not marked by a peripheral structure like a post circle.

Sods at the western flank all have their A horizon upwards. It is possibly that this originally was true for all covering sods, in such a way creating a barrow that even just after its construction became part of the heath environment.

Mound 7 actually was a mound on a mound. A natural elevation was opportunistically used to create a maximum of visual effect. The people who built mound 3, which is located on a flat basis, must have cut many more sods to create a mound that looks the same as mound 7.

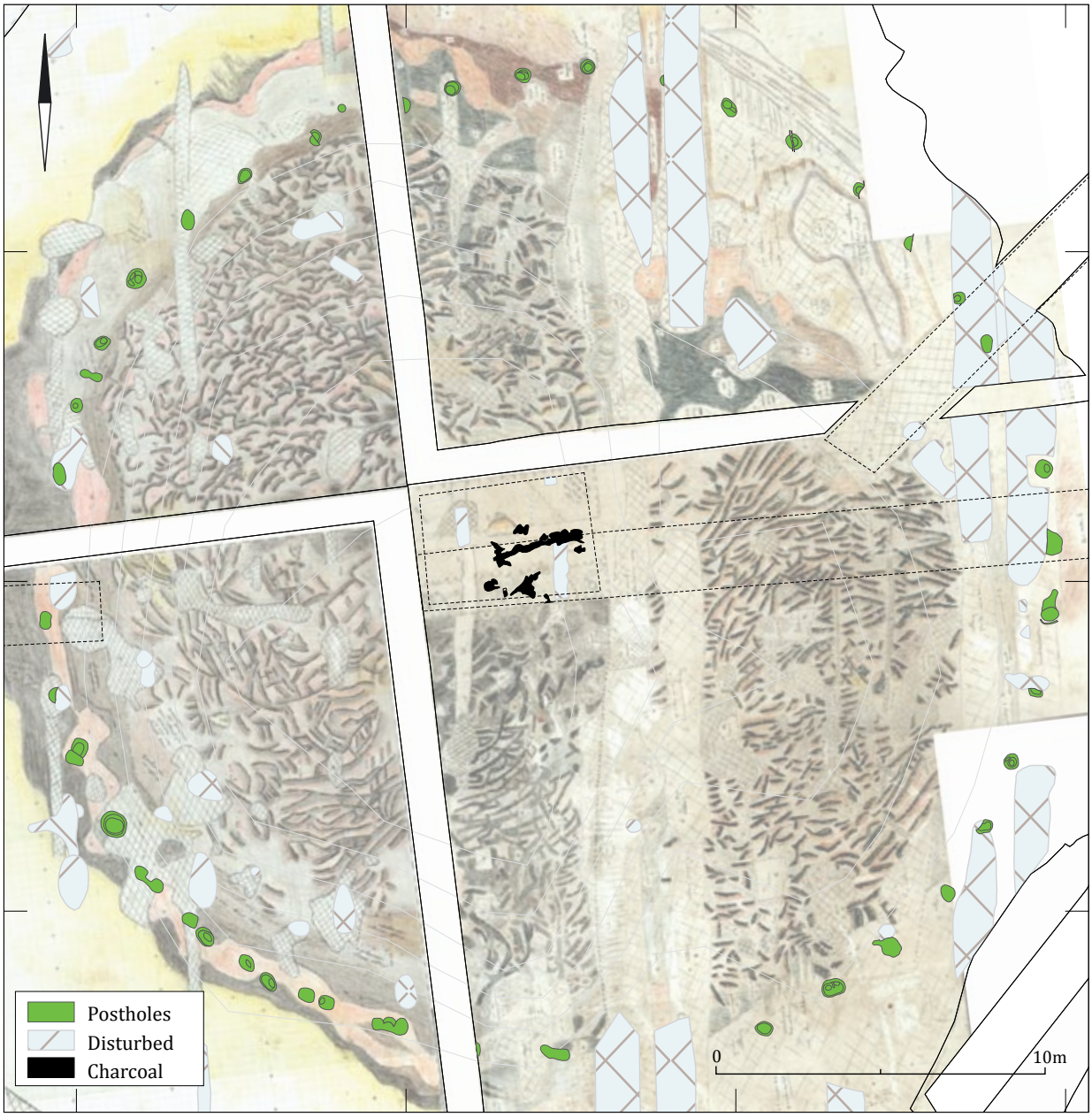


*Fig. 16.7 Mound 3. Compilation of field drawings of sods, the wood in the centre (black) and the traces of the post circle. Figure after van Wijk et al. 2009, fig. 6.14/J. van Donkersgoed.*

## 16.8 Mound 3: a remarkable companion to mound 7

Mound 7 was not the only huge mound built at Zevenbergen. It has a counterpart in another Early Iron Age mound, no. 3 (Fig. 16.7).

A large barrow measuring 30 m in diameter, with a current height of 60 to 80 cm high (but originally higher than that). If we leave the small urnfield graves no. 8 to 11 out of consideration, mound 3 is the only barrow that is situated outside the barrow row. It was built along the northern edge of the high lying area, but on a flat area that is slightly lower than the ridge on which mound 7 was built. Its position in the landscape has similarities to the nearby chieftain's burial of Oss , that other huge barrow: it is positioned in such a way that it overlooks the low lying area to the north. Its original vista can no longer be imagined, as it is now cut off from that area by the highway that is much higher (Fig. 16.8), completely reversing the natural relief.

*Fig. 16.8 View on the south-west quadrant of mound 3 in 2004. One can see the traces of the post circle in front. The highway at the background inverts the original relief. In prehistory, from here one would have looked at lower lying grounds. Figure after van Wijk et al. 2009, fig. 6.18.*

Like mound 7, mound 3 was built on a heath in one phase with heather sods. Like in the case of mound 7, in the centre burned wood was found. One of the larger examples was of an oak that originally had over 180 year rings. Associated with it, fragments of two iron and two bronze objects were found. There is an iron pin and a pin-like object of unknown type, one completely burned piece of bronze, and one broken and decorated piece. It is unclear what we are dealing here with, but in shape it has similarities to a bronze sword (hilt-blade transition). The decoration is totally without parallel though. In addition to this, there is one piece of cremated bone which has been determined as human. Like in the case of mound 7, we see broken, transformed and incomplete pieces of a human and of objects together with wood. The oak fragment may even represent a quite special tree, judging by its age. It has been interpreted as an extreme *pars pro toto* grave (*cf.* Fontijn 2002, chapter 9). Apart from these objects in the centre, no other grave was found. C14-datings of the wood demonstrate that we are dealing with an Early or early Middle Iron Age barrow (between 680 to 400 cal. BC; van Wijk *et al.* 2009, 102). This means that it dates to the same period as mound 7 and the chieftain's burial of Oss, although it cannot be seen which of these mounds was built first. The centre was covered with horizontal sods, just like in the case of mound 7.

There is an indication that these sods were cut at some distance from mound 3, as the pollen spectra of the sods differ from those of the surface underneath the mound (van Wijk *et al.* 2009, 101). We had comparable difficulties in measuring the size of sods as we had in the case of mound 7 (chapter 4)[99], but 66% of 74 measured sods are reported to be between 40 and 60 cm (van Wijk *et al.* 2009, 98). This fits in well with the measurements we have for the sods of mound 7 (*cf.* Fig. 4.24). For its thickness an average of 8 to 18 cm is given (van Wijk *et al.* 2009, 98-101). For mound 7, the majority of sods have a thickness between 17 and 23 cm, and there are still quite some sods that are thicker than that (Fig. 4.25). In mound 3, A-E sods dominate, but there are also B sods. Just like in the case of all other mounds, most sods were placed with the A horizon downwards. A detailed assessment of the construction method as we did for mound 7 was not done here, although all sods were drawn in the same way as in mound 7. A few

99 This mound was excavated and drawn by drs. C. van der Linde and drs. R. de Leeuwe. Both were also involved in drawing the sods of mound 7, and brought their mound 3 experience with them to mound 7.

observations may be relevant. We are here not dealing with a mound built on a natural elevation: the ground was flat. This means that particular problems that were relevant for mound 7 (like the depression that had to be filled in) did not matter here. Here, we also see that sods in the centre were stacked horizontally (Fig. 4.16), and more diagonally to the outer end of the barrow. Against a core of horizontally stacked sods, diagonally placed sods were laid, creating the desired slope in the profile of the barrow (*cf.* van Wijk *et al.* 2009, fig. 6.19 profile section at the top). This way of working is probably not just characteristic for the Zevenbergen, but might represent a "best practice" known to communities in other regions of the Low Countries as well. For example, we documented a similar way of sod stacking (horizontal in the centre, diagonal against a core) at two Middle to Late Iron Age mounds we excavated at Apeldoorn- Echoput (mounds 1 and 2; Bourgeois/Fontijn 2011; van der Linde/Fontijn 2011). More analysis is needed to find out if this mound was also built by different work groups or at different stages.[100] Like in the case of mound 7, this mound misses at least 30 to 50 cm of its top. De Leeuwe (2007, 214) assumes that it was 1 m high. If that were the case, some 2350 $m^2$ of heath must have been cut for sods (De Leeuwe 2007, 210; 214). This is considerably more than the minimum of 815 $m^2$ heath required to provide the sods to build mound 7. So, although mound 3 and 7 are comparable in size, for building mound 3 an area needed to be stripped that is much larger than in the case of mound 7.

The barrow was visually marked with a post circle (Fig. 16.7), something that is absent around mound 7, and rather rare for burial mounds from the Early Iron Age. We will come back to the significance of this mound in relation to mound 7 in section 16.13.

## 16.9 A small (Early Iron Age) urnfield?

Another Early Iron Age addition to the ancient barrow landscape is a group of damaged ring ditch features: no. 9 to 12. Only in the case of no. 10 and 11, the ditches surrounded a cremation grave, one of which (no. 10) could be dated to the Early Iron Age by the typology of the urn (Fig. 6.4). No. 11 contained the damaged remains of an urn which on the basis of its fabric could be dated to the Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age (van Wijk *et al.* 2009, 126-131). Nos. 10 to 12 lie north of mound 2 and south of mound 3 (Fig. 16.9). In no case, clear traces of a mound were recognized. If the role of the post alignments was to compartmentalize the barrow landscape, then these three small ring ditches are situated in one such compartment (by post alignment P3 in the west and P1 in the east. The other ring ditch, no. 9, was badly damaged, but by its form we assume it once defined another small barrow. This one, then, would be the only one situated outside that "compartment". As we are in no position to reconstruct the finer chronology of the post alignments in relation to the smaller Early Iron Age graves, we wish to leave out a discussion on issues of spatial ordering as suggested above, until more precise dates become available.

These ring ditch structures are a remarkable element in the entire barrow landscape. Although we lack definitive evidence that they were all graves, two of them certainly were, and at least one of them can be safely dated to the Early Iron Age, the same period in which two huge mounds were constructed. Did the difference in size matter? We suppose it did. We see a similar contrast in size at the chieftain's burial of Oss, where the largest mound of all is surrounded by a comparable loose

100 An interesting pilot study is to be found in De Leeuwe 2007.

cluster of other Early Iron Age graves (Fig. 1.14). It seems that in both locations very large round mounds and small ones were positioned next to each other, indicating at least a ceremonial or ritual hierarchy in the landscape.

## 16.10 New burials in ancient mounds

We have now seen that people buried the dead in small ring ditch surrounded graves and under two very large mounds. There is a third category of graves that mattered here as well. At least the remains of two Early Iron Age dead were interred in urns in the mounds of Bronze Age barrows nos. 2 and 8 (Fig. 16.6). If there was also such a secondary grave in mound 4 remains unknown, as its mound was very damaged. At the time of burial, both mounds were already more than 500 years old. By this act, these old mounds were not only practically, but also conceptually revived as burial locations. It has been argued that the interment of the urn central in mound 8 went hand in hand with the digging of a ring ditch around it (van Wijk *et al.* 2009, 125-126), in line with the ring ditch structures that by that time were constructed at Zevenbergen. This view, however, is not supported by the pollen from that ditch (De Kort 2009, 163).

These urn graves, the graves surrounded by ring ditches like no. 10 and 11, and the central grave of mound 7 all represent events that took place in the same period. The Early Iron Age urns in mound 2, mound 7, and mound 10 have a similar fabric and comparable shape. The same holds true for pottery sherds that lack a clear context, but were found close to mound 8 (chapter 6). The urn from mound 8 is different, but there is no reason to doubt that this one belongs to the Early Iron Age as well. During the Early Iron Age not only new graves were constructed (the ring ditch graves and mound 3 and 7), much older monuments were integrated as well. Very conspicuous elements of the Iron Age re-appropriation of the Zevenbergen barrow landscape, already hinted at before, are the post alignments. It is to them that we must now pay attention.

## 16.11 Dividing the barrow landscape: the role of monumental post alignments

One of the most special discoveries of the 2004 campaign are the post alignments found all over the Zevenbergen barrow landscape (Fig. 16.6 and 16.9). There were no new post alignments found in those parts of the site excavated in 2007. The Zevenbergen post alignments have been discussed in detail by two of us before, and for that reason we will only briefly summarize the main conclusion (Fokkens 2012; Fokkens *et al.* 2009; van Wijk *et al.* 2009). The post alignments are all single, widely spaced structures. In places, they were flanked by small four-post constructions. They are thought to be part of a complex of alignments dating to the Early Iron Age, although this date cannot be definitively substantiated (Fokkens *et al.* 2009). Based on this assumption the different features encountered give us a distinct insight of the spatial organization of the environment of a (older) barrow group and urnfield dating to the Early Iron Age. In general the structures can be characterized as singular post alignments (with a two-post extension in two alignments) and solitary four-post structures (Fokkens *et al.* 2009, 131-139). The five singular alignments differ strongly in size (116 m, 58 m, >18 m, >17 m, and 8 m) and orientation. The two four-post structures look very comparable, measuring 1.8 by 1.9 m and 1.3 by 1.3 m. Fokkens *et al.* (2009, 136) stated that these structures are an integral part of the cemetery and therefore that the burial ground of Zevenbergen, at least in the Early Iron Age, was not exclusively used for burials.

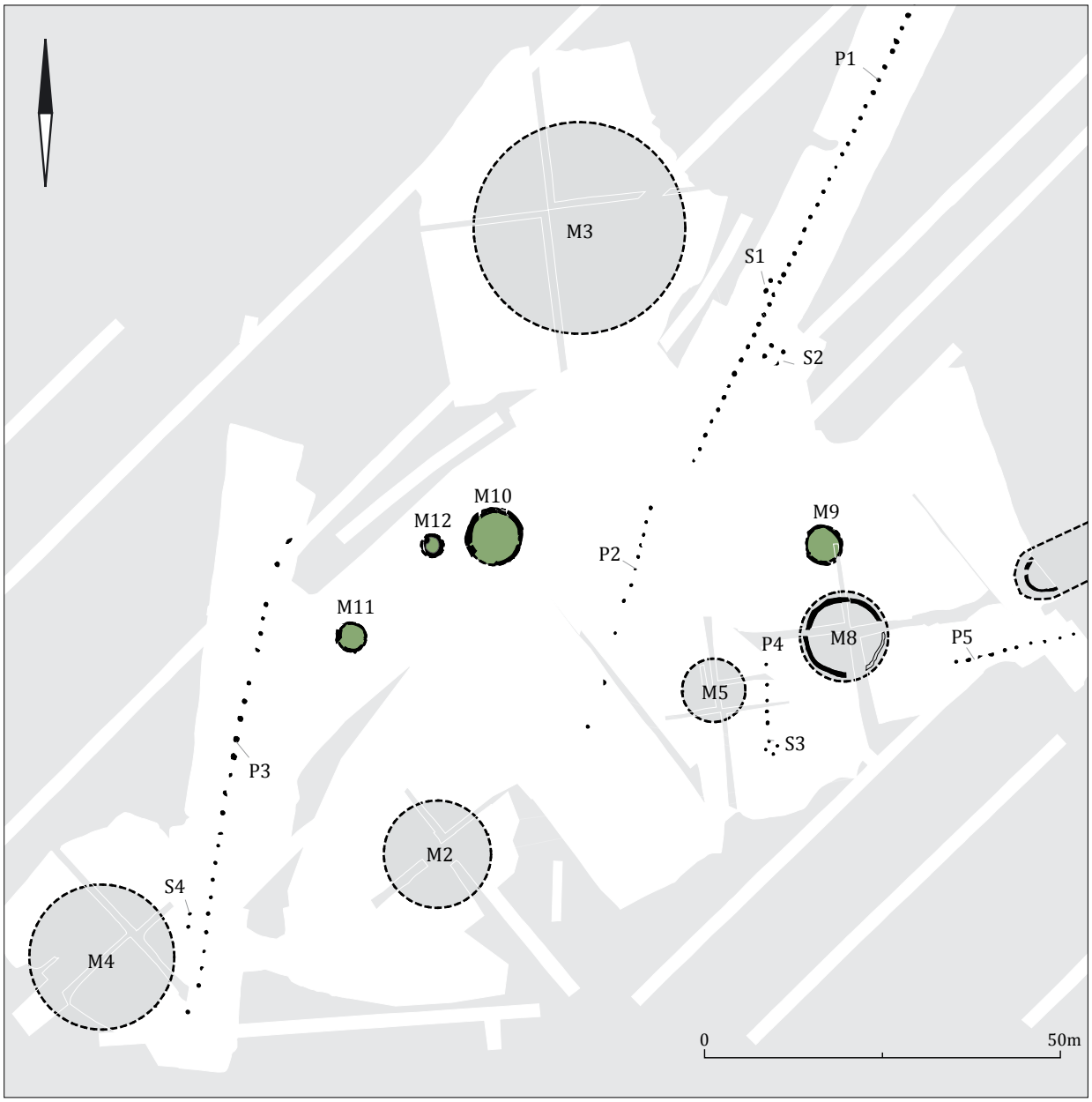


*Fig. 16.9 Detail of the Zevenbergen barrow group showing the position of the small urnfield graves 8 to 11 (in green), mound 3 and the post alignments. Figure after van Wijk et al. 2009, fig. 6.44/by J. van Donkersgoed.*

But what was the function and meaning of these structures? The only parallel for the singular post rows known at the moment is located in the cemetery of Slabroekse Heide located several kilometres to the south, of which the most important use-phase is also in the Early Iron Age (Jansen *et al.* 2011; Jansen/Louwen *in prep*.). In contrast to the more common, mostly older, double or triple post rows as found under the chieftain's burial of Oss and probably the eight-post structure under mound 7 as well, the post rows of Slabroekse Heide and Oss-Zevenbergen do not have a spatial association with a particular barrow. Based on a parallel of a cemetery in the English Barleycroft where similar post rows are also not associated with barrows, van Wijk *et al.* posit the idea of a compartmentalization of the barrow landscape through post rows (van Wijk *et al.* 2009, tab. 6.1; Evans/Knight 2001). Following from this, the two small "extensions" in two post rows could have formed an entrance or passageway (Fig. 16.9). Creating a visible compartmentalization of a monumental funerary landscape suggests that certain

zones in the barrow landscape were symbolically shielded from others and/or that particular routes through that landscape were emphasized (for example, in relation to formal funerary ceremonies where different groups gathered).

The question remains, however, whether the post rows formed a physical barrier. The distance between the generally sturdy posts makes it difficult to determine whether these areas were closed off. If there was indeed a compartmentalization of the cemetery it seems to have mostly been symbolic, which, moreover, need not diminish its significance.

It is also plausible that the erection of the post rows played a part in a process of redefining the cemetery whereby an older cemetery is given new meaning. As if it were "reclaimed" in a broader context of radical changes that seem to occur at the start of the Iron Age (Fontijn/Fokkens 2007).

Explaining the two four-post structures is also difficult (Fig. 16.9). From funerary contexts in the Netherlands we know of several parallels where such four-post constructions were placed in the centre of what would later become Middle Bronze Age barrows (Theunissen 1999, 91). They are considered to be funerary structures or exhumation platforms, functions that fit well in a funerary context (*cf.* the discussion in Theunissen 1999, 91-92). Fokkens *et al.* (2009), however, point out the physical similarities with *spiekers*, grain storage structures that occur in almost all Iron Age settlements. It is possible that this is no coincidence, but rather a reference to a symbolic relationship between grain storage and death (see also Bradley 2005). This interweaving of ritual and daily life is, however, hard to substantiate, especially based on the features themselves.

Whatever the functions of the various structures may have been, the area was more than a burial ground restricted to the mounds. The surroundings of the mounds were also shaped and/or (regularly) used. Presumably, for funerary purposes of an as yet unknown nature.

## 16.12 Early Iron Age: re-definition of an ancestral landscape

If we now order the sequence of developments sketched above, it appears that the Early Iron Age represents a fundamental episode in the long-term history of the Zevenbergen barrow landscape. It should be emphasized that we have no means to precisely date mound 3, mound 7, the post alignments or the other Early Iron Age structures. The exact sequence cannot be reconstructed in detail anymore, unfortunately. What we can see, is how each act related to the basal structure of the barrow group and adhered to it or departed from it.

During the Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age, the existing barrow row was first extended with one (or two, if mound 1 was older than mound 7) long barrow. During the Early Iron Age, however, a more fundamental change took place. The construction of mound 7 represents both continuity and change. It is another addition to a by then already age-old barrow row, with a shape that mimics that of the Bronze Age barrows (continuity), but then strongly exaggerated (contrast), dwarfing all existing mounds (Fig. 16.6). Mound 3, then, clearly breaks with the old spatial ordering. With its monumental size, it is situated outside the existing order, near the edge of the higher grounds. In terms of its remarkable *pars pro toto* content, it looks more like a token structure than like a "true" grave. The otherness of mound 3 seems to have been brought out in its separate position. Nevertheless, as we noted before, although mound 7's content seems more substantial, we also see a deliberate incompleteness in what was deposited in its centre (chapter 5, 6, and 7). Mound 3 differs more in degree than in kind. Whatever the motivation

behind the token deposition in the centre of mound 3, its size and the efforts put into its construction underline that what was inside of it was very important to the communities who built it.

Although mound 7 may have looked even more impressive than mound 3 by its clever use of existing topography, the two are comparable in terms of energy put into their construction, which exceeds by far the pains given to mark the graves deceased buried in the ring ditch graves. These "humble" graves were also built outside the existing barrow row, in an intermediary position between mound 3 and the row of older mounds. Was this deliberately done? Unfortunately, we have too little information on the graves to say more on this in detail, but some details are remarkable. The huge mound 3 only contains one piece of cremated bone, whereas the secondary Early Iron Age grave dug into mound 2 contains 2014 g of cremated bone (van Wijk *et al.* 2009, 85). For the Early Iron Age, this is an excessively large amount of bones from one individual (compare for example the data from the urnfields in Theuws/Roymans 1999 or the 640 g of our own deceased in mound 7). So close to each other, we seem to have two ends of the continuum – a huge barrow containing just one bone fragment in the centre, and an urn without a mound of its own having a near complete skeleton! The bones in the mound 2 urn are those of a female of 30 to 50 years who was buried with – again – an unusual number of grave gifts, one of which was decorated with ochre – another unusual characteristic (see Fig. 6.3).

The post alignments represent another re-ordering of the old barrow landscape; a lot of energy was spent in creating long and truly monumental sight lines that visually seem to parcel or compartmentalize the barrows (Fig. 16.6). The motivations behind it remain hidden, but given the efforts put into it, it must have been something that was very important to these communities, like the construction of the enigmatic mound 3. What the alignments practically do is visually structure the environment. We do not know if they all stood side by side, or if one was built later than another. One contrast that they do emphasize is to separate mound 3 from its counterpart mound 7 (Fig. 16.6 and 16.9).

Although the barrow group may have been in use during the Late Bronze Age (mound 1 and 6), it is during the Early Iron Age that definitive changes took place in its ordering. Old barrows were again used in a totalizing way (at least two of three), valorising and re-defining ancestors, and building another barrow in the existing line, it might have felt like extending an ancient genealogy, or fitting in within an existing narrative in a by then ancestral landscape. The time distance between the Middle Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age in itself makes clear that, although recognized as older graves, true genealogical links between Bronze Age and Iron Age dead are very unlikely to have governed people's actions in the Iron Age. Ancestors were claimed, defined, and appropriated.

As some dead were buried in existing mounds, whereas another one – the man under mound 7 – got an impressive mound of its own, the conclusion seems unavoidable that in the manner in which Early Iron Age dead were inserted into an ancestral landscape, categorical distinctions were made. If we extend this line of thought, an intriguing question is what the visually deviating ring ditch additions placed at some distance of this old row mean. Did the people who buried them deliberately keep their distance?

The Early Iron Age use of the old Zevenbergen barrow landscape seems to have a ritual syntax of its own, in which differentiations were made between categories of deceased. Unravelling this – if possible at all – is not something that can be done on the basis of a book like this. Here, more and new research is needed. Without interpreting the order we identified now as a basic reflection of basic

social differences, it goes without saying the mound 7 represents a pivotal element in that landscape. Fitting in and extending the ancient barrow row in order and shape, mound 7 is at the same time a magnification of all existing monuments.

This brings us to an essential problem: mound 7 was not the only monumental barrow in this area. Within a distance of a few hundred metres, there were actually two others: mound 3 and the Vorstengraf. This is a unique situation for the Early Iron Age in the Netherlands, and begs the question: why?

## 16.13 Three adjacent monumental Early Iron Age barrows: thoughts on the social significance of the Oss barrow landscape

Even though we cannot unravel the finer sequence of events that re-shaped the Zevenbergen barrow landscape during the Early Iron Age, we can safely conclude that a fundamental change took place during the Early Iron Age. If we wish to place this into perspective, it is necessary to zoom out. As set out several times in this book, Zevenbergen is only one stretch of a much larger barrow landscape (chapter 1 and 2). Groups of barrows are known from many locations on the northern edge of the Maashorst. In fact, we may describe this landscape as a discontinuous spread of barrows – zones rather than cemeteries (*cf.* Fontijn 2010). Research of the *Ancestral Mounds* team has shown that this is not exceptional, but very common. Very comparable zones of barrows can be found at the ice-pushed ridges of Nijmegen, Rhenen, and Ede for example (Bourgeois in press). For Zevenbergen, only a few hundred metres to the west, there is another group of barrows – those of Oss-Vorstengraf (Fig. 1.2). To place Zevenbergen in the right perspective, it is to that group that we now must turn.

Vorstengraf and Zevenbergen are now separated by a highway, but must be seen in close connection – if not as one spread of barrows than at least as two clusters very nearby (Fokkens/Jansen 2004). The Vorstengraf group developed around a Middle Bronze Age barrow, just like at Zevenbergen. Similarly, the monumental Early Iron Age mound was flanked by extensively dispersed, non-monumental

*Fig. 16.10 The excavation of the Vorstengraf by F.C. Bursch in 1933. A trench was dug through the already damaged mound. The sods are well visible – note the similarities to the sods with which mound 7 was built. They are also in inverted position and stacked horizontally to diagonally, like in the case of mound 3 and the western half of mound 7. Figure ©RMO.*

*Fig. 16.11 Objects found in the chieftain's burial of Oss. Note that this is only a "presentable" selection and not the complete inventory of the chieftain's burial. Figure ©RMO.*

flat graves and ring ditch graves from the same period (Fig. 1.14). The reason this group has become well-known in archaeological academic circles and to a broad audience is because of one particular barrow: the chieftain's burial of Oss.

As mentioned in the beginning of this book, in 1933 a huge barrow was excavated here by F.C. Bursch (the so-called Hansjoppenberg, see Fig. 1.3 and 16.10). In its centre, a bronze situla was found together with many other items, including iron horse-bits, iron and bronze yoke components, an iron axe and a knife, iron razors, three bronze and iron dress-pins, a whetstone, and a curved iron Mindelheim sword with gold inlay. This extraordinary set of Hallstatt C items finds its closest parallels in so-called Fürstengräber of the Hallstatt period in Central Europe – seen there as members of the elite of a ranked society.

The chieftain's burial of Oss has also been interpreted in this way, particularly because this grave was found in what is the largest barrow found in the Low Countries: a round mound with a diameter of 53 m and at least 1 m high (Fokkens/Jansen 2004). So this is the third huge Early Iron Age barrow apart from mound 3 and 7. The chieftain's burial is clearly the largest of them all. It has been calculated that some 15 000 $m^2$ of heath had to be cut to provide enough sods for a mound this size (compare this to the estimated 815 $m^2$ necessary for mound 7, chapter 10; Fokkens/Jansen 2004, 150). Like mound 3 and 7, the chieftain's burial was surrounded by much smaller graves – ring ditch graves like we have at Zevenbergen (section 16.9) or older graves (Bronze Age barrows nearby). Like in the case of mound 7, the chieftain's burial was built on top of an elevation, in this case a Bronze Age barrow. It has been argued that the central grave of this older mound was even carefully avoided when burying the Iron Age deceased (Fokkens/Jansen 2004, 137).

The chieftain's burial of Oss is one of a group of graves with Hallstatt equipment that is known in the south of the Low Countries. On the basis of a survey of finds it was argued that these included elements from the following categories: weaponry, horse-gear or parts of a four-wheeled wagon, jewellery, and drinking and feasting sets (Roymans 1991, 31), many of which represent imports from Central Europe. More recent research argued that the Hallstatt "chieftains' graves"

can be seen as a mix between novel elements that were added to martial paraphernalia that were already in use for a longer period of time. Particularly, it was suggested that the Hallstatt equipment was re-contextualized in a different way from what was common in Central Europe. Transformation of items and a *pars pro toto* attitude seem to have been important (Fontijn/Fokkens 2007). All these conclusions were done on the basis of data that were mainly collected a long time ago and often during chance discoveries or low quality excavations. The picture that emerges from both Roymans' and Fontijn/Fokkens' inventories is that of a distinct, recurring set of objects. However, with the Zevenbergen excavations we have now found two monumental mounds from the same period that contain objects that lack a parallel in any of the other "Hallstatt chieftain's graves" in the Low Countries. Although the many studs in mound 7 are extremely rare in Northwest European Early Iron Age graves, they are known from Central European rich graves. Given their modest size, it is well possible that if they were part of Hallstatt graves excavated in the past, chances are high that they were not collected or not seen. The collection of fragments from the centre of mound 3 is even more enigmatic. Not one of these objects has a counterpart in any known Hallstatt grave in this region or in Central Europe, but we can be sure that it dates to the Early Iron Age or perhaps earlier part of the Middle Iron Age. We can only guess as to the number of mound 3-like barrows that went unnoticed during excavations in the earlier half of the 20th century.

What the Zevenbergen excavations thus brought us is nuance. Whereas we thought – until very recently – that in the Netherlands there was never more than one Hallstatt "chieftain's grave" in an urnfield, we now have found no less than three monumental Early Iron Age graves in a barrow landscape that actually has little in common with the dense cluster of graves that Early Iron Age urnfields usually are (Fokkens 1997). Although very similar in outer appearance (and construction), the three monumental barrows cover three completely different graves. A collection of horse-gear, a sword with gold-inlayed hilt, elements of a yoke, an iron axe and a knife, razors, a whetstone, dress-pins and the cremated remains of a male without pyre remains interred in a bronze situla in one grave (chieftain's burial), a cremation in an urn deposited with horse tack/yoke elements deliberately left with pyre debris in another (mound 7), and an extreme example of a *pars pro toto* deposition of personal paraphernalia in the centre of a third (mound 3). It almost seems as if they are complementary: there are yoke rosettes and toggles in the chieftain's burial and other elements of the yoke and associated horse tack in mound 7, but no weapons or horse-bits and other bridle components which are present in chieftain's burial. New research by one of us (van der Vaart) shows that the selection, manipulation, and deposition of particular elements of the "Hallstatt package" may well have been what made these items meaningful in the first place. This is indeed what we see in all three graves. Different as they may be in their content, in all the objects were bent, folded, transformed, and dismantled. Objects were picked out, and others were left. What happened to objects also happened to the remains of the deceased. Think of the incompleteness of the remains of the deceased underneath mound 7 in his urn, and of the token deposit of just one bone under a large barrow 30 m in diameter – mound 3, while in contrast the chieftain's burial contains one of the most complete and best-preserved prehistoric cremations ever found.

Whatever exactly happened here, the deposition of different, but related materials under three huge Early Iron Age mounds must have been related in the collective memory of the local communities living here. We may expect that the

people who built mound 7 did know about what was in the chieftain's burial or vice versa (the exact sequence cannot be reconstructed anymore). How else could each of them be so different and still complementary?

All three mounds represent huge accomplishments, probably made to celebrate collective ideals held by a large group of people living here. The three huge mounds visually contrast with the contemporary graves adjacent to them, and for at least two of them we know that they cover the graves of single male individuals. It is common to see this as evidence that these were the graves of chiefs, leading individuals who based their power on connections with Central European exchange networks (Fokkens/Jansen 2004; Roymans 1991). At the same time, it is important – as the excavation of mound 7 showed – to see these huge mounds as constructions made on behalf of and by a wider collective of people. In the complementarities of these three barrows, and particularly in the sheer symbolism of the *pars pro toto* monument of mound 3 we find evidence that these monuments relate just as much to the living as to the social status of the one deceased buried underneath it.

One the one hand, mound 7 gives us a new and unique insight into the vast range of contact networks of communities in the Early Iron Age low countries and how power may derive from it. On the other, it shows us how these were embedded, re-contextualized and celebrated in ritual landscapes of local communities.

## 16.14 Late Medieval period: crossroads in a landscape of terror?

After the Early Iron Age, almost two millennia passed that to our knowledge have not left any archaeological trace at the Zevenbergen. There are no indications that the barrows were used during the later Iron Age. In the Roman Period, the area to the south of the Zevenbergen (around Nistelrode) was intensively occupied (Jansen *et al.* 2011). There were Roman Period burials nearby at Gaalse Heide, Uden-Slabroekse Heide, and Heesch-hoge Wijst. In the latter two cases, native Roman burials were added to prehistoric ones. As far as we can see from the evidence we have, this never happened with the barrows at Zevenbergen or at those of the nearby Vorstengraf, even though barrows like the chieftain's burial, mound 3, and mound 7 visually outrank any other barrow on the Maashorst and must have caught the eye of anyone travelling north of the Maashorst. We also lack pollen records for this period and can only guess at what might have happened at Zevenbergen during the later part of the 1st millennium AD. During

*Fig. 16.12 Grave 4 in mound 2. The victim of a Medieval execution? This pit contained the remains of a young adult of ca. 25 years, who died somewhere in the 13th or 14th century AD. His hands were probably bent behind his back. Figure after van Wijk et al. 2009, fig. 6.12/J. van Donkersgoed.*

the Early Middle Ages, people lived south of the Zevenbergen near Mun, and particularly for the full to Late Middle Ages, we know several settlements south of the Zevenbergen (like Nistelrode; Jansen *et al.* 2011). What is clear is that in the Late Medieval Period, the Zevenbergen was – again – a heath. This time the heath must have been much larger than before, situated between Medieval Oss, Schaijk, Berghem, and Nistelrode (chapter 13). Like in the Bronze Age and Iron Age, but now on a much broader scale and in a much less compartmentalized landscape, people used the area for grazing sheep.

The Zevenbergen became part of a large heath that was used by different local communities, and at the same time it formed the boundary between them. In the shifting power relations of the feudal lords, the area may have been contested land, as the construction of a defensive structure (Dutch: *landweer*) indicates. There were also important routes through this heath, connecting Oss to Berghem and Schaijk. On these extensive heaths, the barrows probably served as orientation points, but as our excavation revealed, they also had a different, more macabre, purpose.

### *16.14.1 A Medieval execution site*

Dug in deep into mound 2, three large pits were found in 2004 that probably all represent inhumation graves. In two of them skeletal remains were found (Fig. 16.12).

The third was too badly preserved to yield bones, but is in form and stratigraphical position similar to the other ones and is assumed to represent a third grave. The remains are dated to the 13$^{th}$-14$^{th}$ century cal AD on the basis of C14-dating. One skeleton was of a young female, the other of a male whose hands were bound on his back. Late Medieval dead buried in a non-Christian location are likely to represent victims of execution. Remains of a large post in the centre of mound 2 probably represent the post of a gallows or execution wheel.

In the SW-quadrant of mound 7 a small part of an equally deep pit was found. It contained fragments of a human skull and lower jaw, possibly of a male. C14-datings of a bone fragment shows that this man probably died in the 15$^{th}$ century cal AD. We must be dealing here with another Medieval grave, the largest part of which is still situated in the unexcavated SE-quadrant. In view of its position, we must be dealing with another victim of a Medieval execution. Although we did not find the remains of a post like we did at mound 2, we assume that this deceased was also buried close to the place where his life was ended. This implies that not only mound 2 was a place where people were executed and their bodies displayed, but that the same may hold true for mound 7. Interestingly, the body from mound 7 dates to a younger period than the body of mound 2. Apparently, the Zevenbergen was an execution place for a long period of time.

Research shows that gallows were preferably located along roads and/or at the boundaries of different territories or jurisdictions, well away from villages and cities (Meurkens 2010). This fits in well with archaeological evidence. The remains of a defensive structure (Dutch: *landweer*) to the east of the Zevenbergen barrow landscape makes sense only if it were located at a (contested or threatened) boundary. Historical sources demonstrate that the Zevenbergen lay at the border between the Duchy of Brabant and the Land of Ravenstein (van der Linde/Jansen 2009). We now also have historical sources informing us on the presence of gallows in this area. A late 16$^{th}$ century map shows two symbols, one of which must represent a gallows in the heath. The location is described as *Ravesteins Gerijcht* (*Gerijcht*: a place where justice is passed; Fig. 13.3). This *Gerijcht* is situated along a road that runs from southwest to the northeast (from Heesch to Herpen). It is likely that

the Zevenbergen is meant (chapter 13). As the most recent victim we have dates to the 15th century cal AD and this map to the late 16th century, it implies that the barrow landscape continued to be used as a *Gerijcht* for a longer period of time than our archaeological evidence currently suggests – it is not inconceivable that there are still more Medieval graves in the unexcavated parts of mound 7.

### *16.14.2 Roads in the heath*

Something which is also brought out by the late 16th century map is the presence of a road. It is tempting to identify the southwest-northeast road on that map with a route along our barrow row, leading all the way to Herpen. In our excavation we found the traces of numerous cart tracks in the sand, representing many passages with wagons through the heath. Unfortunately, these tracks can hardly be dated. As all go beyond the barrows, avoiding mound 7, they post-date these barrows. Most tracks identified during the excavation run north-south, going in between mound 7 and 8, and across mound 6 (implying that its mound apparently was not a major hinder to traffic). This route is parallel to the position of the defensive structure in the east (situated along the political boundary), and then probably bends off to the west (leading to Oss; Fokkens *et al.* 2009, 218). The southwest-northeast route indicated on the 16th century map could not really be identified in the traces of cart tracks, but it should be realized that more recent (north-south) traffic may have obliterated its traces completely. Anyway, with the bodies of executed criminals on display on the top of mound 2 and mound 7, travelling across the extensive heath would not have been a very pleasant experience. Thus, when people were being buried here again, more than 2000 years after the barrows were built, the mounds were situated in a heath again. But this time the background to their reuse as a burial location could not have differed more from prehistory. Whereas the mounds must have been central ritual places for Bronze Age and (Early) Iron Age communities, they were marginal, feared locations in the Medieval period, only good enough to be used to bury the executed outcasts of society.

## *16.15 How the barrows disappeared from view*

The heath remained a hub in local traffic for a very long time. Under the reign of Louis Napoleon and Willem I in the early 19th century, this became more formalized by decrees ordering the construction of paved and sand roads in this part of the province of Noord-Brabant (chapter 15). In a historical document reference is made to the *Hansjoppenberg* which is the local name of the huge mound of the Early Iron Age chieftain's burial of Oss to the immediate northwest of Zevenbergen. This indicates that barrows kept on functioning as orientation points for the construction of roads. In the Zevenbergen area, two new formal roads were constructed as unpaved sand roads with a different orientation from former ones: the Nistelrodese Baan and the Zeelandse Baan (cf. Fig. 15.3). These roads still define our research area. Around 1837, the Zevenbergen, which had been a heath for so many centuries, now gradually was reshaped into a production forest. Three or four copper coins dating to the first half of the 19th century were found close to each other in the car tracks near mound 6. In view of their comparable dating and vicinity, we assume they ended up there during the heath reclamation, and perhaps represent the lost salary of one of the workers.

*Fig. 16.13 (right page/top) The start of the excavation of mound 8 in 1964 by the Institute of Prehistory of the University of Leiden by prof. P.J.R. Modderman (not on this photograph) and G.J. Verwers (sitting, with beard, top left). Note the dense forest around the mound. In the centre L.P. Louwe Kooijmans, who participated in the excavation as a student. (rightpage/bottom) The same mound during the excavations in 2004. The entire forest has gone. Prof. Modderman, now retired, visits the excavation and interprets the profile. He is assisted by the same L.P. Louwe Kooijmans (to the right), who now is professor and his successor and the first dean of the Faculty of Archaeology of the University of Leiden. Figure by Faculty of Archaeology/J. van Donkersgoed.*

The 1837 reclamation was the end of a very long period in which this area was characterized by a heath marked with barrows. The heath became a dense pine forest, and the mounds that had been visible beacons for centuries disappeared from view and knowledge about their whereabouts gradually was lost. In the forest two north-south oriented roads were created. One was situated immediately to the east of mound 7. Its remains were found during our excavation. The new use of the area for forestry left its marks in the form of deep parallel furrows in the top of mound 7 and elsewhere. It was probably during this period that the highest part of the mound was truncated and that the first urns were found on the Zevenbergen (chapter 1). When the area was enclosed by high ways in the 1960's, it probably was no longer used as a production forest. Due to the activities of the then provincial archaeologist G. Beex, the barrows were rediscovered and brought to the attention of prof. Modderman, who together with G.J. Verwers excavated two of them ("our" mound 8 and mound 6) in 1964 and 1965 (Fig. 16.13).

Although they excavated mound 6, which is situated very close to mound 7, no reference is made to a huge mound immediately to its east. Only when the forest was cut down in 2004, the monumentality of this barrow was visible for the first time since long. But by that time, mound 7 had become the home of a badger (family) and could not be accessed until 2007.