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The Roman Villa of Hoogeloon and the Archaeology of the Periphery

Editors

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This volume marks the fruition of a long-cherished wish: a published synthesis of the Roman villa settlement of Hoogeloon and of nearly 40 years of Roman settlement research by the VU University Amsterdam on the sandy soils of North Brabant. The original initiator of this research was our friend and former colleague Jan Slofstra, who organised annual excavation campaigns at Hoogeloon from 1980 to 1987, following a specific research agenda focusing on the themes of state formation and romanisation. The Hoogeloon fieldwork campaigns ultimately resulted in the almost complete excavation of an indigenous settlement with a Roman villa at its centre and parts of a contemporary cemetery in its immediate vicinity.

The excavation was part of what became known as the Kempen project, in which Slofstra sought to study different periods of that region’s integration into larger state societies, most notably the Roman empire, the Duchy of Brabant and the State of the Netherlands. He employed a wide range of new and existing methods such as surveys and soil and ecology studies. The theoretical framework was inspired by New Archaeology and the social anthropology of peasant societies and patronage networks. He never lost sight, however, of the data’s historical context. The plan was to excavate various sites specifically for the Roman period: a settlement that evolved into a villa (Hoogeloon–Kerkakkers) with its associated cemetery (Hoogeloon–Kaboutersberg), a settlement which did not evolve in this way despite the presence of special, early imported goods (Riethoven–Heesmortel), and other settlements in the corresponding microregions. Nothing came of this last plan, however.

Slofstra’s ideas and excavations from the 1980s had quite an impact. From the outset they influenced the international theory-led debate about romanisation. In the Netherlands a whole host of students learned the business of archaeological digging at Hoogeloon, inspired by Slofstra’s ‘lectures at the trench edge’. Some of those who took part in the Kempen project today hold professorships or other prominent positions within Dutch archaeology, and others have continued to play an active role in the archaeology of the southern Netherlands coversand region.

Unfortunately, a lack of manpower and funding meant that systematic post-excavation work and publication of the Hoogeloon excavations were never realised. The only publications were some preliminary excavation reports in Dutch3 and a few influential theoretical papers in English, all by Slofstra. The Hoogeloon excavations were at risk of disappearing into depots without further processing. But this misfortune has been averted, thanks to a grant from the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research and the Province of North Brabant. A research programme The Roman villa of Hoogeloon and the settlement at Riethoven. Key sites in the rural landscape between limes and loess was launched at the VU University in 2010 and completed in 2014. This programme has enabled us to harness a broad team of specialists in Roman rural archaeology to tackle the project and make it accessible internationally. The volume before you is the published synthesis in its final form. The other products of the project include site reports on Hoogeloon and Riethoven in Dutch and Julie van Kerckhove’s PhD thesis. In addition, the outcomes of the academic research have been brought to wider local and provincial audiences using a heritage perspective. In accordance with the principle of community archaeology, the products are a publication

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1 Slofstra et al. 1982; Slofstra 1983.
2 Cf. the recent appreciation of Slofstra’s work in Versluys 2014, 3; Van Dommelen 2014, 42.
4 Slofstra 1983; idem 1991.
5 Hiddink 2011; idem 2013 and 2014; Van Kerckhove, in prep. The site reports of Hoogeloon and Riethoven are also available in open access: http://dare.ubvu.vu.nl (keywords Hoogeloon, Riethoven).
aimed at the general public, collaboration with the Noordbrabants Museum in Den Bosch, and heritage presentations at authentic locations at Hoogeloon.

This volume has a threefold aim:

a. to present the main results of the excavations at Hoogeloon;
b. to provide a regional synthesis of Roman rural habitation in the sandy region in the north of the *civitas Tungrorum*;
c. to contribute to the international debate within Roman archaeology on the social, economic and cultural transformation of the Roman countryside, especially in peripheral regions.

Although the advent of commercialised Malta archaeology heralded the end of a tradition of regional research projects by academic archaeologists, there has been continued interest at the VU University, the University of Amsterdam and Leiden University in the archaeology of the southern Netherlands sandy landscapes. The present synthesis also includes the results of commercial archaeological research. The first decade of the 21st century saw an extraordinary upsurge in large-scale settlement excavations in that region, which came to a rather abrupt end in about 2012 because of the economic crisis. The volume of large-scale excavations is expected to remain low in the coming decade, also because of policy changes with regard to spatial planning. This therefore seemed an ideal time to publish a synthesis.

**Spatial and Chronological Framework**

Our study area roughly corresponds with the Pleistocene sandy landscape of the Meuse/Demer/Scheldt region in the southern Netherlands and northern Belgium (cf. p. 4, fig. 2). Particular attention is paid to the interior zone of this region, where Hoogeloon is situated. In the Roman period this was the territory of the Texuandrian people, who formed a *pagus* within the *civitas Tungrorum*, with Tongeren as its
capital. Hoogeloon’s location in Tungrian territory has prompted us, where relevant, to take the *civitas Tungrorum* as our spatial framework and to explore the specific position of the Texuandrian region within that territory, as well as the social, political and economic networks with Tongeren. This study therefore makes flexible use of different levels of spatial analysis: the micro-regional level around Hoogeloon, the Texuandrian region, the *civitas Tungrorum* and the Roman province of Germania Inferior. In terms of time frame, the focus is on developments in the Roman imperial period from the 1st to the 3rd centuries. Where appropriate, however, a greater historical depth has been chosen. Thus developments in the Roman period were the result in part of processes that had their roots in the preceding Iron Age. The special dynamics of the 3rd and 4th centuries are also examined. According to international convention, the chronological terms ‘Early Roman’ and ‘Late Roman’ refer to the period before and after AD 270.

**Structure of the Book**

The first chapter outlines the theoretical framework and methodology. It is followed by framework chapters on the levels of ethnic belonging among the study area’s inhabitants, the organisation of the rural landscape and the settlement pattern. Next come contributions about the archaeology and social interpretation of the Hoogeloon villa settlement and its cemetery. The book concludes with chapters that place the Hoogeloon evidence in the wider framework of the *civitas Tungrorum*. 

Fig. 2. Participants in the symposium on the Hoogeloon project, held at Tongeren in 2013.
Here we would like to thank all the individuals and institutions who have contributed to the successful realisation of this project. The first is of course Jan Slofstra, who was not only the inspirational director of the fieldwork at Hoogeloon but who also laid the foundations for the interpretation of the archaeological evidence presented here. Having taken part in the excavations ourselves as students and with such fond memories of that time, the three of us would also like to express our gratitude to our many fellow students for their help, enthusiasm and the inspiring talks we had over a beer in the evenings (fig. 1). We would like to thank Julie van Kerckhove and Elbrich de Boer for their enthusiastic efforts in working up the present project. We are also grateful to the participants in the symposium we organised in Tongeren in January 2013 (fig. 2), the results of which have been integrated into this volume. Our thanks go to Bert Brouwenstijn for producing some of the illustrations and for the layout of this publication and to Mikko Kriek for his 3D images of Hoogeloon. Thanks too to Annette Visser for translating or correcting much of the text. We are grateful to anonymous reviewers for their useful comments and critical remarks on a first draft of this book. Finally, we would like to acknowledge the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research and the Province of North Brabant for providing the necessary funds for this project.

Nico Roymans / Ton Derks / Henk Hiddink
This book is about the Roman villa complex of Hoogeloon, a key-site for the understanding of the impact of empire on a peripheral region in the Roman North. The volume is not a simple site report but the synthesis of an academic research programme. It offers an original, multi-dimensional perspective on the social dynamics that led to the development of a large villa in the relatively poor and peripheral hinterland of the Lower Rhine limes. A central role is attributed to agency and the interplay of military and urban networks and native social structures. At the same time the book offers a synthesis of one of the best investigated rural areas of the Roman empire. Themes discussed include town-country relations, monetization, the agrarian economy of the region, changing settlement systems, and the ethnic identity of the inhabitants. This collection of essays written by leading specialists in the field offers a fresh perspective on the integration of marginal areas in the Roman empire and is essential reading for anyone interested in the comparative analysis of the Roman countryside.

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