# The late medieval/Early Modern reuse of prehistoric barrows as execution sites in the southern part of the Netherlands

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## Abstract

*Archaeologists have long known that there is a relation between prehistoric barrows and medieval execution sites. It is a widespread phenomenon in northwestern Europe, but one which so far has received very little attention from researchers. The recent excavation of a prehistoric barrow cemetery at Berghem (province of Noord-Brabant) by Archol BV and Leiden University yielded yet another example of this practice with the discovery of four late medieval burials of executed individuals. This prompted an investigation of this phenomenon in the southern provinces of the Netherlands. This article discusses the Berghem cemetery and a further three sites in this part of the country where prehistoric burial sites were reused as execution sites in the Middle Ages/Early Modern period. The results of this study supplement those in recent publications giving a survey of this phenomenon in the northern part of the Netherlands. This article describes the archaeological remains relating to the sites' use as execution sites and attempts to reconstruct the locations of these sites in the medieval landscape. The question whether burial mounds were deliberately reused for this purpose is also addressed. The results will shed light on the significance of these sites in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period.*

**Keywords:** execution sites, Middle Ages, Early Modern period, landscape archaeology, monument reuse, prehistoric barrows.

## 1 Introduction

The past few years have seen an increasing interest among archaeologists in the reuse or reinterpretation of ancient monuments in the past (Bradley 2002; Roymans 1995; Williams 1997, 1998). The present article focuses on one specific form of such reuse, i.e. that in which ancient (mostly prehistoric) burial mounds were granted a second life in the Middle Ages and more recent times as gallows hills, execution sites and/or sites where the corpses of executed individuals were publicly displayed. In the Netherlands, many burial mounds that were reused for such a purpose can be identified on the basis of toponyms. Moreover, a recent inventory of more recent human skeletal remains from burial mounds in the province of Drenthe has shown

that burial mounds without an immediately evident toponym may also have been used as execution sites (Luning & Van der Sanden 2010). The discovery of four late medieval burials of executed individuals in a prehistoric barrow cemetery near Berghem (province of Noord-Bra-bant) prompted an investigation of this phenomenon in the southern Dutch provinces of Noord-Brabant and Limburg, for which no surveys were yet available.
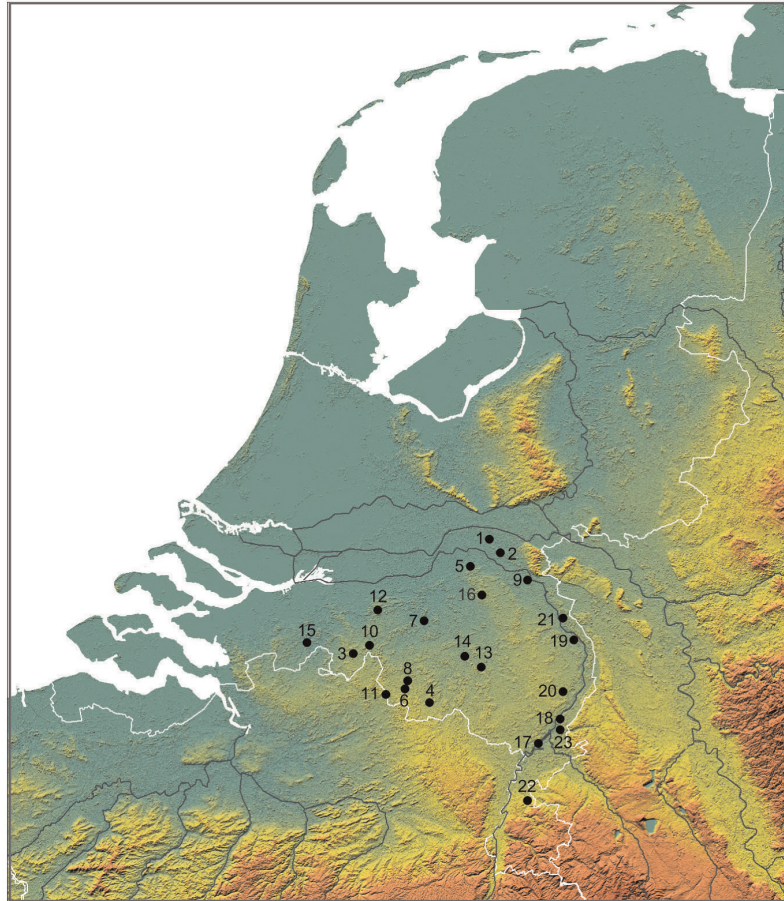


*Figure 1 The sites mentioned in the text and in table 1. 1 Bergharen; 2 Wijchen; 3 Alphen; 4 Bergeyk; 5 Berghem; 6 Bladel; 7 Boxtel; 8 Casteren; 9 Cuijk; 10 Goirle; 11 Leende; 12 Loon-op-Zand; 13 Mierlo; 14 Nuenen; 15 Rijsber-gen; 16 Uden; 17 Beegden; 18 Beesel; 19 Blitterswijk; 20 Maasbree; 21 Nieuw-Bergen; 22 Sittard; 23 Swalmen.*

The present article discusses the Berghem cemetery and three other sites in the southern part of the Netherlands that were reused as execution sites and/or sites for the public display of the corpses of executed individuals (fig. 1). It will first focus on the archaeological remains relating to this reuse, such as burials and remains of gallows structures. It will then consider the location of these sites in the medieval/Early Modern landscape and what this can tell us about the significance of such places in the periods concerned. Furthermore, I will discuss whether burial mounds were deliberately chosen for this reuse and what this tells us about the perception of prehistoric funerary monuments in the Middle Ages and later times. The presentation of the case studies will be preceded by a brief discussion of the practice of displaying the corpses of executed criminals, as was customary until 200 years ago.

## 2    Rationality vs. symbolism in the display of executed criminals

Until the late 18th century it was customary across northwestern Europe to publicly display the bodies of executed individuals. In large towns the execution itself would usually take place in

the town centre, attended by large crowds. The body would then be taken to the site where it was to be displayed – the gallows hill or gallows field – outside the town, where it would be hung from the gallows or attached to a wheel and left there until it was reduced to a skeleton. The remains were then buried at the site, "dumped in a pit like a dead dog", as we read in some old texts (Jelgersma 1978, 15). Only large towns had separate execution and gallows sites. In rural areas the two were usually combined (Jelgersma 1978, 17; Spierenburg 1984, 57).

On the one hand, there was a very rational reason behind the custom of displaying the corpses of executed convicts: to deter future potential criminals. The corpses displayed on a gallows hill or gallows field were intended "as deterrents and examples" or "for instruction and entertainment", as judges often described the practice from the 16th until the end of the 18th century. The site of the gallows hill or gallows field was specifically chosen to maximise this deterrent effect – usually along arterial roads and so that it was visible from a great distance. It was even forbidden to plant trees on such sites, as trees could obscure the view of the gallows (Jelgersma 1978, 15). The practice of erecting the gallows on an elevation must have been intended to create the greatest possible visual impact. Moreover, many gallows hills lay at the boundaries of territories. This would make it clear to people passing by that the law was strictly upheld in the territory concerned and that it was to be respected by everyone (Spierenburg 1984, 57). Amsterdam's gallows field, for example, lay on Volewijck, a peninsula on the north side of the river IJ that was clearly visible from the town itself and also from all the ships that sailed into Amsterdam (fig. 2).



*Figure 2 Fun on the ice at Amsterdam's gallows hill on Volewijck. Besides boys on skates and stalls selling hot drinks we see several corpses hanging from the triangular gallows and a corpse in a state of decomposition on a wheel. Drawing by Reinier Vinkeles, c. 1770-1790 (© Stadsarchief Amsterdam).*

However the display of executed convicts also had a very symbolic character, based on the concept that it was possible to punish "beyond the boundaries of death" (Jelgersma 1978, 11). It was considered an aggravation of the punishment because the gallows hills or gallows fields lay outside the town. This meant that the executed individuals were denied a formal Christian

burial in the hallowed ground of a churchyard, to which great importance was attached until well into the 18th century (Spierenburg 1984, 57). In this way the convicts were forever banished from the community and the absence of a Christian burial would preclude the resurrection of the body on Judgment Day. That the convicts were thus sentenced not only to death but to complete annihilation is evident from various German sentence formulas, such as 'Speyer's Formula':

> ... that he never be committed to the earth, that the wind will blow him apart and the crows, ravens and other birds will tear him up and consume him.[1]

Apart from this Christian symbolism, various strange elements of the execution ritual probably have their origins in ancient Germanic culture. In the late Middle Ages and the Early Modern period those elements were however most probably no longer recognised as relics from a distant past. In the 12th and 13th centuries, important developments took place in criminal law all over northwestern Europe. In the southern part of the Netherlands this period saw an expansion of the central authority of the Duke of Brabant. The collapse of the Carolingian Empire at the end of the 10th century and the subsequent disappearance of the central authority that this implied had led to centuries of anarchy and violence in this region. There were many autonomous areas where judicial power was in the hands of the local lord. Needless to say, this fragmentation of authority led to rather arbitrary jurisdiction that was strongly dependent on the whims of the local ruler. All this changed with the expansion of the central authority of the Duke of Brabant in the 12th and 13th centuries (Vanhemelryck 1987). Local sheriffs' courts were introduced in many parts of the Duchy to promote good legal practice (Van Asseldonk 2002, 476). Furthermore, the increase in the number of court cases, partly as a result of the constantly growing population, led to the formulation of written laws for towns and villages. Those laws were based on ancient Germanic popular law and Carolingian laws, an important aspect of which was the concept of retaliation. The new legislation included this concept. Crimes against persons, property and public order were to be severely and publicly punished which would hopefully enforce respect for persons and property (Vanhemelryck 1987, 149-151).

Various elements of the execution ritual in these areas clearly have Germanic antecedents. For example, the medieval custom of using different execution methods for different crimes was already described by Tacitus in his *Germania*. Other aspects, such as displaying the corpse by leaving it hanging on the gallows or placing it on a wheel, may be based on the Germanic belief that criminals had to be sacrificed to the gods because in Germanic society crimes were seen as insults to the gods (Vanhemelryck 1987, 152-155). By means of hanging, a criminal was sacrificed to the god Odin, who is in Scandinavian mythology was also known as 'Lord of the Hanged' and 'Lord of the Gallows'. Odin consumes the people sacrificed to him via his ravens. This may explain the stereotype way in which many sentences refer to the "birds of heaven", as for example in the aforementioned 'Speyer's Formula' (Ström 1942, 134; Jelgersma 1984, 16).

The custom of displaying the corpses of executed convicts was only abolished in many European countries as late as 1800, when it came to be regarded as "a relic of the barbarism of bygone days" (Spierenburg 1984, 190). In the Netherlands it was abolished in 1795 when the Batavian Republic was established. That was the only major change in criminal justice at that time (Jelgersma 1978, 22-23).

## 3    Gallows hills in the Netherlands: types and locations

There is a paucity of archaeological or historical research focusing specifically on execution sites, gallows hills or gallows fields in the Netherlands. Until recently, the most important publication on this topic was that by H.G. Jelgersma, who discussed the gallows hills and gallows

fields in the western and central parts of the Netherlands largely on the basis of historical sources (Jelgersma 1978). A few years ago, however, an article was published on late medieval gallows in the northern province of Friesland (Mol 2006) and quite recently an extensive monograph has appeared on execution sites in the province of Drenthe (Van der Sanden & Luning 2010). As already noted, there were no comparable surveys for the southern Dutch provinces.

What information on the nature of gallows hills and their location can be inferred from these surveys? Though it should be borne in mind that each individual example has its own specific characteristics, gallows hills nevertheless also show some shared features as far as their nature and locations are concerned. Generally speaking, three groups of gallows hills can be distinguished. First, there are the reused burial mounds that are the focus of the present paper. Second, there are mounds which were built specifically for this purpose, and the third group consists of natural elevations that were used as gallows hills. As far as the locations of the sites are concerned, many lay along major arterial roads and at the boundaries of different territories or jurisdictions.

The best known examples of burial mounds that were reused as gallows hills are those in the province of Drenthe (Luning & Van der Sanden 2010). These prehistoric burial mounds near Anloo, Balloo, Anholt, Sleen and Westerbork bear the toponym *Galgenberg* – gallows hill. The *Galgenbergen* of Balloo and Westerbork, and possibly also that of Anholt, actually contained remains of a gallows structure and/or Medieval/Early Modern burials (Luning & Van der Sanden 2010, 101; Van Giffen 1936, 28; Van der Waals 1964, respectively). Many barrows lie along medieval/Early Modern roads or at intersections of such roads and at the boundaries of *marken*: villages including the collectively exploited wastelands surrounding them. For instance, the medieval location of the *Galgenberg* of Anloo, the earliest reference to which dates from 1332, was at the boundary of three *marken* (those of Anloo, Schipborg and Zuidlaren) and along a thoroughfare. A survey of cart tracks in the area surrounding the barrow showed several tracks converging at the gallows hill, and from there on running in a northwesterly (towards Schipborg) and northeasterly (towards Zuidlaren) direction (Jager 1993, 56-60). The recent inventory of recent burials in barrows in Drenthe showed that many barrows not identified by the toponym *Galgenberg* may well have also been used as execution sites and/or gallows hills. Tumulus 1 at Hijken, for instance, contained a small pit measuring 80 by 40 cm which had been dug into the centre of the barrow. In the pit were skeletal remains of a 20-25 year old man. The pit was far too small for a normal burial, so it is likely that it was used for burying a partly decayed body, possibly after it had been displayed for some time. The bones have been ^{14}C-dated to the 14th century (Luning & Van der Sanden 2010, 109; Ter Schegget 2010, 118-120).

New mounds created specifically for use as gallows hills are known from for example Amerongen and Amersfoort (both province of Utrecht). The *Galgenberg* of Amerongen lies along the thoroughfare connecting Rhenen and Amerongen and must also have been clearly visible from the Rhine (Stol 1993, 53). Prior to the archaeological investigation carried out here in 1981, it was assumed that this was the site of a reused prehistoric barrow, as also known from Drenthe. No evidence of a barrow was found during the 1981 excavation. The excavation did yield the foundations of a post-medieval gallows. They comprised three brick bases, each bearing a stone pillar, arranged in a triangle. The top ends of the pillars would have been connected by beams, from which the convicts' corpses were hung. A similar gallows structure was discovered in 1925 during the archaeological investigation of the *Galgenberg* near Amersfoort (Martin 1927). As can be seen in a drawing dating from 1749 (fig. 3), this *Galgenberg* formed part of a larger site for displaying corpses. In the immediate vicinity were another two low mounds, one of which bore a wheel. Located at a conspicuous point on top of a hill called Amersfoortse Berg and considering the absence of vegetation in those days, the site would have been clearly visible from Amersfoort. Furthermore, it lay close to the boundary between the jurisdictions of Amersfoort and Leusden and along the thoroughfare between Amersfoort and Utrecht. The earliest mention of the Amersfoort *Galgenberg* in historical sources dates from 1550, when the

gallows had to be repaired. So by then the gallows must have been standing there for some time already.



*Figure 3 View of the Galgenberg with a stone gallows near Amersfoort in 1749. To the right of the gallows hill is a low mound bearing a wheel. Drawing by J. de Beyer (after Martin 1927).*

In addition to these artificially erected mounds , we also know of several examples of natural elevations that were used as gallows hills. One of those is Kitsenberg in Roermond (province of Limburg), where executions were carried out from at least the early 15th century. The name Kitsenberg refers to *kitsen* – corpses in an advanced state of decomposition. This context is similar to other examples mentioned above, i.e. at the boundary of the territory of Roermond and also at the boundary between the Duchies of Gelre and Jülich. Moreover, Kitsenberg lay at the spot where the road from Roermond forked, with the two roads leading off going to Cologne and Heinsberg (Van der Borgh 1997).

While not all execution or gallows sites are reused barrows, an inventory of sites in the southern part of the Netherlands has shown that this is often the case. In the next section the aforementioned barrow cemetery at Berghem will be discussed along with three other sites. This will be followed by a survey of sites in the southern Dutch provinces where a relation between barrows and execution or display sites can be shown to have existed.

## 4    Prehistoric barrows reused as gallows hills: four sites in the southern part of the Netherlands

### 4.1 Berghem, municipality of Oss (province of Noord-Brabant)

In 2004 and 2007 Archol BV and the University of Leiden excavated a prehistoric cemetery bearing the toponym *Zevenbergen* ('Seven Mounds') to the south of Berghem (Fokkens *et al.* 2009; Fontijn & Jansen in prep.). This excavation focused on several barrows dating from the Middle Bronze Age to the end of the Early Iron Age. Two barrows, i.e. barrow 2 (the 2004 excavation) and barrow 7 (the 2007 excavation), were found to contain evidence showing that they were reused as execution and/or gallows sites in the Middle Ages (Van der Linde & Jansen 2009; Meurkens 2007[2]).
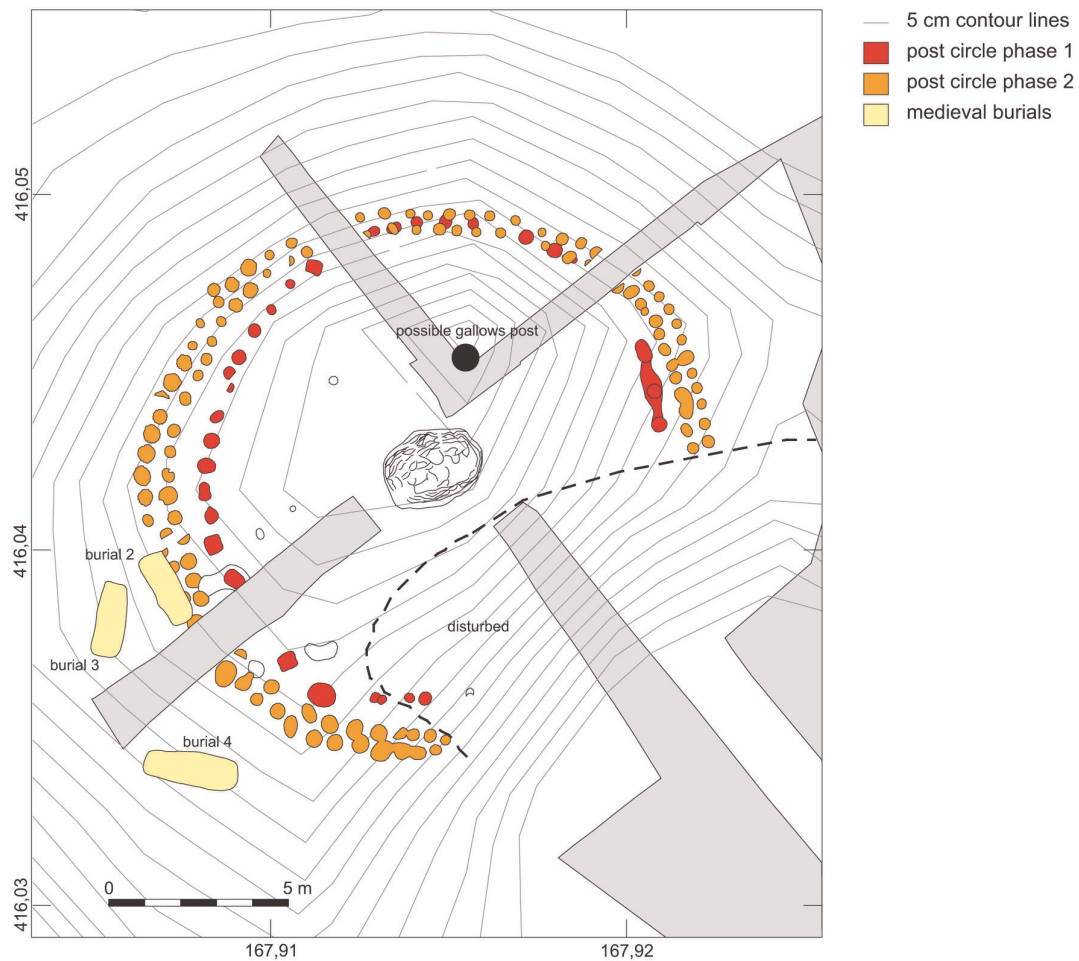
*Figure 4 Zevenbergen, barrow 2. Simplified excavation plan showing rings of postholes, medieval burials and a post of what was probably a gallows structure (after Van Wijk et al. 2009, figure 6.5).*

With its height of 1.20 metres, barrow 2 is one of the highest barrows in the cemetery. Its height is further accentuated by the fact that the mound was erected on one of the highest points in the natural landscape. This is a multi-period barrow first built in the Middle Bronze Age. At least two construction phases date from this period, both of which are associated with peripheral structures in the form of post circles. In the Iron Age the barrow was reused for the burial of an urn containing cremated remains. The clearest evidence relating to the medieval reuse of the barrow as a gallows hill was found on the western side of the mound: three burial pits whose patchy, untidy fills differed distinctly from the prehistoric features (fig. 4). One of the burials intersected the Middle Bronze Age post circle. The medieval burial pits were numbered in the field as burials 2, 3 and 4 and were excavated under the guidance of a physical anthropologist. Skeletal remains (poorly preserved) were only found in burials 3 and 4. The absence of skeletal remains in burial 2 is presumably attributable to the fact that this burial was less deep than the others, precluding the preservation of bones. As far as its shape and fill are concerned, this pit is however entirely comparable with the other burial pits (d'Hollosy 2009).

Burial 3 probably originally contained a complete body, but only the two legs, the right foot and part of the pelvis survived (figs 5a-b). Near the foot was a small bronze ring to which a piece of leather was attached – presumably from a shoe. The bones belonged to a young woman (aged at least 16) who was 166 ± 3.5 cm tall. She was buried on her left side with her legs slightly flexed and raised. The body was oriented south-north (head-feet) and seemed to have

been deposited in the burial pit with little decorum. The pit was too small, as a result of which the body could only be buried in a flexed position.



Figure 5 Zevenbergen, barrow 2. Medieval burials (© Archol BV Leiden).
a-b Burial 3. The detail showing a bronze shoe buckle (actual size).
c  Burial 4. This individual was buried with his hands tied behind his back.

The skeleton remains in burial 4 are better preserved than those in burial 3. It is that of a young adult male (at least 25 years old) who was 172 ± 5 cm tall (fig. 5c). Like the woman in burial 3, he was buried with little care. The man lay prostrate on his back, and with the floor of the pit

being hollow, his pelvis lay deeper than his head and feet. The body was oriented more or less west-east (head-feet). An interesting aspect of this burial is that the bones of the hands were found lying beneath the body, suggesting that the man was buried with his hands bound and crossed behind his back.

These three burial pits are not the only more recent features that were found during the excavation of barrow 2. In different parts of the mound, but concentrated at the top, several deep pits were observed, one of which in particular caught the excavators' attention. It was a posthole, with a width of 40 cm and an impressive depth of 130 cm, which had been dug into the top of the mound (fig. 6). This substantial depth suggests that the posthole contained a large post that would have projected several metres above the mound, most probably the post of a gallows structure. A wide variety of gallows structures were in use in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period. One of the simplest was a crossbeam between two upright posts on which the convicts were hanged (Jelgersma 1978, 13; Van der Sanden 2010, 14-15). That only one distinct posthole was observed during the excavation of barrow 2 may be attributable to the fact that this hole happened to be contained in one of the transverse sections exposed across the mound. Another possibility is that the post in question did not form part of a gallows but supported a wheel.
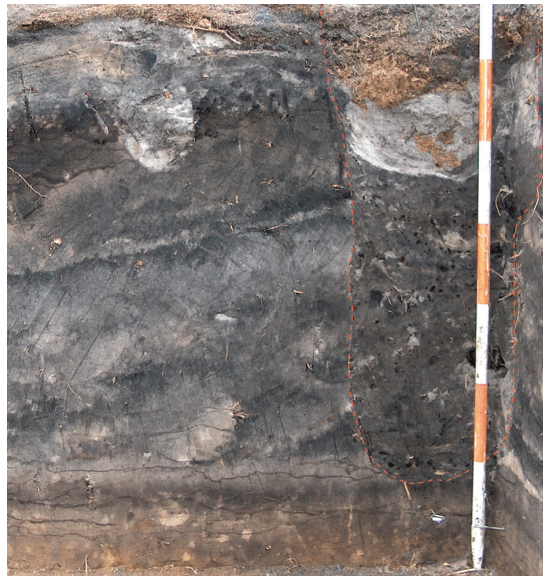


*Figure 6 Zevenbergen, barrow 2. Cross-section of the posthole of what was probably a gallows structure in the centre of the mound. Graduation 25 cm (after Van der Linde & Jansen 2009, figure 7.5).*

Barrow 7 also yielded evidence suggesting reuse as a gallows hill or execution site: a pit containing human bones in a clearly disarticulated state. Barrow 7 dates from the Early Iron Age. In this case, too, smart use was made of the natural relief to make the barrow look larger and higher than it actually was. The medieval burial pit was on the south side of the mound. Only part of it could be excavated because it lay precisely in one of the transverse sections. In terms of depth and fill it is comparable with the burials around barrow 2, only the bones were better preserved in this case. As the post-excavation work on the 2007 campaign is still in progress, no physical anthropological information on the individual(s) buried here is as yet available. Nevertheless, there are a few general observations that can be made with respect to this burial. The dislocated bones show that this was evidently not a formal burial. The body must have been in an advanced stage of decomposition when it was deposited in the burial pit in parts. So this may well be the body of a convict that was put on display for a long time before being buried at the foot of barrow 7.

We have two ^{14}C dates for the medieval burials. Bones from burial 4 in barrow 2 yielded a date in the 13th or 14th century (Fokkens *et al.*, 2009)[3], while the bones from barrow 7 were found to date from the 15th century (Fontijn & Jansen in prep.).[4] The Zevenbergen barrows were thus used as execution or gallows sites for a considerable length of time.


## 4.2 The Zevenbergen barrow cemetery in the medieval landscape

In political-geographical terms the Zevenbergen cemetery formed part of the Duchy of Brabant from the early 13th century onwards. It lay in the Meierij of 's-Hertogenbosch, one of the six districts into which the Duchy was divided. In the course of the 13th century the Meierij itself was divided into five administrative units. The villages lying closest to the Zevenbergen cemetery - Oss, Berghem, Heesch and Nistelrode – then came to lie in what was termed the Kwartier Maasland (Van Asseldonk 2002, 72). The cemetery was situated in the *gemeint* (the southern equivalent of the *marke* of the province of Drenthe; see above): the uncultivated moors between Oss, Berghem, Heesch and Nistelrode. In spite of being uncultivated, such areas were of great economic importance to the local communities. They were used for pasturing cattle, cutting turfs and chopping wood (Van Asseldonk 2002, 159). Initially the Duke of Brabant held the rights to exploit the *gemeint*. In the late 13th and early 14th centuries these rights were however given on loan to the various villages on payment of a tax. From then onwards the wastelands were communal property. Oss and Berghem, which were in the 13th century still united in ecclesiastical and administrative terms, acquired their *gemeint* in 1286. Nistelrode followed in 1296 (Van Asseldonk 2002, 173).

The Zevenbergen barrows and the barrows surrounding the so-called *Vorstengraf* ('Chieftain's Burial') of Oss a little further west will have been major landmarks in the vast moor that constituted the greater part of the *gemeint* between Oss, Berghem and Nistelrode in the Middle Ages. As such they also served as orientation points in the landscape, as can be inferred from the oldest known maps of this area: the 1794 map by Verhees (illustrated in Van Asseldonk 2002, fig. 41.3) and the 1809 map by Kraaijenhof (illustrated in Fokkens & Jansen 2004, 23). Medieval roads, which were often little more than a series of cart tracks, in principle ran along the shortest routes between orientation points: in the first place the church spires of individual villages, which will have been visible from afar, and secondly other striking landmarks in the landscape such as ancient trees, large boulders and barrows (Fokkens & Jansen 2004, 25). As can be seen in the maps by Verhees and Kraaijenhof, the road from 's-Hertogenbosch to Grave ran straight onto the moor from Heesch, in the direction of what is indicated as 'Hans Joppenberg'. This Hans Joppenberg has recently been identified as the large barrow in which the aforementioned *Vorstengraf* of Oss, a rich Early Iron Age burial, was discovered in 1933 (Fokkens & Jansen 2004). The road can be seen to bend at Hans Joppenberg, and it then continues along Zevenbergen straight ahead in the direction of Schaijk. Zevenbergen itself seems to have been the orientation point for the road from Nistelrode to Berghem and Oss. In Kraaijenhof's map the Zevenbergen barrows lie precisely at the point where the road from Nistelrode forks, with the two branches heading towards Oss and Berghem.

During the archaeological excavation of the Zevenbergen cemetery, Early Modern cart tracks were found all over the site. They were oriented northwest-southeast and ran in the direction of the centres of Oss and Berghem, which in the open moor would have been recognisable by their church spires. The carts evidently avoided the largest barrows (barrows 2, 3, 6, 7 and 8) – the tracks unmistakably run around the mounds – but rode straight across the lower ones (barrows 9-12), which were by then probably no longer recognisable as such. It is not clear how old the cart tracks are, but they must predate the period 1809-1837, when the entire site was planted with pine trees (Van der Linde & Jansen 2009).
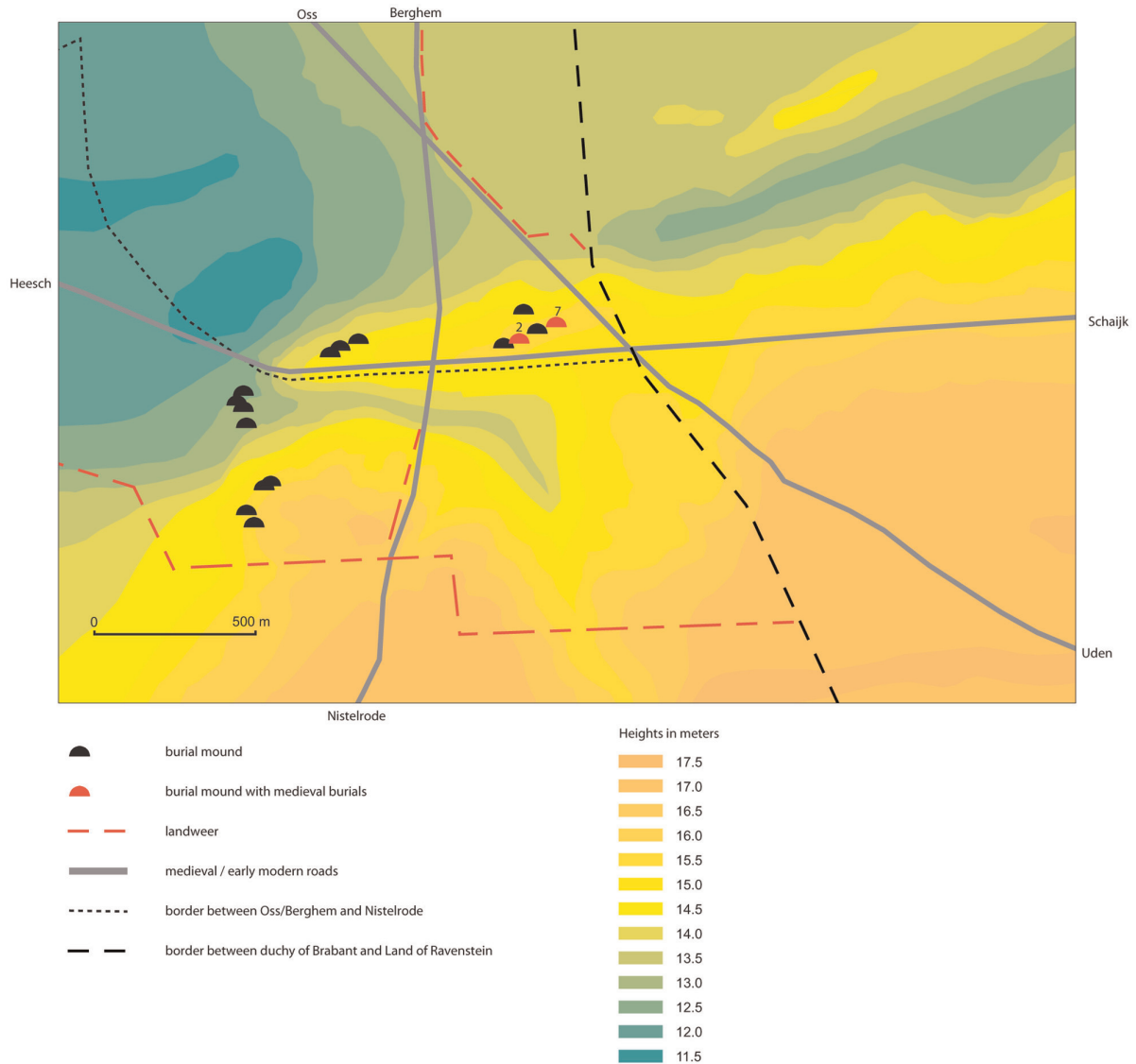
*Figure 7 The medieval landscape around the Zevenbergen cemetery (barrows after Bourgeois 2004; roads and gemeint boundary after the 1794 map by Verhees; landweren (after Van der Linde 2007).*

The Zevenbergen and *Vorstengraf* barrows had a second important role. They marked the boundary between the *gemeint* of Berghem and Oss on one side and that of Nistelrode on the other. At a time when boundaries were not yet accurately defined on maps, grateful use was made of dominant fixed elements in the landscape, such as barrows, to mark them. Like the road pattern, the boundary between the two complexes of wasteland in Verhees' 1794 map probably also indicates the medieval boundaries. In this trajectory the boundary precisely follows the Zevenbergen row of barrows, so it must have coincided with the boundary between the *gemeint* of Oss and Berghem and that of Nistelrode. In the Middle Ages this area was intersected by another boundary. A little to the east of the barrows lay the boundary between the Meierij of 's-Hertogenbosch, which formed part of the Duchy of Brabant, and the autonomous Land of Ravenstein, the territory of feudal lord of Ravenstein. In the 14th century this boundary was an important barrier because the Dukes of Brabant and Gelre had several power disputes in this autonomous area. At the end of the 14th century the boundary was physically marked by a *landweer. Landweren* were structures, often earthworks, with a primarily defensive function that were intended to protect an area against troops of hostile cavalry and bands of raiders that caused havoc in rural areas, in particular after the 14th century. At the Zevenbergen ceme-

tery the *landweer* comprised an earthen bank, of which no traces remained, accompanied by a series of ditches and rows of posts (Van der Linde 2007; Brokamp 2007).

Several conclusions can be drawn with respect to the landscape context of the Zevenbergen gallows/execution site (fig. 7). The site was created by making use of the two highest burial mounds in a prehistoric cemetery, as a result of which the gallows would have been visible from a substantial distance in the then largely open moor. The site lay in the middle of the *gemeint*, far away from the village centres of Oss, Berghem, Heesch and Nistelrode, and in actual fact at the boundary of the *gemeint* of Oss/Berghem and that of Nistelrode. The cemetery lay close to the boundary between the Duchy of Brabant and the autonomous Land of Ravenstein. Although erected at boundaries and far away from the village centres, the gallows did stand at a crossroads and would have attracted plenty of attention.

## 4.3 Rijsbergen, municipality of Zundert (province of Noord-Brabant)

In the early 19th century several urns containing burnt bone were found near Rijsbergen during the construction of a new road that was to connect the nearby city of Breda to Antwerp. The urns have since disappeared and it is only thanks to a few brief reports that we know about them. From those reports it can be inferred that the urns must have dated from the Late Bronze Age to the end of the Iron Age and that they were found near the Fort Oranje campsite north of Rijsbergen. It is reasonable to assume that a prehistoric cemetery was disturbed at this site, which in the old reports is described as 'an elevation on the moor' (Verhagen 1994).

The area where the urns were found a point of contention in a 17th century boundary dispute between the villages of Rijsbergen and Hage (what is now Princenhage, municipality of Breda). The rulers of Hage asked the surveyor J.F. Herrebertus from Antwerp to draw a map to lend force to their claim. The map was duly published in 1690 under the heading of "*Caerte figuratief van de limiete tussche De Haegh en Rijsberghen*" (Figurative map of the boundary between Hage and Rijsbergen). It shows four mounds near the boundary between the two villages. Three of them are fairly low, probably natural elevations in a coversand ridge. The fourth mound, which Herrebertus refers to as 'Stoffelenberg', is higher and steeper than the other three. It lies along the 'Oude Baan', the old road from Breda to Antwerp that lay a little to the east of the new road, near the present-day Fort Oranje campsite. This makes it likely that this 'Stoffelenberg' is the site where, or near which, the prehistoric urns were found during the construction of the new road (Verhagen 1994).

The name 'Stoffelenberg' is based on an event that took place here long before the boundary dispute. In the 16th century a man named Stoffel, who had committed a crime in Rijsbergen, was beheaded on the mound. His corpse was then been displayed on a wheel at this site. The execution is illustrated on Herrebertus's map (fig. 8).

On present evidence, it is not possible to determine whether Stoffelenberg was a prehistoric barrow. It is indeed possible, as Herrebertus drew a mound with relatively steep slopes, which are rare in the case of natural hills in this area. Furthermore, the urns imply that there was a prehistoric cemetery at this site and it is quite likely that such a cemetery would have contained one or more prehistoric barrows.

As far as its location in the medieval and later landscape is concerned, the same conclusions can be drawn for Stoffelenberg as listed above in relation to the Zevenbergen cemetery near Berghem. It is very likely that the Stoffelenberg execution site lay in a prehistoric cemetery far away from the village centres of Rijsbergen and Princenhage. The site lay along a thoroughfare at the boundary of two jurisdictions.
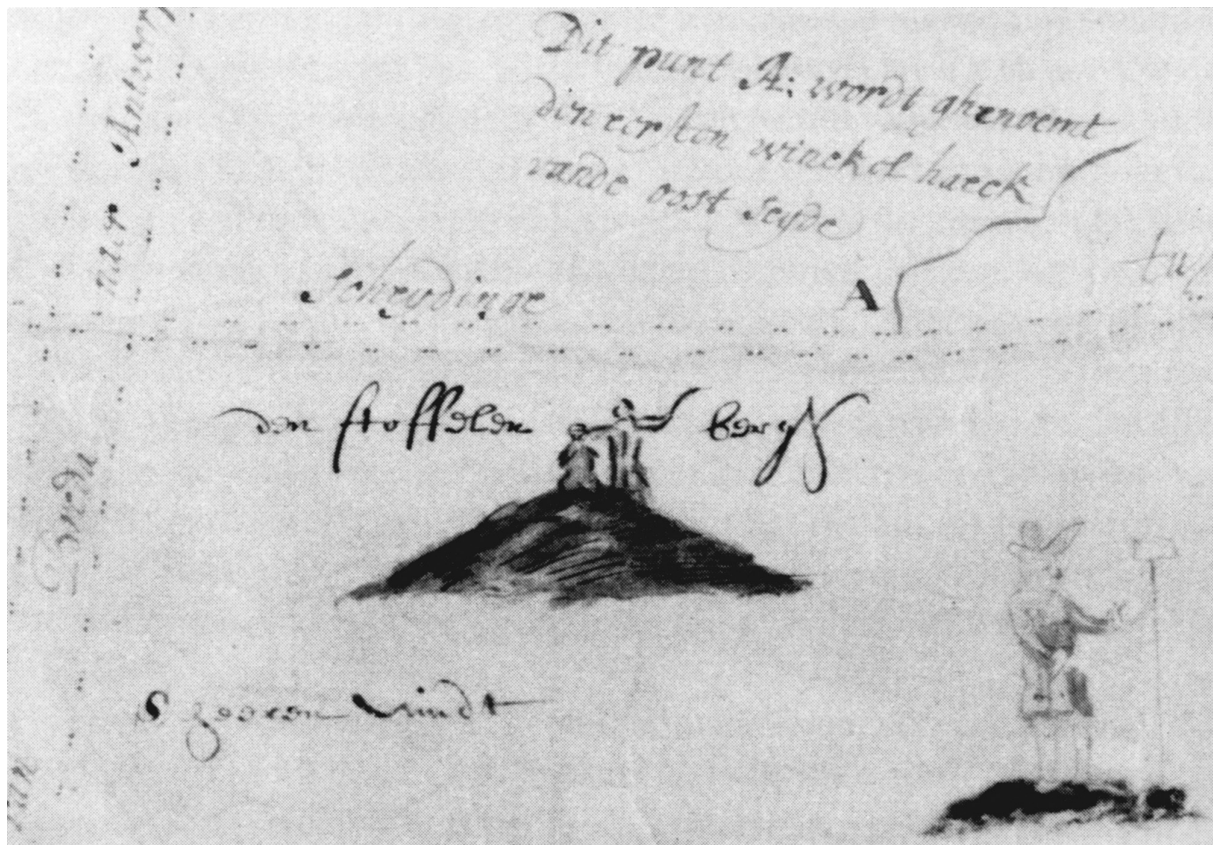
*Figure 8 Stoffel's beheading on Stoffelenberg near the scheydinghe (boundary) between Rijsbergen and Hage as illustrated on the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Caerte figuratief by the Antwerp surveyor Herrebertus (after Verhagen 1994).*

## 4.4 Goirle, municipality of Tilburg (province of Noord-Brabant)

In 1937 the Department of Archaeology at Groningen University excavated a group of barrows near Goirle on a moor called 'Rechte Heide' under the supervision of A.E. van Giffen (Van Giffen 1937). The group was referred to by the toponym 'Vijfberg' (Five Mounds). One of the barrows (tumulus 2) yielded evidence in the form of medieval or Early Modern human skeletal remains showing that it had been used as a gallows/execution site. Unfortunately, the remains were not examined any further at the time. Van Giffen had heard old rumours claiming that Vijfberg had been used as a gallows/execution site, but in his report he does not specify the precise content of those rumours. They may have been partly based on the name of the moor on which the barrow group was situated. A map dating from 1792 shows this as "Regt Heide", suggesting a connection between the site and *rechtspraak,* the Dutch term for the administration of justice.

In the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period, Vijfberg also lay in the *gemeint*, far away from occupation centres. The barrows lay close to the boundary between Goirle and Alphen.

## 4.5 Swalmen/Beesel, municipality of Roermond (province of Limburg)

In 1936-1938 and 1969-1979, teams from the National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden, led by F.C. Bursch, and the Department of Archaeology of Groningen University, led by J.N. Lanting and J.D. van der Waals, investigated several groups of barrows near Swalmen and Beesel (Lanting & Van der Waals 1974). Of relevance here are the investigations of the groups of bar-

rows at Swalmen-Bosheide and Swalmen-Hoogterras. From historical sources we know that both sites were in the past used as gallows/execution sites. However, only Swalmen-Hoogterras has yielded indisputable archaeological evidence of this.

Swalmen-Bosheide was originally the site of eight Late Neolithic barrows. Many of them (barrows 3,4,6 and 8) have disappeared over the centuries. The barrows were erected on the late glacial low terrace of the Meuse, at the foot of the high terrace. Mounds 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 lay fairly close together whereas the others were more isolated. The concentration of barrows lies near boundary post 425 marking the Dutch/German border. Although the two teams of excavators did not find any evidence to show that this site was used as a gallows/execution site, there is an old report suggesting that it was. At the end of the 19th century, labourers planting pines at this site found a skull along with some cervical vertebrae. The remains were still attached to an iron chain that would have been used to hang the body from a gallows or tie it to a wheel (Luys 1981; Giesen 2010b).
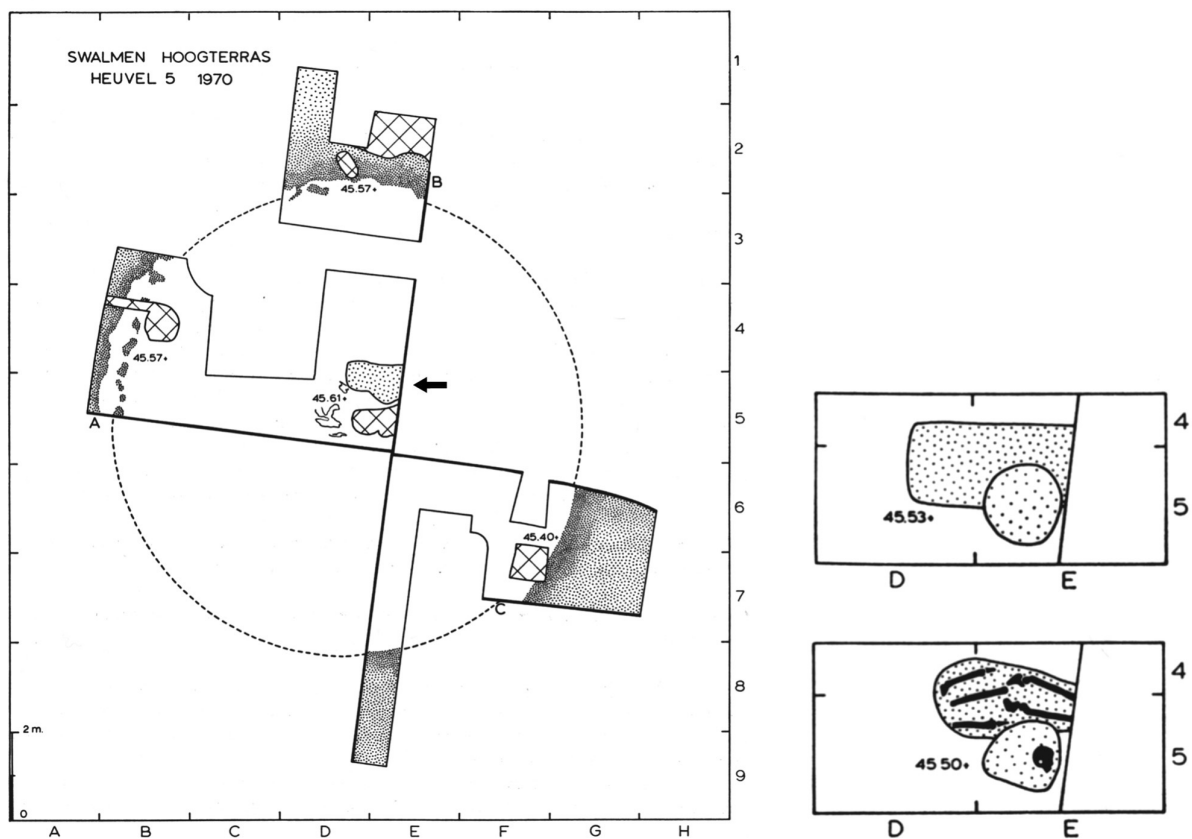


*Figure 9 Swalmen-Hoogterras, barrow 5. Plan of the excavation showing the subrecent burial pit (marked by the arrow) and detail of the pit at two different levels (after Lanting & Van der Waals 1974, figure 22).*

The Swalmen-Hoogterras group consists of eleven Bronze Age barrows prominently sited in the landscape, at the point where the valley of the Swalm intersects the Meuse high terrace, creating a narrow elevated tongue. On 19th-century maps this tongue and the barrows on it bear the toponym 'Suvenberg' ('Seven Mounds'), although there are actually more than seven burial mounds. Ten barrows lie at the very tip of the tongue, the eleventh about 300 metres further north. On the western side the tongue is steeply sloped, the relief decreasing by about 10 metres across a relatively short distance. Five of the barrows (mounds 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5) lie in a row just above this steep slope (Lanting & Van der Waals 1974).

The 1937 excavation by the National Museum of Antiquities uncovered medieval or Early Modern human skeletal remains in barrow 3. Unfortunately no further information is available

on these remains (Lanting & Van der Waals 1974, 37). The excavation of barrow 5 that was carried out by the Groningen Department of Archaeology in 1970 revealed a pit that had been dug into the centre of the barrow (fig. 9). It had clearly been dug from the top of the mound, but it could not be excavated in its entirety as it lay in the transverse section. Investigation of the pit did however show that it actually consisted of two separate pits. The largest contained a west-east (head-feet) oriented skeleton whose skull and top vertebrae were missing. The body was lying on its back. The skull and missing vertebrae were found in the second pit, which had been dug through the original burial pit more or less at the point of the pelvis. The human remains were found to derive from a young adult, probably a male. The skeleton's condition suggested that the person in question had died by beheading, although a physical anthropologist was unable to find any unambiguous evidence of this (Lanting & Van der Waals 1974, 52).

## 4.6 The barrow cemeteries in the medieval/Early Modern landscape (fig. 10)

Swalmen and Beesel have a complex political and geographical history. After the end of the 13th century the two villages both belonged to the County of Gelre (the Duchy of Gelre after the 14th century). The villages lay in the administrative district of Ambt Monfort, which formed part of the 'Overkwartier of Gelre', one of the four districts that together constituted the Duchy of Gelre. From the mid-16th until the early 19th century the villages were subsequently under Spanish, Austrian (only Swalmen), French and finally Dutch control. In the Middle Ages the territories of both villages bordered the Duchy of Jülich to the east (more or less along the present Dutch/German border) (Giesen 2010a; 2010b).

From historical sources we know that the Swalmen-Bosheide group of barrows was the site of the gallows/execution site of Beesel. The site is also known as 'Grietjens Gericht'. This toponym probably relates to the execution of one Margareta Gysberts, who was sentenced to death in 1651 for murdering her newly born baby. Margareta was beheaded and her body was displayed on a wheel (Luys 1981).

This execution site lay far away from the town centre of Beesel, in the *gemeint* that was collectively exploited for gathering wood, cutting turfs and pasturing cattle. The area consisted largely of wetlands and moors. Grietjens Gericht also lay at the boundary between Beesel and Swalmen and at the boundary between the Duchies of Gelre and Jülich. The present Dutch/German border also runs through this group of barrows, with border post 425 being positioned on barrow 6. On 17th-century maps the gallows/execution site can be seen to lie at a crossroads, the point where Grensweg (marking the boundary between Beesel and Swalmen) intersects Prinsendijk (along the Gelre/Jülich boundary). The course of Prinsendijk, also referred to as Steenweg and Keizer Karelsweg, largely coincides with that of the Roman road from Xanten to Heerlen (De Groot & Prangsma 2008; Giesen 2010b).

Before the Swalmen-Hoogterras group of barrows was reused as the gallows/execution site for Swalmen, the execution site was located elsewhere, or perhaps Swalmen had two gallows/execution sites. A map drawn by Muliex in 1662 shows an execution site at a point at which Rijksweg-Noord intersects Grensweg in the southwesternmost part of the territory of Swalmen (Giesen 2010a). There are two mounds here which are assumed to be barrows, Swalmen-Turfheide tumuli 1 and 2 (Lanting & Van der Waals 1974). These mounds have however never been excavated, so in this case there is no archaeological evidence to validate the historical sources. This site also lies along a thoroughfare and at the boundary of two jurisdictions (in the 18th century one of the barrows at this site bore a shield marking the boundary between Austrian (Swalmen) and Dutch (Beesel) territory (Giesen 2010a) ). And once again the site lay in the collectively exploited wastelands, in this case also close to the *landweer* 'Wolfsgraaf', which according to historical sources was constructed before 1457 (Luys 1983; Brokamp 2007, 133).
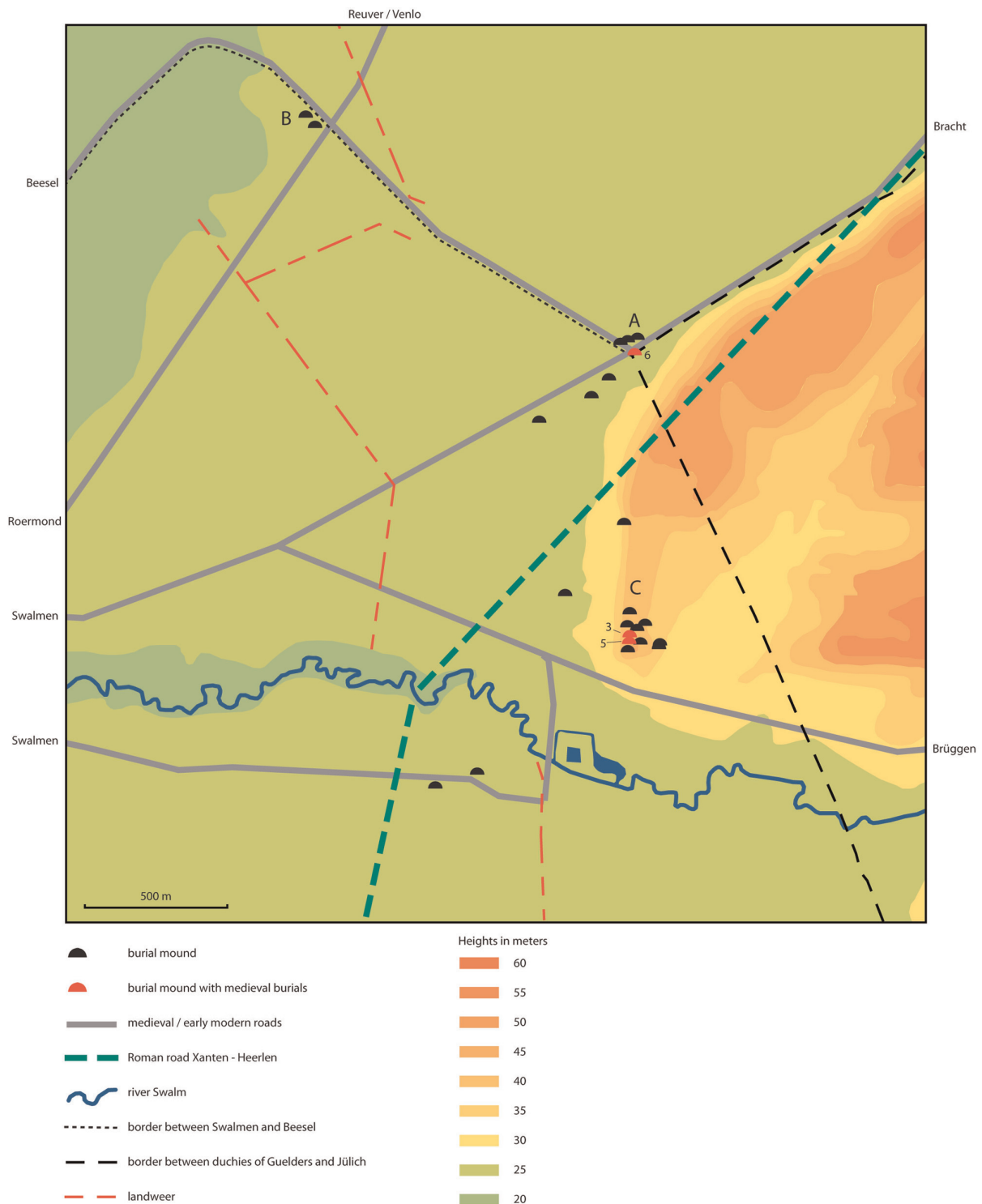
*Figure 10 The medieval/early modern landscape surrounding the cemeteries of Swalmen-Bosheide (A), Swalmen-Turfheide (B) and Swalmen-Hoogterras (C). (barrows after Lanting & Van der Waals 1974 (figures 2 and 16); roads and boundaries after Lanting & Van der Waals 1974 (figure 1); Roman road after De Groot & Prangsma 2008, figure 10; landweren after Brokamp 2007, figure 50).*

From an anonymous map indicating the *Swamer Galgenberg* we know that the site of the Swalmen-Hoogterras barrows was being used for executions in the second half of the 17th century. The map, which is actually little more than a simple drawing, shows a mound surrounded by

some smaller mounds, presumably barrows (Giesen 2010a). On the gallows hill are a wheel and a gallows structure comprising two posts. The map shows the site at a conspicuous point in the landscape, on a high tongue to the north of the river Swalm. In the Middle ages/Early Modern period the site lay in the *gemeint* of Swalmen, at the boundary between Swalmen and Brüggen, which also formed the boundary between the Duchies of Gelre and Jülich. It must have been clearly visible from the thoroughfare between Swalmen and Brüggen. As can be inferred from the aforementioned anonymous map, part of the Roman road in the territory of Swalmen was still in use in this period. The map shows a road running along the foot of the high terrace called 'Keizer Karelsweg' (the continuation of Beesel's Prinsendijk). Unlike the Roman road, which continued across the river Swalm, 'Keizer Karelsweg' stops just north of the river, where it probably joined Bosstraat. Close by was also another stretch of the aforementioned 'Wolfsgraaf' *landweer* (Luys 1983). So the execution site at the Swalmen-Hoogterras barrows also lay in a kind of no man's land, along arterial roads and at the boundaries of territories.

The examples presented above show that there are several ways of determining whether a barrow was used as an execution site, such as archaeological remains, historical sources or toponyms. In very few cases do we have all forms of evidence together. Even so, a literature review has shown that there were more such sites in the southern part of the Netherlands. The identified sites are summarised in table 1 (see also fig. 1). Insofar as can be ascertained, many of these sites lay close to a road or at the boundaries of territories. The following section will discuss another characteristic of these sites, namely that many of them are barrows specifically reused for this purpose. The focus will be on the perception of these monuments in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period.

## 5 The afterlife of prehistoric barrows in the medieval Low Countries

### 5.1 Before Christianisation

It would seem that attitudes towards prehistoric barrows were on the whole positive before the full Christianisation of society, which in the Netherlands occurred around the year 1000. There is hardly any archaeological evidence of a hostile attitude towards barrows to the south of the Rhine in the Roman and Merovingian periods (Roymans 1995, 9-12). In the Frankish areas in general there was even a brief revival in the erection and reuse of barrows after the mid-7th century, which is assumed to reflect deliberate use of pagan burial rites in reaction to the expansion of Christianity (Sippel 1980, 146). In the Saxon areas outside the Frankish Empire small cemeteries were often sited close to prehistoric barrows well into the 8th century, a custom that is generally associated with Saxon ancestor worship (Thäte 1996). This practice was indeed so common that the Carolingian emperor Charlemagne felt the need to issue a law to ban it when these areas were annexed to the Carolingian Empire at the end of the 8th century. This *Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae* stipulates that Christian Saxons were from then onwards no longer to be buried *ad tumulus paganorum* but in Christian churchyards (Sippel 1980, 139). This is a first sign of a changing attitude towards the pagan barrows.

In the course of the Carolingian era new churches were founded in many places and the land was gradually divided into parishes. There is however still no clear evidence that prehistoric burial monuments were deliberately destroyed. On the whole they appear to have remained respected elements of the landscape (Roymans 1995, 9).

## 5.2 The demonisation of prehistoric burial monuments

It was not until the High Middle Ages (11th-13th centuries), after the more or less complete Christianisation of society, that the perception of the prehistoric burial monuments changed drastically. This was a period of agricultural expansion and land reclamation during which the prehistoric cemeteries in the areas that were brought under cultivation were destroyed, both unintentionally and deliberately. In many cases prehistoric monuments survived as visible elements only in the peripheral parts of the landscape, the 'wastelands' between the villages.

This deliberate destruction of prehistoric burial monuments is associated with the expansion of Christianity, which now also reached other parts of the population besides the elite to which it had initially been largely restricted. This led to a transformation in the cosmological order of the local communities, who began to see the world around them in terms of an 'inner circle' and an 'outer circle' (Roymans 1995, 9-12). The inner circle comprised the part of the landscape that was organised and cultivated by humans, with the church at its centre. The outer circle consisted of the uncultivated wastelands, including moors and bogs, which had very negative connotations. The destruction of prehistoric cemeteries in the inner circle was not only the inevitable consequence of reclamations and economic expansion, but a deliberate policy to cleanse this zone of unchristian, pagan elements (Roymans 1995, 18-19). Only in the liminal parts of the outer circle, dangerous uncivilised areas where spirits and other demons resided, were the ancient barrows still tolerated. There they became surrounded by myths. They were the homes of goblins, witches and spirits, an ancient pagan world in stark contrast to the Christian village with its surrounding cultivated fields.

The rich folklore associated with prehistoric cemeteries and burial mounds implies that they had a strong symbolic meaning for the local farming communities. The myths surrounding the barrows contain numerous pagan elements suggesting that the prehistoric cemeteries were important sacred places for pagan religion before Christianisation (and probably a long time after). This may well explain why these places were demonised under the church's influence, as can be inferred for example from the fact that non-Christian mythical creatures acquired ever more evil features. Pagan gods and goddesses were transformed into demons and witches. Interestingly, many of the myths associated with barrows featuring witches and cats (the latter being witches in a different form) contain the element of collective celebrations. The prehistoric cemeteries may have been places where people in pre-Christian times assembled for rites and religious celebrations (Roymans 1995, 15-17).

To return to the execution sites of the late Middle Ages and the Early Modern period, it is to such demonic places that criminals and other people who had forfeited their right to a Christian burial were banished. On the one hand, the burial of outcasts in the prehistoric cemeteries confirmed and enhanced the demonisation of these pagan sacred places (Roymans 1995, 16). And on the other, as already explained above, it formed a symbolic part of the punishment, banishing the convict from society for eternity. In this perception prehistoric barrows came to be the obvious places for executing convicts and displaying their corpses.

## 5.3 Barrows as sites marking boundaries and boundaries as execution sites

In spite of the negative connotations that prevailed from the High Middle Ages onwards, the barrows in the wastelands remained important landmarks. This is evident from the fact that they were used rationally to mark the boundaries of territories. An early reference to barrows as such boundary markers dating from around the year 780 is known from a charter describing the estates of Fulda Abbey (Germany), which refers to *antiqua sepulchra*. Other German sources refer to *alte Gräber* (ancient burials), *Hünengräbern* (megalithic tombs[5]) and *Heidengräbern* (heathen burials) in boundary charters (Sippel 1980, 139).

A comparable relationship between boundaries, (burial) mounds and gallows/execution sites has also been observed in the northern part of the Netherlands (Luning & Van der Sanden 2010). As far as the southern part of the country is concerned, in addition to the archaeological examples discussed in the present article we also know of various chronicles and other official documents revealing this relationship between burial mounds, execution sites and boundaries. There is for example a document from 1420 defining the boundaries between Vierlingsbeek and Sambeek into the Peel region. This document tells us that one boundary runs from a pit near a farm called "ten Henegot" to the mound (a barrow?), where old father Morren was hanged.[6]

A second example concerns an early 16th-century chronicle by Peter van Os (Van Lith-Droog-leever Fortuijn *et al.* 1997). This is an exceptionally interesting passage as it may be a historical reference to the gallows of the Zevenbergen cemetery. Van Os writes that in 1365 a list was drawn up of the rights of the Duke of Brabant in the Land of Herpen (later known as Land of Ravenstein, see above). The chronicle quotes as evidence that in the early 14th century the boundary between the Land of Herpen and the village of Nistelrode was been defined under the supervision of the high sheriff of 's Hertogenbosch, Jan van den Plas.[7] Seven occupants of Nistelrode were selected to point out the boundary, and this they did as follows.[8] They walked from Nistelrode:

> [..] to the Witte Scilbergen [mounds] and pointed to a post where Sir Jan, the aforementioned sheriff, had installed the gallows; the aforementioned seven men then walked on from the Witten Scilbergen to Dedweg [a road] and from Dedweg on to Slabroek and from there on to Hanenberg [another mound], from there to Sleekberg [yet another mound] and into the centre of Erpt.[9]

Many of the landmarks that are here referred to as boundary markers are 'mounds', probably artificially created elevations, so including burial mounds. We know for sure that there was an urnfield at Slabroek (Van Wijk & Jansen 2010). As noted above, the barrows near Berghem marked the boundary between the *gemeint* of Oss/Berghem and that of Nistelrode, but they also lay at the boundary between the Duchy of Brabant and the Land of Herpen (later Land of Ravenstein). This makes it very likely that the Zevenbergen cemetery was one of the landmarks pointed out by the seven occupants of Nistelrode. Insofar as their route can be reconstructed on the basis of surviving toponyms, the *Witte Scilbergen* (unfortunately the exact meaning of this toponym remains elusive) may very well relate to the Zevenbergen and *Vorstengraf* groups of barrows. In that case the reference to a gallows at this site, erected in the early 14th century by the high sheriff of 's-Hertogenbosch Jan van den Plas, could in fact relate to the gallows the remains of which were found during the excavation of the Zevenbergen cemetery.

## 6   Parallel developments: barrows, gallows and boundaries in England

The medieval custom of granting prehistoric barrows a new life as a gallows hill or execution site is not restricted to the Netherlands. We also know of many examples of comparable reuse from Germany and, to a lesser extent, the Scandinavian countries (Van der Sanden 2010). Recent extensive research has focused on this custom in Great Britain (Reynolds 1997, 2002, 2009a, 2009b; Whyte 2003a, 2003b). Since there are a lot of similarities in the relationship between barrows, execution sites and boundaries between the Netherlands and England, the situation in England will be considered more closely below.

In Britain, the late 5th century saw a distinct increase in the reuse of prehistoric barrows as cemeteries. This is in marked contrast with the Roman period, from which we have virtually no evidence of this practice (Williams 1998, 92). This intensifying reuse of barrows as cemeteries is thought to be associated with efforts of the Germanic immigrants (among whom were prob-

ably also Saxons from the northern part of the Netherlands) to legitimise themselves as the heirs of the original occupants. This custom peaked in the 7th century. In that same period various new mounds were erected and they were much larger than their prehistoric predecessors. They were intended for spectacular (pagan) burials of elites. As in Merovingian Europe, this brief revival is assumed to represent a reaction against the expansion of Christianity in this period (Williams 1998, 103-4).

The pagan burial rite died out in the early 8th century. From then onwards, the deceased were always buried in churchyards. Around the same time attitudes towards barrows changed, presumably as a result of the expansion of Christianity and the associated demonisation of pagan views and customs. It is assumed that in the early Anglo-Saxon period barrows were seen as the homes of spirits, ancestors and gods, and that they played important roles in pagan rituals. Verses and other texts written in Christian times describe barrows as abominable, terrifying haunted places, inhabited by monsters, spirits and other demons. Barrows were incidentally unique in this respect as other types of prehistoric monuments do not seem to have had such negative connotations (Semple 1998, 115-118).[10]

Another important development in 7th-century England, besides conversion to Christianity, was the establishment of individual Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. The centralisation of power led to a penal system intended to secure peace and stability. The laws issued by the Anglo-Saxon kings contain long lists of crimes that were punishable with death. Laws from after the 10th century also stipulate that convicts were not to be buried in the hallowed ground of a churchyard. This resulted in formal cemeteries for executed individuals, the earliest of which date from the 7th century. Many of the skeletons in these cemeteries show indisputable evidence of an unnatural death. Almost all the known cemeteries for executed convicts lie at the boundaries of the 'hundreds' into which Anglo-Saxon England was divided. Two thirds of those cemeteries are moreover associated with barrows, the others with linear earthworks. The locations of those sites are comparable with those of the Dutch gallows hills and they are interpreted in the same way. Executed criminals had not only violated the laws of the secular authorities, they had also sinned against God. The appropriate way of disposing of such sinners was to bury them in pagan cemeteries, thus denying them a grave in a Christian churchyard. Barrows were specifically chosen for the execution and burial of criminals so as to ensure the most impressive visual impact, and probably also with the intention of ensuring that in their afterlives the executed criminals would suffer under the evil influence of the spirits that resided in the barrows (Reynolds 1997).

Anglo-Saxon charter bounds also show that there was a close relationship between boundaries, barrows and cemeteries for executed convicts. The charter bounds frequently refer to *cwealmstowa* (execution site), *heafod stoccum* (stakes on which severed heads were displayed), *beorh* or *hlæw* (barrow) and *hæðenan byrigels* (pagan burials) (Grinsell 1991; Reynolds 2002).

This situation continued in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period, as revealed by a recent study focusing on Norfolk (Whyte 2003a). In the Middle Ages the gallows were used both for executing convicts and for displaying their corpses. Maps show that eight of the eleven gallows in Norfolk stood on mounds lying within 300 metres from a parish boundary. In later periods, the gallows for displaying corpses stood at points where parish boundaries intersected common grounds, underlining the banishment of criminals from the spiritual core of the community. The parish boundaries of the Norfolk communities were defined and reviewed by means of 'perambulation ceremonies', processions in which the occupants of a parish would confirm their boundaries by walking along them. During these perambulations the occupants would point out striking landscape features such as barrows and places that were of importance in the parish's collective memory, such as gallows hills. So barrows and gallows hills were both important elements in the interpretation and organisation of the (post-)medieval landscape. Many of the known barrows in Norfolk indeed appear to lie at medieval boundaries. And, as in the Netherlands, most lie in peripheral areas. Whyte suggests that their distri-

bution pattern is not just the consequence of patterns of land use, with the barrows in the fertile agricultural areas having disappeared. It is quite possible that many barrows owe their survival largely to the key role they played in marking boundaries and their distribution pattern is as much a reflection of their later use as boundary markers as of their original use as burial monuments (Whyte 2003b).

## 7   Conclusion

The discovery of four Late Medieval burial pits containing executed individuals in a prehistoric barrow cemetery at Berghem prompted an investigation into the phenomenon of reusing prehistoric barrows as execution sites and/or sites for displaying the bodies of executed individuals. Based on an inventory of such reused sites, this discussion of this phenomenon in the southern part of the Netherlands supplements earlier studies centered on the northern part of the Netherlands. The focus of the present study was how the locations of execution sites relate to the medieval/Early Modern landscape. It was found that the majority of the sites lay along arterial roads and at the boundaries of territories, as previously also observed in the northern part of the Netherlands. Such locations were chosen partly for practical purposes, the gallows were intended to serve as deterrents and in those locations they would confront as many people as possible with the severity of the penal system in the area concerned. The locations concerned however also had a more symbolic meaning. Burying executed convicts at the boundaries of territories and outside the hallowed ground of a churchyard was a way of banishing them from the community for eternity.

A second important point in the discussion was the question why specifically barrows were reused for this purpose. This can likewise be explained in terms of practical considerations and symbolic meaning. Erected on an elevation, the gallows were visible from a great distance and afforded an impressive visual impact. At the same time the meaning that was assigned to barrows in the Middle Ages as places of evil will have strengthened the thought that these places were ideal for the burial of executed individuals and other outcasts. It should be added that not all gallows/execution sites were prehistoric barrows. In some cases a natural elevation was used or a new mound was constructed. As a mound is not practically necessary for the erection of a gallows, this construction of a new mound may even refer to the old custom of reusing a barrow for this purpose, the symbolic meaning of which may have been lost in later times.

The earliest gallows hills in the Netherlands date from the late Middle Ages. In historical sources they are mentioned for the first time in the first half of the 14th century (Anloo's *Galgenberg* (Drenthe)). The medieval burials at the Berghem cemetery yielded ^{14}C dates between the 13th and 15th centuries. In the Duchy of Brabant these dates coincide with the introduction of stricter administration of justice as a result of the expansion of the central authority of the Duke of Brabant. The key principle of the stricter laws was the concept of retribution, with crimes being punished by a wide variety of corporal punishments. There are indications of the introduction of severe corporal punishments going hand in hand with the development of central authority elsewhere, for example in Anglo-Saxon England, where the appearance of separate cemeteries for executed criminals is associated with the establishment of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.   An interesting point of study for future research would be to compare the appearance of execution sites in different northwest European countries, notably Germany, France and the Scandinavian countries. The neglect of these countries in favour of England in the above comparative discussion is partly due to the local situation being far less well studied than it is in England.

| | Province | Town | Toponym | Type of Monument | Date | Archaeology | Toponym | Historical source | Folklore/tradition | Location in Middle Ages/ subrecent | References |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Gelderland | Bergharen | Galgenberg | cemetery | EMA | | ● | | | - | Archis no. 25.665 |
| 2 | Gelderland | Wijchen | Galgenberg | urnfield / cemetery | LBA-EIA / RP | | ● | | | - | Schuyf 1995, 121 |
| 3 | Noord-Brabant | Alphen | Kwaalburg | barrow | MBA | ●a | | | | - | Beex 1964; Theunissen 2001 |
| 4 | Noord-Brabant | Bergeijk | Galgenbergje | barrow? | MBA | | ● | | | - | Glasbergen 1954, 9 |
| 5 | Noord-Brabant | Berghem | Zevenbergen | barrow | MBA-EIA | ●b | | | | boundary / road | Van der Linde & Jansen 2009; Meurkens 2007 |
| 6 | Noord-Brabant | Bladel | Galgeveld | urnfield | LBA-EIA | | ● | | | - | Archis no. 36.429 |
| 7 | Noord-Brabant | Boxtel | Galgeberg | barrow? | - | | ● | | | boundary / road | Archis no. 36.163 |
| 8 | Noord-Brabant | Casteren | Galgevelden | cemetery | RP | | ● | | | road | Findhammer 2006; Archis no. 39.597 |
| 9 | Noord-Brabant | Cuijk | Galberg | urnfield | LBA-EIA | | ● | | | boundary | Hermans 1865, 4 |
| 10 | Noord-Brabant | Goirle | Vijfberg / Rechte Heide | barrow | MBA | ●c | ● | | | boundary | Van Giffen 1937 |
| 11 | Noord-Brabant | Leende | Galberg | urnfield | LBA-EIA | | ● | | | - | Findhammer 2006 |
| 12 | Noord-Brabant | Loon op Zand | Galgenwiel | barrow? | - | | ● | | | boundary | Archis no. 34.709 |
| 13 | Noord-Brabant | Mierlo | Galgenven | urnfield | LBA-EIA | | ● | | | boundary / road | Roymans 1995, 22 |
| 14 | Noord-Brabant | Nuenen | Gulberg | barrow | - | | ● | | | - | Roymans 1995, 22 |
| 15 | Noord-Brabant | Rijsbergen | Stoffelenberg | barrow? / urnfield | LBA-EIA | | | | ●d | boundary / road | Verhagen 1994 |
| 16 | Noord-Brabant | Uden | Slabroek / Galgenberg | barrow? / urnfield | LBA-EIA | | ● | | | boundary | Jansen et al. in prep; NMA correspondence H. Wiegersma - J.H. Holwerda, 30-01-1923 |
| 17 | Limburg | Beegden | Galgenberg | urnfield | LBA-EIA | | ● | | | - | Archis no. 15.973 |
| 18 | Limburg | Beesel | Bosheide / Grietjens Gericht | barrow | LNEO | | | ●e | | boundary | Lanting & Van der Waals 1974; Luys 1981 |
| 19 | Limburg | Blitterswijck | Galgenberg | urnfield | LBA-EIA | | ● | | | - | Roymans 1995, 22; Archis no. 17.500 |
| 20 | Limburg | Maasbree | Galgeven | cemetery | IA-RP | | ● | | | - | Archis nos. 6.618, 6.628 |
| 21 | Limburg | Nieuw-Bergen | Galgenberg | urnfield | LBA-EIA | | ● | | | - | Archis no. 16.117 |
| 22 | Limburg | Sittard | Auvelenberg | barrow? | RP | | | ●f | | - | http://nl.wikipedia.org/ wiki/ Auveleberg |
| 23 | Limburg | Swalmen | Hoogterras / Bosberg / Zevenberg | barrow | BA | ●g | ● | | | boundary / road | Lanting & Van der Waals 1974; Giessen 2010a |

a   Two subrecent burial pits at the foot of the barrow. One of the two contained skeletal remains of a person aged 12-18.

b   Posthole of a gallows structure and three subrecent burials in barrow 2, one subrecent burial in barrow 7.

c   Tumulus II contained a subrecent burial pit with human skeletal remains.

d   Tradition has it that a man named Stoffel was beheaded here in the 15th or 16th century and that his body was displayed on a wheel.

e   Execution site of Beesel, named after one Margaretha (Grietje) Gysberts, who was beheaded here in 1651 for the murder of her baby. Her body was displayed on a wheel.

f   The Auvelenberg is believed to have been used for executions. In 1550 two supporters of Luther were burnt at the stake here.

g   The gallows hill of Swalmen is indicated on historical maps. An archaeological excavation of tumulus 5 revealed a subrecent burial of a beheaded young individual. It is believed that subrecent skeletal remains were also discovered during an earlier investigation of tumulus 3, but no further information is available on the remains.

*Table 1 Prehistoric, Roman and Early Medieval monuments associated with gallows/execution sites in the southern part of the Netherlands (see endnotes for information on archaeological aspects, historical sources and folklore/tradition; abbreviations: LNEO (Late Neolithic); BA (Bronze Age); MBA (Middle Bronze Age); LBA (Late Bronze Age); IA (Iron Age); EIA (Early Iron Age); RP (Roman Period); EMA (Early Middle Ages); Archis (Database of Dutch Archaeological Sites and Monuments); NMA (National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden) ).*

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## Notes

1. "*Das er nimmer zu Erde bestattet werde, der Wind ihn verwehe, die Krahen, Raben und Tiere in der Luft ihn verfuhren und verzehren*" (Ström 1942, 160-161).
2. A previous (Dutch) version of the present article.
3. GrN-29554: 725 ± 40 BP. With 95.4% certainty the calibrated date lies between AD 1210 and 1310 (86.8%) or AD 1360 and 1390 (8.6%).
4. GrN-41266: 450 ± 35 BP. With 95.4% certainty the calibrated date lies between AD 1400 and 1500 (93.9%) or AD 1600 and 1610. (1.5%).
5. Literally the term means Hun's burial. It probably refers to megalithic tombs of the Neolithic Funnel Beaker Culture. In the northern part of the Netherlands these megaliths are known as 'Hunebed' (Hun's bed).
6. "*den berch, daer Morren alden-vader gehangen waert*" (Van den Brand 1982).
7. Jan van den Plas was the high sheriff of 's Hertogenbosch in the years 1311-1312 and in 1317 ('s Hertogenbosch city archives: http://www.stadsarchief.nl/content.cfm?contentid=D1501CEE-8021-0F65-08822430BCDF0C05 (last accessed on 1 May 2010) ).
8. The term used in the chronicle is 'palinge'. This refers to *palen* (posts). The villagers were supposed to walk along a route marked out by posts. In the Middle Ages and later, posts were often used to mark boundaries. Other markers, such as a hole in the ground, a tree or a large boulder, could also be used. The same terminology was often used when referring to the latter. In 1826 mounds of sand (barrows?) at the boundary between Veldhoven and Riethoven were referred to as *aardpalen* ('earthen posts') (Van Asseldonk 2002, 43-44).
9. "[...] *totten Witten Scilberge toe ende wesen dair enen pael dair heer Ian, scouthet voirs., dede setten die galge met enen styll; ende voirt gingen die voirs. zeven mannen van den Witten Scilberge all totten Dedwech ende van den Dedwech in de stege tot Slaebroeck ende vandair voirt op Hanenberch, vandair voirt op Sleecberch tot midden in den Erpt*" (Van Lith-Droogleever Fortuijn *et al.* 1997, 96-97).
10. An exception are the linear earthworks, which did have negative connotations. These monuments were often used to mark boundaries and it would seem that the negative connotations were in this case based on their function as boundary markers.

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