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## Settling in a Changing World

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# 6 Settling in a changing world: a synthesis

This final chapter aims to provide a synthesis of the preceding study. On the one hand, the central phenomenon of ‘villa development’ is discussed in an integral way, combining insights from the subsequent analyses and hopefully reaching a better understanding of these processes. On the other hand, the reconstructed processes are viewed from a higher perspective, embedding them in their broader context of the profound developments that took place in relation to the integration of this region into the Roman Empire.

As elaborated in this study’s introduction, two main objectives can be identified. The first involves reconstructing, visualising and analyzing development trajectories in settlement organisation and house building. The second concerns understanding these developments from a dimensional perspective, combining the short and the long term, local, global as well as social and economic perspectives and focusing on both structure and agency. The diachronic dimension is crucial, especially when wanting to shed light on processes of social and economic change within the context of the settlement and house. It is in this way that archaeology can greatly contribute to the studies of the Roman past in ways that other disciplines cannot.

In this chapter I will review the results of the two objectives mentioned. The first part focuses on the variety in settlement development within the research region. The following section will then present a coherent view on how we could interpret these developments socially. Subsequently, it is discussed in brief how villa development relates to processes of ‘becoming Roman’ that have been reconstructed in recent studies on the Roman provinces. Lastly, some recommendations with regard to future research will be presented.

Before starting off, it must be emphasised that the present study has set out to explore *villa development*. As such, it reaches beyond the study of ‘the villa’ in a traditional sense, being defined as a monumental house with strong Roman architectural influences or a settlement with such a main house. Taking a broader perspective, this study explores the complex of development processes within the rural settlements of the provincial countryside.

## 6.1 Reconstructing development trajectories

Over the decades, large-scale excavations of rural settlement have led to a marked increase of settlement data, providing a new potential for studying the organisation of wider settlement complexes, the diachronic dimension of both settlements and individual houses. These data shed new light on the developments taking place on the countryside of the northern provinces during the first centuries AD.

Instead of primarily looking at the final results of the developments, generally concerning highly structured settlements with more or less monumentalised buildings, the development process as such constitutes the key aim of this analysis. A variety of settlement trajectories in settlement organisation and house building have been reconstructed.

Using the five regions distinguished within this study, we will briefly recapitulate the variety of analysed developments within the broad research region. In the northern regions, during the later Iron Age and into the Roman period, a trend can be identified of farmsteads becoming increasingly clustered and spatially stable. In an increasing number of cases, houses were rebuilt at the same location. This trend continues into the Roman period, when settlements were being fixed within the landscape by means of their ditch enclosures, simultaneously defining and structuring settlement space. Houses have often been rebuilt within the enclosures and in many cases even on exactly the same spot. This trend towards stability can also be recognised in house building itself. Around the Early Roman period, a new type of post-built house is starting to be built, one sturdier than its earlier counterparts. From the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, houses in some settlements were founded on stone footings, which significantly increased their durability. Most frequently, however, the existing tradition of building two-aisled post-built houses remains the norm. In some cases, new elements were being adopted in house building, although

traditional ways of building seem to have remained dominant. The wood-built houses that are extended with a portico are particularly interesting. In some cases, the creation of such a portico is associated with the use of new building materials and new construction techniques as well. Multi-roomed houses on stone foundations are relatively rare in this region. With regard to the coastal region and central river area, it seems that such houses were only constructed from the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century onwards. Possibly, this was linked to the monumentalisation of the military camps along the limes in this region, from around 160 AD. The monumental houses documented around Nijmegen, however, seem to have been constructed somewhat earlier. The same applies to Hoogeloon.

Respecting the Dutch, German and Belgian loess regions, the pre-Roman and earliest Roman habitation of the countryside remains difficult to reconstruct. In Germany, clusters of post-built constructions have been documented at a number of sites. These seem to have been loosely structured settlements, consisting of one or more contemporary farmsteads. In the German region, these do not seem to have been enclosed by ditches in the pre-Roman period. With regard to several cases within the Belgian region, however, pre-Roman enclosures could in fact be documented. This can be linked to the region of northern France, where pre-Roman enclosed settlements are a well-documented phenomenon.

In the German region, it can be established that from around the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD settlements were organised as rectangular, well-structured compound settlements, where the buildings were arranged along the enclosure ditches and surrounding an open space. At a number of sites, the development from loosely structured farmstead(s) to a well-structured compound could be documented (Pulheim-Brauweiler, Jüchen-Neuholz, Hambach 412 and Frimmersdorf 129). Also with regard to the many other compound settlements in this region, it is important to be cautious with interpreting these as colonial units, planted in the landscape in a planned manner. As sites like Pulheim and Jüchen have demonstrated, it might well be that earlier development phases existed than those that were previously considered to have been in place. In quite a number of the structured settlements, houses were still post-built during the early phase of development. It was not until much later that they were monumentalised. Some houses were rebuilt as rectangular hall-like single-aisled houses, constructed with posts set on stone footings. At other sites, post-built houses were replaced with the well-known type of multi-roomed houses on stone foundations.

Within the Belgian region, a development trajectory from post-built settlements towards well-structured and monumentalised settlements can also be documented. At Meslin-L' Eveque an enclosed settlement with simple post-built houses was replaced by a highly monumental and axially organised settlement in the late 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. This complex is situated at exactly the same location, adhering to the existing orientation. At many other sites, post-built houses dating back to the Late Iron Age or earlier Roman period were documented, pre-dating the construction of multi-roomed houses on stone foundations.

In northern France, existing settlements enclosed by curvilinear ditch-systems were replaced by much more rigidly organised settlement compounds, often rectangular in shape. Some settlements seem to have been replaced by highly structured and axially organised settlement complexes quite rapidly. In other cases, rectangular compound settlements developed. A new way of organising settlement space becomes apparent, creating clear spatial hierarchy by means of organisation and axially as well as segregating space by means of walls and ditches.

With regard to house building, a variety of development trajectories was reconstructed as well. In many settlements of the northern sand and clay region, house building continued in traditional ways, building two-aisled post-built byre houses. In a number of settlements, however, some interesting changes to house building could be documented. A first category concerns traditional houses that were extended with a new architectural element: the portico. In this region, quite a number of houses have been interpreted – though not exclusively in an entirely convincing way – as portico-houses, being more or less traditional houses surrounded by a wooden portico. In other cases, the construction of the house itself also changed. Central roof-supporting posts were replaced by heavy wall constructions supporting the roof. Such houses, quite a number of which included wall posts on stone footings, can also be found in the German loess region (Hambach 516, Jüchen-Neuotzenrath, Frimmersdorf 131 ). One of these houses, located at Druten, had a long fronting wooden portico, acting as a façade. At Jüchen and Hambach 516, a façade was created by adding a single risalith to the hall-like house. These houses were essentially still traditional structures or remarkably close to it. The category of multi-roomed houses on stone foundations, however, represented more of a break with tradition. These houses were built using new materials, new techniques, new forms and concepts, such as the portico-risalith façade and had a

different domestic spatial organisation with its several rooms. Such a development of traditional houses towards multi-roomed houses on stone foundations could be documented throughout the research region, from Druten in the northernmost part to Verneuil-en-Halatte in the southern section.

Besides houses, buildings associated with production also developed over time. A variety of relatively large buildings developed during the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, for which it was generally difficult to reconstruct a precise function. The category of storage buildings, which was easier to recognise, were generally rebuilt as larger buildings, often constructed on stone foundations. When looking at the spatial structure of the settlement, it is remarkable that these conspicuous storage constructions were often spatially associated with the main monumental houses.

Focusing on the development processes, moving beyond the differentiation in eventual form, a number of general trends in settlement organisation and house building may be recognised:

- A long-term trend towards increasing stability of settlement: over time, settlements became stable and well-defined, enclosed units within the landscape
- Increasingly structured, differentiated and complex organisation of domestic space: spatial segregation, organisational concepts (like symmetry and axiality), monumentalisation and a more complex symbolic structure (created especially inside the house by using elements of decoration and furniture) were ways in which more socio-politically complex and asymmetrical relationships were created in both settlements and houses.
- Increasing durability: by using new materials and techniques, house became more durable constructions
- Increasing differentiation of house building: some houses developed into larger, monumentalised and spatially complex constructions, others remained more or less traditional
- Larger, more specialised buildings with economic functions were constructed: these reflected and were probably actively used in the creation of new productional relationships. In several settlements, it could be established that control over surplus was symbolised by the spatial association of a monumental storage building with a monumental house
- Increasing differentiation in the settlement landscape: some settlement developed towards large, highly monumental settlements while others remained small, simple and only little monumentalised

As has become clear from the above descriptions, these general developments did not take place in a uniform way throughout the research region and not even within the same regionality or locality. While in some cases the reorganisation of domestic space and transformation of architecture remains limited, in others, new, highly structured, complex and luxurious settlement forms developed. With regard to the different ways in which these developments took place, a number of settlement and house types can be defined (see fig. 6.1):

- Multi-farmstead settlements: these settlements remain to be organised as a cluster of individual farmsteads, although a common ditch enclosure was created. In some cases, one of the houses has changed: a new concept, new techniques, materials, new forms. A very strict organisation is lacking and there is only little differentiation in houses within the settlement.
- Compound settlements with one or more houses: more differentiated, more structured, more monumentalised.
- Axial complexes: highly structured and highly differentiated
- Simple post-built settlements in villa-dominated landscapes

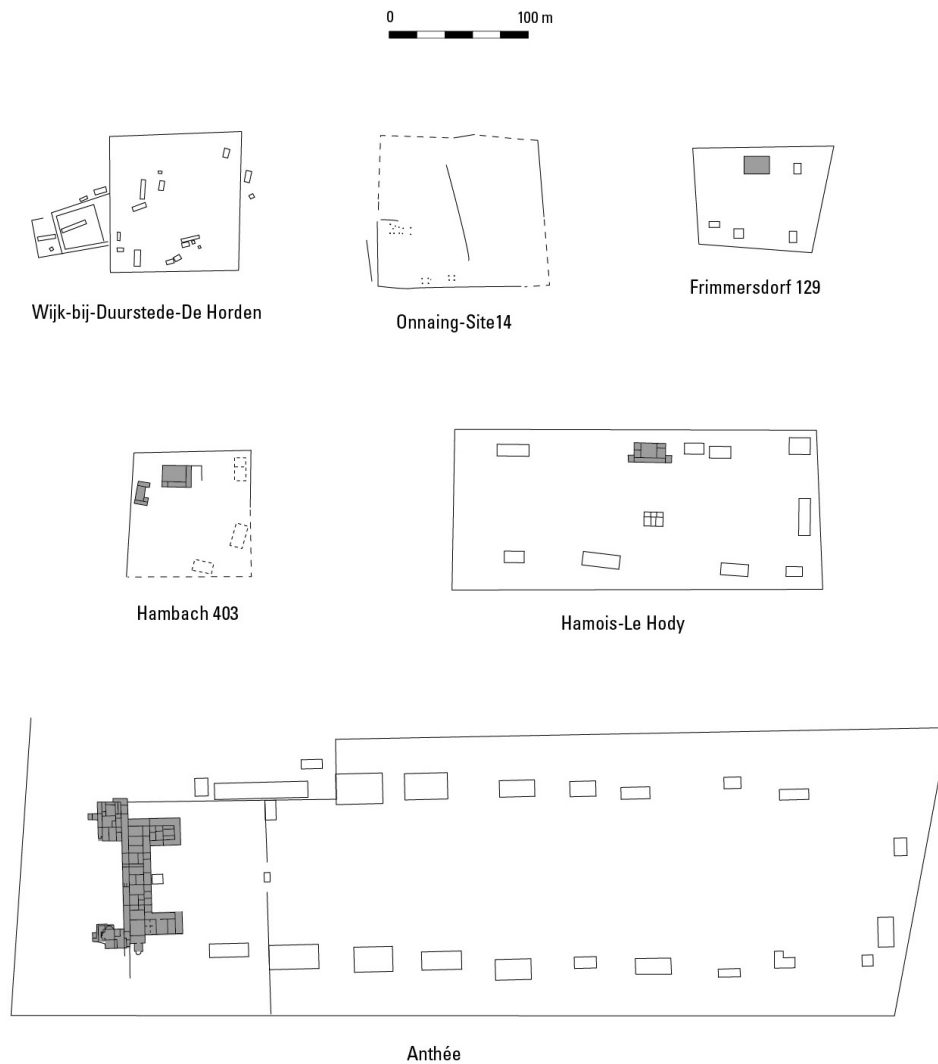


Fig. 6.1 a number of enclosed compound settlements from the research region, demonstrating the pronounced variation in settlement, form, size and character.

## 6.2 Interpreting development trajectories from a multi-dimensional approach

With the objective of understanding the complex implications and backgrounds of the developments sketched here, a multi-dimensional approach has been suggested, combining social, cultural and economic perspectives, both short term and long term, global and local. Moreover, it concerns focusing on both the agency of individuals and the effect of institutional developments (structure). Such an approach is a reminder not to focus solely on current theoretical issues but attempt to find a balanced theoretical approach.

The concept of villa development, as used in this study, relates to the way that, within their direct living environment (settlement and house), people constructed a new place in the changing world of the developing Roman provinces. Over time, the majority of people inhabiting the provincial countryside will have been affected in most aspects of their lives. However, how people responded to these developments, what precise forms these changes took and how profound they were was geographically and socially differentiated. Generally speaking, by reorganizing space, breaking with traditions and changing patterns of consumption and production, new social and economic realities were created. Relationships within the local communities as well as between these communities or individuals and the outside world were

redefined and redesigned within the local settlements of the provincial countryside. The basic research question, then, is how new social and economic realities were constructed within the context of the rural settlement between the Late Iron Age and Roman period.

Firstly I will focus on the reorganisation of domestic space as a means of creating new social and economic relationships. This involved increasing spatial structuration and segregation and thus the increasing control over access and exclusion, movement and experience, both on the level of the settlement compound and the house. Consequently, a spatial hierarchy was created as a metaphor for social centrality, prominence and control. The location of monumental houses in prominent locations, segregation by means of ditches and walls, the spatial association with large granaries, the creation of paths to guide movement were all used as illustrations of this process. In general, the more complex and differentiated way that space was organised can be understood as associated with an increasing socio-political complexity. The fact that settlement complexes were laid out as planned units as well as their spatial structure indicate significantly shifting patterns of power and control. To emphasise the significance of these changes; it was in this new spatial structure of their direct living environment that people interacted on a day-to-day basis, thus highly structuring their social behaviour and relationships.

A second important process can be described as monumentalisation. A number of dimensions should be highlighted. On the one hand monumentalisation involved the increasing objective of communicating social distinction toward the outside world, as illustrated by the creation of impressive facades as well as the basic visual character of the house with its white walls and red roof. On the other hand, it involved the increasing physical durability of the house, which was consequently becoming a monument derived from the past. Being associated with past generations, the house became a durable monumental symbol for the continuity of the family line, its social and economic position of prominence. The introduction of new building materials should consequently not be regarded as a passive adoption of Roman forms or ways, but as an active way to create a new durable symbol of power and continuity.

Another aspect of the developments in house building involved the act of breaking with existing traditions. With the construction of houses on stone foundations, new techniques, materials, forms, concepts from outside the local communities were introduced. Furthermore, knowledge and workforce were also brought in from outside. By breaking with local ways that rooted in history, social relationships were redefined and new positions were created. Viewed from a broader perspective, developments in house building are part of a broader break with existing lifestyles and the construction of new ones. By doing so, existing relationships are redefined and new ones are created, both within the sphere of the emerging rural elites and towards the arenas of administrative and political power, located in the urban centres.

Obviously, some people had the opportunity to redefine social relationships and create, strengthen, fix and communicate their prominent and dominant position. That is however only part of the story, because, if some people were becoming increasingly powerful, others must have become increasingly powerless and dependent. It is these people that have often remained underexposed, as they are generally less visible archaeologically and their material culture is regarded as being less interesting. Here, we have attempted to shed somewhat more light on the broader social range on the countryside. In general, we distinguish between the more high-class social groups, the middle class and lower-class social groups. The higher social groups include the people that took advantage of the opportunities that developed in the context of the provincialisation of the research region. These people managed to improve, renew or strengthen their power positions within society and successfully relate to the new institutions of power created by the Roman authorities. Old elite, new elite and veterans all fall into this category.

The middle class included the people who did not directly relate to new institutions and arenas of power but managed to make a good living by owning smaller plots of land or being successful tenants. These people invested in their housing and partly connected to newly developing lifestyles on the countryside, probably indirectly inspired on urban lifestyles and more directly on the large villa complexes on the countryside.

The lower social groups included those people who, as a result of some groups becoming more powerful, often became increasingly powerless and dependent. As has become evident, they were being controlled in different ways. They did not connect to new elite lifestyles. Within this category, there is some considerable variation still, however, ranging from small free tenants to slaves or people who were controlled so directly that they were practically unfree.

Different development trajectories can in certain ways be related to the different social classes as described above. Different people responded to changes in different ways and thus constructed their place

in the new world in different ways. Probably, we may assume that there was a 'fashion for the foreign' among the highest social groups. They welcomed new forms, materials, objects and ideas to redefine themselves and distinguish themselves from other people.<sup>618</sup> These were the people who first started consuming in new ways and first connected to new (urban) lifestyles, also bringing these to the countryside. Another reaction is adaption, borrowing piecemeal in order to incorporate the pieces into a traditional structure.<sup>619</sup> Cultural adoption involves de-contextualisation and re-contextualisation, lifting an item out of its original setting and modifying it to fit its new environment.<sup>620</sup>

Focusing on the multi-dimensional approach more explicitly, it should be questioned what this approach has actually contributed to insight into processes of change. Looking at both long-term and short-term development has certainly increased insight into the development processes. Changes in settlement organisation, the economy and possibly also social changes began in the pre-Roman period, and continued into the Roman period. Some more radical transformations were taking place during the Roman period, but it seems that these should be placed within the longer lines of development. Therefore, it has been argued that villa development should be viewed as a process in the tension field between continuity and change. Villa development is not just a radical break-away from existing traditions. In a number of ways, it is also a continuation of existing development trends.

With regard to the local and global it could be stated that this study has mainly focused on the local in the sense that the settlement and house constituted central objects of study. However, it is not possible to understand the developments at this local level if disregarding more global developments taking place on the level of the civitas, province or even empire. Eventually, changes at the level of the 'global' influenced people down to the 'local' level of their settlements and houses; the setting of their daily lives. The development of an increasingly market-oriented economy (related to the fact that, for the first time in this region, large groups of people were not directly involved in agricultural production), for example, significantly influenced the way that production was organised, and the related process of monetisation affected the spheres of exchange, leading to the increasing importance of short-term exchange. This eventually affected the way that settlements were organised and people interacted. Something similar could be said for the political-administrative system that the Romans introduced to administer the provinces. This highly institutionalised and socio-politically complex system eventually caused the development of more complex and asymmetrical relationships on the countryside as well. Such developing relationships were demonstrated in relation to the reorganisation of domestic space at the level of both the settlement and house. From a somewhat different perspective, it could be stated that the elites, in the process of redefining their social position, were no longer focussing on the local, but increasingly connected 'global' lifestyles, referring to sources and using elements, forms and ideas from outside the local community. As emphasised before, these more 'global' lifestyles predominantly developed in the urban centers.

Finally, with regard to agency and structure, or the cultural and institutional dimension as Slofstra labels it, this research has focused on the creative individual who actively restructured existing relationships by choosing to reorganise settlement space and choosing to break with existing ways of house building. This was an active strategy to define, communicate and fix new relationships. However, another important part of villa development was the institutionalisation that took place on a broader level. Power was now increasingly organised in institutions and some people on the countryside became part of such institutions. Relationships within rural settlements also seem to have been formalised in some cases. Especially in the most rigidly organised axial complexes, it seems likely that the relationships between the proprietor living on the main residential compound and the workers on the working compound were quite formal and probably organised in the form of contractual tenancy. It is these people who probably lost individual freedom (agency) compared to the pre-Roman situation. Another important factor of institutionalisation with regard to villa development is the creation of a taxation system, whereby rural inhabitants were taxed and consequently became connected to Roman law systems and therefore part of Roman institutions.

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618 On different responses to cultural encounter and exchange see Burke 2009, 72 ff.

619 Burke 2009, 93; a phenomenon termed 'bricolage' by Levi-Strauss.

620 Burke 2009, 93-94.

### 6.3 Interpreting villa development as a process of change: ‘becoming Roman’?

Often, the adoption of Roman materials, objects and symbols is associated with the adoption of Roman culture and is viewed as a process of ‘becoming Roman’.<sup>621</sup> But is this a correct representation of what was going on? Were people using new materials, techniques and forms in fact becoming Roman? Did they want to display a Roman identity?

In his influential study, Cohen showed how influences of an intruding power can be employed for the service of indigenous symbolic systems. As emphasised before, the adoption of new objects and forms involved the incorporation of these into a traditional structure.<sup>622</sup> Furthermore, this study has argued that much more than a passive adoption of Roman forms, villa development is much more about the creative and active use of new forms for construction new social and economic realities. It is therefore absolutely crucial to be cautious when relating the adoption of new forms, objects and concepts, to an intentional desire of ‘becoming Roman’ or communicating a Roman identity, even though the objects themselves might well have been of Roman origin or inspired on Roman forms. New ways of organising and building did not so much serve to explicitly create a new Roman identity, but much more used as instruments to create a system of internal social differentiation. As such, inhabitants reinterpreted Roman culture to fit their circumstances and because it was useful and necessary to them.<sup>623</sup> Necessary, because adherence to Roman values and lifestyle was required for participation in the ruling strata of the empire, and useful because this gave them a secure place within the new order, and access to the broader horizon of imperial life.<sup>624</sup> Viewed in this way, were people building villas ‘exploiting a medium of alien origin for the conceptualisation and expression of essentially indigenous ideas’?<sup>625</sup> Indeed, ‘Roman’ should in most cases be understood in a relative way, as ‘Roman’ villas were adjusted to the colder climate and also seem to have used native ideas on house building. These therefore in fact constitute new, hybrid creations rather than straightforward copies of Roman forms. It is not about being Roman or being native, it is about constructing new and much more complex identities in a changing world among others through the creative manipulation of material culture.<sup>626</sup> Furthermore, meaning and perception are important topics. Were certain ‘Roman’ styles indeed associated with Roman-ness or were they too embedded in local systems of meaning? The adoption of styles can be part of conscious social strategies (for example to connect to arenas of decision making and power), without having direct relations to the cultures with which these styles are generally related by archaeologists.

With regard to these considerations it is perhaps necessary to distinguish between the first generations of locals that were confronted with Roman culture and the later generations that grew up in a Roman province. While to the former certain forms might indeed have had associations with the Roman culture that had newly arrived in the region, to the latter the Roman objects had blended their way into local cultures and were no longer specifically associated with Roman-ness.

### 6.4 Avenues for future research

At the heart of this study, a number of specific choices with regard to data use and themes of research can be found, which have both structured and limited the present study. A number of these limitations may be made explicit here again, as they can be regarded as potential avenues for further research.

In the present study the spatial organisation of rural settlements and the house have been central particular objects of research. As a result, mobile material culture has remained underexposed, although this category could have been used to explore themes addressed in this study. Furthermore, it has been decided to approach reconstructed patterns and processes from a mainly archaeological-anthropological perspective. The confrontation of archaeological and historical sources, however, has not been explored.

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621 Woolf 1998.

622 Burke 2009, 93.

623 Trow/James/Moore 2009, 67; see also Tilley 2004: ‘Roman forms were not imposed from the outside, but grew up [...] as a combination of local types and materials with long histories with outside influences, from both Mediterranean culture and neighbouring Gaul.’

624 Trow/James/Moore 2009, 67.

625 Cohen 1985, 76.

626 See Taylor 2001.



I would like to conclude this study with a few recommendations for future research of rural settlements. Regarding existing studies it could be stated that although the amount of data on rural settlement is enormous, the quality of both excavations and publications remains problematic in many cases, making more detailed research questions difficult to answer. Completely and integrally excavated complexes with regard to which the constitutive elements are described and discussed in detail are particularly vital (such as for example Kerkrade-Holzkuil, Hambach 59, 512 and 516). Such research could answer questions that cannot be answered by the multitude of fragmentarily excavated settlements. Specific recommendations for such more detailed settlement research include:

- More detailed study of secondary buildings. This could greatly improve understanding of the social structure and economic functioning of settlements. Analyses serving to identify building functions could include detailed botanical research in and around the building, (micro-)artefact-studies in and around the building, phosphate analysis and attempts to find a hearth place. Recognising secondary houses should be an important objective.
- Detailed phasing of settlement features remains essential when we want to get more grip on the developments taking place in rural settlements.
- The research focus should not only be on the settlement compound and its buildings, but should include associated graves, ditch systems and roads, and, if possible, the relationship between the development of these structures and the settlement. Graves themselves should also be studied in more detail, including physical-anthropological analyses of the cremated remains.
- Micro-regional studies could increase our knowledge of the social settlement hierarchy and the relationships between settlements. It would be particularly interesting to search for non-monumental settlements within the landscapes dominated by monumental villa settlements.