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How did Aristocrats live in Merovingian and (Early) Carolingian Times in Northern Gaul?

An Archaeological Enigma.

With some Remarks on the Royal Seat in Nijmegen

ABSTRACT

One of the great enigmas of early medieval archaeology in the northern part of the Merovingian Kingdom is the invisibility of aristocratic residences before Charlemagne started his »*palatium* building program«. First, it is puzzling that excavations do not produce clear evidence of Merovingian royal palaces or aristocratic residences in towns; second, one wonders why no aristocratic residences can be recognised in the countryside. It is not because of a lack of settlement research, which has increased considerably in the last 50 years. In this paper, several settlements are reviewed which could have been aristocratic residents, or were interpreted as such, but which on closer inspection were most likely not. We are left with the important unanswered, or for the moment unanswerable (?) question of why aristocratic residences characterised by an above-average lifestyle and architecture are absent in the archaeological record. To sketch the contrast we present an overview of the recent research on the Carolingian *palatium* of Nijmegen.

KEYWORDS

Merovingian / Carolingian / settlement research / elite residence / palace / Nijmegen

In Aachen, it seems self-evident that early medieval kings and aristocrats would have created a luxurious living environment[1]. However, the splendid architecture of the royal palace in Aachen is deceptive because it is quite difficult to see how counts, dukes and even kings could have been housed in northern Gaul before this palace was built[2]. Extant profane architecture dating to before AD 900 is extremely rare in continental northwestern Europe, and excavations have not revealed types of settlement that one could, beyond reasonable doubt, identify as aristocratic residences of the Merovingian and early Carolingian period. There is thus an interesting contrast to, for instance, England, where »royal« sites, or rather »great hall complexes«, in the terminology of John Blair, built in wood and dating to the first half of the 7th century have been identified outside towns[3]. Royal palaces are known from other parts of early medieval Europe as well, but Merovingian kings seemed to have been satisfied with quite non-monumental residences, which is hard to believe[4]. The overall image of the aristocratic built environment we have today is determined by Carolingian royal palaces with their exquisite architecture, such as those at Ingelheim, Paderborn, Frankfurt/Main, Nijmegen and Aachen. These are palaces that we, after excavation, would have identified as »royal« even without knowledge of what the written sources have to say about them[5].

1 This publication is a result of the Rural Riches Project. It is a European Research Council (ERC) advanced grant project with number 741340 (Horizon 2020).

2 This is also noticed by - for instance - C. Loveluck (2013, 105-113), although I would date the first clear appearances of elite residences to the second half of the 8th century rather than the second half of the 7th century.

3 Blair 2018, 103-138; Hines, this volume.

4 On the problem see the debate by J. Barreveld (in print).

5 See different contributions in this volume.

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But what about royal and aristocratic residences before this architectural »renaissance« in Carolingian times[6]?

There is a curious void of archaeological evidence in northern Gaul for aristocratic rural architecture between the time of the splendid villas of the Roman Empire and the oldest residences of the late Carolingian period, which often developed into chateaux à mottes[7]. These examples lead us to a specific aspect of this void of evidence: It is a void of evidence that is especially notable in the countryside. From the 7th century and onwards, there is clear evidence in the written accounts of the presence of elite groups in northern Gaul, although there are not many of them for the first half of the century. One only needs to think of the Pippinids with their power base in the middle Meuse valley who, however, only appear in the written sources at about 610–620[8], or what could be called the Chrodo-ids, who can be related to a monumental religious building in the later 7th and early 8th century in Glons[9]. We can point to Adalgisl Grimo, whose will, dated to 634, provides an interesting insight into the disorderly complex of properties of an aristocrat (and deacon at Verdun)[10]. We could also point to families in the Moselle valley, to which important women such as Plectrudis, Adela and Irmina belong[11]. We see these families creating monasteries in the 7th century and having or creating hilltop fortresses, such as the Chèvremont near Liège, probably a creation of Pippin II, which includes a monastery and about which there is a near-mythical story that he planned to be buried there[12]. Again, we are at the end of the 7th and the start of the 8th century, a time when aristocratic positions seem to have crystallised[13]. Were these monasteries and fortresses also their »home« or residence, or one of their multiple residences, or not aristocratic residences at all? We see an elite person such as Adalgisl Grimo having a house in Trier[14]. A house, and that is it[15]? It might have been a splendid house though, as he was, of course, a deacon of the church of Verdun and would have lived there. We would love to know what splendid 7th century houses in Trier looked like. Is this an indication that Merovingian aristocrats were predominantly »at home« in the ancient Roman towns or did they have »homes« in several towns or *vici*? If so, up to today it remains difficult to assign excavated elements in towns and *vici* (e. g. Maastricht, Huy, Andernach, etc.) to aristocratic residences[16]. Despite the possibility that aristocrats were regularly »at home« in monasteries or in towns and *vici*, it remains a mystery why they are archaeologically invisible in the countryside. Is it an image of early medieval reality or is it an archaeological problem of conservation and interpretation? Building in stone certainly enhances archaeological visibility, but building in wood does not necessarily mean that aristocratic residences must remain invisible or unnoticed when excavated. English aristocratic residences built in wood (the great hall complexes) have been identified in the archaeological record, as have exquisite residencies in Scandinavia (so without the help of written sources)[17], why not in northern Gaul?

The lack of good examples of aristocratic residences cannot be the result of a lack of settlement research. In the context of the Rural Riches Project at Leiden University, we collected data on Merovingian cemeteries and settlements as well as attestations in written sources from northern Gaul[18]. The data, though not yet complete already show that excavations of rural settlements were by now reasonably well distributed over northern Gaul, although one would wish for more of them in eastern Belgium and the German Rhineland[19]. In some more regions, dots are present (such as in Westphalia), and we are in the process of recording these. Research is also uneven

6 Nees 1995; Stiegemann/Wemhoff 1999. - An explosion in religious building, especially monastic complexes, was part of this »renaissance« (Rulkens 2013).

7 A well-known example of such a settlement is the Husterknupp in the German Rhineland (Herrnbrodt 1958). The date of construction of the »Flachsiedlung« is a matter of debate (late 9th or 10th cent.).

8 Werner 1980, 342-354.

9 Members of that family could include Chrodoaldus, mentioned in an inscription found in Glons, Chrodoara, whose sarcophagus was found in Amay and possibly even Chrodegang of Metz, who originated from the Hesbaye region: Dasnoy 1953; Stiennon 1979; Werner 1980; Dierkens 2004; Theuws 2017.

10 Levison 1932.

11 Werner 1980; 1982; Hlawitschka 1985; Wood 2004. - Their histories date to the later 7th and early 8th century.

12 Werner 1980, 410-441.

13 M. Werner dates the construction of the fortress to the time before Pippin II, which is rather unlikely in view of its indication as a *novum castellum/novum castrum* between 741 and 870 (Werner 1980, 413).

14 Levison 1932, 128: *Casa in Treveris* […].

15 Moreover, he had bought it and he gave it away, how long did it really function as a residence for himself?

16 For a more in-depth discussion of the relationship between aristocrats and towns see: Barreveld in print.

17 Jørgensen 2003; 2010; Skre 2017; 2020; Hines and Grimm, this volume.

18 See earlymedievaleurope.org (25.06.2025).

19 Go to earlymedievaleurope.org under Search, use the filter and select only »Sites« and »Settlements«; click on the + before Settlements and select Rural settlements and click on »Filter«. You will get a map of all recorded rural settlements up to now. Click U to see individual dots on the map.

when one looks at the number of houses identified at a site, as well as the number of sunken featured buildings[20].

However, when browsing through these data one can easily see that nearly all of them are rural settlements inhabited by cultivators whose main task was to plough the soil, keep animals, feed themselves and their livestock (and probably other rural people) and see to it that the same happens the year after. This does not mean that these inhabitants were poor, miserable people. Burials dating to the late Merovingian period in the southern Netherlands (Kempen), for instance, show that these cultivators, living in quite modest houses, had access to wide-ranging networks and collected gold and silver objects that we find in their graves next to the houses. They might even have come from afar to the settlements in which their bodies were found. But a lavish burial does not make them aristocrats, nor necessarily legally free peasants[21]! They lived in small buildings which have, as far as we can see, nothing fancy about them.

It has been suggested by Johan Nicolay that the gold and silver found at rural sites is indicative of the presence of kings and aristocrats, but there is no reason to think that the lower ranks of the population were denied access to the networks in which such precious objects circulated[22]. Some of those rural dwellers will have been intimately involved in long distance exchanges, which probably brought them more wealth than their fellow cultivators. It was also suggested by C. Loveluck and D. Tys that such wealth was rather a phenomenon of the coastal regions, where a free population had easier access to such wealth than inland dwellers, who were often in a dependent relationship with an aristocrat[23]. This can be questioned by pointing to the wealth deposited in cemeteries in the interior as, for instance, at the below-mentioned Dommelen settlement. In what follows, I shall introduce a number of settlements that are part of the rural world but show characteristics that might suggest they were aristocratic residences. A critical evaluation, however, shows that this qualification can hardly be correct.

The Oegstgeest Riverine Settlement

A good example of a settlement along a river that is well connected with other parts of northwestern Europe is located in the mouth of the Rhine River at Oegstgeest in the Netherlands (**fig. 1**)[24]. The settlement consists of four to six contemporary farmsteads, inhabited between c. AD 550 and 725[25]. It is located on the sandy elevations marked in yellow on the map in **figure 2** and was thus a relatively small settlement of maybe 60 inhabitants. On the riverbank were jetties and constructions for boats to land and immediately behind were large storage buildings, probably for storing (imported) grain and wine. Wooden wine barrels from the middle Rhine regions were used secondarily for making wells, and some of the grain found came from loess regions, probably in middle Germany or Belgium/northern France. In fact, almost everything was brought in to the settlement. Clear evidence for iron and copper alloy working and casting were found. A large number of coins (such as tremisses and sceattas) indicate their long-distance contacts, which are also indicated by a number of precious metal finds, such as sword fittings from England and a silver bowl found in a ditch, the decorative elements of which represent the entire European exchange network. All this does not make these inhabitants aristocrats or kings. They were well-connected rural dwellers involved in agriculture, fishing, cattle raising, craft activities, and exchange. The houses they lived in were farms with stables and living quarters rather than halls or palaces. Their variability is low. Other sites along the Rhine show similar characteristics, such as the Leidse Rijn site near Utrecht[26].

So, there were many rural settlements with well-connected dwellers, but where are the halls and palaces from the time before Charlemagne? As said before, in England there are fewer problems in defining »royal« seats, especially for the first half of the 7th century. Sites such as Lyminge, Yeavering, and Cowdery's Down among others, testify to the presence of a social layer beyond the rural dwellers. The sites are considered to be »royal seats« or rather great hall complexes[27]. Why are we not able to identify such sites in northern Gaul?

20 Use the filter as explained in note 18 and add 5 as the minimum number of excavated houses/main buildings (left box).

21 Theuws 2023. – I see no possibility of identifying the legal status of dead persons when they were alive based on the goods deposited in their graves.

22 Nicolay 2014; Theuws 2020; 2023 ; Theuws et al. 2021.

23 Loveluck/Tys 2006.

24 de Bruin et al. 2021.

25 The main buildings were rebuilt several times.

26 With lots of coins, gold objects, craft activities and large storehouses: Nokkert et al. 2009.

27 Blair 2018.

Fig. 1 The Rhine-Meuse region and the sites mentioned in the text: ● Sites discussed in the text. – ○ Other sites mentioned. – (Background map Rural Riches Project; generalised landscape map by R. Emaus).

The Cult Site (?) of Vasse-Steenbrei

When browsing through the corpus of settlements, one does encounter interesting settlements that one could consider aristocratic, but we have to be careful as to their interpretation. An interesting example is, for instance, the settlement of Vasse-Steenbrei, located in the province of Overijssel in the Netherlands (fig. 1)[28]. This settlement existed from sometime in the 6th century to the years around AD 750

28 Pronk 2015. – The settlement is thus more or less contemporary with Oegstgeest. The material culture profiles of both settlements, however, differ enormously.

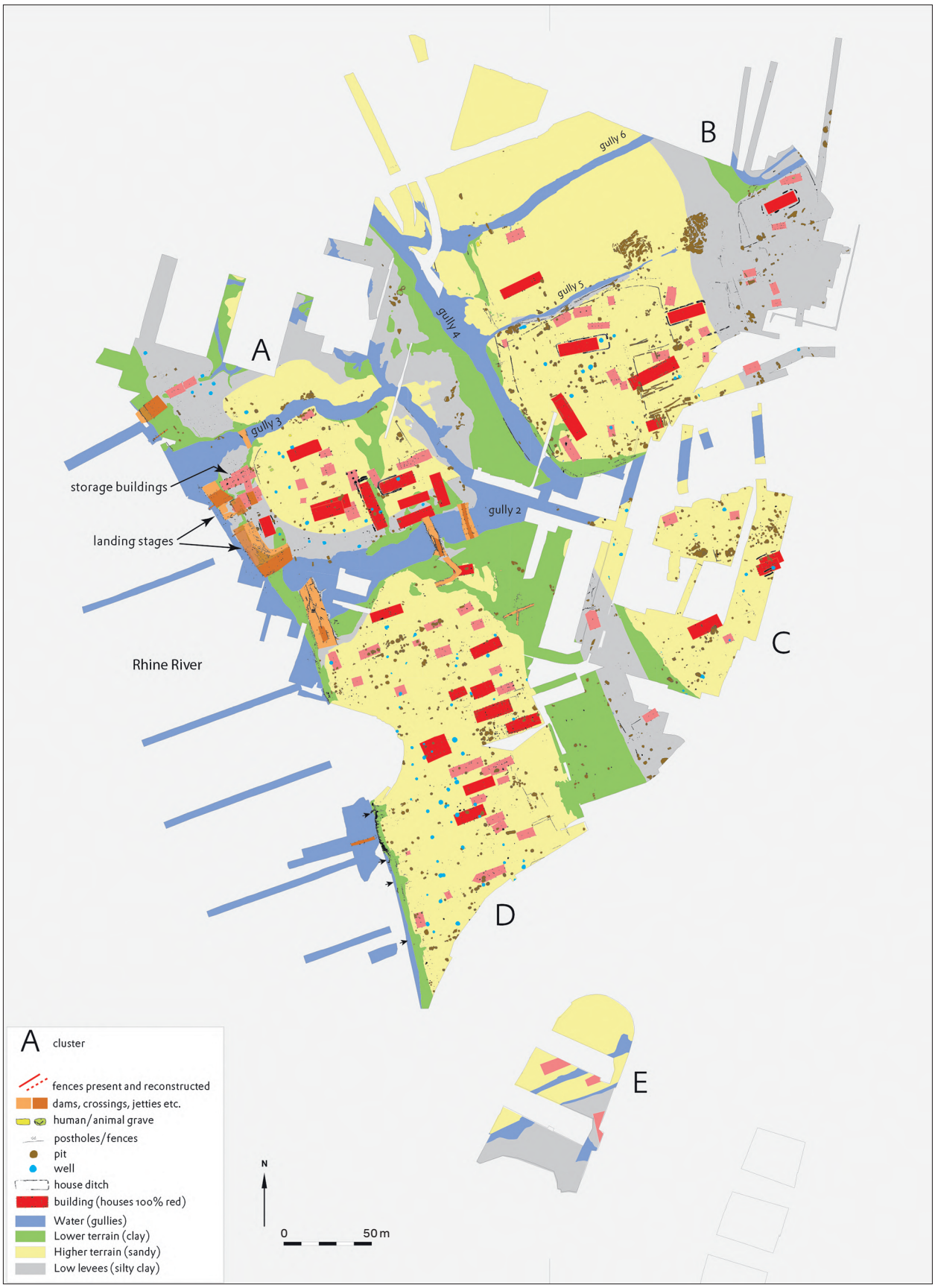

Fig. 2 The plan of the settlement of Oegstgeest with the four habitation clusters. – (After de Bruin et al. 2021, fig. 25, 3).

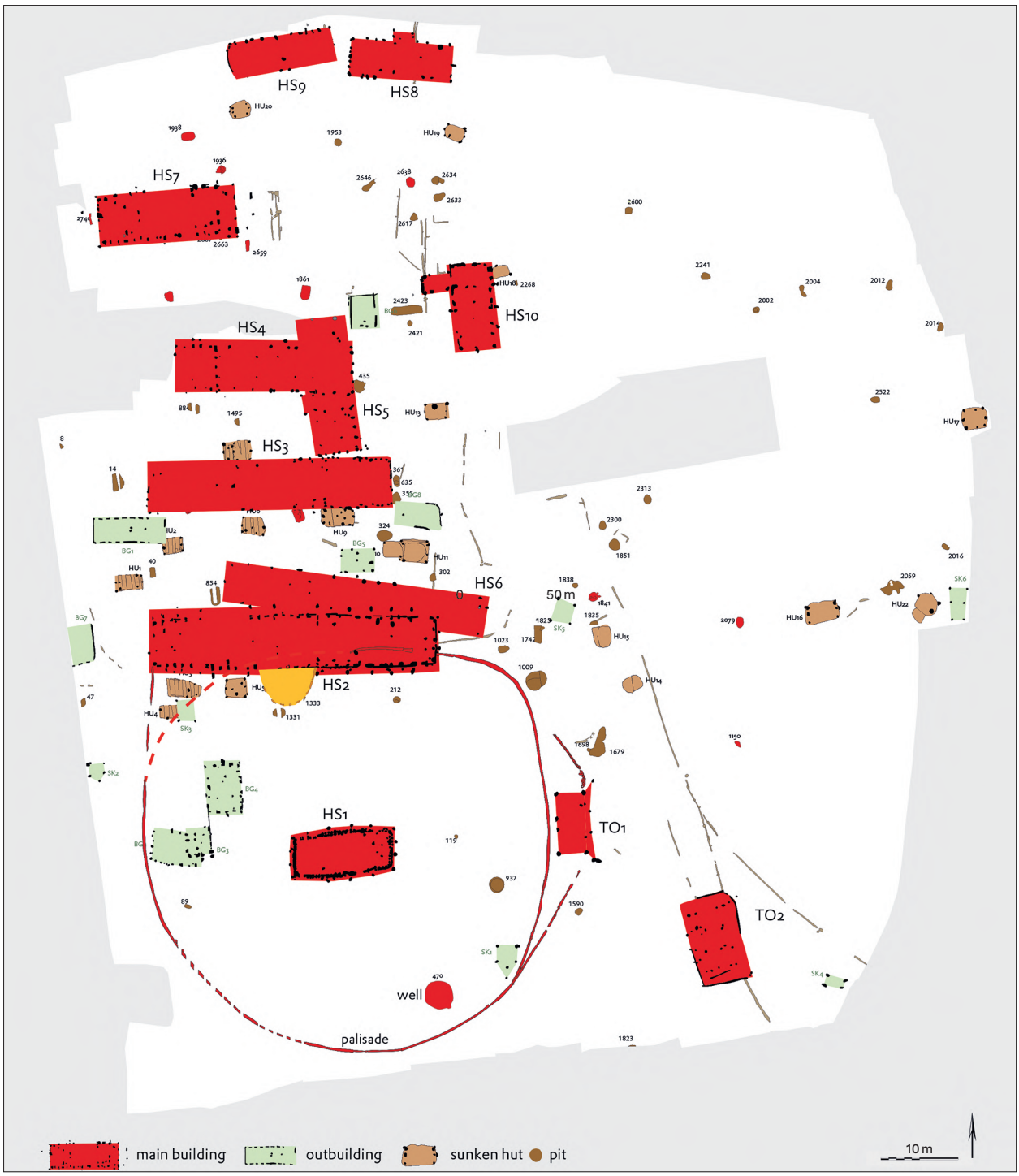

Fig. 3 Plan of the settlement of Vasse-Steenbrei showing all structures. Main buildings in red, outbuildings in green and sunken huts in brown. – (Adapted after Pronk 2015, fig. 18).

(fig. 3)[29]. There were at least six large buildings and four smaller ones (including HS1) and two buildings interpreted as entrance gates (TO1 and 2). The excavators suggested that, in view of the time span in which the settlement existed (c. 550–750), there might have been only one main building at the time. This could have been the case during several periods in the existence of this part of the site, but there would have been (brief?) periods when more than one house was inhabited, possibly periods during

29 The plan in fig. 3 represents the eastern part of a larger excavated area. In the western part, no comparable structures were found although the remains of three barely identifiable buildings and sunken huts were present. The excavators suggest that the settlement might be larger in a western direction, but this is not certain because the dating of those buildings poses problems.

which one house was built and another abandoned. A relatively small, sturdy building in the centre of an enclosure (HS1; **fig. 3**), which is a palisade, and a large building (HS2) immediately to the north of it are noteworthy. It is of course evident that not all of the excavated buildings could have existed at the same time, though the sturdy building (HS1) and the palisade are thought to have been created at the same time. The large building (HS2) could not have been constructed at the same time as the small building and the enclosure because the palisade is located on the site of the large building. The well inside the enclosure is dendrochronologically dated to 583–603 and might not belong to the original concept of the complex. The small building and enclosure could be the oldest elements at the site, and may have existed next to one of the buildings to the north of it (not being HS2), but it is difficult to exactly reconstruct which ones because the buildings cannot be dated individually. The majority of the ^{14}C-dates fall within the period 530/550–650; however, one must be careful when using them to date individual settlement features[30]. Two ^{14}C-dates are clearly older but they have a very long date range, from c. 420 to 550–570, because there is a plateau in the calibration curve in that period. These are the dates for houses 1 and 5. The ^{14}C-date for house 7 is one of the oldest in the »regular« group of ^{14}C-dates. If we accept that these ^{14}C dates indicate that these three buildings are in general the oldest ones[31], then this means that they would have existed in the period before the majority of the ^{14}C dates: One could suggest a date around the middle of the 6th century (**fig. 4**). Houses 5 and 7 need not have co-existed at exactly the same time; there might have been only one house at a time. Some of the sunken huts and pits or outbuildings (which have all been indicated on the map in **fig. 4**) might belong to this phase as well[32]. Thereafter, the large building, HS2, was constructed, which may have existed for some time in the same period as HS3 to the north of it (**fig. 5**). The palisade was adapted so that it led to the southwest corner of the large building and linked the house in the fenced-off space with the sturdy building, HS1. Maybe one of the houses further north also existed in this phase, which may have dated to the late 6th/early 7th century. The well in the enclosure was dug in this period. Possibly, the second entrance building (if the interpretation is correct) also belongs to this phase. How long the enclosure with building HS 1 was in use, how long building HS2 was in use and what the settlement looked like in the course of the 7th century is difficult to tell. House 2 would have fallen out of use early in the 7th century. There was a younger building at the same location. The site, especially the enclosed space with building HS1, has been interpreted by the excavators as the centre of an aristocratic estate (Herrenhof), and also as an aristocratic residence. The early date of the site (mid-6th century) would indicate that (substantial?) (landed) property complexes had already developed in this area in the middle or second half of the 6th century, which seems too early to me[33]. It is possible that this interpretation as an estate centre might have to be adjusted. Might we be looking at a cult building inside an enclosure? The plan of the small, sturdy building is, of course, not exactly like that of the cult building in Uppåkra in Sweden, but it resembles it to some extent[34]. It also resembles some of the cult buildings at the Tissø site in Denmark[35]. Such settlements in Scandinavia are considered magnate farms, or would be better qualified by following J. Blair's »great hall complexes«, such as the one excavated in Tissø in Denmark, where an arrangement was discovered that is quite comparable to the Vasse settlement. Moreover, the large house in Vasse (HS2) also finds its parallels further north where houses get even bigger, rather than to the south. The excavators pointed to a house in the settlement of Esens in northern Germany, and for comparison house 5 in Oegstgeest has been added in **figure 6**. R. Bärenfänger interprets the house in Esens as a large farmhouse[36], the same interpretation that was given to the house in Oegstgeest[37]. Stabling areas and living areas and some extra spaces at the ends of the buildings can be identified[38]. The size of the stabling and living areas need not be interpreted in terms of a vertical social hierarchy, but they might relate to different household structures and cattle raising practices. Farmhouses in the coastal area and further north can get quite large, which may relate to an increased importance of cattle rais-

30 ^{14}C dates are based on charcoal and single grains from postholes and infills of features (Pronk 2015, 20 tab. 2). – The exact relationship between the charcoal and the grains and the features is difficult to establish, one could easily be dealing with intrusions.

31 Again, this can be stated only with a huge number of reservations included.

32 Whether houses 5 and 7 were the oldest of the northern group or one or two other houses is, at a structural level, not relevant. So, **fig. 4** illustrates the structure of the site rather than its exact layout in the middle of the 6th century.

33 The property complex could be based on cattle, not landed property.

34 Larsson 2007. – The finds in Vasse are no match to the collection of exquisite finds related to the Uppåkra building. See for possible reconstructions: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upp%C3%A5kra_temple (25.06.2025).

35 Jørgensen 2003; 2010; Grimm, this volume.

36 Bärenfänger 2002.

37 de Bruin 2021.

38 See also: Zimmermann 1988. – In the houses in **figure 6** it is less easy to clearly identify an entrance.

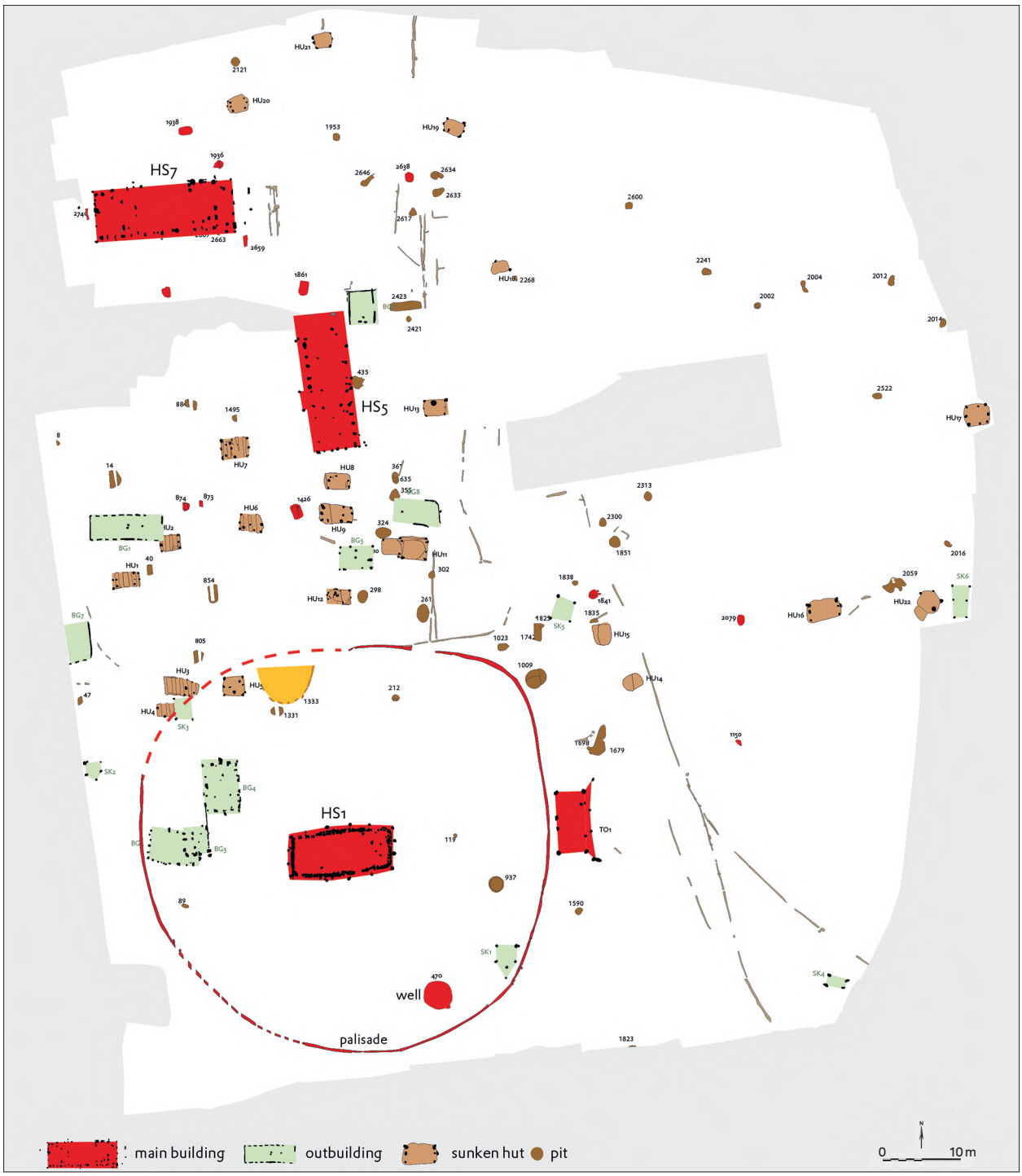

Fig. 4 Plan of the settlement of Vasse-Steenbrei showing main buildings that probably date to the middle of the 6th century. – (Adapted after Pronk 2015, fig. 18).

ing in the course of the early Middle Ages. This makes us wonder what the relationship between a large house and landed property was, or the relationship between property and authority[39]. How do we measure property when it is related to herds of cows rather than (plough)land[40]? Whatever the appropriate explanation is for the Vasse site, at present it might show more resemblances to sites in Scandinavia than to sites in regions further south. Moreover, in the first original phase of the settlement the enclosure and sturdy building stood on their own, with additional farmsteads nearby. It was only later that a large building was integrated into that complex. Originally, the sturdy building (HS1) was thus

39 Piketty 2020, 51-98.

40 On the importance of the size of cow herds see: Emaus in print.

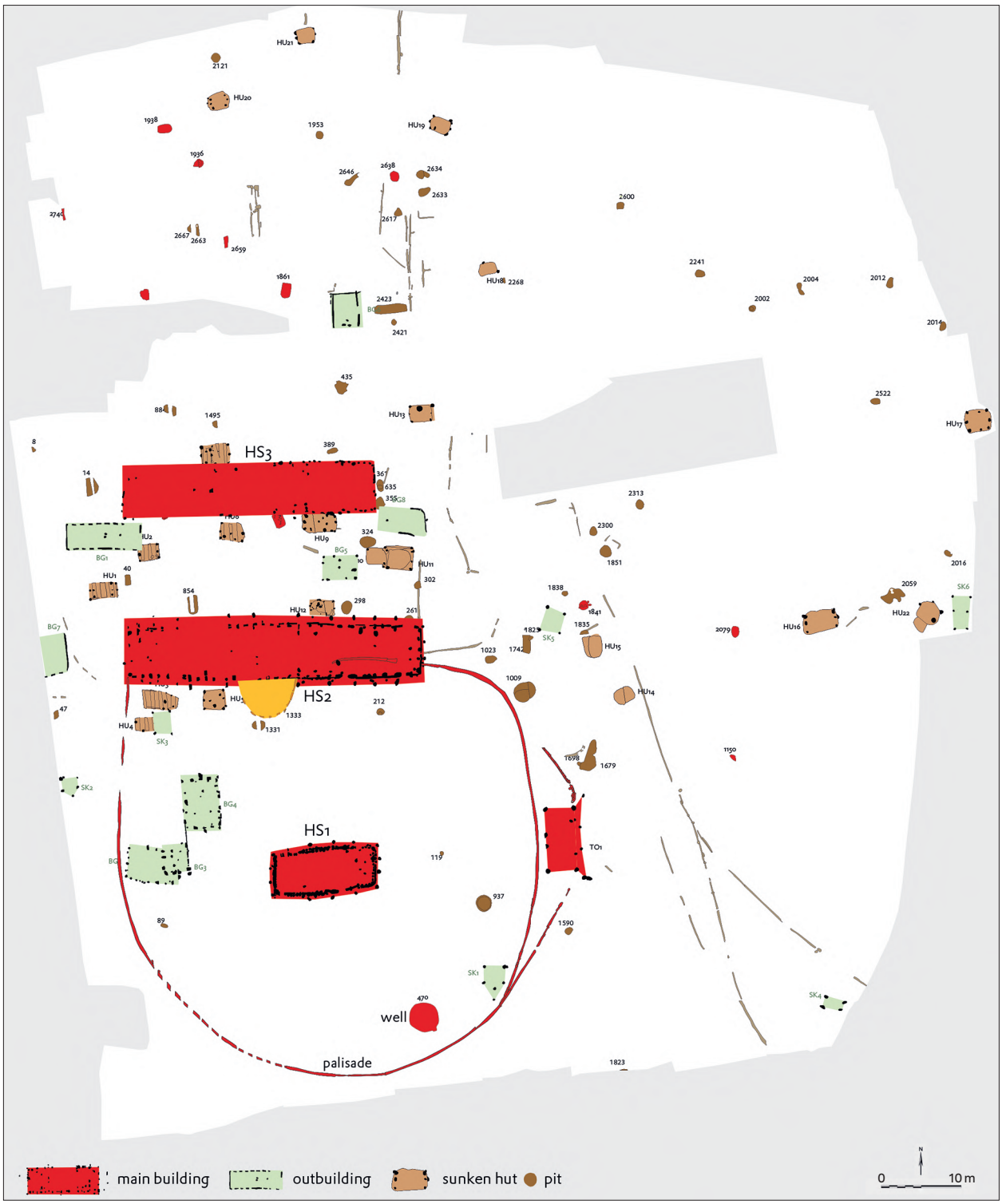

Fig. 5 Plan of the settlement of Vasse-Steenbrei showing main buildings that probably date to the end of the 6th century. – (Adapted after Pronk 2015, fig. 18).

not related to a specific farmstead but was an element in a settlement. We might not be looking at an aristocratic site but at a rural site with a cult place to which a large building was later added. Was it the residence of an aristocrat or was it rather the farm of a well-to-do cultivator taking up a local leading position in the settlement, at best a »big man« at a local level[41]? Although the large farmhouse suggests a stable position of authority, we must realise that it probably stood for no longer than one or maybe two

41 Sahlins 1963; Hylland Eriksen 2001, 166–167.

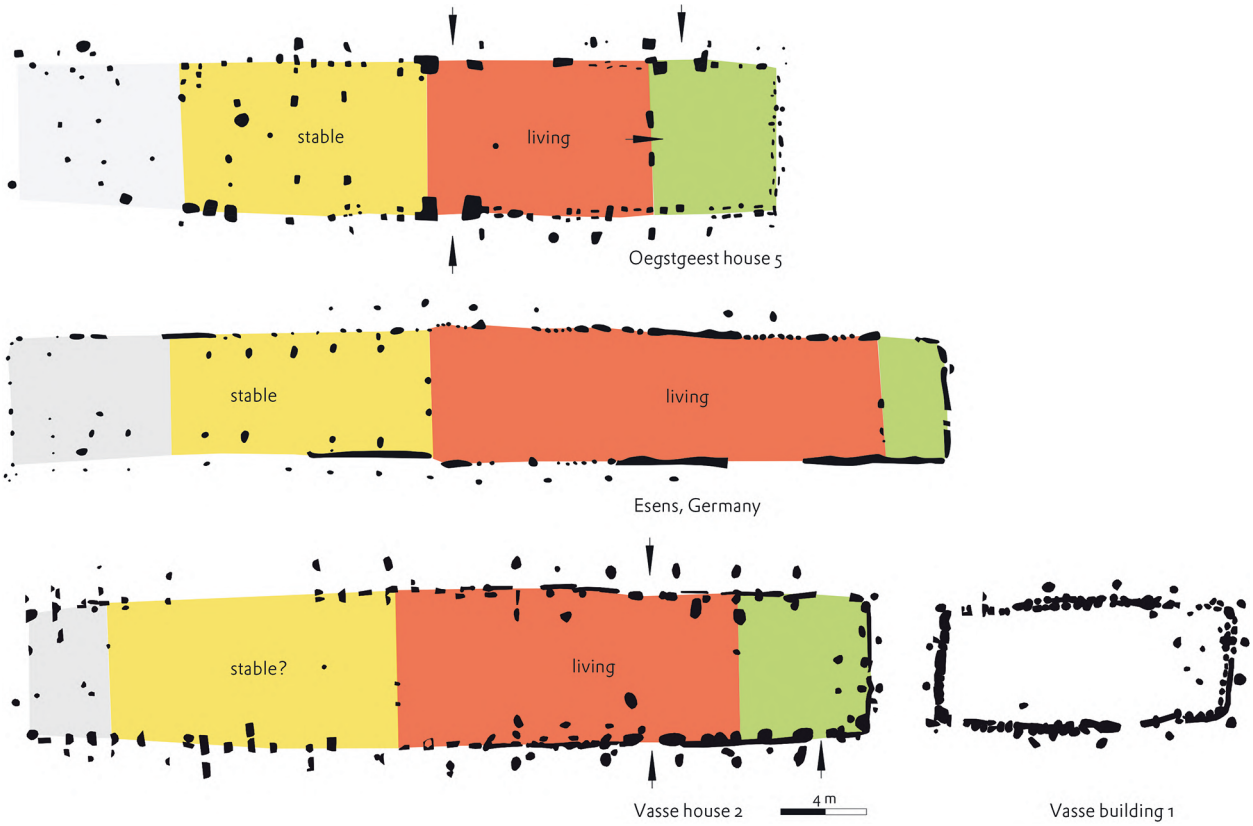

Fig. 6 Plans of main buildings recorded at Oegstgeest, Esens (DE) and Vasse-Steenbrei. – (After de Bruin et al. 2021, fig. 25, 8; Bärenfänger 2002, fig. 1; Pronk 2015, fig. 20).

generations at best, indicating that this position of authority (and property/wealth?) was lost again after some time, maybe together with the small, sturdy building. The position of the household in HS2 might be one of temporary authority rather than permanent power. This temporality distinguishes it from positions held by 7th century aristocratic families further south. It is evident that rural society in the early Middle Ages was not an egalitarian society; it would have known an internal differentiation that is hard to define based on settlement excavations. In many regions, the variability of houses and settlements is mostly not eye-catchingly different.

The excavators of Vasse interpreted a number of smaller buildings as houses as well (such as HS8 and HS9 in the northern part of the excavation; **fig. 3**), although these might have been barns: The long building, HS6, might well have been a barn. That it was the centre of an aristocratic estate (Herrenhof) and was the residence of an aristocrat at such an early date (mid-6th century), seems to be less probable. Let us hope similar examples of such settlements will appear in the archaeological record, or will this settlement turn out to be a rare exception? We now leave the northern Netherlands to move southwards.

Fig. 7 Plan of the settlement of Berkel-Enschot phase A (c. 725–775). – (Adapted after Brouwer/van Mousch 2015, figs 6.58; 6.62; 9.03; 9.04).

The Centre of a Property Complex (?) in Berkel-Enschot

A site that deserves our attention is that at Berkel-Enschot in the province of North-Brabant (**fig. 1**)[42]. This settlement, which is at least 100 years younger than the Vasse site, seems to have consisted of a farmstead (farmyard 4) inside an enclosure with farmsteads around it. Only parts of the rectangular/trapezoid enclosure have been found, but the location of the other farmsteads seems to indicate its outline (indicated with a broken line). In the first phase, dating to c. 725 to 775, there is a central farmyard (no. 4) and a subsidiary farmyard (no. 1) (**fig. 7**). The central farmyard consists of a main building (no. 79) and a number of outbuildings around an open space. One of the small outbuildings (no. 65) is interpreted as a smithy. A small outbuilding, placed at right angles to the main building, seems to be related to a fenced-off area, possibly a garden. In the second phase (**fig. 8**), there is again a central farmyard with a main building (no. 77) and outbuildings, organised around an open space, and several subsidiary farmyards (nos 5 and 2, of which the well was dendrochronologically dated to the summer of 779) as well as a new en-

42 Brouwer/van Mousch 2015. - The maps presented here only show the southern part of the excavation where early medieval habitation was recorded. In the northern part, there are many features related to intensive habitation in the central Middle Ages, features of which were also found in the southern part, following after the Carolingian habitation. The chronological development as presented by the excavators has been reinterpreted by me. The plans provided in this article, although of course inspired by those in the report, cannot be found in the report on the excavations. The study of this and other Merovingian and early Carolingian settlements is part of a new overview and analysis of those settlements by the author. More than 50 sites dating to that period have by now been excavated in the Kempen region.

Fig. 8 Plan of the settlement of Berkel-Enschot phase B (c 775–825). – (Adapted after Brouwer/van Mousch 2015, figs 6.58; 6.62; 9.03; 9.04).

closure ditch dating to between c. 775 and 825. The buildings of farmyard 5 seem to be aligned alongside the old enclosure and may for that reason take an intermediate chronological position between phases A and B. In the later part of phase B, the old enclosure does not seem to function anymore. At this time all the farms are situated within the larger enclosure ditch. Farmyard 4 consists of a main building (no. 77), which was of more or less the same size and construction as the main buildings of the other farmyards, and outbuildings around an open space. Building 63 might have been used to live in as well. Is this a settlement representing a *sala cum curticula* and *casatae*, or maybe even a *mansus indominicatus* and *mansi*, such as are mentioned in the contemporary charters concerning the region[43]? *Sala cum curticula* and *casatae* are indications of the landed property complexes donated by aristocrats to Bishop Willibrord around AD 700, which distinguishes them from the property complexes mentioned in the later Carolingian sources, who tell us that they consist of a *mansus indominicatus* and *mansi*. A *sala cum curticula* may not be much more than a house with a courtyard without attached lands, and a *casata* a small farm, whereas the *mansus indominicatus* is a fully-fledged farm with cultivable lands attached to it, which were partly worked by the *mancipia* who were housed in its farmyard and partly by the *mancipia* who inhabited the separate *mansi*. Could phase A show a *sala et curticula* and a *casata* and phase B a *mansus indominicatus* and *mansi*? We cannot be certain because in general it proves to be very diffi-

43 Theuws 1988; 1991; 2023.

cult to attach the terminology of the written sources (which are abundantly available in the southern Netherlands)[44] to the excavated settlement remains, mainly because not a single settlement in the region looks like another one in its layout. The aristocrats involved, however, did not live in these settlements, they were rather in monasteries outside the region or were probably at home in the Moselle valley. The main buildings at the Berkel-Enschot site were not aristocratic residences and would have functioned as farms, although the organisation of production might have differed between the various farms. This is the only site in the region excavated so far where one could suggest such an interpretation. All the other early medieval settlements sites excavated in that province, by now some 50, must be interpreted as rural settlements whose functions in an elite estate organisation of production, or the legal status of the inhabitants, cannot be established. Moreover, they may have existed outside such a system and housed independent cultivators.

I would now like to turn to more southern sites in the Meuse valley and enter a region dotted with aristocratic and ecclesiastical properties. One would expect to find aristocratic residences there in the archaeological record easily.

The Collection and Redistribution Site (?) of Lanaken-Industrieweg

At the Lanaken-Industrieweg site in the Belgium province of Limburg (**fig. 1**), the northern part of an exceptional structure was discovered[45]. According to the excavators, it represents a fortress with two large ditches or moats, parts of a large rampart of wood and loam on the inside with towers added and a gate (**fig. 9**). Its construction is dated to somewhere between the late 7th and the third quarter of the 8th century and it existed to the end of the 9th century. One side is about 150 m long and the dotted line that I added in **figure 9** indicates its possible size if the sides were more or less equally long. Such a large, early Carolingian fortress built in the Roman tradition not far outside of Maastricht (4.7 km as the crow flies) is a unique element in the lower Meuse valley. It is impossible to establish who was responsible for its construction but, is it a fortress? The excavators already wondered why the wall was not present further north. Moreover, its features do not reach the gate. They gave several reasons, such as erosion, for the disappearance of the postholes, but stuck to the interpretation as fortress. But is it? The postholes of the rampart could also relate to a long two-aisled building such as have been found in Aschheim near Munich in Germany in a settlement that could be related to a royal estate[46]. The long building in Lanaken might not be a rampart but could be a *horreum* and the towers granaries of a simpler type (**fig. 10**, my reinterpretation). Lanaken is where the church on the estate of the Saint-Servatius abbey was in use by the king, but he handed it over to the abbey in 1109[47]. Lanaken was already mentioned in around 828 by Einhard in a letter to his *vicedominus*, ordering him to provide the necessary food (flour and grain prepared for brewing, as well as wine, cheese and other things) when Einhard was in Aachen, with the express order to bring cattle to Lanaken (*Ludinacum*) to be slaughtered there[48]. Are we looking at a place where aristocrats such as Einhard or the king or a religious institution, such as the abbey of Saint-Servatius in Maastricht, gathered the products of agriculture to be sent off to centres such as Maastricht, Liège or Aachen? It would fit in with the settlement systems in the Maastricht-Aachen-Liège region, which became dotted with Carolingian royal and other estates, and also in areas where Merovingian cemeteries have not yet been found, indicating that the Carolingian estates were new creations, probably related to the development of the Aachen *palatium*, a fortress such as the above-mentioned Chèvremont, or an abbey, such as that of Saint-Servatius in Maastricht (**fig. 11**)[49]. I think we must keep this alternative interpretation for the Lanaken-Industrieweg in mind.

44 Theuws 1991.

45 Augustin et al. 2019. - The southern part is across the national border in the Netherlands.

46 Gutsmiedl-Schümann/Pütz 2019. - Such long two-aisled buildings are also known from sites in the northern Netherlands (Waterbolk 2009, 112 and fig. 81). Building 6 in Vasse-Steenbrei site might be such a building.

47 Hackeng 2006, 40. 63-64. 284-285. 493.

48 Einharti Epistolae 1899, 111 (ep. 5): »*Boves vero, qui occidendi sunt, volumus ut facias ad Ludinacam venire et ibi occidere. Unum ex bis volumus ut dari facias Hruotlouge; et illa minutalia atque interanea, que ad nostrum opus servari non possunt, volumus ut dentur ad illam familiam, que ibidem est.*« Translation Dutton 1998, 140.

49 Theuws 2014.

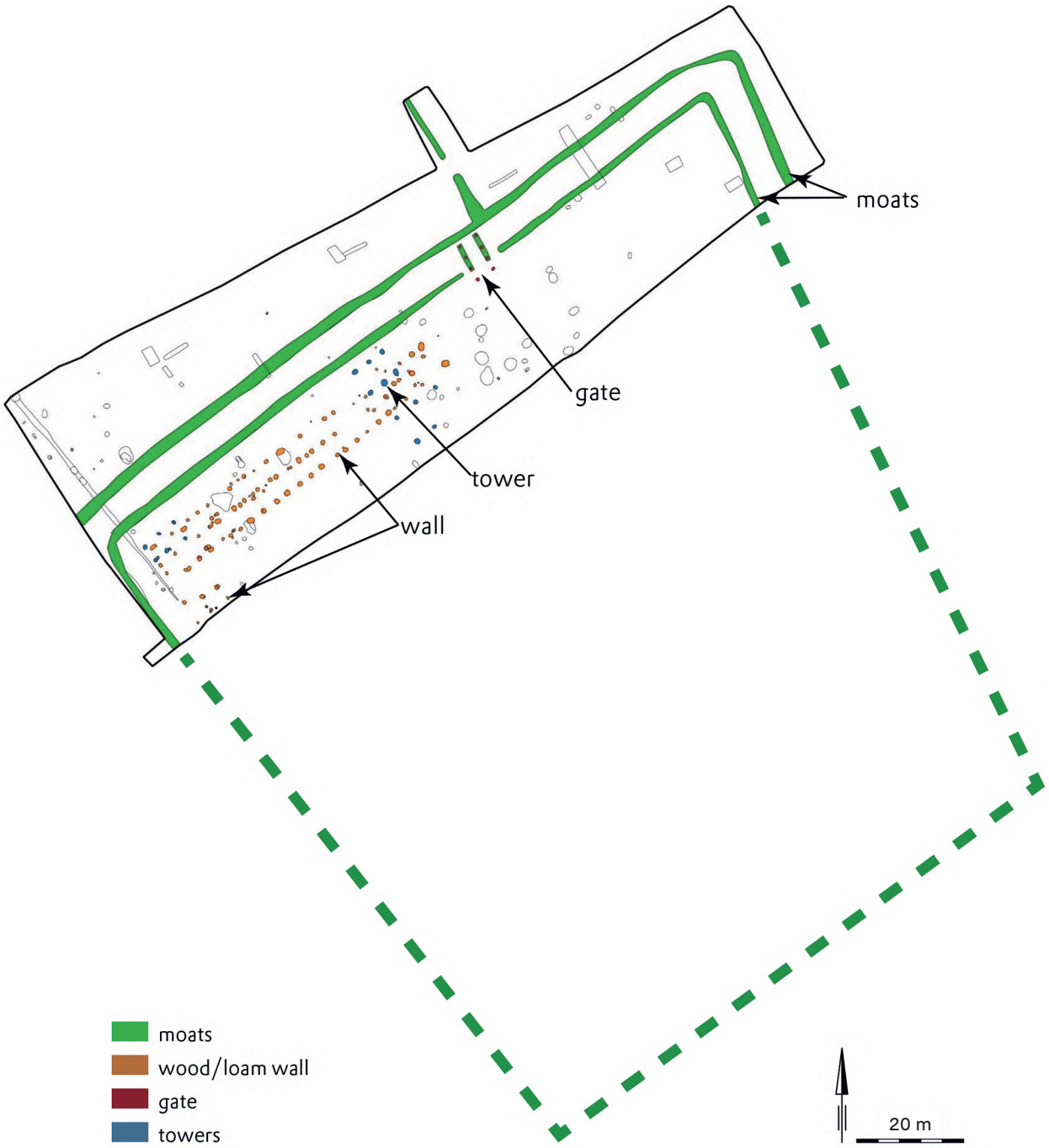

Fig. 9 Plan of the settlement at Lanaken-Industrieweg as interpreted by the excavators. – (After Augustin et al. 2019, fig. 26).

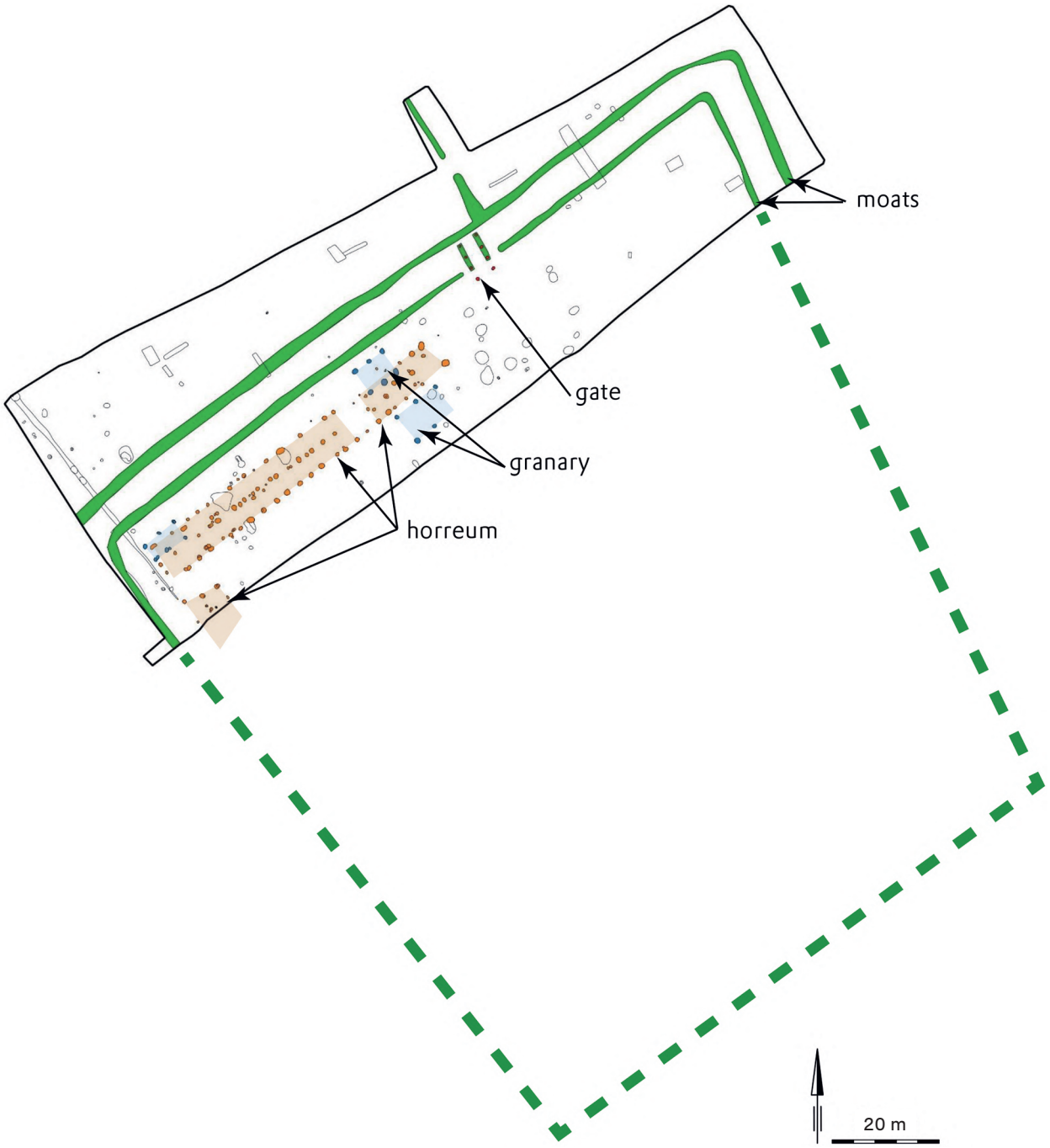

Fig. 10 Plan of the settlement at Lanaken-Industrieweg as interpreted in this contribution. – (Plan after Augustin et al. 2019, fig. 26).

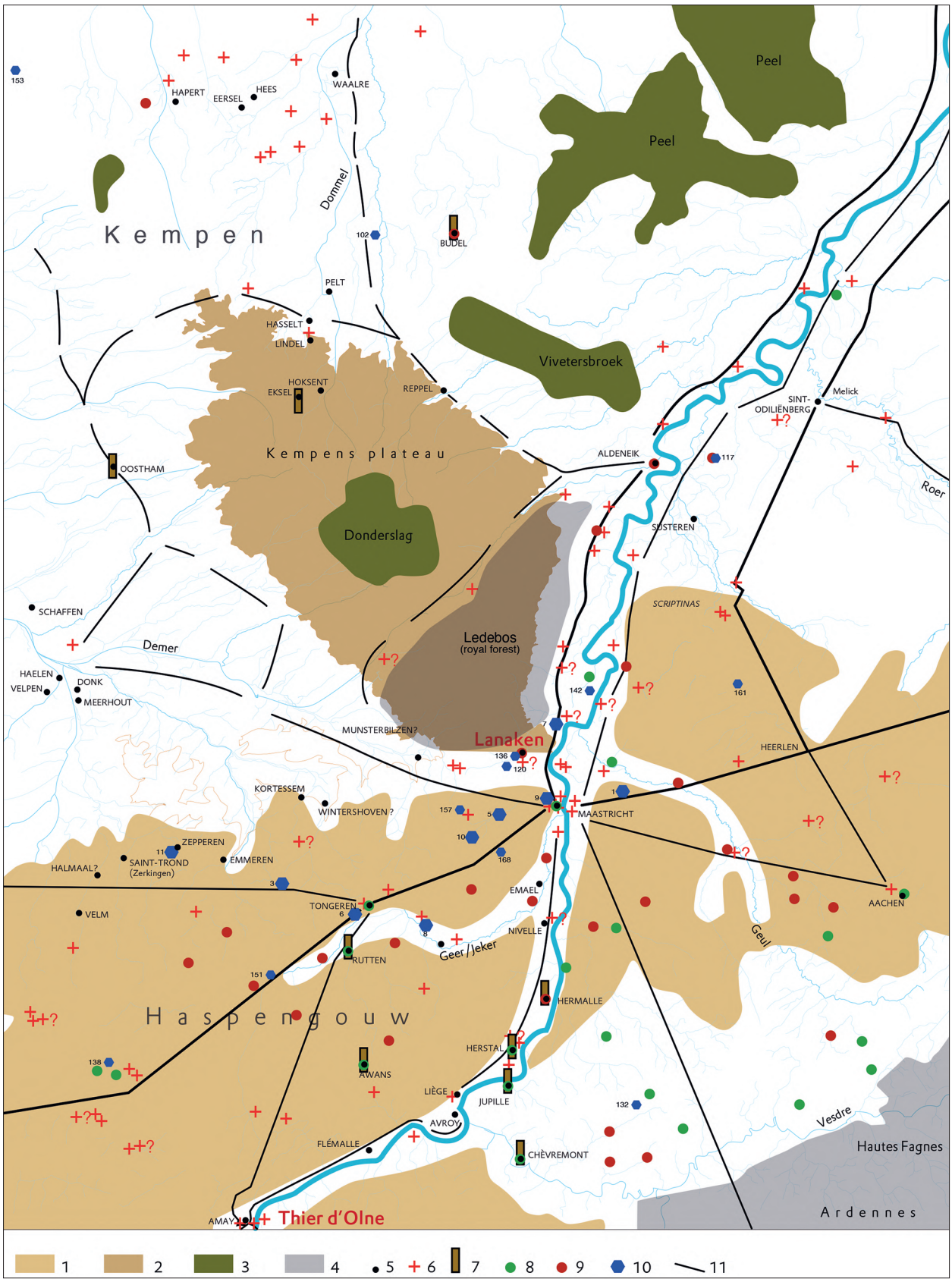

Fig. 11 The Maastricht-Liège-Aachen »royal« region and its hinterland: **1** Loess soil region. – **2** The Kempens Plateau. – **3** Swamps. – **4** The Ardennes forest. – **5** Places mentioned in early medieval written sources. – **6** Merovingian cemeteries. – **7** Early property of the Pippinids. – **8** Royal property mentioned in the 9th century. – **9** Royal property mentioned in the 10th to 11th centuries. – **10** Property of the abbey of Saint-Servatius (large symbols, major estates). – **11** Roman roads. – (After Theuws 2014, fig. 4).

The Cult Site (?) of the Thier d'Olne

Let us move further up the Meuse River and go to the Thier d'Olne (**fig. 1**), a hill on the river bank opposite Amay. At the top of this hill, the members of the Cercle archéologique Hesbaye-Condroz excavated a site that is interpreted as a Carolingian estate centre (**fig. 12**)[50]. The oldest phase (phase A) consists of a Merovingian memoria, in which two exceptional sarcophagi were found, as well as a number of other graves inside and outside the building. The sarcophagi are the focus of the development of a church, at first a simple one (phase B), and later a larger one (phase C). No burials are associated with the first church, and those of the last phase are located outside a wide circle around the church. Next to these churches are buildings, again at first simple ones but in the second Carolingian phase (C) they are much larger and of an exceptional type. There is a building that is almost identical, excavated at the site of the monastery of Hamage in northern France and interpreted as having housed monks in the various cells[51]. This makes one wonder about the nature of the Thier d'Olne site in Carolingian times (phases B and C). It might not have been the centre of an estate but rather a monastery[52]. It could originally have been the centre of a Merovingian estate, or rather a memoria for the deceased members of an important local group in the middle Meuse valley, at an exposed location on top of a hill, a site that was later turned into a small (family?) monastery, in which members of a family and monks were buried. The first building was not a church. Estate centres (with pre-existing memoria transformed into a small church) turned into monasteries occur more often in northern Gaul and are not as such an exceptional development[53]. Moreover, it might be one of those many examples of early cult sites constructed on top of a hill, such as are found all over Europe with Chèvremont as a good example nearby[54]. What is exceptional is that this process seems to have been made visible by the excavations of the Cercle archéologique Hesbaye-Condroz. If this alternative interpretation is correct, we lose yet another possible Carolingian aristocratic residence.

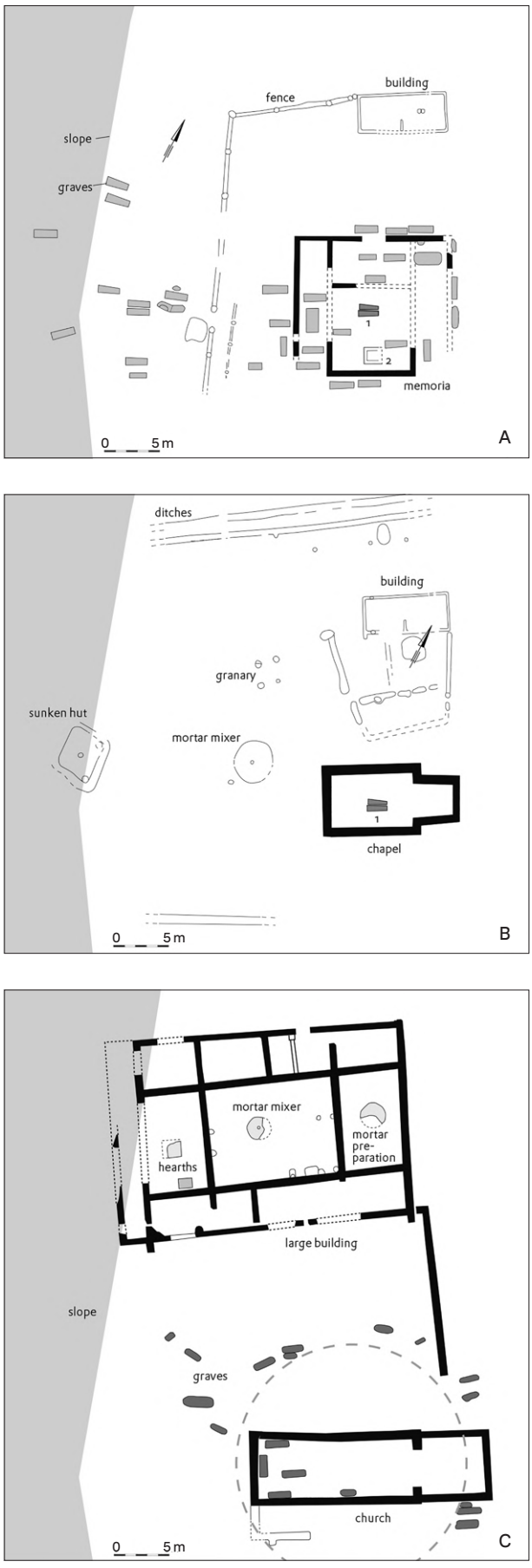

Fig. 12 The plans of the central part of the Thier d'Olne site in Merovingian (**A**), early Carolingian (**B**) and later Carolingian (**C**) times. – (After Witvrouw 2005, various figures).

50 Witvrouw 2005.

51 Louis 1997; 1998. - Cf. www.culture.gouv.fr/Media/Regions/Drac-Hauts-de-France/File/RESSOURCES-DOCUMENTAIRES/Service-regional-de-l-archeologie/Archeologie-en-Nord-Pas-de-Calais/Wandignies-Hamage-ancienne-abbaye-de-Hamage (25.08.2023).

52 Theuws 2017, 24.

53 Dierkens 1985; Helvetius 1994.

54 See the many contributions in: Steuer/Bierbrauer 2008.

The Cult Site (?) of Sclayn

The last site I would like to discuss is further south again, in Sclayn (**fig. 1**), where excavations in the centre of the village revealed the presence of early medieval buildings. L. Van Wersch published the excavations and reconstructed three major building phases, of which the first two are of interest for this paper, one dating to the Merovingian period and the second to the Carolingian period[55]. The Merovingian building measures 13 m × 6.3 m, and its remains indicate that it was well executed with foundations, and perhaps walls, of stone (**fig. 13**). It is possible that the walls were not of stone but of half-timber work but, even then, the building seems to have been above average. Its construction must have taken place somewhere towards the end of the 6th century. On the basis of the pottery found and the characteristics of the building, Van Wersch concludes that it was the residence of socially elevated persons. But do the finds and the building exclude that it was part of a religious complex? The small scale of the excavation, which does not allow us to evaluate other contextual evidence, makes it difficult to reach final conclusions on the function of the site, which also may have changed in the course of time. The aristocratic residential character of the site is not so self-evident, as the finds are not that exceptional for the 6th century but the walls are[56]. The Carolingian building of the second phase is much larger: It is 18.6 m × 13 m, which is a considerable building for a homestead (**fig. 14**), and is an extension of the Merovingian building in an eastward direction. Other fragments of walls suggest the presence of annexes[57]. Graves were found inside the building; in at least one there were several skeletons, indicating a prolonged use of the grave rather than it being a founder's grave created at the time of the construction of the building. This building poses interpretative problems because of its exceptional plan, with its curious interior dividing walls and the presence of graves in it. The building seems to have a central corridor with open cells at each side. The cells could, however, have been closed off by wooden walls or curtains. What function could such a building have had? L. Van Wersch compares the building with that of Hamage, which was mentioned above when discussing the building at the Tier d'Olne. If that was the case, the building would have housed monks, but the graves make it less likely that it was a residential building. She therefore favours the interpretation as a memorial building or a church. If that is the case, in her interpretation a luxurious Merovingian residential building was replaced by a Carolingian cult building, which is not impossible. Could it be that the first building was already a religious building (a memoria?) and not the residence of socially elevated persons unless it housed, for instance, an abbot? One possible solution is that it is neither an aristocratic residence nor a cult building but, for instance, a *xenodochium* to house poor people or a hospital, perhaps for lepers, such as the one mentioned in the will of Adalgisl Grimo in Maastricht[58]. The cells would then have housed poor or sick people. Moreover, it need not be completely excluded that

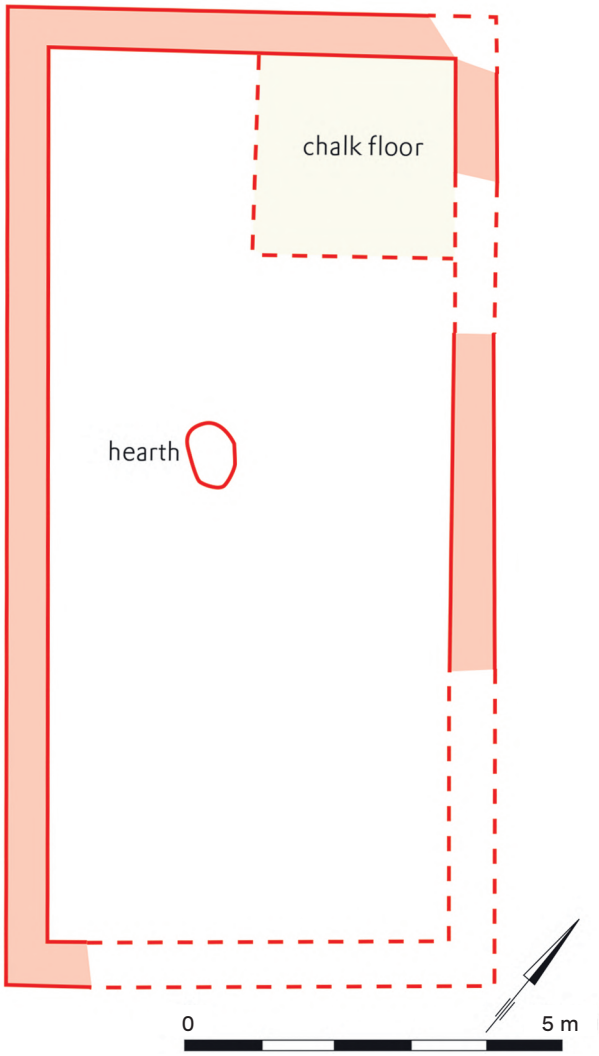

Fig. 13 Plan of the Merovingian building excavated at the Grand'Place at Sclayn. – (After Van Wersch 2006, fig. 110).

55 Van Wersch 2006. The Merovingian phase could consist of two subphases which, however, do not seem to form a continuous development (thanks to L. Van Wersch for this comment).

56 Up to today stone walls or finely decorated timber framed walls are the hallmark of religious building.

57 The limits of the excavation are only just outside the building.

58 Levison 1932, 132.

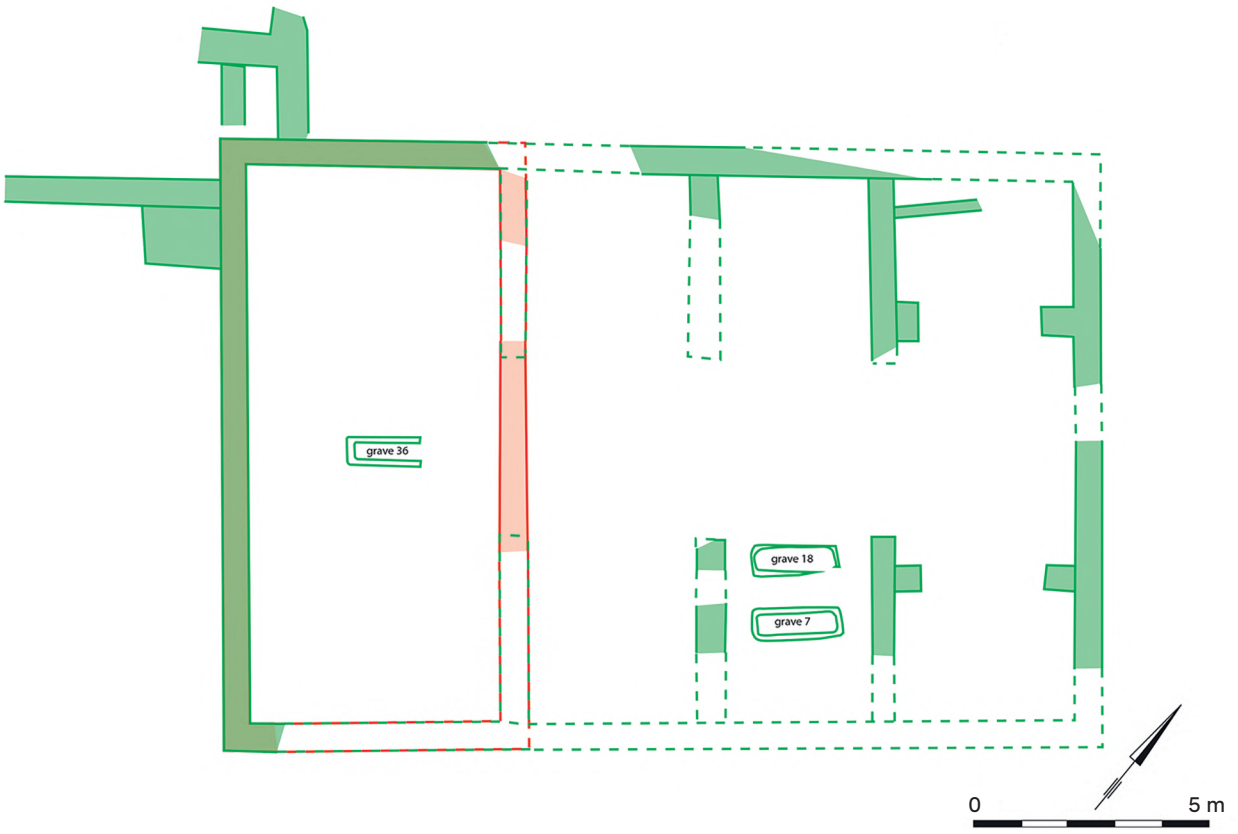

Fig. 14 Plan of the Carolingian building excavated at the Grand'Place at Sclayn. – (After Van Wersch 2006, fig. III).

occasionally people were buried in such a building. A footnote is that the oldest material dating to the 5th and early 6th century might relate to walls that are on some plans but not on others and that there is a chronological gap between this older material and the later Merovingian material. So, the interpretation of the Sclayn site is not yet solved, especially not concerning its oldest occupation phase.

Discussion

With the site of Sclayn, I end the survey of those settlements that do not seem to follow the normal patterns of rural settlements, a substantial number of which have now been excavated. However, it remains difficult, in spite of their exceptional character, to identify them as aristocratic residences. What we might begin to see are pristine forms of estate centres, such as the (early) Carolingian Berkel-Enschot site. Its spatial organisation shows some regularities that might indicate some sort of planning, centred on a more or less rectangular courtyard delineated by a narrow trench. A settlement such as that in Lanaken, also dating to the (early) Carolingian age, might be related to a more sophisticated elite-organised agrarian production. The settlements of the Thier d'Olne and Sclayn might rather be religious sites and the settlement in Vasse might illustrate the growing differentiation among cultivators at a local level. The remaining problem is to identify aristocratic residences; places where aristocrats dwelled for longer or shorter periods with an above-average lifestyle. We should not forget that the recovered material culture of all the presented sites, with the notable exception of Oegstgeest, is extremely poor. It is the material culture and exquisite architecture that characterises the elite residences in England and Scandinavia. The safest conclusion is that, up to now, elite residences seem to be absent from the archaeological record in northern Gaul, which is not a satisfying conclusion. We want to know why they are absent. There are several possible answers: One answer is that they were not there in the early Middle Ages. The first time we see aristocratic residences is when the Carolingian kings began to build

their palaces, although Merovingian kings must have lived in palaces too, but they are also difficult to identify in the archaeological record[59]. We cannot imagine that there were no Merovingian royal palaces, but we might have to imagine that there were next to no aristocratic residences in the countryside. This might have to do with the near absence of aristocrats during a large part of the Merovingian period in northern Gaul. Of course, we know of the aristocratic groups referred to before, mentioned in the 7th century, especially from the middle of the 7th century on, but their number is relatively small and when present they are concentrated in the (middle and upper) Meuse and Moselle valleys (the Pippinids, Chrodo-ids, Wulfoalds, Irmina-Adela group, Adalgisl Grimo). The 6th century aristocratic groups are even less visible. Aristocratic visibility or invisibility might have many causes, some of them quite banal, such as the absence of written sources mentioning them, but if both types of sources, written texts and archaeological evidence, speak only in a whisper of aristocrats in the 6th and first half of the 7th century, we might start to think of them as hardly relevant to the organisation of Merovingian society in northern Gaul before c. AD 650. So, the question remains: What was the influence of courtiers on rural society in northern Gaul? How many more rural settlements do archaeologists have to excavate before we find an aristocratic residence?

A second possible answer is that they are there, but that we do not recognise them or have not found them yet[60]. Early medieval aristocratic residences might not be that impressive. A site interpreted as comprising an aristocratic residence is Serris, near Paris, which is almost completely excavated[61] (**fig. 15**). The dates provided for the start of the habitation, after a late Roman and early Merovingian void, vary between the early, middle, and late 7th century. It is safe to consider its earliest start around the middle of the 7th century. One quarter of the settlement is said to be of an aristocratic nature, which thus came into being only in the middle and second half of the 7th century. Four buildings have stone footings (and stone walls?), whereas other contemporary buildings at the site are post-build structures, with the exception of a cult building related to a cemetery[62]. All aristocratic (stone) buildings need not have functioned at the same time, for the quarter was in use for 150 years. Post-build structures, however, can be highly decorated and impressive in contrast to the primitivism of modern reconstructions in open-air museums. The aristocratic character of the Serris quarter depends on its location in the settlement, the different architectural remains and some exceptional finds in that quarter, such as coins and coin weights, a scale, a stylus, and a different bone and pottery composition[63]. We have to ask a fundamental question: How do we recognise an archaeological site as an aristocratic residence independent of written sources[64]? One answer is an above average material culture profile, but the Oegstgeest settlement excavations show that this is not a watertight criterium. Precious metal finds do not necessarily denote aristocrats. We might look at how, in Scandinavia, early medieval aristocratic residences are identified without the help of written sources[65]. Looking at the »magnate farms« and »royal sites« identified there, we see highly complex sites compared to the ones presented in this paper, with an exquisite material culture and characterised by a host of metal finds. The meagre pottery and metal finds and the two glass beads found at Vasse-Steenbrei are not of great help in identifying an aristocratic residence, nor are the finds of pottery and the relatively few metal finds found at the sites discussed. An exception might be the Oegstgeest site with its exquisite finds that are not unlike those from other riverine sites, but the built environment of that and other riverine sites along the Rhine River[66] points rather to rural sites that were well connected to European networks, an element that need not point to an aristocratic status of its inhabitants.

Another reason why we might not recognise aristocratic residences is that the »normal« rural population would have been differentiated; rural society in Merovingian times would not have been an egalitarian society, nor a strongly hierarchical organised society. There is no evidence for either position in the varied nature of the settlements in northern Gaul. This could make it difficult to distinguish between well-to-do cultivators and low-ranking aristocrats who did not till the lands themselves for their

59 For a debate on this see: Barreveld in print.

60 The last point becomes more unlikely by the day because the choice of excavation locations is not determined by possibly biased research perspectives of where such sites are expected to be, but by a fairly random process of choices determined by modern infrastructural interventions in the landscape. Excavations no longer take place in predetermined places in the landscape.

61 Foucray/Gentili 1993; 1995; Foucray 1996; Blaizot 2017.

62 The number of post-built structures contemporary with the »stone« buildings is limited (Blaizot 2017, 15 fig. 4) and dated to a long period of c. 650-775.

63 A coin weight was also found further north, on what is considered a normal »unité d'exploitation«. Such finds are, however, regularly found on rural sites further north.

64 See also: Peytremann 2013.

65 Although younger sources are in some cases used to identify royal residences.

66 See for instance the Leidse Rijn site near Utrecht: Nokkert et al. 2009.

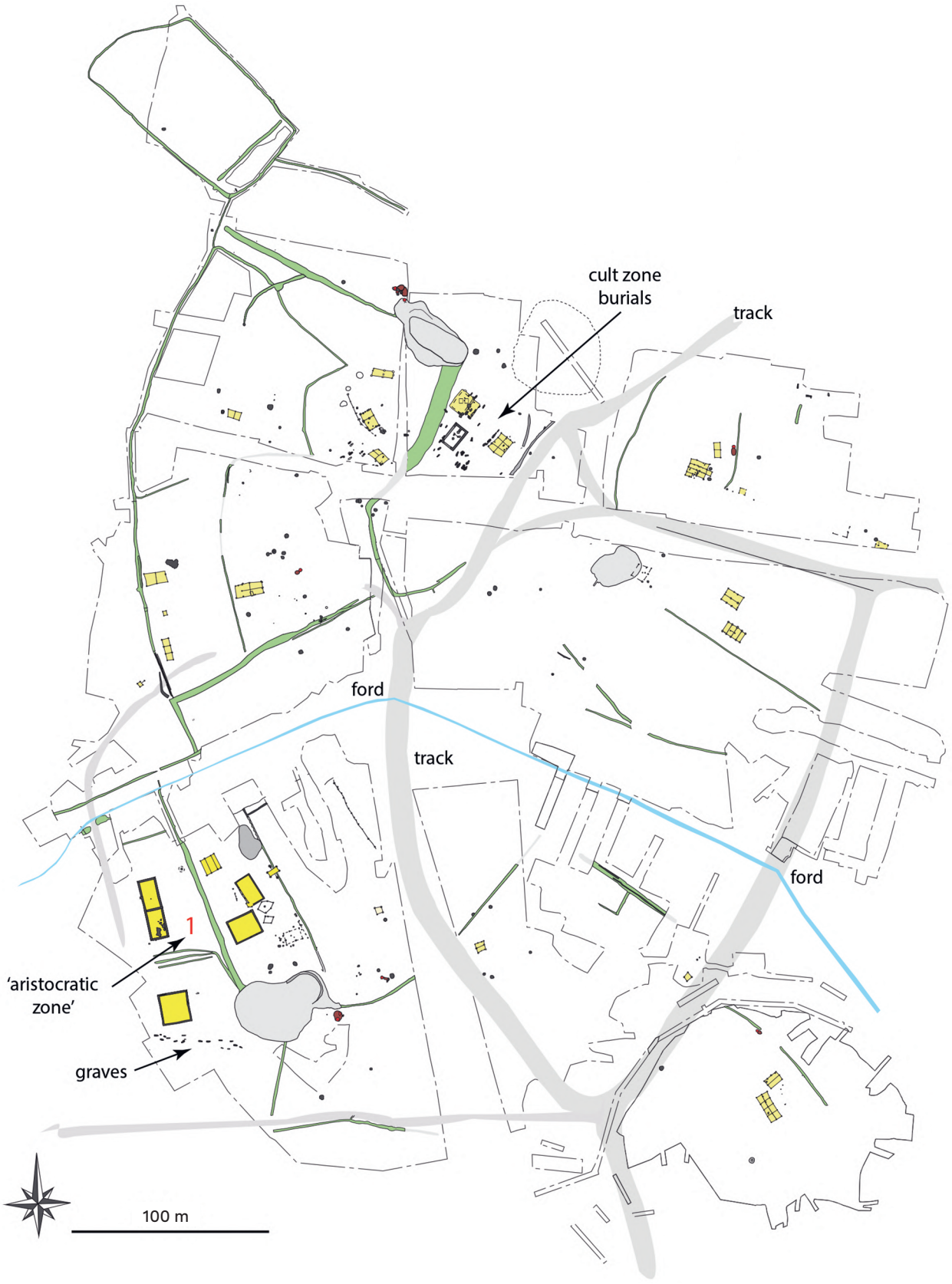

Fig. 15 Plan of the settlement of Serris des Ruelles in the 7th century. In the southeastern quarter, there is a group of buildings interpreted as an estate center. In the northern part, there is a cult zone. These elements are complemented by a number of agricultural units. – (Adapted after Gentili 2017, fig. II–15b).

livelihood. The study of early medieval society in the Middle Rhine River area on the basis of written sources shows how complex rural society was in the 8th and 9th centuries, with a plethora of social statuses, proprietary statuses, and wealth statuses, at short distances from each other and present in the same settlement[67]. One wonders whether such differentiation was already present in Merovingian times: the settlements excavated in northern Gaul so far do not give that impression; the variability among farmyards in settlements is not very large, even within specified regions. One would love to excavate such a settlement in the Middle Rhine River area and see how visible these dynamic statuses were in Carolingian times (post 750). Archaeology might also show different aspects of rural social life not recorded in the written texts, such as the long-distance contacts of dwellers in settlements such as Dommelen, Geldrop, Oegstgeest and Leidse Rijn and their mobility[68]. Self-identification might have been as important to the local dwellers as the images of social relations presented in the texts by monastic and literate scribes, which were worded with the interests of the large landowners and the monasteries who received rents in mind. We will probably not be able to excavate early medieval Dienheim, for instance (although everything should be done to find its location and, when possible, excavate it), but what we can do is analyse regions with a high density of excavated settlements and contextualise these, such as the Kempen region (**fig. 11**), where more than 50 excavated settlements or parts thereof are available in an area of 50 km × 50 km, and compare the resultant models with those of other regions.

So, my conclusion is that, in spite of a huge excavation effort over the last 30 years, it is as difficult as it was before to find aristocratic residences of the Merovingian and early Carolingian period in the countryside of northern Gaul, that is, before Charlemagne began to build his palaces in Aachen, Nijmegen, Ingelheim and Paderborn. Another possible answer may come from the excavations at the Chèvremont fortress near Liège, which have just started. Hopefully, we will get an idea of how Pippin II lived, at least at those moments when he was in the fortress. The palaces and the Chèvremont fortress represent a staggering monumentalisation in architecture and an elite representation not seen before in the region. To show the contrast, we present in a very brief manner what we know about the palace of Charlemagne in Nijmegen.

F. Theuws

Charlemagne's Palace in Nijmegen: An Archaeological Enigma?

The palace of Nijmegen, together with Aachen and Ingelheim, is no doubt one of the more important royal palaces of the Carolingian Empire. The impressive monumental architecture of these palaces, as an expression of royal power and authority, make them highlights of the Carolingian Renaissance. The palaces of Aachen, Ingelheim and Nijmegen have in common that they were all built or significantly enlarged during the reign of Charlemagne[69]. Later in Charlemagne's life, Aachen became his favoured royal residence and it remained equally important to his son, Louis the Pious[70]. Nevertheless, other royal palaces, such as Nijmegen, were still visited frequently by the king and members of his court.

Einhard mentions in his Life of Charlemagne: »He [Charlemagne] also began [to build two] splendid palaces, one not far from the city of Mainz, on the [royal] estate of Ingelheim, and the other at Nijmegen on the river Waal, which passes along the south side of the island of the Batavians«[71]. Charlemagne visited Nijmegen at least four times between 777 and 808. Each time, he and members of his court stayed there for several weeks, if not months. Louis the Pious visited Nijmegen no less than nine times between 815 and 838, also often for several months. The importance of Nijmegen is further underlined by the fact that several royal assemblies were held in this palace between 804 and 870[72]. According to the *Annales regni Francorum*, Nijmegen was also a place where Charlemagne celebrated Easter. He did this for the first time in 777, the same year that a charter mentions the *palatium publicum* of Nijmegen[73].

67 Innes 2009.

68 Dommelen and Geldrop: Theuws 2023. - Leidse Rijn: Nokkert et al. 2009. - Oegstgeest: de Bruin et al. 2021.

69 G. Binding (1996) gives a general overview. Recently, the archaeological and architectural evidence of individual palaces have been published in more detail: Aachen (e. g. Heckner/Schaab 2012; Ristow 2014a; 2014b; Ley/Wietheger 2014). - Ingelheim (Grewe 2014; Gierszewska-Noszczyńska/Peisker 2020). - Nijmegen (den Braven 2014; Thissen 2014; Hendriks et al. 2014).

70 R. McKitterick (2008, 158) has argued that Aachen's central role in Carolingian political ideology is primarily due to Louis the Pious and his heirs.

71 Translation by Dutton 1998, 26.

72 Thissen 2014, 72-74.

73 Leupen/Thissen 1981, 17-18 (nos 20-21).

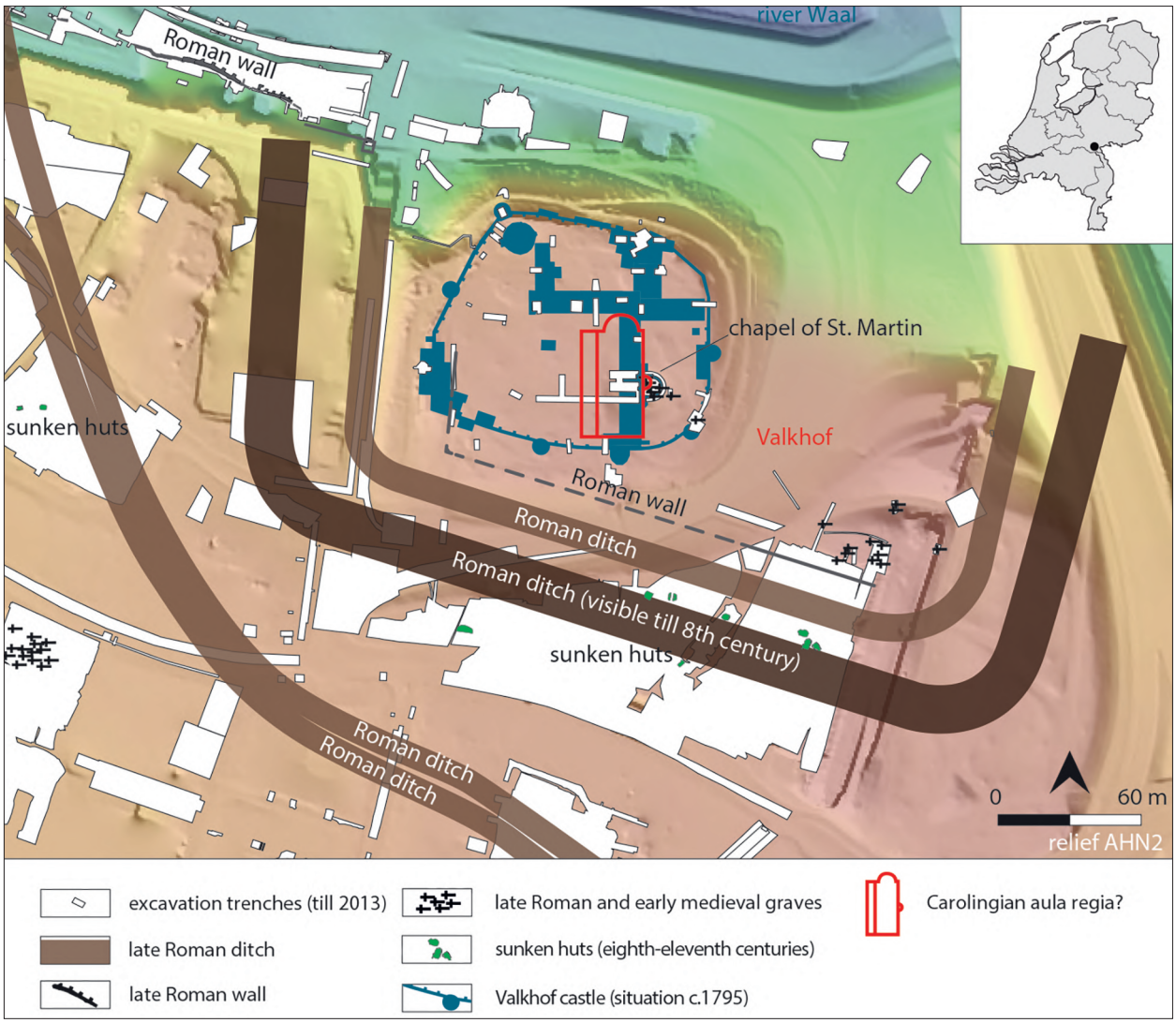

Fig. 16 Simplified plan of the palace site of Nijmegen. The lay-out of the Carolingian *aula regia* assumed by H. Hundermark is also shown. – (After Hundertmark 2020, 153 fig. 18, 4).

B. Thissen suggests that this *palatium publicum* refers to an older palace, perhaps dating back to the Merovingian period[74]. The emphasis on the public character of the palace seems to indicate that it was an official government building that was regularly used by the mayor of the palace or other royal officials, but was not necessarily visited by the king in person[75]. Nijmegen is called *palatium publicum* one more time (821), but is referred to as »royal palace« (*palatium regium, regale palatium*) in other 9th century sources. Does this shift in terminology perhaps indicate a difference between the use of the old (Merovingian?) palace and a new palace Charlemagne had built after his first visit in 777? The formulation by Einhard »He [Charlemagne] also began [to build two] splendid palaces« suggests that the (new) palace of Nijmegen was not completely finished when Charlemagne died in 814. Perhaps the palace was still partly under construction in 828 when Gerward, court librarian and responsible for the construction and upkeep of the palace buildings, visited Nijmegen[76].

So, the Carolingian palace of Nijmegen was important, but what do we actually know of the topography, architectural layout and, no doubt complex, building history? The palace was located strategically on the far end of a moraine ridge, the so-called Valkhof plateau. From this high point, one has a clear view of the Betuwe and the River Waal, a tributary of

74 Thissen 1995, 271. 273; 2014, 70.
75 Compare with Zotz 1990, 82-84.
76 As mentioned by Einhard in his Translatio ss. Petri et Marcellini: »Gerward, the librarian of the palace, to whom the care of the palace's books and buildings had already at the time been entrusted by the king, was coming from Nijmegen to the palace of Aachen.« Translation by Dutton 1998, 115.

Fig. 17 Carolingian capital that was re-used in the chapel of St Martin at the Valkhof in the 12th century. – (Photo Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed, Amersfoort / 10.704B [= Weve 1925, Plaat LVIII–1]).

the Rhine. The palace was built on the remains of a late Roman fortification (castellum), of which a large ditch was still visible in the 8th century. This ditch was more than twelve metres wide and four metres deep, and it enclosed an area of approximately 4.5 ha (**fig. 16**). Also, the late Roman stone castellum wall was still in use in the early Middle Ages but seems to have been used as a stone quarry from the 9th century onwards[77]. Around the palace site, excavations have revealed several sunken huts, pits and cultural layers of a settlement that dates to the Carolingian and Ottonian periods. This settlement seems to be focussed on artisan production and was probably a vicus connected to the palace[78].

During the later medieval period and more recent times, the palace complex was modified and partly rebuilt several times. Unfortunately, the palace was almost completely demolished in the revolutionary years of 1796–1797[79]. Only the early 11th century chapel of St Nicolas and the mid-12th century chapel of St Martin are still standing. Several beautifully carved Carolingian capitals (some of them re-used in later palace buildings) give a glimpse of the classical architecture of the original palace, which must have been just as impressive as the palaces of Aachen and Ingelheim (**fig. 17**).

Since the late 19th century, small parts of the central palace site have been archaeologically investigated, more notably during the excavations by J. J. Weve in 1910–1911[80]. During these and other small-scale excavations, part of a cemetery dating from the 7th and 8th centuries was excavated at the chapel of St Martin. Perhaps this early medieval cemetery extended to the old churchyard in the southeastern part of the palace site. Here, the oldest graves belong to the Carolingian period on the basis of their radiocarbon dates[81]. Perhaps the most exciting and well-documented discovery made by Weve, however, is a north-south orientated early medieval building. Of this building, the eastern stone foundation was preserved as well as parts of a wall with a window arch that is still visible above ground (**fig. 18**). In addition, several demolition trenches were observed in a small excavation trench perpendicular to this building and dug by H. Brunsting in 1946. These demolition trenches probably indicate the location of the western wall of the building and an adjacent corridor[82]. In the 12th century, part of the eastern wall was demolished in order to expand the building with an apsis, which still remains above ground and is nowadays known as the chapel of St Martin or Barbarossa's ruin. There are some indications that the north-south orientated building was perhaps the Carolingian *aula regia* that was later enlarged with a throne apsis with a »crypt« for sacred objects, such as royal regalia and relics of St Martin of Tours. This would also explain why the chapel was dedicated to St Martin[83].

The foundation of the north-south oriented building is between 1.15 and 1.20 m wide and is made out of rather small blocks of tufa stone, some pieces of sandstone and Roman brick, all pointed with a white mortar. J. J. Weve assumed that this stone foundation dated to the Merovingian period[84]. Directly on top of this foundation, he documented a stone wall that, for the greater part, is made from rectangular tufa stone blocks and pointed with a »red« mortar made from crushed (Roman) brick.

77 den Braven 2021, 151.
78 den Braven 2021, 152.
79 Langereis 2010, 137-138.
80 Weve 1925. - For further discussion: Thijssen 1980, 10-13; den Braven 2014, 26-29; 2021, 151-152; Hendriks et al. 2014, 70-71; Thijssen 2014, 182-183.
81 Hendriks/den Braven 2015, 13-14. - It should be noted that the deep depression between both burial grounds is a late medieval phenomenon and graves may have disappeared.
82 Hundertmark 2020, 152.
83 Mekking 1997, 103-115.
84 Weve 1925.

Fig. 18 Photos taken during the excavation by J. J. Weve in 1910 of the early medieval wall and foundation, which were partly incorporated into the chapel of St Martin. Also in the wall, a window arch was partly preserved because it was bricked up in the 12th century. – (Photo Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed, Amersfoort / left 10.676 [= Weve 1925, Plaat LV-2], right 10.713 [= Weve 1925, Plaat LVI-4]).

The northern part of this wall contains a window arch that was bricked-up in the 12th century. The wall, with its characteristic red mortar, was dated to the Carolingian period by Weve. This discovery by Weve, despite its significance, was more or less forgotten until recently. This probably has to do with the fact that the archaeological and historical research of the palace by Weve was never fully published. Already in 1917, he had advanced plans to publish his opus magnum, including the research of the German historian H. Wirtz, in a series on the great »German« palaces of Charlemagne by the »Deutscher Verein für Kunstwissenschaft«. The First World War, and especially the sudden death of co-author H. Wirtz during the battle of Verdun 1916, threw a spanner in the works[85].

In 2019, the building historian H. Hundertmark conducted an exploratory study of the chapel of St Martin in anticipation of future restoration works[86]. His work is important, as it shows that J. J. Weve was probably right on the Carolingian origin of the wall with the red mortar. Hundertmark argues that the stone foundation with white mortar is also Carolingian. In his opinion, the foundation and wall are different building phases of the same building, i. e. the *aula regia* of Charlemagne's (new) palace, which was probably built during the last quarter of the 8th century[87]. On basis of the robbed-out foundation trench west of the wall, he concludes that this *aula regia* was approximately 19.5 m wide and therefore similar to Aachen (20.5 m)[88]. In the reconstruction of the *aula regia* by Hundertmark, two building elements play an important role: The location of the (split) window in the Carolingian wall and the large re-used Roman stone blocks below it that must have flanked an entrance building. According to Hundertmark, a deep stone foundation block (with red mortar), excavated by Weve directly east of the north-south orientated foundation wall, belongs to this entrance building, which would have been about 6 m wide. It is a

85 Nevertheless, J. J. Weve completed his manuscript »De Valkhofburcht te Nijmegen« in 1925, but unfortunately no more than four typed copies were made, one of which is still at the Regionaal Archief Nijmegen.

86 Hundertmark 2020; in prep.

87 Hundertmark 2020, 149-152.

88 Hundertmark 2020, 152-153 fig. 18.

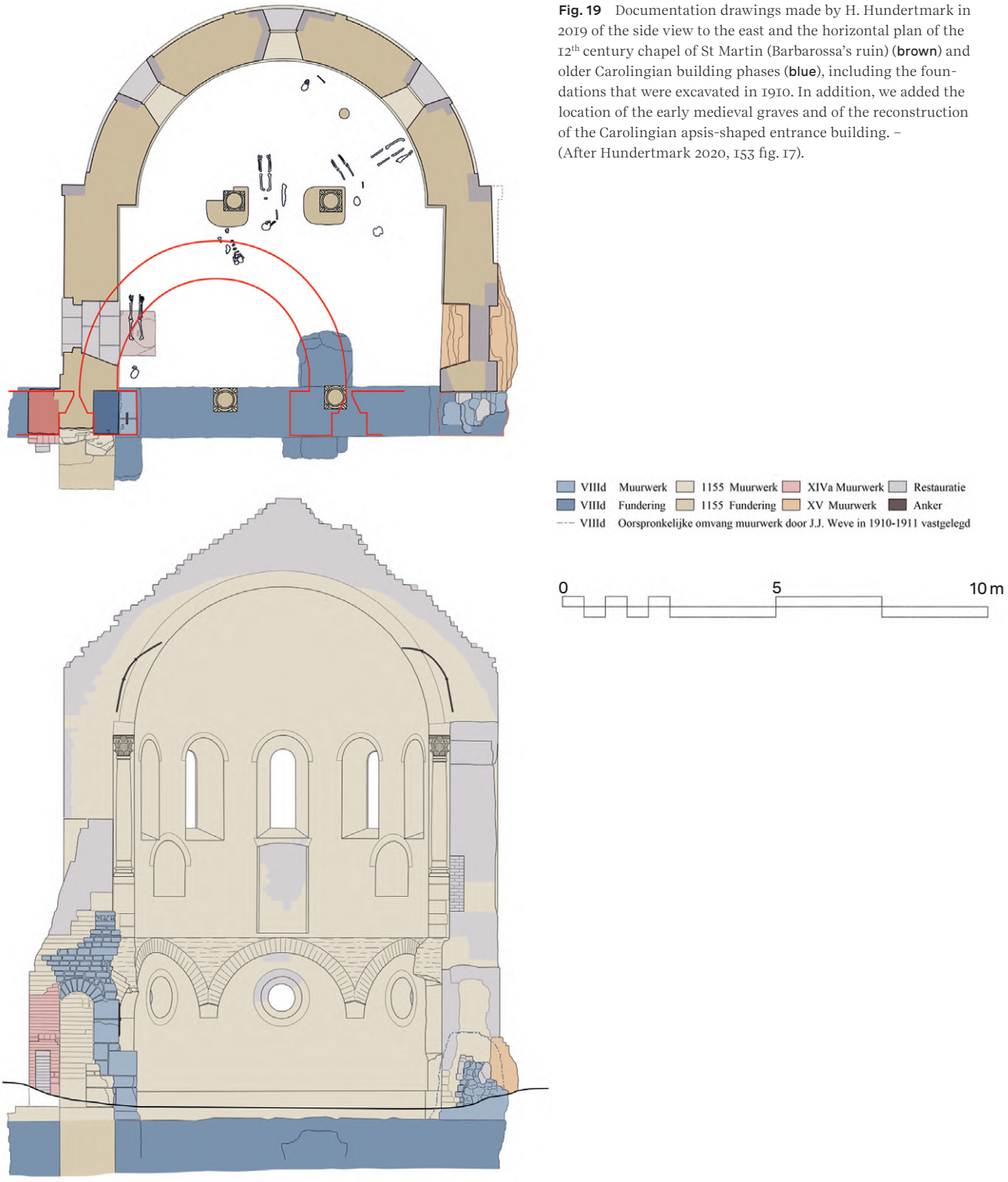

Fig. 19 Documentation drawings made by H. Hundertmark in 2019 of the side view to the east and the horizontal plan of the 12th century chapel of St Martin (Barbarossa's ruin) (**brown**) and older Carolingian building phases (**blue**), including the foundations that were excavated in 1910. In addition, we added the location of the early medieval graves and of the reconstruction of the Carolingian apsis-shaped entrance building. – (After Hundertmark 2020, 153 fig. 17).

convincing reconstruction that makes sense from an architectural point of view. The only problem is that at least one of the early medieval graves, whose location and depth was recorded by Weve, is in the place where Hundertmark suspects the apsis-shaped foundation of the entrance building (**fig. 19**). If his reconstruction is right, a possible explanation would be that the apsis-shaped building was built in different phases with apparently less deep foundations. However, this remains a matter of debate.

We conclude this article with sad news: »Barbarossa's ruin«, with the remains of the possibly Carolingian *aula regia*, is increasingly becoming a real ruin; the southern part of the Carolingian wall especially is in a deplorable state. It is recommended that, during necessary restoration works, further research is carried out on the last tangible remnants of Charlemagne's palace at Nijmegen.

A. den Braven

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