

Rural cult places in the *civitas Cananefatium*

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Abstract

Rural cult places are a widespread phenomenon in Roman times. They are found across the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, France and England. In 1987 Slofstra and Van der Sanden published a discussion of such structures for the Meuse-Demer-Scheldt area. They argued that there are several similarities between the structures in terms of the appearance of the features and the accompanying finds. Although others have discussed open air cult places, so far the focus has never been on the western Netherlands. This paper intends to redress the balance by presenting an overview of Roman rural cult places from the area between the Rhine and Meuse estuaries (fig.1). Furthermore, this study identifies new criteria for identifying new cult places.

Keywords: Rural cult places, rectangular structures, depositions, cult, Roman times, Cananefates, western Netherlands

1 Introduction

As comprehensive as our knowledge of rural habitation in the Cananefatian area is, our knowledge of cult and religion within this region is limited. So far, no clear traces of temples, as known from other parts of the Roman Empire, have been found in the study area, limiting our knowledge of Roman rural cult places in the western Netherlands. Although temples might very well have stood in the area, most places of worship here are likely to have been open-air sanctuaries. However, in line with our limited knowledge of temple structures, only a few examples of these open-air sanctuaries could be identified in past decades, resulting in a lacuna in our understanding of rural Cananefatian communities.

The discovery in more recent years of a number of indigenous Roman rural cult places in the coastal area between the Rhine and Meuse estuaries furthers our understanding of rural cult in this specific part of the Roman Empire, complementing our knowledge of the Cananefatian society as a whole. By presenting these sites in a single overview, this paper therefore aims at a more constructive definition of rural cult places in the Cananefatian area. In addition, the sites presented add to our knowledge of cult in a much broader geographical context.

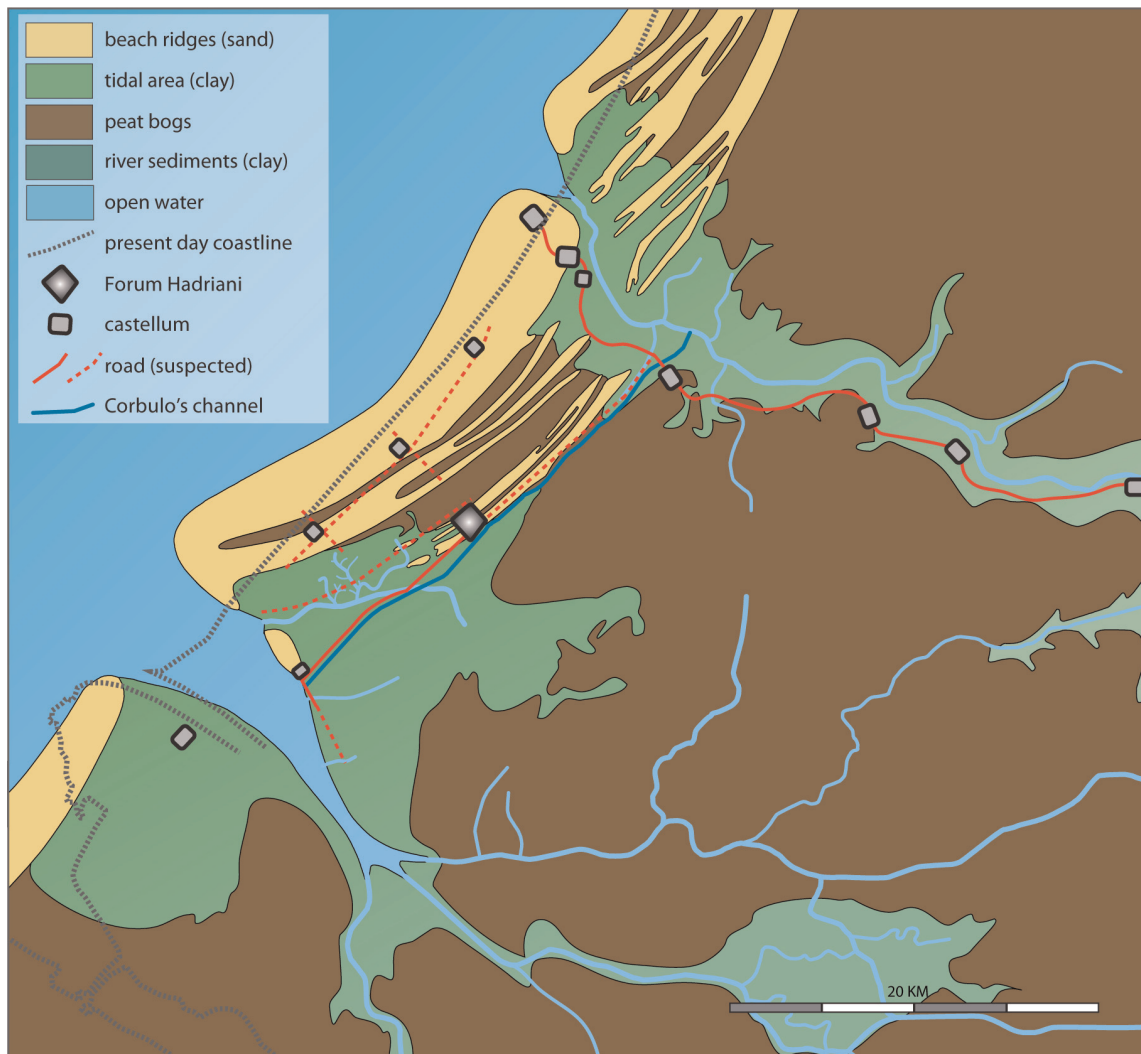


Figure 1 Study area (*civitas Cananefatium*) with underlying geology.

First, this article briefly introduces the coastal settlement between the Rhine and Meuse in the Late Iron Age and Roman period. Special attention is paid to the underlying geology, rural settlement in the area, and known places of worship. Second, there is an overview of the study on rural cult places outside the study area. This forms a framework within which the cult places in the study area are introduced. Each structure is briefly described, focusing on the features and the accompanying finds. This paper concludes with some general remarks on cult and broader themes.

2 Study area and geological setting

The exact boundaries of the *civitas Cananefatium* are unknown but this paper focuses on known approximate boundaries. The northern boundary is formed by the current Old Rhine, which flows into the North Sea in present day Katwijk (fig. 2). In Roman times this river was however significantly wider. In the south the estuary of the Meuse, Waal and Scheldt form the boundary of the study area. In Roman times this river mouth was known as *Helinio*. The area between the two estuaries consisted of peat bogs, which in the west were separated from the sea by a series of parallel beach ridges. On top of these sandy barriers small dunes formed over the centuries, making this an ideal landscape for habitation from prehistoric times onwards. The area east of these barriers was less suited for habitation.



Figure 2 Location of sites mentioned in this article.

From the Late Iron Age onwards, the sea entered the inland bog area through the large river mouths as a result of storm surges, resulting in the erosion of large sections of peat by tidal channels (Van der Valk 2006, 24-25). Clays were deposited simultaneously over the surrounding and partially eroded moors. The most influential of these tidal channels is the so-called Oer-Gantel, which entered the area from the Meuse estuary. While clay sediments covered the peat, they also silted up the tidal channels in the course of time, decreasing the catchment area. The clay area became suited for habitation from early Roman times onwards as most of the tidal channels became inactive by this process.

During Roman times, the landscape slowly sank as a result of a rising sea level, making the area less suited for habitation. From the beginning of the second millennium AD, the sea again enters the inland area through the Meuse estuary, depositing new clay sediments on top of the Roman habitation traces. At the same time the coastline also drastically changes. As a result of coastal erosion sands get picked up by the wind, transporting the sediments further inland, covering the former 'Older Dunes' and resulting in the present day 'Younger Dunes' on top of them. As a result, much of the archaeology in this area has been preserved, but is also difficult to find and excavate.

3 Rural habitation in the *civitas Cananefatium*

Occupation in the western Netherlands starts in the Neolithic and has always been highly influenced by a dynamic landscape. Not only did the landscape offer and constrain particular opportunities for existence, its dynamics also changed or even destroyed traces left by occupants. Although it is likely that the area was (however scarcely) populated during the transition from the Late Iron Age to Early Roman times, the archaeological evidence for this assumption is extremely scant and difficult to interpret. Historical sources mention an *ala Caninefas* taking part in a military campaign against the Frisii as early as AD 28 (Tacitus, *Annales* 4.73). This shows that the Cananefates already existed in the first half of the 1st century as recruitment among this tribe clearly had been possible. It is likely that the western Netherlands were primarily part of the tribal area, although the precise geographical location of the tribe is not mentioned. It may be expected that the majority of early Cananefatian settlements were situated in the dune area as the inland tidal area only became suitable for habitation during the 1st century AD.

Numerous traces dating from the second half of the 1st century AD prove that the area between the Rhine and Meuse estuaries became intensively inhabited in this period. The vast majority of these sites were located in the clay area, but there is also some evidence for habitation in the dune zone. This lower number is not indicative of the total number of settlements that would have existed in this area, but is more a result of the archaeological (in)visibility in this landscape.

The excavated settlements of the 1st century show that Cananefatian society was a rural community. The fertile clay deposits around the (former) tidal channels were intensively occupied in Roman times. This occupation was mainly situated at the levees of former tidal channels. The highest parts of these levees were used as arable land, while the lower areas were suitable as grassland for livestock. The various sites show the area enjoyed a certain economic prosperity during the 2nd century due to the presence of the Roman army and the provincial town of *Forum Hadriani*. The army was mainly encamped in *castella* along the Rhine and, from the late 2nd century onwards, also along the North Sea coast (fig. 2). Smaller military installations were present in the hinterland. *Forum Hadriani* was located near present day Voorburg (fig. 1). The town functioned as an official marketplace and capital for the *civitas Cananefatium* from at least the beginning of the 2nd century AD. Both the army and the town were dependent for many products on the production of the hinterland to provide numerous products. Roads and a channel connected the town and the *castella* with each other and with the settlements in the hinterland.

The construction of several ditch systems from the middle 2nd century AD indicates that the inhabitants started managing the water. This is particularly evident in the settlements of The Hague-Hoge Veld, Midden-Delfland and Schipluiden-Harnaschpolder (Siemons & Lanzing 2009; Van Londen 2006; Flamman & Goossens 2006). The (former) tidal channels were integrated into these systems and served as drains. The ditches formed part of an administrative system focussed on land division and tax collection. In his study, Vos recognized a system based on Roman measurement in the rural villages in the Batavian area, indicating that a (local?) government initiated the process (Vos 2009, 109-116; 257-259). The presence of a comparable system based on parcelling may be expected in the Cananefatian lands (Van Londen 2006).

At the same time as they started to manage water and divide the land, the inhabitants also started build their farmsteads on higher parts of the landscape, instead of exploiting these areas as arable land. It has been suggested for sites such as Schipluiden-Harnaschpolder and The Hague-Hoge Veld that from the moment the lower parts of the landscape were drained by ditches, such areas became suitable for cultivation (Siemons & Lanzing 2009, 352, with reference to Kooistra 2006).

Archaeological evidence from the beginning of the 3rd century AD suggests that the population of the area decreased dramatically (De Bruin 2005). Only a few settlements remained occupied into the 4th century AD. One (local) explanation for the exodus of habitants is water logging, but unfavourable economic or socio-political circumstances may have played a broader important role.

4 Current views on cult and religion in the *civitas Cananefatium*

In comparison to habitation in the Cananefatian area, little is known about cult and religion within this region. Only a few traces of temples, shrines or sanctuaries are known from the study area and the identification of certain sites remains uncertain. For example, in the mid-19th century traces of buildings which may be interpreted as belonging to a temple structure were found at *Forum Hadriani* (De Jonge *et al.* 2006). However, the data provide us with very few details, making any interpretation difficult. Other hypothetical temple remains are equally unconvincing. Van Giffen unearthed a square stone foundation in the *castellum* near Valkenburg in the mid-20th century, which he thought could have belonged to a small temple. Later research by the archaeological service of the Province of South Holland in 1991 expressed doubt on this conclusion. The structure was more likely part of a bathhouse than a temple complex (De Hingh & Vos 2005, 163).

Another presumed religious structure from Valkenburg has been documented in the *vicus* at Marktveld. A cemetery was found next to numerous farmsteads and outbuildings. Ten metres to the west of this cemetery a structure was documented, interpreted by the excavators as a possible sanctuary (Hallewas & Van Dierendonck 1993, 27-28). The building measured 7.2 by 4.9 m and was east-west oriented. The walls and inner framework consisted of posts. Two entrances opposite each other were situated in the long side walls, 1.6 m. from the eastern short side wall. The building was surrounded on three sides by a horseshoe-shaped ditch, c. 1 metre wide. The structure was dated to the second half of the 2nd century AD. The site's location near the opening of the surrounding ditch towards the cemetery formed the basis for an interpretation as a sanctuary. However, this interpretation is problematic, especially when it comes to the inner building. Numerous farmsteads excavated in recent years show a strong likeness with the Marktveld structure (Kodde 2007, type 5A, 32-33). An interpretation as a farmstead is furthermore emphasized by the structure's location in the southeast corner of the habitation zone, incorporated within the enclosing ditch system. The lack of finds supporting a cult function also points to a farmstead. Finally, the horseshoe-shaped ditch can very well have functioned as a border or drain surrounding any type of building.

Another uncertainty applies to the site of Rijswijk-de Bult. The publication of this rural settlement mentions the remains of two temples after a Gallo-Roman model (Bloemers 1978, II, 189-191). The temples would have succeeded each other and have been dated to the end of the 2nd and the first half of the 3rd century. A similar structure was recently excavated in the Harnaschpolder near Schipluiden (Bakx & Jongma 2009). In his study of cult buildings Derks (1998, 152-153, ref. 96.) rejects the interpretation of these structures as temples, as does Goossens (2006) in his excavation report. Recently Heeren (2009, 215) proved the structures to be *horrea* (granaries) instead. The recently discovered structure in the Harnaschpolder is likewise seen as a *horreum*.

The presence of temples is more certain outside the study area. Not far south, near Domburg and Colijnsplaat, there are remains of sanctuaries dedicated to the indigenous goddess Nehalennia. Dozens of altar stones representing Nehalennia and two large stone sculptures representing the Roman goddess Victory were found in 1647 in the dunes near Domburg (Hondius-Crone 1955). These finds point to the presence of a sanctuary in the vicinity although no *in situ* traces of any kind of settlement are known. Even more votive altar stones were collected to the north of Colijnsplaat (fig. 3), where over 300 altar stones and a small number of sculptures



Figure 3 Votive altar dedicated to Nehalennia by Marcus Exgingius Agricola (i 1970/12.1; photograph: National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden).

representing Nehalennia were found (Stuart & Bogaers 2001; Stuart 2003). Again, no *in situ* traces of a settlement are preserved,¹ yet the sheer number of votives indicates that a temple complex once stood at the southern bank of the river Scheldt. A study of the votive inscriptions has shown that Nehalennia played an important role in overseas trade (Stuart 2003). These conclusions are also supported by the coastal setting of the sites. One may imagine that Nehalennia also played a role in the coastal Cananefatian region to the north.

Evidence from Domburg and Colijnsplaat shows that objects such as (fragments of) altars or statuettes of gods and goddesses, may be considered as evidence for the presence of a sanctuary even in the absence of actual structures. In the *vici* of Valkenburg-Marktveld and The Hague-Scheveningseweg several terracotta and even bronze statuettes, especially of goddesses, were found. The relative large numbers, respectively eleven terracotta figurines at Valkenburg (Van Boekel 1990) and twenty at The Hague (Van Boekel 1989), are a clear indication that a shrine of some sort must have stood nearby. As most of the figurines resemble *matres*, or mother goddesses, we may assume that the votives belonged to a *lararium* or household shrine. Also interesting are several fragments of a sandstone altar from the rural settlement of The Hague-Uithofslaan (De Hingh & Van Ginkel 2009, 102) (fig. 4). The fragments were unearthed among an exceptional quantity of ceramic and stone rubble, suggesting that the altar fragments had been brought to the spot together with this material. The excavated section of the site revealed no clear evidence for any stone construction, which leaves the question of what the original function of the material could have been. The possibilities include virtually all types of buildings constructed of stone and brick, among which would be a temple complex.



Figure 4 Fragments of a sandstone altar found at The Hague-Uithofslaan (photograph: O. Odé, Amsterdam).

It can be concluded that the existing views on cult and religion in the study area are based on marginal evidence. In essence, a few finds point at the existence of some sort of shrine, but virtually no evidence exists actual (part) stone temples or shrines in the Cananefatian area. However, since this was a rural society it is reasonable to expect that traces of rural cult places do exist, albeit in another form. In order to gain more insight into the existence of rural sanctuaries, an examination of such structures outside the study area is necessary.

5 Rectangular structures as cult places in rural communities

Outside the *civitas Cananefatium* our knowledge of cult practices among rural communities is more detailed, especially in terms of the places of worship and the nature of cult. A common type of rural cult place is the open-air sanctuary, which occurs in many parts of Europe as a mainly rectangular structure. These structures have been known as *Viereckschanze*, *sanctuaires de type belges*, *enclos cultuels*, *Grabgärten*, *temenoi*, open-air sanctuaries or simply rural cult places. Most structures date from the late Iron Age and Roman times. There has been much debate on the function and interpretation of these structures, with interpretations varying from places of worship to tombs or even central places of assembly. For instance, *Viereckschanzen* are more often considered to have been settlement areas instead of cult places. Terms like *sanctuaires de type belges* suggest that this type of cult place is representative of a certain ethnic group, whereas a series of similar structures is known from far outside the known tribal area of the Belgae (cf. Cabanillas de la Torre 2010). These structures follow a certain pattern and are generally considered to have been rural places of worship (for instance Roymans 1987; Slofstra & Van der Sanden 1987; Bourgeois & Nenquin 1996; Fontijn 2002; Gerritsen 2003, 150-167).

The rural cult places have a number of features in common. It is important to note that not all structures have the same characteristics and interpretation often hinges on the accompanying finds. However, they are all more or less rectangular in shape (Fontijn 2002, 150). Some structures are square, for example the ones in Oss-Ussen (Slofstra & Van der Sanden 1987, 131-135) and Nijmegen (Fontijn 2002, 156-164) or square in shape but not completely closed, for example Wijshagen (Maes & Van Impe 1987) and Geldermalsen-Hondsgemet (Van Renswoude & Roesingh 2009, 570; structure O1). Whatever the shape, what all structures have in common is that a specific area is restricted from the surrounding outside world by means of palisades, ditches or embankments (Slofstra & Van der Sanden 1987, 155; Fontijn 2002, 150). The orientation is in many cases an important aspect of the structure, especially with reference to the four cardinal directions. Examples are Alphen (Van der Sanden & Van der Klift 1984), Wijnegem (Cuyt 1985; Slofstra & Van der Sanden 1987, 138-143) and Nijmegen (Fontijn 2002, 169). Likewise the interior of the areas was treated with care. Post and pit configurations occur in almost all rural cult places. Examples include Hoogeloon (Slofstra 1982, 102-112), Gournay-sur-Aronde (Bruneaux *et al.* 1985) and Kontich (Annaert 1993). It is known from classical sources that trees played an important role in places of worship.² In that sense, the post configurations might have been a symbolic representation of a forest (Benamins 1999, 90). However, it has also been suggested that such post configurations may be representations of stellar constellations (Therkorn 2004).

Cult places are often situated at the outskirts of prominent features in the landscape, such as cemeteries and watercourses. Fontijn (2002, 156-164) demonstrated the relationship of cult places with the world of the dead, seen in the location of the sanctuaries near cemeteries or burial mounds (see also Bittel 1981). He notes that the Iron Age cult place at the Kops Plateau in Nijmegen is situated halfway between a cemetery and a settlement, arguing that this position demonstrates the transition zone between the world of the dead and the secular world. This status as a 'corridor' is further reinforced by the square shape, which would express ambivalence and individuality (Fontijn 2002, 164). Revisiting of, or digging graves in, older places of worship is a known activity in the Late Roman period and thereafter (see for example Vermeulen & Bourgeois 2000). However, cult places lacking any relationship with tombs are found from the Late Iron Age onwards, showing a growing diversification in function. Under Roman influence new religious ideas are introduced, resulting in the replacement of ancestor worship by the veneration of anthropomorphic gods after the Mediterranean model (Fontijn 2002, 170-171). The loss of a connection with cemeteries implies that from Roman times onwards, cult places were regularly situated closer to or even within the boundaries of settlements (Fontijn 2002, 165-171).

The archaeological material associated with rectangular structures often offers strong evidence for a ritual context. Material culture can likewise also indicate less fixed cult places, for instance offering sites or off-site depositions. Aberrant complexes are in particular seen as ritually interpretable, though less divergent finds certainly could have played a similar role during rites. Regardless of the materials used, it is clear that the deposition of objects was common practice (Slofstra & Van der Sanden 1987). It is assumed that the sacrifices were useful in achieving certain goals, to influence situations or to express gratitude to the divine (Derks 1998, 215-239; Groot 2009, 49-50). Votive offerings are therefore common in places of worship. The offerings are usually found in clusters and in the vicinity of special locations within a cult place, such as post configurations and sacrificial pits. They mainly consist of pottery, but metal and organic objects are also found. Many complete pots are found, suggesting that the contents were also part of the offering. The ritual of bending or breaking objects, such as pottery or metal or bone objects, before sacrificing is another known practice in places of worship (Slofstra & Van der Sanden 1987, 131)

6 Rural cult places in the *civitas Cananefatium*

We know only a few rural places of worship in the *civitas Cananefatium* (fig. 5). One possible explanation for this limited number is that the sanctuaries were used by several families belonging to one *pagus* and are therefore not found in each rural settlement. Another explanation is that the cult places are not always recognized as such. All sites mentioned in the following overview consist of a square, rectangular or U-shaped structure. As these typical structures do not represent the only possible form of sanctuaries, the overview is followed by examples of other ritual structures.

The Hague-Lozerlaan

Five small-scale excavations were carried out in the 1990s by the Municipal Department for Archaeology along the Lozerlaan in The Hague (Van Zoolingen 2010). These excavations revealed an extensive indigenous Roman settlement. One of the buildings has been interpreted as a polyphase sanctuary, on the basis of relevant features and associated material culture.

The sanctuary shows three phases of construction (fig. 6). The first phase (AD 70-100) comprises at least five palisades, ranging in length from 2 to 16 m. Except for one, all palisades have the same orientation, NNW-SSE. An interesting parallel for these palisades is the open-air sanctuary near Empel, where two parallel rows of poles are considered to represent its first phase (Roymans & Derks 1994, 19). The Lozerlaan palisades are overlapped by a rectangular structure formed by a double palisade with poles placed in a ditch (phase 2, AD 100-130). The dimensions are approximately 9 by 8 m, the eastern and western sides being the longest. The orientation is roughly NNW-SSE. A cluster of posts was found within the rectangular area and a single pit was found outside the area. The rectangular structure was overlapped by a third construction (AD 130-190). This phase of the sanctuary is in many respects comparable with rural places of worship outside the study area (fig. 7). The structure consists of a square-shaped ditch with corners pointing to the four winds. The sides measure approximately 10 by 10 m. No traces of poles or stakes were recognized in the ditch. In the south corner of the structure there is a T-shaped post configuration consisting of at least eight posts. Though it could not be precisely dated, the orientation of the axis in line with the edges of the square shaped ditch suggests that both structures are contemporary. A very disturbed pit was documented within the boundaries of the square area.

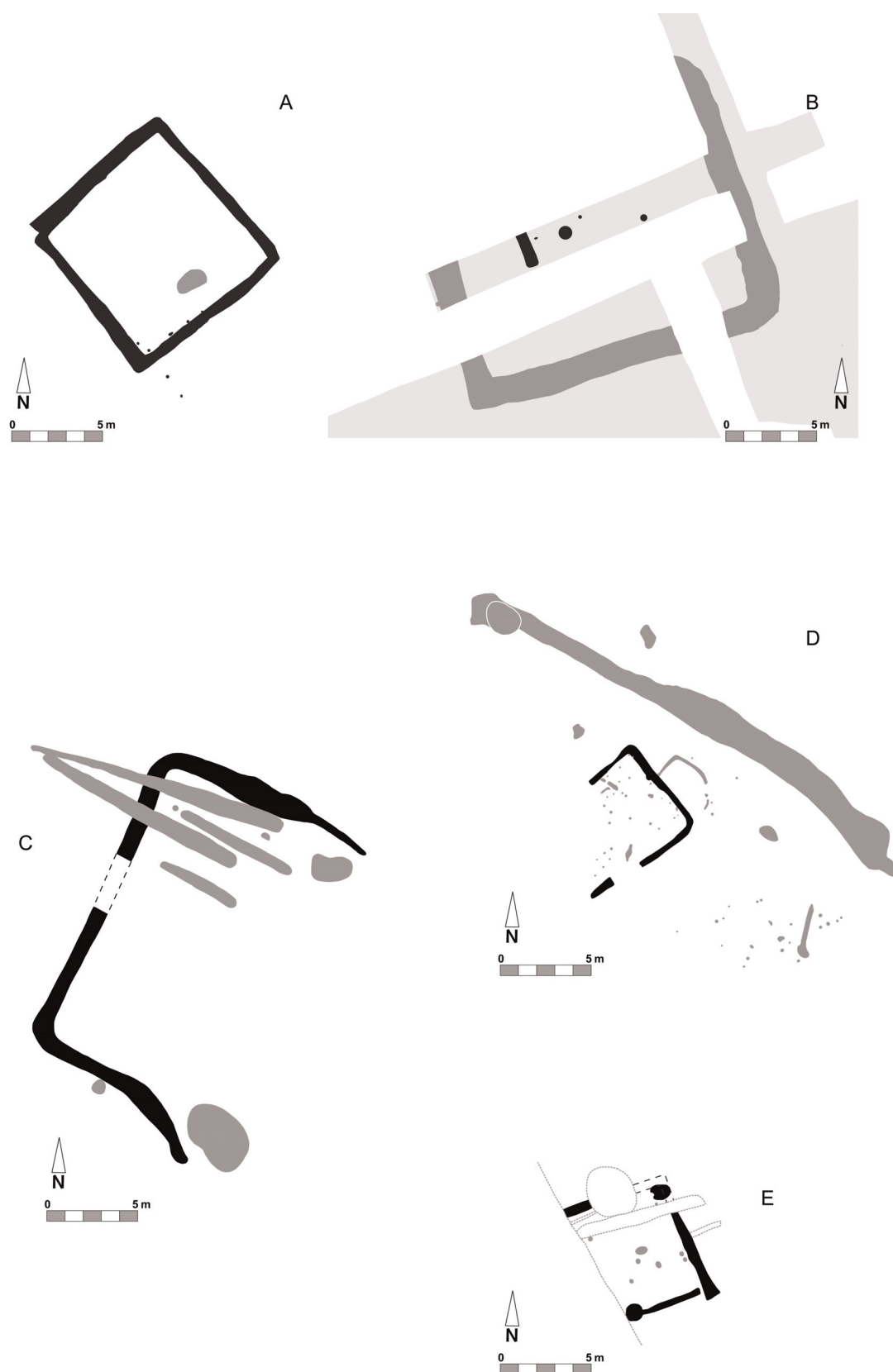


Figure 5 Rectangular and U-shaped structures from the civitas Cananefatium. A) The Hague Lozerlaan (after Van Zoolingen 2010); B) The Hague-Hoge Veld (after Siemons & Lanzing 2009, fig. 3.48); C) Leidschendam-Leeuwenbergh (after Wiepking 1997, II, p. 33); D) Midden-Delfland (after Van Londen 2006, fig. 93); E) Poeldijk-Westhof (after Blom and Van der Feijst 2007 fig. 4.12).

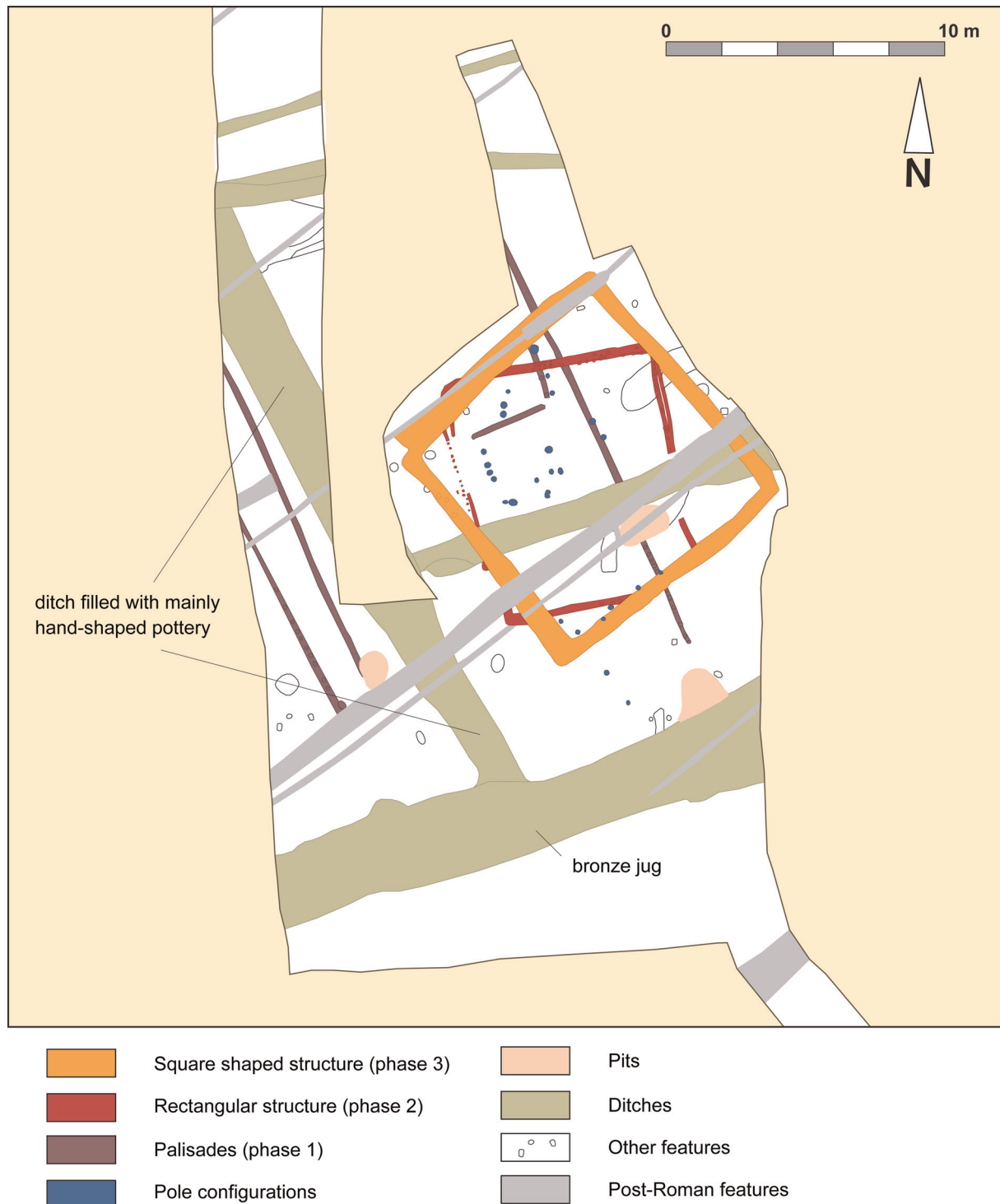


Figure 6 Plan of the three phased sanctuary at The Hague-Lozerlaan.

The sanctuary (or cultic place) is surrounded by ditches in the second and third phases of use. The western ditch has the same orientation as the palisades of the first phase and, as evidenced by the finds, forms an important element for the ritual character of the site. A bronze jug was found at the intersection with the southern ditch, about 6.5 m from the south corner of the square-shaped structure (Van Zoolingen 2010, 95-98). The jug is nearly complete, only the lid is missing (fig. 8). The object is composed of three parts: the jug itself, made of sheet bronze³ and a spout and handle cast from a single piece of brass and mounted on the jug with a brass

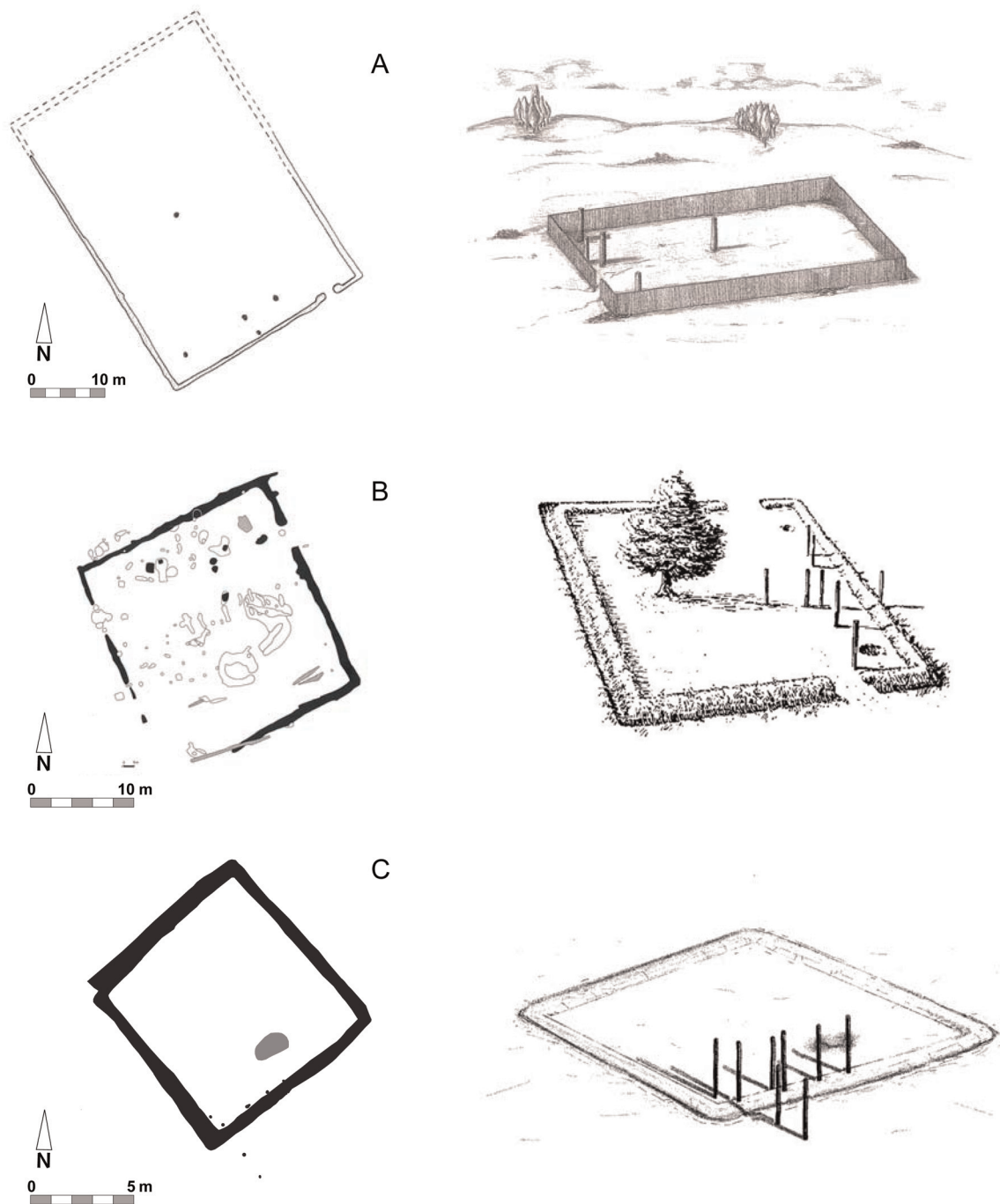


Figure 7 Reconstruction of Lozerlaan sanctuary (C) based on examples of Kontich (A) and Hoogeloon (B) (after Annaert 1993, fig. 52; Slofstra & Van der Sanden 1987, fig. 6).

strip. The jug is of the Eggers 128 type (Eggers 1951; Koster 1997, 33-35) and dates to the 2nd and 3rd centuries. This find is unique in the region. The discovery of a brass handle of a second jug during construction of an apartment building next to the cult place renders the situation even more exceptional. The jugs identify the place as a ritual site and their ritual function is documented elsewhere (for example Empel, see Koster & Derks 1994, 174-180). Metal ware was used for the preparation of sacrificial meals or deposited as a cultic object. The location of



Figure 8 The bronze jug from The Hague-Lozerlaan (photograph: O. Odé, Amsterdam).

the bronze jug at the junction of two ditches surrounding the cult place is remarkable and may indicate that the deposition of the jug was carried out at a meaningful spot at the site.

Next to the jug, large quantities of metal, pottery and slag were collected, especially from the western ditch. The metal finds include fragments of a bronze (or copper?) cauldron, a folded belt fitting, fragments of bronze wire, copper fittings and a late 1st century bronze bracelet. In total, three *fibulae* were found (fig. 9). The imported pottery includes fragments of several South Gallic *terra sigillata* bowls, an olive oil amphora and coarse ware cooking pots (fig. 10). However, the majority of finds consisted of hand-shaped pottery. This material shows a low level of fragmentation (Van der Linden 2010), an indication that the vessels were deposited intact, possibly with contents (fig. 11).

The Hague-Hoge Veld

Between 2001 and 2003 excavations were carried out at the Hoge Veld in The Hague (Siemons & Lanzing 2009). They revealed a rural settlement first occupied from AD 40 to 220. A total of fifteen farmsteads, eighteen outbuildings, several ditch systems, wells and a number of other structures were documented, including a possible cult place (Siemons & Lanzing 2009, feature 502, 138-139).

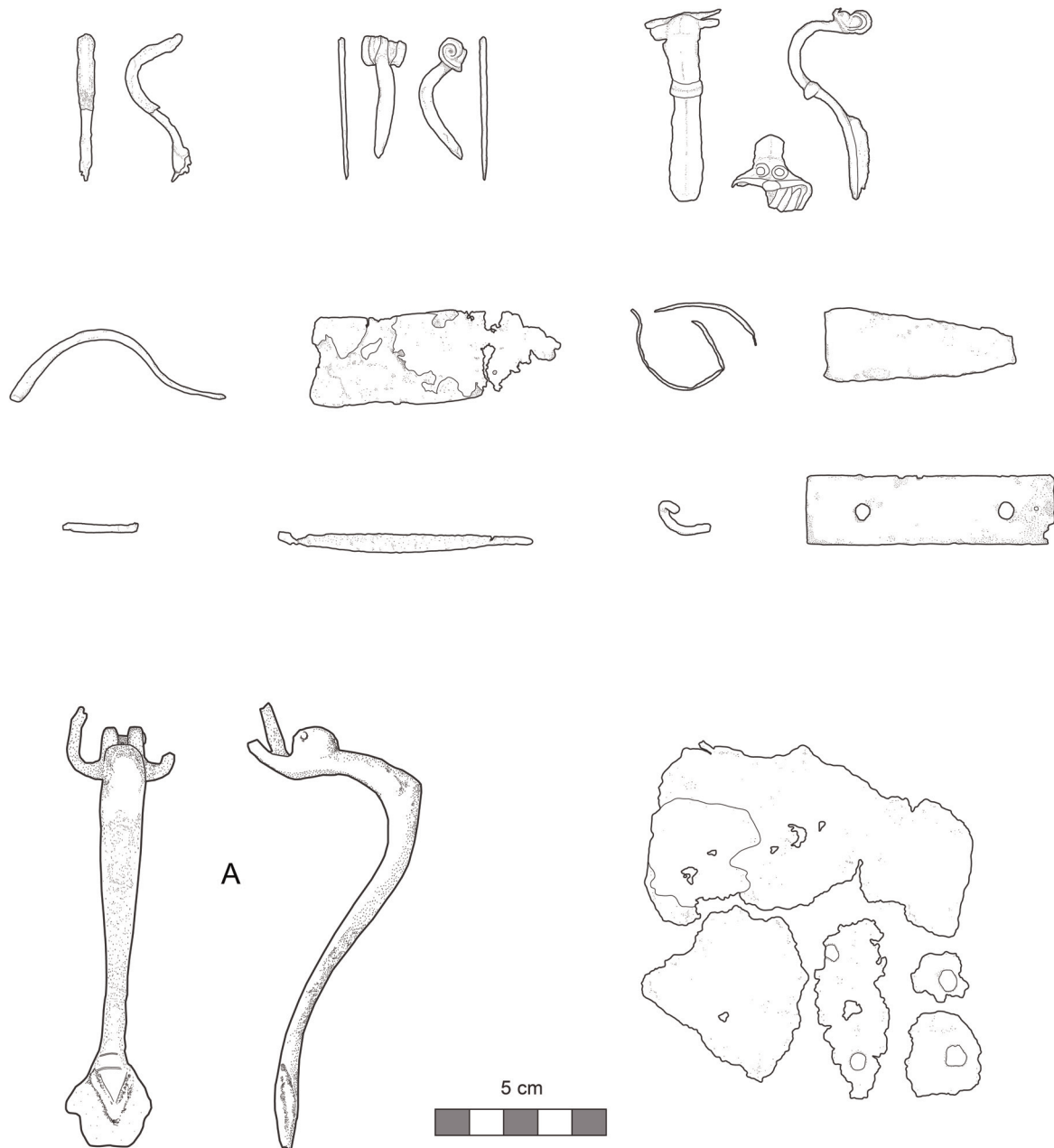


Figure 9 Metal finds from the The-Hague-Lozerlaan sanctuary.

The cult place of The Hague-Hoge Veld resembles the third phase of the Lozerlaan sanctuary (fig. 5B). It too features a square shaped ditch, with its corners pointing to the four cardinal directions. The structure is situated at the northern border of the settlement and measures 16.5 by 14 m. Post holes within the structure may have been part of the cult place as a pole configuration. The function of a ditch section within the limits of the structure remains unclear. Whilst the features have a clear parallel with the Lozerlaan sanctuary, the finds are less convincing. Although the majority of finds are hand-shaped ($n=36$) and wheel-thrown pottery ($n=12$), six fragments of medieval pottery were also found. A medieval date would be in line with the dark soil filling the traces, but the Hoge Veld structure is dated to the first half of the 2nd century on the basis of the dominant Roman material, the few medieval sherds are considered as secondary contamination.

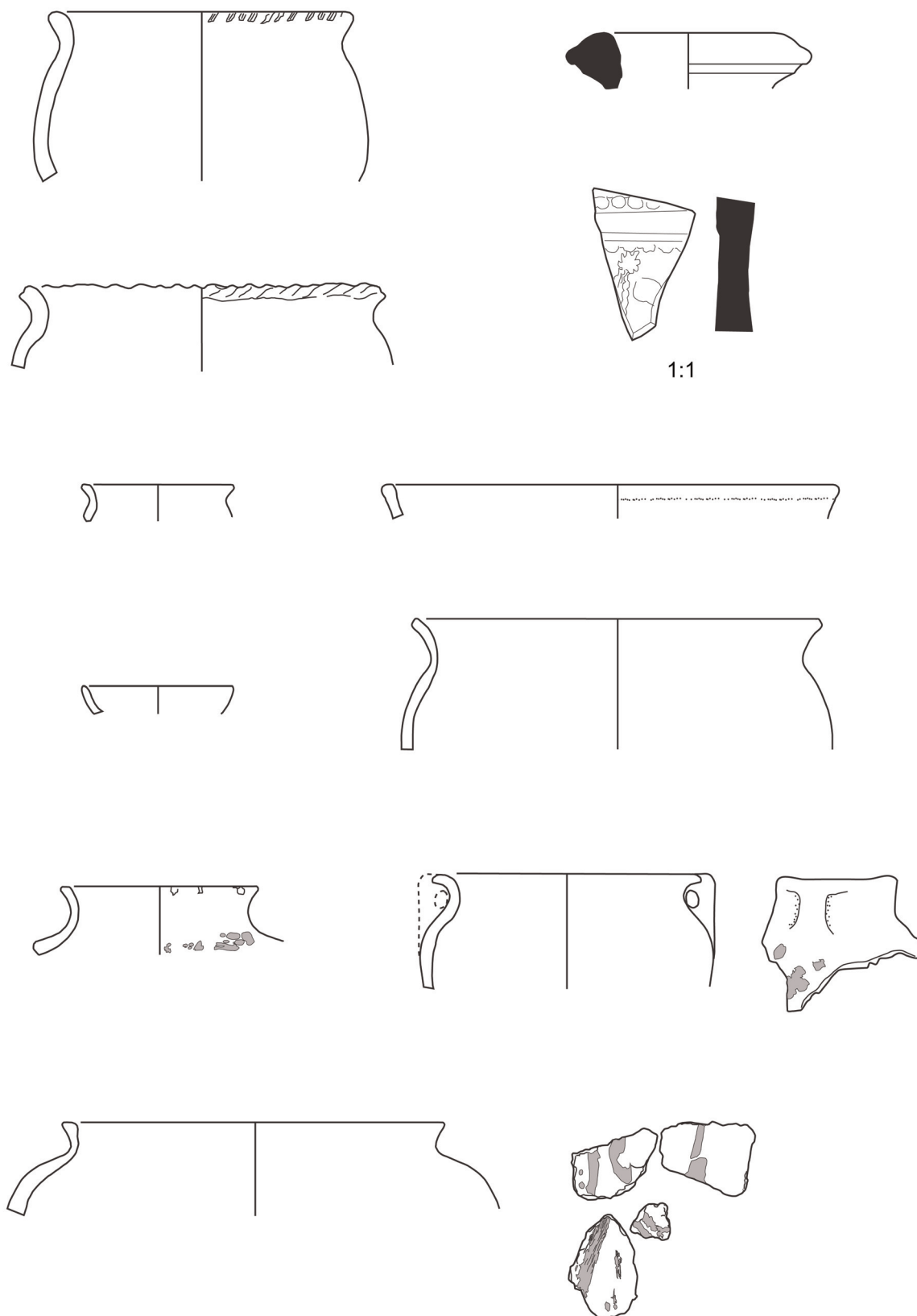


Figure 10 Selection of pottery found near the The-Hague-Lozerlaan sanctuary; scale 1:4.



Figure 11 Hand-shaped pottery in a ditch flanking the Lozerlaan sanctuary during fieldwork (photograph: Department for Archaeology, Municipality of The Hague).

Leidschendam-Leeuwenbergh

An indigenous Roman settlement was excavated in two stages at Leidschendam-Leeuwenbergh, in 1991-1993 by the former Dutch State Archaeological Service (ROB) (Wiepking 1997), and in 1997-2001 by the Municipal Department of Archaeology of Rijswijk (De Bruin & Koot 2006). The excavations yielded a rural settlement with two nuclei and a field layout in between. The settlement is dated AD 40-250. It bordered a former tidal channel and was situated only 600 m southeast of the Roman town of *Forum Hadriani*. The documented features include seven farmsteads, nine outbuildings, nine wells, seven palisades, seven cremation burials and four animal burials.

A cult place was excavated at the northwestern edge of the southern nucleus, along the former watercourse (Wiepking 1997, F14a, 40-41 and 84-85). The structure lay in a separate part of the settlement away from other features. The Leeuwenbergh cult place is rather different from the rectangular sites of Lozerlaan or Hoge Veld. It consists of a U-shaped ditch, with the opening on the east side (fig. 5C). The west side is 16 m long, the north and south sides approximately 12 m. A series of pits was dug along the inner end of each of the short sides. The cult function of the structure is not only based on the unusually shaped features and the absence of other buildings in the vicinity, but also on the associated finds. In total thirteen mainly wire *fibulae* were collected, as well as imported wheel-thrown pottery and large quantities of hand-shaped made local wares. The imported pottery includes South Gallic *terra sigillata* and some rare types of painted ware. The hand-shaped made pottery comprises the majority, 86% in total. The cult place stands out from the surrounding farmsteads where local pottery comprises 48-77% (Wiepking 1997, 128-129). Furthermore, the material is comparable to the hand-shaped pottery from the Lozerlaan in terms of deposition. According to the excavators several fragmented, but complete hand-shaped pots were found *in situ*, placed in a row in the ditch (pers.

comm. J.K.A. Hagers, Wiepking 1997, 41, note 4). The cult place is dated to the second half of the 2nd century and the beginning of the 3rd century.

Midden-Delfland

The University of Amsterdam conducted extensive archaeological research in Midden-Delfland in the years 1991-1999. Seven micro-regions were studied via monitoring work, trial trenches and excavations. Several indigenous Roman settlements and a large scale Roman field system were identified. Three sites (MD 01.23, 20.17 and 21.15) yielded traces that were interpreted as cattle corrals (Van Londen 2006, 34-49, 138-142, 134-136). They were located in isolated parts of the site where traces of buildings were virtually absent. The U-shaped structures and vague impressions of hoof-marks have resulted in the interpretation as areas for keeping livestock. Another interpretation is however plausible, particularly for the MD 21.15 structure (fig. 5D). This three-sided structure measures approximately 7 by 6 m and is situated east of a silted up channel. The finds included six *fibulae* as well as hand-shaped pottery. Part of a hand-shaped pot was found *in situ* in a pit at the end of an immediately adjacent ditch. The entire complex of features and finds is at least unusual for a corral or outbuilding. The faint traces within the structure were interpreted as hoof-marks on a basis of similarity to the impressions found at site MD 20.17. They are however far from convincing as such, and could easily be interpreted as traces of poles or stakes. Taking everything into account, it appears that this building was not a cattle corral but the locus of rural cult.

7 Singular structured depositions and other offering sites

Rectangular and U-shaped structures are not the only ritual contexts in a rural setting. Singular depositions are also found. Whereas the cult places were designed to function over a period of time, these depositions were obviously not. Foundation deposits for instance are the result of a single act. The potential resemblance between singular depositions and cult places lies in the associated material culture. Foundation deposits often include pottery (Gerritsen 2003, 63-66), most commonly hand-shaped wares, sometimes even miniatures (fig. 12). Some examples in the study area are those at The Hague-Jan Willem Frisolaan (Waasdorp 1995, 374), The Hague-Hoge Veld (Siemons & Lanzing 2009, 79) and Schipluiden-Harnaschpolder (south) (Goossens 2006b, 191).

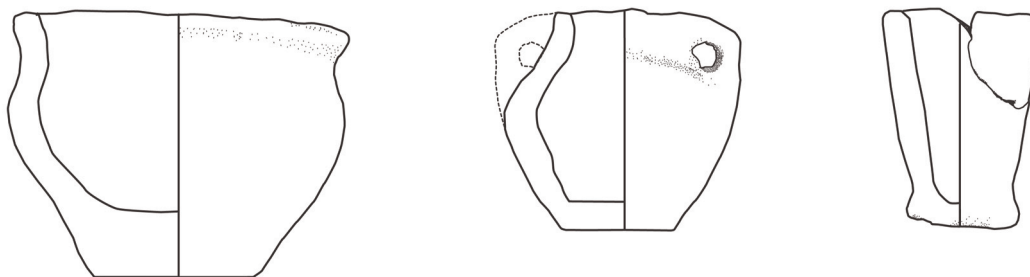


figure 12 Miniature hand-shaped pots found as foundation deposits at The Hague-Hoge Veld; scale 1:2 (after Siemons & Lanzing 2009, fig. 6.15).

Other forms of ritual depositions, for instance in pits or wells, reveal a greater diversity of materials and objects. Features containing complete or partial animal skeletons are regularly found during excavations (Groot 2009). A well at Katwijk-Zanderij yielded four bovine skulls

and a large fragment of a grinding stone (Van der Velde 2008, 69). This deposition is interpreted as an abandonment rite. Next to the foundation deposit of The Hague-Jan Willem Friso-laan a pit contained the skull and legs of a horse. Multiple (sometimes incomplete) animal skeletons of horses, oxen, sheep and dogs were found at the Hoge Veld in The Hague (Nieweg 2009, 307-311). In the northern settlement of Schipluiden-Harnaschpolder, a pit containing the skull of a horse was found aligned with a nearby post configuration (Goossens 2006a, 115). A final example comes from another settlement in the Harnaschpolder, where the skull and some bones of at least one dog together with a fragment of wheel-thrown Low Lands ware pottery were found at the bottom of a pit. This deposition stands out as the pit was completely filled with the extraordinary number of 79 loom-weights (Bakx & Jongma 2009) (fig. 13). All weights were hand-shaped, though of four different types. Based on the excavation level the pit seems to have been dug relatively late. Conclusive interpretations are currently not possible since the excavation reports are in preparation.



Figure 13 Concentration of 79 hand-shaped loom weights from Schipluiden-Harnaschpolder (photograph: Erfgoed Delft).

The deposition of a skull and lower leg of a cow at the indigenous Roman settlement of Poeldijk-Westhof (Groot 2007b, 86) is remarkable because of the surrounding context of other depositions. One of the excavated features is a small square shaped area enclosed by ditches and pits (Blom & Van der Feijst 2007, structure GS1, 29) (fig. 14A). The area measured 7 by 8 m and lay parallel to a farmstead to the northeast. The bottom part of a *dolium* was found *in situ* at the north end of the easternmost ditch. Six big lumps of rust were unearthed directly next to it, weighing approximately 8 kilograms in total (Blom & Van der Feijst 2007, 61-62). X-ray photography revealed folded metal bands in some of the lumps. These bands can be interpreted as bucket or barrel hoops. Another possibility is that the bands had been part of a *lorica segmentata* (plate armour). Several types of tools are also recognizable on the X-ray photographs, some of which originally had wooden handles. Other finds from the enclosed area include some glass fragments, hand-shaped pottery, wheel-thrown Low Lands and colour-coated ware (fabric C). The pottery dates the structure to the second half of the 2nd century AD.

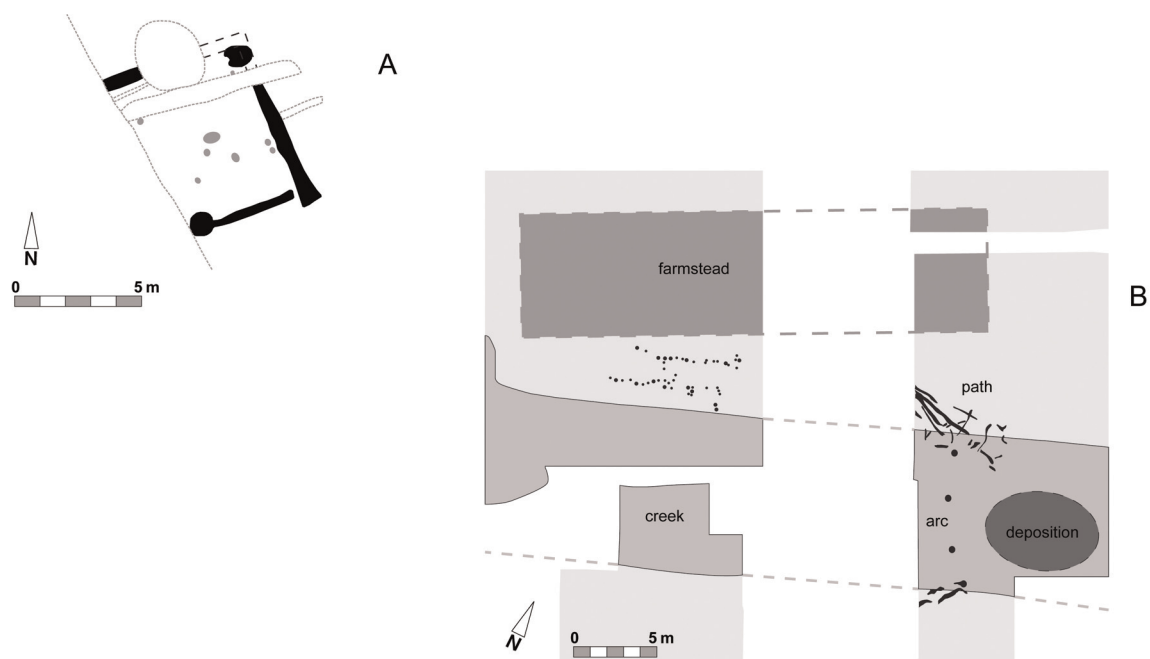


Figure 14 Schematic plan of sites Poeldijk-Westhof and Schiedam-Polderweg (after Blom en Van der Feijst 2007, fig. 4.12; Van Londen 1996, fig. 5).

Although it is uncertain whether the deposited metal at Poeldijk-Westhof belonged to plate armour, the ritual deposition of military objects would not be exceptional. Such objects are frequently part of ritual depositions at rural sites in the Batavian area and are related to veterans of the Roman army (Nicolay 2007, 181 ff.; Vos 2009, 196-203). An interesting parallel comes from the rural settlement of Houten-Hofstad (site 16), where fragments of plate armour were found in association with cheek covers of seven helmets (Vos 2009, 160-162). The careful arrangement of the objects indicates a ritual deposition. The offering of *militaria* is however not unique to the *civitas Batavorum*. For example, large numbers of weaponry, coins and *fibulae* were collected from an offering site at Velserbroek (site B6; Bosman 1992, 1993; Therkorn 2004, 107-117). This site is situated on a sand ridge in a swamp, close to the Roman fort at Velsen. The site shows strong parallels with Schiedam-Polderweg, a rural settlement located along a creek, dated to the 1st and 2nd centuries AD (Van Londen 1996). A path of branches and trunks ran from the settlement along the creek, towards an offering site characterized by deposition in the creek (fig. 14B). The remarkable concentration of finds comprises *militaria*, imported pottery and various metal finds, such as a compasses and several axes (Van Londen 1996, 17-21). An arc of four posts was erected to the west of the offering site. Besides the creek itself, this struc-

ture could have formed a physical boundary between the bringers and receivers of the sacrifice. The material culture indicates that the inhabitants were in contact with the Roman army, which is confirmed by the presence of construction materials such as window glass and a bone pin with inscription *militis*.

If we consider the idea of depositions being the result of an act that is broadly related to the religious practices associated with rectangular and U-shaped structures, a major difference contradicting the assumption is the arrangement of features. Apart from the offering site at Schiedam, all depositions mentioned above lack a fixed outline, indicating the singular nature of the act. In contrast, the rectangular and U-shaped structures were meant to be used over a long period of time, with the features transforming the symbolic boundary between the profane and sacred worlds into a permanent physical one. As this difference in arrangement indicates a difference in frequency of worship, the question arises whether this also points to various types of religious acts. For example, variation may lie in the importance of the message sent to the deities. If singular depositions were meant to only obtain a single favour, religious practices within the permanent and more considerably arranged cult places might have aimed at achieving higher goals over a longer period of time. More specifically, the different practices could also point to different uses. Whilst singular depositions could indicate ritualized symbolic activities associated with water, boundaries, changes in occupation, etc., fixed cult places could be related to a more traditional practice of worship.

8 Cult as indigenous tradition?

The overview of rural cult places and depositions gives insight into the variety of ritual customs within the area under discussion. However, it is important to explore who created these different expressions of cult. Finds and features from the rectangular and U-shaped structures bear strong similarities, suggesting that these cult places belong to (or were used by) a certain group of people. The wider occurrence of rectangular rural cult places provides a broader indigenous Roman context. The associated material may help to define the cultural background of those who brought the specific offerings.

The finds associated with the cult places consist mainly of hand-shaped pottery with occasional wheel-thrown wares, metal objects and bone material. In addition, *fibulae* occur in relatively large numbers. Apart from the latter, a comparable selection of objects is also found in the singular depositions discussed above, where there is no evidence of structural features related to cult activity.

All four rectangular and U-shaped cult places date well into the 2nd century AD. Roman wares were introduced into the indigenous Roman world from the late 1st century onwards, steadily replacing local wares during the second half of the 2nd century. It is remarkable in this perspective that the locally produced hand-shaped pottery comprises the majority of finds from the cult places, showing that the users of these sites deliberately selected these vessels as part of their rites. This is consistent with the dominance of local wares in offerings outside the study area (see for instance Slofstra & Van der Sanden 1987, 127-133 for Hoogeloon and Oss-Ussen). Like metal wares, the hand-shaped vessels were used for the preparation or consumption of food and drink during ritual meals or as containers for votive offerings of organic matter, such as fruits, cereals or liquids. They may also have served as a sacrifice themselves (Roymans 1987, 89). Complete or incomplete pots are regularly recovered from cult places outside the area under discussion, for instance in the *civitas Menapiorum*. The assemblage of hand-shaped vessels found in open air sanctuaries is comparable with the repertoire from nearby settlements. Furthermore, pits are found filled with large numbers of smaller versions of the same hand-shaped pots which are sometimes deliberately broken (personal communication W. De Clercq).

Aside from pottery, relative large numbers of *fibulae* have been found in the sanctuaries. The Leidschendam-Leeuwenbergh structure yielded thirteen *fibulae*, the Midden-Delfland 21.15 structure yielded six *fibulae*, and the Lozerlaan sanctuary three *fibulae*. Most are relatively simple wire *fibulae*, which were common among the rural society. These numbers do however stand out in comparison to the finds from the surrounding settlements. They appear in large numbers as offerings at several cult places outside the area under study (Slofstra & Van der Sanden 1987). Both the hand-shaped pottery and the *fibulae* resemble an indigenous Roman tradition of offering at cult places.

Both the rectangular structures and the associated material culture dominated by hand-shaped pottery and *fibulae* are features of indigenous Roman cult. The question arises as to whether this should be conceived of as an expression of tradition or rather a local interpretation. Unfortunately we lack suitable data to determine whether this is a tradition that has more ancient indigenous antecedents. Our knowledge of Late Iron Age societies and their cult practices remains limited. Furthermore there exists no physical relationship between the Roman cult places and earlier prehistoric structures.

There is however evidence for such connections outside the area under study. Fontijn (2002) demonstrated a relationship between places of worship from the late prehistoric and Roman times and older funerary structures in the Nijmegen-Kops Plateau, making ancestor worship a plausible option. As the rectangular structures studied by Fontijn show strong resemblance to the cult places in the western Netherlands, there may be a similar relationship in this area. Finds of votive figurines in rural settlement sites indicate that ancestor worship was indeed a common practice among in the rural western Netherlands. These terracotta figurines mostly represent female deities, known as *matres*, or ancestral mothers (Derks 1998, 119-130; Bauchhenß/Neumann 1987). These goddesses were worshipped throughout the entire Roman empire, mostly by soldiers of non-Roman origin. Although the deities were originally non-Roman, depictions and naming of the *matres* became standardized under Roman influence. Conventionally, we see enthroned female deities sitting upright, often in groups of three possibly representing different generations. Their appearance resembles that of Roman goddesses such as Fortuna or Diana.

The originally indigenous deities are known by a great variety of names, showing that they were honoured by various indigenous tribes (Derks 1998, 119-120). The widespread variety also shows a strong relationship between a specific ancestral mother and a certain tribe, indicating the uniqueness of each deity. The *matres Hiannanefatae*, as known from an inscription found in Cologne (CIL XIII 8219), can thus be related to the Cananefates (Byvanck 1935, 382, 551; Galsterer & Galsterer 1975, no. 102). Although this inscription comes from outside the tribal homeland, the find of a ceramic votive (fig. 15) in a rural settlement at The Hague-Nikkelwerf (Van Veen & Waasdorp 2000, site 42) clearly shows that the ancestral mothers were important in the western Netherlands. Similar figurines representing Venus or an ancestral mother were found at The Hague-Uithofslaan and Schipluiden-Harnaschpolder (north) (Reigersman-Van Lidth de Jeude 2006, 146). At Weteringen-Juliahof there are three ceramic images, of which at least one could be identified as a female figure (Van der Meij & Reigersman-Van Lidth de Jeude 2009, 107-108). All four sites are indigenous settlements, indicating that the worship of ancestral mothers was practised in the rural communities of the Cananefates.

The rectangular and U-shaped structures, the use of locally produced pottery and *fibulae*, as well as the potential existence of ancestor worship at rural settlements, all indicate that cult among the rural Cananefatian society was based on indigenous traditions. The question remains however, whether these traditions were fixed, perhaps even dogmatic, or if they were liberal and open to interpretation. The occasional deposition of Roman wheel-thrown pottery or metal ware suggests the latter. As there is no clear pattern of objects recognizable in these occasional depositions, the most likely conclusion would be that the choice depended on the



Figure 15 Terracotta figurine from The Hague-Nikkelwerf (photograph: P. van Oosterhout, The Hague).

availability of objects or that the actual objects or configuration of objects was not itself of primary significance, rather it was the act or process involved that was paramount. As Roman products became more and more the norm in the indigenous Roman world, the choice of these objects as offerings within a traditional cult may be understandable and should not necessarily mean the cult was liberal. The cult could still have kept its traditional rituals and it is important to note that we have very few physical traces and material objects left by the rites and it remains difficult to interpret the meaning of these practices.

On the other hand, the choice of materials could also be used to confirm a certain identity. A clear example is the deposition of *militaria*, presumably by those connected to the Roman army, such as soldiers or veterans. Numerous finds from the settlement site at Schiedam, like window glass and brick building materials, show that the occupants had somehow been connected to the army. The specific offerings brought to the offering site near the settlement reflect this connection and include numerous items of *militaria*, imported pottery and various metal objects. The ritual of offering is however not specifically related to the Roman army but rather widespread, making the chosen objects agents of cultural identification. The deposition of possible plate armour at the rural settlement of Poeldijk can be seen as another example of a common deposition with a Roman expression. Although no such structures have yet been convincingly demonstrated, the existence of Gallo-Roman temples at Empel (Roymans & Derks 1994), Elst (Van Enckevort 2007), Domburg (Hondius-Crone 1955) and Colijnsplaat (Stuart & Bogaers 2001) lead us to suspect that comparable structures stood in the *civitas Cananefatium*. Considering these structures and the Roman identity adopted by soldiers and veterans living among rural communities, it appears somewhat strange that these individuals continued to practice traditional depositions. There apparently somehow existed a need for traditional cult practices, although Roman culture became even more familiar. The same is also revealed by the fact that rural cult places still existed well into the 2nd century AD, at a time when the *civitas* was surely integrated into the Roman world.

9 Conclusion

The study of cultic practices among rural communities in the *civitas Cananefatium* during Roman times takes into account recent discoveries of structures and material assemblages associated with ritual practices, thereby offering the first clear overview of the subject. There is some evidence for temples or shrines at *Forum Hadriani* and in *vici* near Roman fortifications, but these structures are anything but representative of the rural communities. This study of rural cult places thus offers a deeper insight into ritual that took place in rectangular structures, a well-known phenomenon found in a much wider area, and singular depositions lacking any structural arrangements.

On the basis of this evidence the following characteristics for rural cult places in the *civitas Cananefatium* can be listed:

- The appearance of built cult places in the rural parts of the Cananefatian territory differs little from those outside the region. Although a geographically bounded group, the Cananefatian structures do not differ from other Late Iron Age Roman open-air sanctuaries used by various social groups.
- Cananefatian rural cult places are areas enclosed or marked by ditches, embankments and/or palisades. The shapes vary from rectangular or square to U-shaped. They are located at the periphery or in isolated parts of settlements and are oriented to the four cardinal directions. Post configurations and offering pits are found in the enclosed areas.
- In addition, we also find singular depositions that do not follow specific patterns. These are found in isolated pits and wells, as foundation and abandonment deposits associated with houses, and at special offering sites. All depositions involve a concentration of specific objects. Although some materials are more common (see below), no pattern can yet be defined.
- Singular depositions are made up of predominantly local objects. Most commonly, we find considerable quantities of hand-shaped pottery similar to that found in built sanctuaries. Its limited fragmentation refers to the ritual use of intact vessels as (containers of) votive offerings. Metal finds include various types of objects such as table wares, *fibulae*, ornaments and fittings. For other find categories there is less evidence for a cult context.
- Little can be said about the actual cult practices themselves. The objects point to sacrifice and other ritualized symbolic practice involving deposition. It is however unknown which deities were received such sacrifices. Although there are indications that mother goddesses played a significant role in rural communities, there is no relationship between these goddesses and the cult places. Evidence from cult places in the surrounding regions indicate that ancestor worship may also have played a role in the region of the Cananefates.

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Notes

1. Large quantities of roof and paving tiles and ceramics were collected during archaeological investigations by the National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden. These finds suggest the presence of a building nowadays covered by sediments of the Oosterschelde.
2. Tacitus and Medieval sources speak of holy places in forests. Tacitus mentions that the Germanic tribes honoured their gods not in temples but in forests under the stars.
3. It is unclear whether the base is made separately. For other examples of this type see Koster 1997.

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