

# PALAEOHISTORIA

*ACTA ET COMMUNICATIONES*

*INSTITUTI ARCHAEOLOGICI*

*UNIVERSITATIS GRONINGANAЕ*

61/62

(2019/2020)

University of Groningen / Groningen Institute of Archaeology

&

Barkhuis

Groningen 2021

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21827/5beaafbcc2bf2>

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Barkhuis  
Kooiweg 38  
9761 GL Eelde  
The Netherlands  
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[www.barkhuis.nl](http://www.barkhuis.nl)

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A decorated Late Postclassic Mixtec human skull from Teotitlán del Camino, Oaxaca, Mexico, possibly dating to c.1400–1520 CE. The type of adhesive used to affix the mosaic to the skull raised some doubts about the authenticity of the object. Photo P. Erdil. (Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. Coll.No. RV-4007-1.)

ISSN 0552-9344

ISBN 9789493194298

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## In memoriam Piet Kooi

24 January 1943 – 13 September 2020



Piet Kooi inspecting the exposed plane in the excavation of the Kleuvenveld site at Peelo, 1981/82. Photo © Groninger Instituut voor Archeologie.

On 13 September 2020 – six months into Covid-19 ravaging the world – Dr Pieter Barteld Kooi died in his home town of Winsum (Groningen), at the age of 77. For a considerable time he had been suffering from leuko-araiosis, a condition that progressively impaired his mobility and motor function. In 2008, the Biologisch-Archaeologisch Instituut (BAI, now GIA), the institute where he had worked for over 35 years, had marked his retirement with a symposium. Over this long period he had grown into something of a ‘Northern Celebrity’. The daily paper *Dagblad van het Noorden* and the regional broadcasting channel RTV-Drenthe reported his demise and highlighted his significance to the archaeology of the northern Netherlands.

Piet was born in the Groningen parish of Middelstum. He was the second of three siblings, whose mother was a home-maker and father was a notary. His mother came from the farm ‘Oldenoord’ at Toornwerd, a village on an ancient dwelling mound. Piet often visited his grandparents’ farm, to play, to work and even to perform his

first excavation there. This place without doubt awakened his love of village life and farming, areas of interest that were to return throughout his subsequent career.

The same period saw his emerging interest in old churches. In 1960 he bought the clock mechanism from the church tower of Middelstum, which the church wardens had casually thrown out as scrap metal. At home, he carefully cleaned the component parts, and – by trial and error – patiently put them together. He discovered that the timepiece dated from as early as 1561, when Johan van Ewsum was Lord of Middelstum. In subsequent years he took care of the clock; but in 1980, when the church and tower were restored, he returned it to the church committee, as a loan in perpetuity (Kooi 2017).

Piet’s interest in archaeology goes back to his teenage years. In an issue of the periodical *Stad & Lande* (Kooi 2007), he writes about family holidays in the 1950s on the island of Rottumeroog, where he would pick up all sorts of intriguing finds from the northern beach: sherds of

globular pots and stoneware, fragments of roof tiles and bases of glass bottles - all of them washed-up remains of (post-)medieval habitation on the islands of Ameland and Schiermonnikoog, or of ships that had foundered with their cargoes.

After his years at 'HBS' secondary school in the city of Groningen, Piet set his sights on archaeology. He was exempted from military service because of his exceptional height, somewhat over two metres. (That he did not opt for a legal career is remarkable, since he sprang from a true dynasty of notaries: his grandfather and great-uncle were notaries, his father and uncle too practised this profession, as did his elder brother, his cousin and his nephew.) Since Archaeology in those days was an MA course only, students were required first to obtain a BA in a different discipline before entering the Institute on the Poststraat. In 1961 Piet opted for Biology, then took his time to complete his BA. It was not until 1968 that he embarked on his archaeological studies at the BAI, where four years later he graduated. Meanwhile he had married Winnie van Hasselt, with whom he was to have two sons, Niels and Barteld.

Fairly soon after graduating, he found a home base at the BAI. Between 1973 and 1975 he worked on his PhD research with a grant from the then ZWO, studying the urnfields of the northern Netherlands. He had become familiar with the subject in fieldwork during his student days: on the Koningskamp at Havelte (1969), on the Hoornseveld at Buinen (1970 and 1971), and at Dwingeloo (1971 and 1972). In these ZWO-funded years he revisited the Koningskamp site at Havelte (1972) and excavated the Hoge Loo site at Noordbarge, where between 1972 and 1974 he uncovered an extensive urn-field that had been built over in the Iron Age and Roman Period. (It was this excavation that brought him insight into the origin of the so-called 'horseshoe-shaped features'; Kooi 1974.) Three years after obtaining tenure at the BAI, Piet received his PhD with his thesis featuring fourteen cemeteries (Kooi 1979). It not only focused on the phasing, the layout and spatial distribution of these Late Bronze Age / Early Iron Age necropoles, but also on related subjects such as trackways, population density and the history of urnfield research in the northern Netherlands.

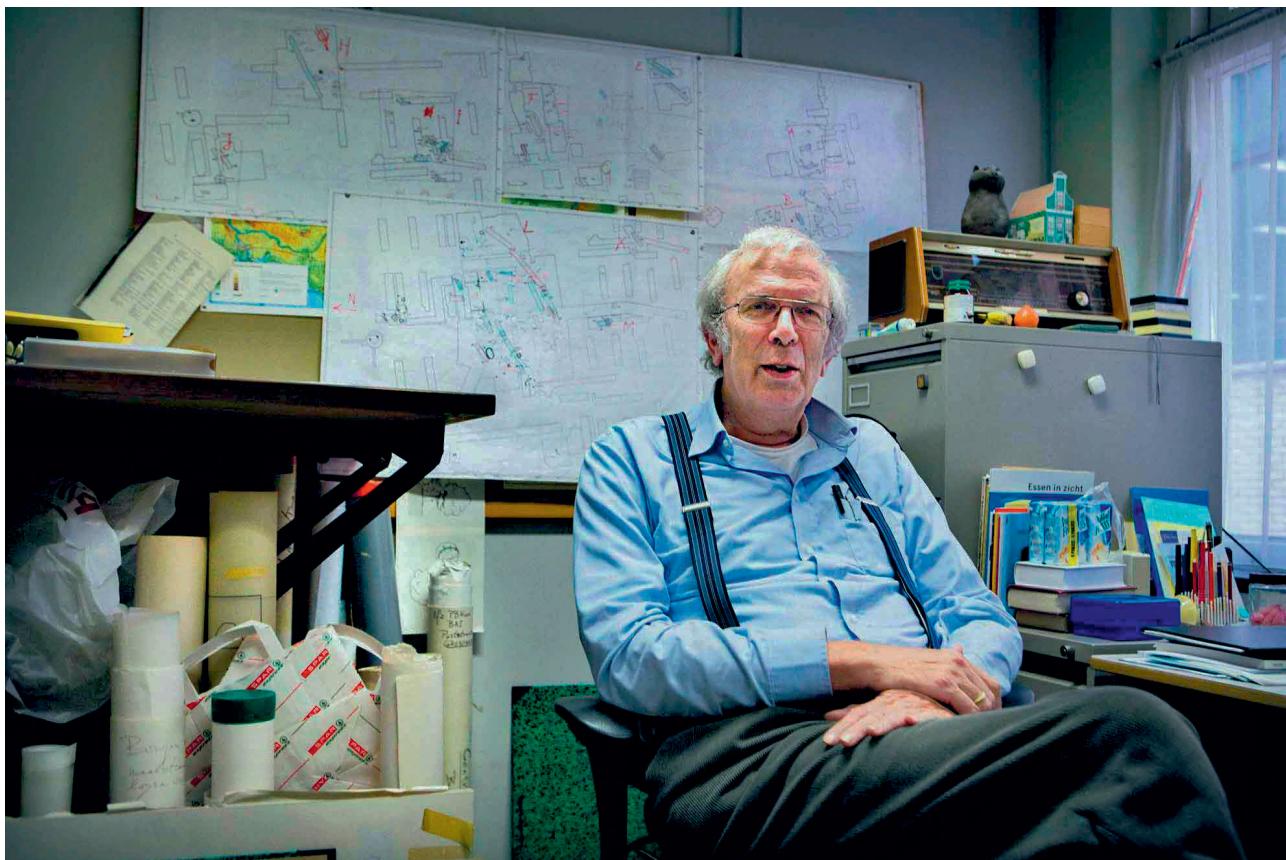
Even before his PhD, Piet became involved in settlement research, a topic for which the BAI had been renowned since Van Giffen made his name in this field, both nationally and internationally. Piet's most famous project must be 'Peelo'; the name of this hamlet (now part of Assen, absorbed into the suburbs Peelo and Marsdijk) has become inextricably linked to that of its excavator. Piet started excavating here in 1977 and continued up to 1996; this large-scale research project revealed settlement traces from the Iron Age, Roman Period and Middle Ages. Over the 1990s, Piet published the impressive results in *Palaeohistoria*. The superb

photo of the 36-metre-long extended longhouse in the Haverland field, which he took from the top of a ladder truck in 1987, has since been reproduced in many overview publications (e.g. Van der Sanden 2018, 204 and Waterbolk 2019, 148).

Piet's settlement research further included the excavations at Dalen (Westakkers 1989: Late Bronze Age to end of Early Middle Ages; Huidbergsveld 1990: Middle Bronze Age), Borger (Daalkampen 1994-1995: Middle Bronze Age into Iron Age) and Midlaren (De Bloemert 2003: Iron Age to end of Middle Ages). Repairs and alterations to houses clearly received his special attention. This is also evident in his analysis of the excavations at Angelslo-Emmerhout, carried out between 1961 and 1968 by H.T. Waterbolk and J.D. van der Waals, excavations that Piet himself had not participated in. Quite astonishingly, in the final publication (Kooi 2007/2008) he devoted a brief passage to the subject of 'ritual', an aspect that I personally know him to have regarded as an explanation of embarrassment: his harsh judgement would unfailingly be "When archaeologists run out of ideas, they come up with ritual". This dimension of the past would clash with his down-to-earth Groningen outlook. And this down-to-earthness also accounted for his - at times quite abrupt - plain speaking.

Piet excavated not only in Drenthe, but in Groningen as well, albeit on a smaller scale. I should mention the dwelling-mound De Weer near Stedum (1990), a fortified house at Heveskes (1993), a raised dwelling site at Westeremden (1993), a small cemetery at Lellens (1994), the church at Bedum (1995), a medieval farmstead at Haren (1996), the lost church of Oldekerk (1998) and a cremation burial mound at Laude (1998).

The list of Piet's publications (Van der Ploeg, this volume) closely reflects the author's career. His focus was exclusively on the provinces of Groningen and Drenthe. With the exception of his PhD thesis and an article on a headman's farmstead at Peelo, he published in Dutch, and by preference in regional periodicals (*Groningse Volksalmanak/Gronings Historisch Jaarboek/Historisch Jaarboek Groningen, Stad & Lande, Groninger Kerken, Noorderbreede, Nieuwe Drentse Volksalmanak, Waardeel*) and the GIA yearbook *Paleo-Aktueel*. In this same vein - informing a broad readership - were his publications on the settlement history of various villages and regions in Groningen (Loppersum, Middelstum, Warffum, the Marne district, Halfambt, Usquert, Bierum and Appingedam), and of course the photograph books *Groningen op glas - Beelden van vijftig jaar archeologisch onderzoek 1910-1960* (2003) and *Ezinge - Ijkpunt in de archeologie* (2014), which he compiled together with his second wife (and colleague) Kirsten van der Ploeg. These two books illustrate his love of good photographic documentation, glass-plate photography in particular. *Ezinge - Ijkpunt*, beautifully executed, also contains a large number of informative drawings by Piet himself.



Piet Kooi in his always chock-a-block office at the Groninger Instituut voor Archeologie, March 2008. Photo © Pepijn van den Broeke.

Drawings in this style are a recurrent feature in his publications. His charming sketch of the Warden's house behind the dunes on the isle of Rottumeroog, dating from 1953, was among the first in a long series (Kooi 2007, 4).

Speaking of co-authors: Piet wrote the majority of his publications on his own; the remainder, with BAI colleagues and/or former students of the Institute. What is unusual, and typical of Piet: seven publications bear not only his own name but also those of the draughtsmen / field technicians (Geert Delger, Hans Zwier and Klaas Klaassens). In this way he unequivocally emphasised their importance to the archaeological process: conducting and documenting an excavation will always be teamwork.

In the course of his 35-year academic career, Piet made a one-off excursion into the museum world. In the 1983-1986 period he was detached to the Drents Museum, following the departure of his colleague Otto Harsemann in the aftermath of the 'Vermaning affair' (Waterbolk 2003, 130). As head of its department of Archaeology - which entailed a position both as curator and Provincial Archaeologist - Piet laid a solid basis for the make-over of the permanent archaeological display. Upon Piet's return to the BAI this was completed by his successor together with the Museum's two other archaeologists, Jaap Beuker and Vincent van Vilsteren. Piet returned to Groningen because ultimately he felt more

at home in academia than in the museum world (pers. comm. K. van der Ploeg). He is sure to have had happy memories of his most notable acquisition as a curator, the spectacular bronze hoard of Drouwenerzand (1984; see Butler 1986, esp. 133-149), and disagreeable ones of his involvement in the 'Eemster drama' which he found himself confronted with in his years at Assen (Waterbolk 2003, 137 ff., esp. 144; Van der Sanden and Schuring 2018, 90 ff.).

Piet's work was not limited to excavating, publishing and occasionally teaching. For many years he was the coordinator of the Institute's drawing office, ensuring that the available capacity was fairly distributed among the users. Also he would find paid jobs for newly graduated students - for instance, drawing up archaeological impact assessments during land-reallotment schemes or in watching briefs during the building of new gas mains. This came to an end with the introduction of commercial archaeology. Further, he was on the committee of the Stichting Groninger Landschap from 1976 to 1980, and of the Vereniging voor Terpenonderzoek from 1973 to 1996, where between 1981 and 1987 he fulfilled the Secretary's duties. During his interlude at the museum in Assen, Piet was part of the editorial team of the *Nieuwe Drentse Volksalmanak* (1983-1987) and the *Drentse Historische Reeks* (1983-1989), and a member of the Werkgroep Hunebedden (1983-1987) instituted by the Minister of Public Health and Culture, as well as the

Provinciale Monumentencommissie voor de provincie Drenthe (1983-1986).

Piet was an approachable archaeologist, always friendly, unfazed and ready to explain his work in plain language. In the town hall of Assen, the municipality where he performed his Peelo research for almost twenty years (in pre-Malta days, for sure), he was always spoken of in warm terms. On several occasions the local authority co-funded his publications on the Peelo project. I often visited his office, where large survey maps covered the walls, while under the drawing table were stacks of big cardboard tubes containing yet more drawings. Piet himself would sit back comfortably in his chair, his large torso vertically trisected by eye-catching braces. And always there would be a pen poking from his breast pocket.

Piet was born into a world in crisis – World War II – and died during another worldwide crisis. What remained unaltered, and probably only grew greater over these 77 years, was his love for Groningen and his native town of Middelstum. After his retirement he wrote only about this province.

Then it is small wonder that both his PhD thesis and his death announcement bore the motto in Groningen dialect: '*En kiek ik om, den zai ik Middelsom*' ('and when I look round, what I see is Middelstum').

*W.A.B. van der Sanden*

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