Preface

While preparing the preface of my dissertation I looked at prefaches written by other researchers, mostly close colleagues and friends. One of the things I noticed is that many state they do not want to end up with a long summary of thanking all the people who supported them in their academic journey. However, then they do start thanking fellow researchers, supervisors, family and friends. Some of them even thank their cats. I found only one thesis in which this statement was made and which was not followed by an extensive list. In that preface the author stated that everybody he is thankful to knows he is. In his opinion, a list of names is not very useful. I consider this rather blunt preface, written by my good friend Willem-Jan (van Zeist, 2011), the minimal version of a preface. On the other hand, I consider thanking your cats, like my friend Atze did (Van der Ploeg, 2015), is somewhere on the other side of the prefaches spectrum. Although I have three cats - Dexter, Luna and Puk - I do not think they deserve to end up in this preface. They never had any interest in my work. On the contrary, they might even have had a negative effect on my productivity since they quite disturbed me in my sleep when they were hungry.

Another thing I noticed, many dissertations start with a quote. The only quote I could think of, is a quote of Johan Cruijff who once said: “Als ik zou willen dat je het begreep, had ik het wel beter uitgelegd”, which in English would be something like: “If I would have wanted you to understand it, I would have explained it in a better way.” For those who know Johan Cruijff and know that I am a huge AFC Ajax supporter will understand that this is not meant to be arrogant, although Ajax of course is the best football team in the Netherlands (and Johan the best football player ever). Therefore, to avoid confusion and to not offend the reading committee I decided to not include this quote, but thank the reading committee instead for judging and reading my thesis.

Something else many other prefaches contain is a short history on the academic journey, stating it has been tough and mentioning the heavy obstacles encountered, but in the end all tend to be proud with the final result. For me, it all started when Jan Kolen and Henk Scholten were looking for a junior researcher with a background in both landscape archaeology and experience in Geospatial Technologies to write a grant proposal. Thanks to the internship I did at the Spatial Information laboratory (SPINlab), supervised by Alfred Wagtendonk, and the opportunity I got at BAAC to improve my GIS skills, mostly thanks to Paul Franzen and Roy van Mousch, I appeared to be a good candidate for the position. In the initial phase of my career at the SPINlab I was the only one with a background in a past oriented humanities discipline. I would never have survived this period without Daphne Lentjes, with whom I discussed my thoughts and doubts during lunch. However, most of the time we were just making stupid jokes and quoting Hans Teeuwen. When Niels van Manen joined the SPINlab team everything changed. Although the initial proposal was not funded, our activities did lead to nice innovative research ideas which did get funding. With the support of Henk Scholten, Jan Kolen, Gert-Jan Burgers, Niels van Manen and Rita Hermans we could create a team around the topic of Spatial Digital Humanities.
To this group, but also to other members from the department of Spatial Economics, I want to say I experienced a warm working environment. I enjoyed the nice and interesting talks on academic topics – but also on the weather and football – around the coffee machine and during department drinks. From the department and the SPINlab, I want to thank Eric Koomen, Jasper Dekkers, Chris Jacobs, Or Levkovich, Vasco Diogo, Dani Arribas-Bel, Eduardo Dias, Ron Janssen, Xander Wilcke, Simeon Nedkov, Brian de Vogel, Rein van ’t Veer, Frank Beijaard, Rens de Hond, Heleen Duinker, Mark Opmeer, Sanne Hettinga, Chris Lucas, Azarakhsh Rafiee-Voermans, Luc Kohsiek and Liesbeth Tangerman. To all of you I would like to say thanks for the interesting academic discussions, feedback on my work and pleasant atmosphere. Simeon and Dani, you inspired me to start coding, for which I will always be grateful. For Frank, although initially I really had to get used to your extremely critical anti–pretentious view on our modelling work, I really enjoyed working with you and think that we can be really proud of our achievements. Xander and Rein, thank you for teaching me what machine learning, linked data and data mining can mean for landscape research. Rens, thank you for the nice collaboration and fieldwork we did alongside the Via Appia and the many adventures in Amsterdam, Nijmegen, Groningen, Gothenburg, and of course Roma.

With regards to the partners from other faculties, universities and institutes with whom I collaborated, I would like to thank Peter Vos, Fokke Gerritsen, Jan Paul Crielaard, Stefan Kooi and Ruben Brugge. Furthermore, I really enjoyed working together with the Netherlands eScience Center during the Mapping the Via Appia project. It was a unique opportunity to work with so many academic eScience engineers in the development of the 3D tooling. It was not only fun, but foremost very inspiring. I learned a lot. From the eScience research engineers I want to thank Oscar Martinez-Rubi, Maarten van Meersbergen and Stefan Verhoeven in particular. Other researchers I wish to thank and who participated in the Mapping the Via Appia project are Eric Moormann, Stephan Mols, Jeremia Pelgrom, Steven Soetens, the many students and other researchers participating in the fieldwork.

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During my research I also worked at Leiden University where I became a member of the Global Centre of Heritage and Development. From that period I want to thank Mara de Groot, Marco Roling, Chiara Piccoli, Hans Kamermans and Milco Wansleeben.

To my promotors a special thanks. Jan and Henk, it was - and still is - spectacular to work with you. You really inspire me and give me a lot of energy through your enthusiasm. Thank you for seeing the potential in me and for giving me the many opportunities and freedom to develop myself. Another special thanks goes to my co-promotor and friend Niels van Manen. Thanks for the daily supervision and the help to structure my work. I loved working together and learned a lot from you. To all of you, you really shaped me as a researcher and I hope to continue our collaboration.

Like many other prefaces we now arrive at the section where to thank my family and friends (and cats). A lot of my friends were very efficient in producing babies over the last couple of years. With every announcement I thought I could finish my thesis before the baby would arrive. I have lost that game 3-9, so three babies yet to come.1 For Willem-Jan, Atze, Olivier, Bas, Mark and Sander, thanks for all the nice hikes we did in Scotland. I really enjoyed these trips and the long talks and discussions we had. To Patrick, Daniel, Michal and Tessa, thanks for all the nice evenings and drinks we had together. Roeland, Anouk and Liam for the “Walking dead” evenings, Dewi and Jeroen (aka Geronimo) for all our music festival and caravan adventures, René and Tim for our cycling tours around Amsterdam and of course to Ronald for our many visits to the Johan Cruijff ArenA. All these nice distractions really helped me to recharge. Finally, I would like to thank Esther, Hugo and Ed for our many visits to the botanical gardens. Special thanks go to Ed with whom I discuss the week and play a game of chess every Sunday morning at 10:00 at the Hortus. Although you won most of the games (60 out of 73 over 2016-2017), I would like to use this opportunity to remind you of the game we played on the 22nd of May in 2017 and get it printed (d4–d5, c4–xc4, Da4†–Pc6, Dxc4–Px4, Pc2†).

Of course, I also want to thank my family. The last couple of years we have had a lot of ups and some downs. We experienced a lot of joy with the birth of Jochem, my marriage with

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1 A match I unexpectedly did not lose is that against the opening of the Amsterdam metro line North-South.
Gonneke and the many celebrations of special birthdays. We also encountered some severe health issues. I feel very lucky to still have you around and hope that we stay in good health and shape for a very long time. To my parents Ada and Ton, sister and brother Nicole and Julien, and Arnold and Nadir, thank you for all the support, interest and love you gave me. For Emma, Aron and Jochem, let’s keep goofing around on family birthday parties! To my family in law, Jan, Rita, Laurens and Oma Jos, I feel really welcome in your family. I enjoyed all the Dutch, Scottish and Australian hikes we did together. Finally, of course my wife Gonneke, thanks for all the patience when I got to my computer on evenings and during many weekends to finish yet another article or report (or preface). I feel lucky to have met you and look forward to all our future travels and adventures. Without your love and support I could never have done this.

One more big thank you for my paronymphs Edwin de Vries and Nicole de Kleijn who, I assume, have been of a huge mental support during the defence.

Since you ended up here reading this preface you might have noticed that it contains many similarities with other prefaces. Even referring to other prefaces is not very original since Henk did a similar thing back in 1988 in his dissertation (Scholten, 1988).

To conclude I would like to go back to the preface of my friend Willem-Jan. He stated, rather cynically, that prefaces are traditionally the most read parts of dissertations. I would really want to encourage you to flip this page and go for the rest of the book as well². If you ever have any questions or want to discuss the content: I will not respond like Johan Cruijff, but will try and do my best to explain it (in a better way).

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References

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² If you ever decide to throw this book away, please do not hesitate to just give it back. I will not be offended by that.