The homecoming of religious practice: an analysis of offering sites in the wet low-lying parts of the landscape in the Oer-IJ area (2500 BC-AD 450)
Kok, M.S.M.

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: http://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
1. INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

In 1999 the governmental ‘Belvedere’ policy was implemented with the aim to make cultural-historical identity a guiding principal in environmental planning and for which the government will create the right conditions. The context of this policy is the large scale environmental changes in combination with the political and social interest in the cultural identity of everyday surroundings. There is especially concern about the decrease in diversity and quality of the rural areas. A solution to this problem could be the care for existing values through the active development of the rural areas from a cultural-historical perspective. In 2001 the ‘Belvedere’ policy was embedded within the ‘Fifth Policy Document on Town and Country Planning’, which provides a stronger base for the actual integration of cultural-historical values into new environmental developments. Within the framework of the above mentioned policies and the policies on science the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) has initiated the stimulation programme ‘Protecting and developing the Dutch archaeological-historical landscape,’ better known as BBO.

The aim of BBO is to make a scientific contribution to the present-day policy issue of embedding archaeological-historical values within the environmental planning process. Two key concepts within the BBO-programme are ‘the biography of the landscape’ and ‘thinking and doing.’ The concept of the biography of the landscape is chosen for its capacity to form internal integration between the different cultural-historical values as they are studied within different disciplines, such as archaeology, historical-geography and architectural history. The biography of the landscape is also seen as a bridging concept with the environmental planners. The concept of thinking and doing is related to action-research as it tries to bind research into policy making and at the same time contribute to the policies made.

The BBO-programme facilitates three types of research: conceptual, strategic and applied research. Conceptual research is aimed at the development of theoretical frameworks. The goal of strategic research is the integration of different cultural-historical disciplinary views in relation to an interdisciplinary evaluation of cultural-historical values within the environmental policy and planning process. Applied research aims at studying methodological, technical and procedural problems within specific disciplines and the use of their results in the environmental policy and planning process.

Within the strategic research programme four regional projects are initiated that are situated at the cardinal points with distinctive landscapes and typical environmental developments. The here relevant project ‘From Oer-IJ estuary to metropolitan coastal landscape: assessing and preserving archaeological-historical resources from 4000 years living between land and water’ is one of these regional studies. The Oer-IJ area is situated between the modern towns of Amsterdam, Alkmaar, and Haarlem and the coast (figure 1.1). Within the Oer-IJ project three research strategies are applied: archaeological-historical studies into the developments in the Oer-IJ area from 2000 BC onward and the formulation of habitational/land use models and predictive maps; action research on the application of the concept of the cultural biography of landscape within archaeological heritage management of the region; and an assessment of the physical quality of an archaeological monument and how this physical quality of archaeological monuments can be monitored in the future. The archaeological-historical studies will produce the characteristics for the cultural biography of the Oer-IJ area. It was early on established that the connecting element of the cultural biography of the Oer-IJ area would be water. Water has been an important shaping force behind the developments in the Oer-IJ throughout its (pre)history and the (current) water levels are one of the main reasons for the excellent preservation of archaeological

---

1 Feddes 1999, 7.
2 Feddes 1999, 77.
3 Feddes 1999, 77.
4 In Dutch: Vijfde Nota over de Ruimtelijke Ordening.
5 In Dutch: NWO Stimuleringsprogramma Bodemarchief in Behoud en Ontwikkeling.
6 Bloemers 2001, 1.
7 Bloemers 2001, 1.
8 Bloemers 2001, 5.
9 Better known as the Oer-IJ project.
remains within the Oer-IJ area. This thesis is one of the two archaeological-historical studies into the developments of the Oer-IJ area and focuses on the pre- and protohistory of the Oer-IJ area. Gerard Alders has done research on the archaeological-historical developments from the Early Medieval Period onwards for the Oer-IJ area and adjacent areas.\textsuperscript{10} Heleen van Londen has studied the concept of the cultural biography of the landscape and its use within the archaeological heritage management process.\textsuperscript{11} Liesbeth Theunissen has made an assessment of the physical quality of archaeological monuments and how they can be monitored.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{10} Alders, forthcoming.
\textsuperscript{11} Van Londen 2006.
\textsuperscript{12} Van Heeringen et al. 2003.
1.2 AIM OF THE RESEARCH

During the last two decades several sites that have been excavated in the Oer-IJ area are interpreted as containing offerings in watery places. This kind of site has not yet been made explicitly part of the archaeological heritage management process. The absence of offering sites in the archaeological heritage management process is partly due to the lack of integration of these sites into the habitational/land use models of the Oer-IJ area. As a consequence this type of site is absent in predictive models and predictive maps that are an important tool in archaeological heritage management. Predictive models also have a tendency to focus on the higher parts of the landscape in the Holocene part of the Netherlands as they focus on settlements/houses. In this way other practices in low-lying areas of the landscape have less chance to be discovered. In addition little is known of religion and ritual practices – of which offering sites in watery places are a part – in Dutch archaeology in general and these aspects are therefore not part of mainstream archaeological practice.

The aim of this research is to analyse all the offering sites in wet low-lying areas in the Oer-IJ area from a landscape perspective. In order to integrate offering sites in wet low-lying parts of the landscape into a wider land use model and subsequently place them in a predictive model. It is the hope of the researcher that the result of the analyses and the predictive model will be used in the archaeological management process as building blocks for the characterization of the Oer-IJ area and as a tool for the management of unknown sites.

1.3 APPROACH TO THE RESEARCH

The recognition of offering sites in watery parts of the landscape in the Oer-IJ area in the last two decades is the starting point for this research. Therkorn in her thesis studied especially the ritual depositions in pits in the Oer-IJ area, but the wet parts of the landscape were less intensive analysed. The term offering site immediately places the research in a discussion on how to recognise such a phenomenon. This discussion is nearly absent from economic or settlement studies. It has been recognised over the last decade that the recognition and understanding of rituals, like offerings, will not be achieved by a universal checklist of specific archaeological remains. Hill and Fontijn put forward that ritual can mean many things to many different people and refrain from a universal definition of ritual. Both authors see a way forward in studying ritual as a practice and start their research from the archaeological record. The avoidance of the formulation of a definition of ritual has partly to do with the way in which most definitions are formulated. The definitions are very particular on the function and/or on the appearance, which causes problems if applied to different cultures.

In this chapter a theoretical framework is proposed that defines religion, ritual and offerings without making any allusion to their appearance. A cognitive perspective is seen as the most suitable approach in this respect. Although the definitions are universally applicable it has to be stressed that the cultural expression of the practices associated are not seen in a universal or deterministic way. Following Hill and Fontijn, ritual will be viewed as a practice and a social perspective is developed to incorporate this aspect and at the same time place ritual within the social world of people. As all practice takes place in a literal sense, in addition a landscape perspective is given.

In Dutch (prehistoric) archaeology until recently there has been little debate on ritual and religion, partly due to the difficulty or lack of recognition of these phenomenon in the archaeological practice. The exceptions

---

\[14\] For example, Soonius et al. 2005.
\[15\] The ‘Archeologiebalans 2002’ shows that of the 14 Dutch archaeo-regions only one region (Drents sandy area) has resonable to good knowledge of religion and cult practices in one specific period (V). The knowledge on religion and cult practices in all the other regions and relevant periods (IV-VII) is either moderate or little to none (Lauwerier and Lotte eds. 2002).
\[16\] Therkorn 2004.
\[17\] For example, Hill 1995, 96-101 and Fontijn 2003, 15-22.
\[18\] For example, Durkheim’s view that religious beliefs and practices are socially integrated (Belier 1995 and Cunningham 1999 44), and Richard and Thomas (1984, 191) put emphasis on formalised repetitive behaviour as characteristic for ritual.
would be mainly Bronze Age metal depositions and research in the province of Drenthe. Especially the latter has become well-known through the work of Van der Sanden, however, his data is rarely from archaeological excavations. In order to give some insight into the range of offerings in watery places and give some background on discussions taking place within this field of archaeology in chapter 2 an overview is given of 100 offering sites from Denmark, North Germany and South Sweden. This area is chosen as it is part of the Germanic world of which the Oer-IJ area is situated on the western edge. Another important aspect is that in this area from an early date onwards excavations and publications of offering sites have taken place. The 100 offering sites in wet conditions were selected on the basis of the general agreement on the interpretation of these sites as offering sites and their publication in the mainstream archaeological discourse of the area. After this excursion into the wider context of offering sites in chapter 3 the local context will be examined. The Oer-IJ area is relatively small and well researched. A short overview of the preceding archaeological research into the Oer-IJ area will be given in order to place the present research in its research tradition. The context in which the offerings have taken place will be outlined through the geological, ecological and archaeological developments of the Oer-IJ. Peter Vos has updated the geological development of the Oer-IJ area, especially for this research. The geological maps created will also form the basis of the predictive maps in chapter 5. As the amount of research in all three fields is considerable, especially the aspects relevant for the embedding of the offering sites are given.

With the background or context of the offering sites outlined, in chapter 4 the offering sites themselves will be analysed. All nearly 500 known archaeological sites in the Oer-IJ area have been reviewed in order to see if they contain offerings in wet low-lying areas of the landscape. Of these 22 sites are interpreted as (probable) offering sites in wet low-lying parts of the landscape by the author. The 22 sites are analysed from the perspectives given in chapter one and an archaeological model for the offering sites is formed. The results of the analyses can be used as building blocks for the characterization of the Oer-IJ area.

On the basis of the archaeological model in chapter 5 predictions are put forward. The baseline report of van Leusen et al. is used as a guideline for the formulation of predictions. The predictive model can be used as a tool in archaeological heritage management. Due to the dynamic nature of the landscape a geogenetic and five palaeogeographical maps made by Peter Vos are used as the basis for the predictive maps. The geogenetic map will be used for predictions that start from known archaeological sites and the palaeogeographical maps will be used to predict the use of specific zones of the landscape. Finally, the hope is that the predictions will be used in local policies and two examples are giving to show how offering sites can be important for the characterization of the Oer-IJ area.

1.4 RELIGION

The aim of this thesis is to understand offering sites in relation to the landscape. Both the physical and immaterial qualities of the landscape are analysed. People’s perception of the landscape is seen as an important element of landscape research. Here I will first explore a specific type of perception or worldview, namely religion. The focus will be on people’s religious worldview as offerings are a religious practice. And in order to understand offering sites as part of a religious worldview, it is important to define what is meant by religion and religious ritual practice.

The study of religion has a centuries long history and over the years many theories and definitions of religion

20 See § 2.1.
21 Data acquired through archaeological excavation is lacking in the province of Drenthe which lies between the Oer-IJ area and North Germany and would because of its location seem a more logical choice.
22 Peter Vos is a geologist working at TNO-Bouw en ondergrond.
24 See § 1.2.
25 For the physical description of the Oer-IJ landscape see chapter 3 § 3.4 and § 3.5.
have been created. There have been various overviews and here is not the place to repeat them. Many of the anthropological studies into religion work from a specific culture and theorize within that specific situation. Although these studies can be very illuminating when considering the variety of ritual and religion, they are less well translatable to other cultures and times. This seems especially to be the case for the area under study as it consists of a society with single farmsteads in a fairly egalitarian society, which to my knowledge has not been dealt with in anthropology.

In current pre- and protohistoric archaeology there has been a lot of research into ritual, but relatively little attention is paid to religion. Ritual is viewed as more accessible due to its practical and material nature and has become somewhat separate from religion. Through losing its connection to religion, ritual has become separated from other non-religious practices. In recent years the connections between ritual and other practices has become part of archaeological studies, but the link with religion remains weak. The cause for the near absence of religion is probably the difficulty in forming an image of the specificities, such as the names and uses of gods, of the religious worldviews of the distant past.

In this thesis no attempt is made at constructing a full picture of the religion of the people living in the Oer-IJ area. But it is important to construct a theoretical framework in which ritual and religion are connected in order not to forget what rituals are about. Here first a cognitive and then a social perspective are chosen to study religion. The main reasons for the use of a cognitive perspective are the definitions and explanations of why and how religion exists without a specific cultural infill. Although cognitive scientists have universalistic affinities, here their work is seen as analytically helpful and a non-deterministic approach will be put forward. The social perspective will look at religion as a social phenomenon and will approach religious practice as action and embed it in the broader social world. This perspective will place religious practice in relation to other practices. As all practices take place, and offerings are studied in relation to the landscape, finally a landscape approach is used to integrate both other perspectives and this will guide the archaeological interpretations and subsequent predictive maps.

1.4.1 A COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVE

Within cognitive science mental processes are studied such as how knowledge is obtained, organised and used. There are different fields of interest within cognitive science of which religion is one. And within the subject of religion there are again different emphases. Three themes will be examined here: symbolic thought; the nature of religious thought and their persistence; and why CPS-agents appear as they do. Before these themes are approached a definition of religion will be given. The definition proposed by the cognitive scientists Lawson and McCauley is chosen as it encompasses aspects that are relevant for both the cognitive and social perspectives that form the theoretical framework of this thesis. Lawson and McCauley define religion as “a symbolic-cultural system of ritual acts accompanied by an extensive and largely shared conceptual scheme that includes culturally postulated superhuman agents. The former is a set of actions (including speech acts) of a relatively standard form which manipulate entities (and situations) in the world entertained within the conceptual scheme.” The inclusion of culturally postulated superhuman agents (CPS-agents) is the important element of their definition. CPS-agents are what separates religion from all other cultural domains. An advantage of this approach is that not all symbolic or formal action is automatically seen as religious, delineating the subject

---

27 For example, Bell 1997, Childe and Childe 1993, and Cunningham 1999.
29 See chapter three for a description of the area.
30 For an example of the exception, Cunliffe 1992. In German and Danish archaeology there has been more interest in the religious aspect of ritual but these studies took place some decades ago (see chapter 2) and these studies have found little response in Dutch archaeology.
32 Cunningham, 1999, 96.
33 See §1.4.1.2.
34 Lawson and McCauley 1996, 5.
35 CPS-agent is a broad concept as it includes gods and goddesses, ancestors, spirits, but also a sentient earth and every other agent that transgresses or transcends ontological categories as explained in §1.4.1.2.
in a more manageable form, without being too constraining for different cultural expressions of religion. Furthermore, their definition contains two elements – ‘actions’ and ‘conceptual scheme’ – which will guide the two perspectives chosen here to study religion. A cognitive perspective will give insight in how religious thoughts can be explained. The social perspective will give insight in how individuals act and fit into their larger social context. In this way religion will be dealt with at different levels of analysis. The aim is to ensure a degree of coherence between different aspects of the social world, ranging from individuals to institutions like religion.

1.4.1.1 SYMBOLIC THOUGHT

Although there are many theories about the nature of religion, most of the researchers agree that religion and symbolic behaviour are closely related. Studies range from how symbols function in ordering society to the decoding of specific symbols. Here symbolic thought is used in a specific way. Although it can be argued that all thought or language has symbolic qualities, a more narrow approach is taken in which symbolic thought relates to the meaning attached to words and objects that surpasses their basic description.

Dan Sperber in the early seventies proposed a new approach as he was not satisfied with the way research on religion was developing. In ‘Rethinking Symbolism’ Sperber tries to deal with the symbolic component of religion in a more fundamental way. Instead of focusing on symbols in a specific cultural context, he wanted to understand if symbols have meaning and what symbolic thinking is. In Sperber’s view the best way to approach this problem was to use a cognitive perspective. At that time, the cognitive approach had made progress in the linguistic sciences, especially through the work of Chomsky. And in anthropology structuralist Lévi-Strauss had made the link between linguistics and symbolic studies. Lévi-Strauss, however, treated a symbolic system as language and although this gave many insights into the relations between symbols, it did not resolve the differences between language and symbolic systems.

Sperber’s main point and critique of the structuralists, was that symbols cannot be decoded in the same way as words: “the semiological axis of signifiant-signifié or message-interpretation is absent; since symbolic elements enter not into one pairing alone but into a set of associations; since the interpretation bears not on the elements but on their configuration, it is the very notion of the symbol that must be brought into question.”

Sperber proposes that symbols have no meaning – a much-quoted outcome. This seemingly bold statement is a little misleading. Nancy Frankenberry comments “For semantic theory, there is nothing at all interesting about metaphors beyond the literal meaning of the utterance or proposition. For a theory of language use, on the other hand, the interesting feature of metaphor is its ability to make us see things in a new light.” From this comment it follows that it would be more just to say that symbols have no semantic meaning. But symbols can be used in a meaningful way as Sperber himself acknowledges.

In ‘Rethinking Symbolism’ Sperber explains that there are three kinds of knowledge: semantic knowledge about categories, encyclopaedic knowledge about the world, and symbolic knowledge about the encyclopaedic entries of categories. He states: “What matters, symbolically speaking, is neither how foxes are semantically defined nor what foxes actually are, but what is known of them, what is said of them, what is believed about them, … In other words, symbolic knowledge is … about the encyclopaedic entries of categories. … It is a knowledge about knowledge…”

Symbolic knowledge shapes the way we think about our world. It makes connections that are not inherent to the objects themselves – in this way symbols do not have a meaning. But symbolic knowledge shows how the order of things is and where the links between different domains are – symbols are meaningful in the way people deal with their world.

Only because Sperber is unable to come free from a tacit linguistic (or decoding) perspective when talking about meaning, he appears to propose that exactly because there is a diversity of interpretation, symbols have
INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

no meaning. He states “… cultural symbolism focuses the attention of the members of a single society in the same directions, determines parallel evocational fields that are structured in the same way, but leaves the individual free to effect an evocation in them as he likes. Cultural symbolism creates a community of interest but not of opinions…” 42 In other words, diversity within a community which uses symbols is inherent to the ways symbols work.

There may not be agreement about certain symbols and some symbols may be used without explicit knowledge of their meaning, they do, however, get their meaning through use in a cultural context. This use in a cultural context will have effect on the cultural identity of the people involved. 44 If symbols did not have meaning during their use there would be very little reason to use them at all. 44 In addition, without meaning anything could be replaced by the symbol. That is, however, not the case for there may be changes in symbols but these changes are limited by the culture’s symbolic system. 45

What is important about Sperber’s work on symbols is that he made it clear that the analogy with language is not satisfying. Although I think Sperber adhered more to the linguistic turn then he would like us to believe, he opened up the way for a cognitive approach. He emphasised that in the future there should be a focus on the way people order and recall all the different kinds of information they receive. Many researchers were inspired by Sperber and they took his ideas further, which has led to three main questions in cognitive studies on religion: is religious thought different from ordinary thought, how can we explain the continuity in religious thought in its sometimes bizarre form, and, why do the gods/CPS-agents look like they do? These problems will be dealt with in the next sections and as the first two questions are closely connected, they will be dealt with in relation to each other.

1.4.1.2 IS RELIGIOUS THOUGHT DIFFERENT FROM ORDINARY THOUGHT AND WHY DO THESE IDEAS CONTINUE TO EXIT?

In the second half of the twentieth century research on religion focussed – under the influence of Durkheim and the French année sociologique 46, and Mircea Eliade and Rudolf Otto – on the oppositional pair of sacred and profane, whereby the sacred was given a special status. Eliade says: “A religious phenomenon will only be recognized as such if it is grasped at its own level, that is to say, if it is studied as something religious. To try to grasp the essence of such a phenomenon by means of physiology, psychology, sociology, economics, linguistics, art or any other study is false; it misses the one unique and irreducible element in it – the element of the sacred.” 47 This has sometimes led to mystification in the study of religion, in the sense that research was led by belief and experience of the sacred. Furthermore, the divide between the sacred and the profane is not as easily made as has been suggested. 48 Its influence in archaeology has however been widespread, separating the religious from the everyday practical domain.

In studies on religion researchers started to look for a better way of explaining religion and religious behaviour, and the angle they took was; is religious thought as different from ordinary thought as the sacred-profane divide wants us to believe?

On a general level religion has been compared to science, trying to overcome the idea that religion is irrational or bizarre. 49 The comparison to science has led to the insight that religion has it own rationale, and is just a specific way of explaining the world. In this thesis religion is not viewed as some sort of primitive science. Religion is both rational and symbolic, not related to a scientific but a cultural truth in which attention is drawn to certain ideas through the use of metaphor. However, not all religious acts should be considered purely symbolic. Moreover, religion is not science and therefore is not bound to the criteria of scientific reasoning – if there is such a uniform thing. Religion can only be talked of in terms of cultural laws and, as the sociologist

42 Sperber 1991, 137.
46 Belier 1995 and Bowie 2002 [2000], 139.
48 Bowie 2002 [2000], 140.
49 For example, Guthrie 1980 and Horton 1967.
Anthony Giddens\textsuperscript{50} explains, cultural laws are different from natural laws. Unpredictability is just one aspect which makes cultural laws differ from natural laws. This general insight does, however, not explain how people cannot only think creative, strange thoughts, but also perpetuate them.

Cognitive studies on religion try to deal with this aspect of religion. A cognitive approach takes an interest in how humans conceptualise the world around them. Starting from a human viewpoint Justin Barrett states: “Regardless of metaphysical claims, what we observe as religion is still a constellation of human phenomena communicated and regulated by natural human perception and cognition.”\textsuperscript{51} It means that religion is part of the human world and should be studied in this respect, thereby denying the claim of Eliade that the sacred should be studied as a separate phenomenon, which cannot be grasped by relating to the ordinary world.

Barrett calls his approach the ‘naturalness-of-religion thesis’, which claims that “…what is typically called ‘religion’ may be understood as the natural product of aggregated ordinary cognitive processes.”\textsuperscript{52} With ‘natural’ Barrett does not want to hold on to a deterministic view of religion, or culture for that matter, but he emphasizes that religious behaviour is normal behaviour. In other words, religion is a cultural engagement with the (natural) world around us, through our own cognitive mechanisms.

Sperber stated that we possess three kinds of knowledge, and argued that we store our knowledge about the world in encyclopaedic knowledge. Since the publication of Rethinking Symbolism the concepts used have been slightly changing. Although the difference is not very apparent at first sight, Pascal Boyer and Charles Ramble talk about kind-concepts and domain concepts or ontological categories\textsuperscript{53} instead of semantic and encyclopaedic knowledge. In my view the encyclopaedic knowledge of Sperber is broader than the ontological category. Encyclopaedic knowledge could be about horses or dogs and animals as a category. In the perspective of Boyer and Ramble dogs and horses are kind-concepts and their ontological category would be animals. From this shift it is apparent that the cognitive study area has developed its own analytical concepts. Sperber was still working from a linguistically oriented field of study, which explains his use of the concept of semantic knowledge, which nowadays has lost most of its research value. Encyclopaedic knowledge is a concept still occurring and useful, but here the term ontological category will be used as an analytical concept. Boyer and Ramble start from a cognitive field of research and are more concerned with how we learn, store and exchange information. Their narrowing down of the ontological category is important for understanding the occurrence and perpetuation of religious thought.

Over the last twenty years much research has taken place in the field of cognitive science and these studies “have amassed considerable evidence supporting the idea that people have a large number of often tacit assumptions about the sort of properties different things possess, based on ontological category membership.”\textsuperscript{54} In other words, people have a lot of tacit knowledge of ontological categories. Moreover, the number of ontological categories appears to be limited. According to Boyer “we have some reason to think that ANIMAL, PERSON, TOOL (including all manmade objects other than tools proper), NATURAL OBJECT (e.g. rivers, mountains) and PLANT more or less exhaust the list.”\textsuperscript{55}

Following the definition of Lawson and McCauley religion is a worldview that includes CPS-agents.\textsuperscript{56} An interesting aspect of CPS-agents is that they transgress or transcend these ontological categories and therefore go against the tacit knowledge of people. Boyer and Ramble, through the use of experiments\textsuperscript{57}, may have found an answer to the question why these concepts that go against our tacit knowledge of ontological categories – in other words, counter-intuitive information – persist as they do. These experiments were conducted in France, Gabon and Nepal and participants were unaware of the religious dimension of the experiments. The stories were constructed per culture in such a way that the participants thought of them as ordinary stories with no reference to god-like creatures. In this way it is a cross-cultural experiment on cognitive processes that is sensitive to the cultural context of the participants. In each story there were ordinary persons and artefacts, and persons and artefacts that had aspects which transferred and/or breached ontological categories. The participants read or heard stories and after a diversion were requested to recall elements from the stories. They dem-

\textsuperscript{50} Giddens 1995.
\textsuperscript{51} Barrett 2000, 29.
\textsuperscript{52} Barrett 2000, 29.
\textsuperscript{53} In this thesis the term ontological category will be used.
\textsuperscript{54} Barrett 2000, 30.
\textsuperscript{55} Boyer 2001, 78.
\textsuperscript{56} See § 1.4.1.
\textsuperscript{57} Boyer and Ramble 2001.
onstrated that counter-intuitive information is better remembered than non-violated ontological categories. But at the same time that too much violation of the ontological category diminishes this effect. Boyer and Ramble expect that, “all else being equal, concepts that are very easy to recall to spread in a cultural environment and concepts that are intrinsically difficult to recall to spread less.”\(^{58}\) So this would account for the persistence of the counter-intuitive knowledge, instead of its direct elimination.

Some researchers, especially Maurice Bloch, have criticised the counter-intuitive as a kind of universal category. Bloch’s main point is that through the everyday contact with, for example, ancestors, within a culture, these entities lose their counter-intuitive character.\(^ {59}\) I think this critique is founded on a misunderstanding of the idea of the counter-intuitive. The point is that how familiar an ancestor is, does not determine its measure of counter-intuitivity. The breaches and transfers of ontological categories determine their measure of counter-intuitivity and this is not influenced by cultural images. In other words, “What is counterintuitive here is not even necessarily surprising. … It becomes part of your familiar world…”\(^ {60}\)

Boyer and Ramble showed through the use of experiments what elements a religious concept needs to be culturally successful. A religious concept needs:

- [1] a pointer to a particular ontological category
- [2] an explicit representation of a violation of intuitive expectations either:
  - [2a] a breach of relevant expectations for the category, or
  - [2b] a transfer of expectations associated with another category;
- [3] a link to (nonviolated) default expectations for the category.”\(^ {61}\)

Furthermore these elements are linked to religious concepts, which are more specific, or could be seen as the cultural infill of a more general concept. The religious concepts have therefore

- [4] a slot for additional encyclopaedic information;
- [5] a lexical label.”\(^ {62}\)

The difference between the first three general elements and the last two cultural in fills makes it clear why people can easily understand the general ideas behind a specific religion, but need to acquire the specific details of that religion with more effort. Some gods and goddesses of another culture will look familiar because they have the same elements, although their names – or religious concepts – are different.

The breaches or transfers taking place in the religious concepts have an effect that might explain the use of symbols in religion. Sperber remarked that symbolic knowledge is knowledge about encyclopaedic knowledge, ordering and connecting different domains. These breaches and transfers go also beyond the boundary of a specific domain and link different domains through the combination of intuitive and counter-intuitive knowledge, thereby establishing new relations. Symbols have the same property of linking different domains and the more domains they link the more powerful they are.

Although it has become clear how these strange concepts can be explained within an ordinary cognitive framework, it is not clear why CPS-agents often take the form they do.

1.4.1.3 WHY DO THE CPS-AGENTS LOOK LIKE THEY DO?

The occurrence of CPS-agents across all and even the most technological and scientific advanced cultures is a phenomenon that has to be explained in more general theories than cultural historic explanations. Cultural-historic explanations may explain the specific occurrence of certain CPS-agents, but not why they all have some link to human-like qualities. In other words, it has to be explained why CPS-agents always seem to have a pointer to or transgression of the ontological category person.

In order to answer this question Stewart Guthrie has put anthropomorphism at the centre of his theory of religion. He states that “religion may be defined as systematic application of human-like models to nonhuman,
in addition to human, phenomena.” Guthrie argues that humans try to explain their world first in human terms and will only replace these explanations if better ones are made. The reason for these anthropomorphic explanations is that human relations are the most important relations in people’s lives and, therefore, they tend to model their worldview in a social perspective. Guthrie puts forward five propositions (P) and two informal deductions (D) to explain his theory. These are:

“P1. Phenomena (aspects of the world as known through our senses) initially are ambiguous.
D1. Therefore phenomena must be interpreted.
P2. Phenomena are interpreted by a set of models based on experience of analogous phenomena.
P3. A model by which to interpret a phenomenon in a context is chosen from the set by (a) its capacity to generate the phenomena; (b) the likelihood of occurrence of the phenomena from which the model derives, and (c) its subjective importance to the observer.
P4. Humans, (a) because they are complex and multifaceted generate a very wide range of phenomena; (b) as social beings, are likely to be wherever the human perceiver may be; and (c) are the most important factor in the human environment.
D2. Therefore human-like models frequently are chosen to interpret ambiguous phenomena.
P5. Generalization and systematization of this choice is the cognitive basis of religion.”

These propositions and deductions are here considered not to be very problematic, except for P4. P4 puts the anthropomorphic explanation in the equation and therefore, has to be right. The difficulty with P4 is that the humans can be replaced by other entities. What is necessary to give anthropomorphism a central place in religion is evidence that people tend to explain their world in an anthropomorphic way, instead of in any other way, and that people perceive humans as the most important in their environment.

One of the most compelling studies addressing this problem has been the experiment performed in America by the cognitive scientists Justin Barrett and Frank Keil. The basic aim of their research was the question if people anthropomorphise god even though they may adhere to a nonhuman image of god? College students with different religious backgrounds had to fill in a questionnaire on god, listen to a story and after a short diversion answer yes/no questions. Barrett and Keil found: “In striking contrast to the results of the questionnaire, the results of the story recall items suggest an anthropomorphic everyday God concept. …most of the time subjects falsely remembered particular anthropomorphic characteristics of God being mentioned in the story.” To take this experiment further they also told a story about a futuristic computer Uncomp. Here people also tended to anthropomorphise, but it was less marked. Although the study of Barrett and Keil is not conclusive there appears to be good reason to assume that people do tend to anthropomorphise the phenomena they encounter.

Anthropomorphism is still a very broad concept. Guthrie appears to focus on the human appearance in the things we see. Pascal Boyer criticises Guthrie on this point. He proposes that people do not see human shapes but human traces. Paraphrasing Guthrie’s book title Boyer writes people see not faces in the clouds but traces in the grass.

In other words, people see the result of actions and infer from these the presence of (CPS)agents. Following Boyer, I would like to suggest that for religious ideas it is especially important that people see human agency in different phenomena. Because, closely bound with human agency is intentionality, making it into a social event. In other words, it relates to why things happen.

Besides, there is reason to think that people do pay special attention to other people from an early age. Studies in child-development have indicated that “from early infancy human beings represent agents and the actions they perform very differently from the ways they represent other entities and events.” This is necessary because humans depend on other humans. People are social beings.

Guthrie’s Proposition 4 is partly validated by the cognitive studies as mentioned above. But it appears more appropriate to speak of human agency instead of human forms. Boyer sees other cultural cognitive advantages if CPS-agents have person-like qualities. Persons cannot only do complex things they can also think complex things. Through different inferences about the ontological
categories people can judge situations in complex manners and also speculate about imagined events. In this way people also interpret social action. In social situations people do not only react on the directly visible, but also on what they estimate the other person knows. What someone knows about a particular situation is called tactical knowledge. It is something especially associated with the domain concept of PERSON, because the other domains do not have these specific inference systems. However, normal human agents do not have access to all tactical information, because of their physical properties as persons. A very compelling thing about most CPS-agents is, however, that through their counter-intuitive properties they do have access to all tactical information. Taking into account that “[t]he religious concept preserves all the relevant default inferences except the ones that are explicitly barred by the counterintuitive element”\(^{70}\) it becomes clear that CPS-agents have a great social advantage. As Boyer explains, if CPS-agents hold certain knowledge unknown to others, then this knowledge is usually perceived as tactical information and not information about objects. All people’s actions are known by the CPS-agent who acts according to this information and, therefore, people have to acknowledge the presence of CPS-agents in all events. As Boyer states “The powerful gods are not necessarily the ones that matter; but the ones that have strategic information always matter.”\(^{71}\)

1.4.1.4 SUMMARY OF THE COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVE

According to the cognitive perspective people’s tendency to see intentionality behind phenomena they experience leads to the creation of supernatural beings. Supernatural beings hold an element of counter-intuitive information that is remembered and therefore communicated better and which, leads to their spread throughout culture. And the best way to talk about these phenomena is in a symbolic way – crossing different domains or categories.

The interesting aspect of the cognitive perspective is that it shows how people can think religiously. In doing so they give some pointers to how this information can be used in an archaeological – or other human sciences – context. First, because religion is not so different from ordinary life, these two fields should be looked at together. Second, focalisation instead of decoding makes it clear that diversity within a culture is not something to be glossed over, but essential for the use of symbols. Difference is not splitting off, or getting it wrong, but engaging with the culture people grow up in. Third, the apparent strangeness of religion is its strength instead of its weakness. Fourth, people conceptualise the world through the use of a specific set of ontological categories. The way in which objects from different ontological categories are used in combination may give some insight into their cultural specific ordering of the world.

Cognitive studies have given insight in how the individual processes information and communicates. The relations between these social actions and culture are however less developed. I will therefore turn to the social perspective, through the work of Giddens and Lawson and McCauley. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter I have not gone into the work of Lawson and McCauley within the cognitive perspective, because, although they rely heavily on the work of the afore mentioned cognitive researchers, their strength lies in the social application.

1.4.2 A SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

When talking about religion from a social perspective, one immediately thinks about the work of Emile Durkheim, who saw a direct relation between the social and the religious. He ascribed to religion the fundamental role of “maintaining the social system by strengthening the bonds attaching the individual to the society of which its god is the figurative representation.”\(^{72}\) Functionalist approaches, which view religion as controlling the social order, have had considerable critique during the twentieth century and I will not repeat them here. To make it clear from the start, this is not what is meant here with a social perspective on religion. In this research the social perspective means that religion in itself is viewed as a social phenomenon.

---

\(^{70}\) Boyer 2001, 73.

\(^{71}\) Boyer 2001, 160.

\(^{72}\) Lawson and McCauley 1996, 49.
1.4.2.1 BELIEF AND THE QUESTION OF TRUTH

If we view religion as a social phenomenon the question of religious belief takes on different dimensions. The question of the irrationality or falsity of religious beliefs has mainly been dealt with in view of the intellectualist debate that sees religion as some kind of primitive science. The question of belief is, however, not obvious in many cultures. It is typically a question for cultures in which there are different excluding religious doctrines. In other cultures it is obvious that there are CPS-agents with which everybody has to deal. As shown in the cognitive perspective, people ascribe agency to CPS-agents and these CPS-agents are part of social reality through their actions. It is not a question of believing but a question of knowing what these CPS-agents mean or want.

From a social perspective the question of truth becomes irrelevant and shifts to the position of how people interpret and deal with the phenomena they encounter. However, it is of vital importance that most CPS-agents are considered to have full access to strategic information. Boyer links this to morality in the sense that “we intuitively assume that if an agent has full access to all the relevant information about the situation, that agent will immediately have access to the rightness or wrongness of the behaviour.” Therefore, if something happens people will interpret this in view of their own and their group’s behaviour and consider what has to be done. Whether the right action is performed is judged not on the basis of belief but on the basis of efficacy.

Lawson and McCauley have approached this problem through the concept of competence. A concept closely related to the concept of monitoring used by Giddens. The competence approach holds that: symbolic-cultural systems “are the kinds of system about which explicit instruction is, at least sometimes, completely absent, and about which, therefore, participants must have some form of intuitive knowledge. That knowledge is revealed by their acquisition of and successful participation in the systems and by their judgement about real and possible uses of the symbols within the system.” In other words, agents are reflexive about their own behaviour and at the same time make judgements about their own and others behaviour. The success of a religious action is not successful because it conforms to the ‘truth’, but because the participants feel it was carried out according to their expectations. Irrational or false beliefs and practices are rational and true within their cultural context because they work. And in the case that misfortune continues the ritual is often not seen as false, but the interpretation of what the CPS-agent intended or wanted is. Someone’s competence to interact with CPS-agents is being challenged in this kind of situations.

These situations where someone’s competence is challenged leads to questions concerning authority. In other words, is everybody in a position to make these judgements? Perspectives in religious studies are shifting from proving that CPS-agents exists to seeing CPS-agents as a social phenomenon, where the truth question becomes irrelevant and even undesirable. The interesting question is who has authority on religious matters and why?

1.4.2.2 AUTHORITY

Authority is linked to power. Power is used here in the way Foucault and Giddens understand it – an enabling force. Giddens sees power as the ability to use “authoritative resources, which derive from the co-ordination of the activity of human agents, and allocative resources, which stem from control of material products or of aspects of the material world.” Power is always a two ways – or dialectic – motion, where, although there may be little room, subordinate agents can always influence their superiors. The advantage of using a power concept, which does not automatically involve domination but focuses on the enabling aspect, can be applied

---

75 Boyer 2001, 187.
76 Although Lawson and McCauley do not refer to the work of Giddens in any of their publications, their approaches are very similar. Giddens work, however, is much more general encompassing all social action, place and time.
77 McCauley and Lawson 2002, 4-5.
78 The CPS-agent itself can be viewed as a non-social (or anti-social) entity within some cultures, but people have to deal with them within their social world.
80 Giddens 1995, xxxi.
to all kinds and all levels of societies. Archaeology has been especially concerned with the allocative resources; here the emphasis will be on authoritive resources.

Authority is based on three different aspects: knowledgeability, experience and position. These three elements are closely interlinked but do not have the same bearing in different cultural contexts. As a general rule, in large scale, differentiated societies the position of the agent will play an important role, while in more egalitarian societies knowledgeability and experience will be more valued.

Barrett shows there is a difference between theological concepts and religious concepts. Theological concepts are based on explicit knowledge and religious concepts on tacit, everyday knowledge. Religious specialists will have more access to and use of theological concepts. Their authority on this level will be little challenged. Most people will assume that through their position or training they have acquired a certain amount of knowledge. Religious specialists will, however, be judged on the efficacy of their religious practice. Here tacit knowledge and/or expectations come into view. But participants in a religion will tend to view the specialist as a secure factor and in cases of failure of religious practice will first look for other circumstances to be the source of failure. If there is no religious specialist knowledgeability and experience will take a more prominent role in the judgement of the efficacy of a religious practice. Discussion on the performance of the religious action will take prominence. These pointers are, however, no certainties; the circumstances in which the judgement takes place will also have a prominent place. Social commitments will be taken into consideration by the participants as well. The respect people posses will count when judged in different situations. If the person’s competence is judged and this person is normally seen as very competent, people may explain failure because of hidden reasons, which are only known by the wrongdoer and the CPS-agent who has full access to strategic information, a trait not associated with the religious practitioner.

Authority depends on social position and efficacy. Efficacy is dependent on the situation and social position depends on the way a society is organized. Whether specific rituals were effective in the prehistoric past is very difficult to establish, but the institutions of a society may be grasped. In the next section religion will be viewed as a social institution.

1.4.2.3 RELIGION AS A SOCIAL INSTITUTION

Religion is part of the life of people and from an analytical perspective can be seen as specific domain within the wider society. There will always be interplay between religion and other social actions. However, this is not to say that religion is a reflection of the social; religion is much more a reflection on the social. Religion makes the ideal order of the world explicit, not the real order. Religion is, however, not necessarily a masking device for inequality or power struggles. The fact that it is an ideal worldview means that reality will probably differ from this view. The ideal worldview can be achieved or maintained but just as well it can be contested. Furthermore, religion is seen as having effect in the real life-world of people and is not an extra layer of conceptual reveries.

In the cognitive sciences there is general agreement that religion can be studied in the same way as any kind of action. It means that religion can be regarded as any other social institution. Giddens made clear in his structuration theory that social institutions are not free-floating entities; they are grounded in the actions people take. These actions are however in their turn guided by the social institutions. This relation between action and structure is in the work of Giddens described as the ‘duality of structure’. The duality of structure means that “the structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize.” Agents use tacit knowledge to cope with everyday life and through the repetition of actions form social institutions. The reproduction of social institutions is never exactly the same, which makes them dynamic entities. However, agents are not robots. Agents are knowledgeable and intentional, having certain goals. The consequences of their actions can never be fully predicted, but this does not mean that social mechanisms are hidden for agents. Social institutions can be seen as traditions, the way people do things. Action is dealing with a present situation on the basis of past experience and future expectancies. Most action is, however, tacit; people perform many tasks without thinking about them.

Giddens theory of structuration states that there is a constant movement between actions and social institutions. The relations between these different institutions are however less clearly defined. What binds the different institutions is the society of agents, who through their continuous re-enactment within a cultural framework reconstruct the institutions, which sustain their world. In everyday life the different institutions will not be as clearly demarcated as the researcher’s analytical view envisages. People will draw from a mixed set of ideas involving different institutions, and at the same time act in different institutions. As Boyer says “religion is a rather practical thing.” Ideas must have a degree of coherence if people want to be able to function normally. This coherence will not always be present, but most people will either transform their ideas or their actions to make their world coherent. In other words, if their religious worldview differs too much from their everyday life, people will either make changes in their religious ideas or their everyday life. It is, however, necessary here to remember that, as Barrett showed, theological and religious concepts may differ considerably and that this will enable people to relate religion to their everyday life without too much conflict between different kinds of knowledge.

The absence of a perfect fit between different institutions and institutions and agents is not in itself problematic; it explains why societies change and cannot remain as they were. Society is a dynamic system in which there is a measure of stability. This equilibrium is not static as it is moving between all the different institutions and agents, but it will stay within the cultural limits of a society. Sometimes actions undertaken have consequences which will push the equilibrium to its limit and when a certain boundary is crossed there is no way back and a new equilibrium will be established.

1.4.2.4 SUMMARY OF THE SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

The social perspective has shown that belief and truth are not very helpful in explaining religion. CPS-agents are part of the social world and religious concepts are not dealt with in abstract manners but are applied to real situations. Efficacy, competence and authority are determining factors in establishing if religious practices are done as they should be, not their relation to truth. Furthermore, religion is part of society and can be studied as every other aspect of society. Through the duality of structure religion as an institution comes to it full potential in religious acts. It follows that religion cannot be studied without taking into account the actions that sustain it. I will, therefore, now turn to a particular kind of religious action, ritual.

1.5 RELIGIOUS RITUAL IN ACTION

In the previous section it was shown that religion is sustained through religious practice. Religious practice encompasses many acts, including offerings. Here, I will focus on religious ritual practice in a general sense, later I will turn to offerings in particular. Ritual is a very vague concept, ranging from creative, expressive to formalised repetitive behaviour. Some even think that a definition of ritual is not necessary because people will recognise it when encountered. The range of (absence of) definitions is not very satisfying and just as with religion it has to be made clear what is meant with religious ritual, not only to guide research but also to avoid the problem that every ritual becomes religious. Again the definition of Lawson and McCauley is coherent, delineating the subject without constraining it too much. They propose that “All religious rituals – in our technical sense – are inevitably connected sooner or later with actions in which CPS-agents play a role and which brings about some change in the religious world.” Religious rituals have three main elements an agent, an act/instrument and a patient. The agent performs an act in order to bring about a change in the patient. They discuss all ritual in relation to these three elements or roles. Just as in their definition of religion the presence of CPS-agents is what demarcates a ritual as a religious ritual. Religious ritual acts are seen as any other social act, where the participants have the same kind of expectancy. People’s judgements of a religious ritual are influenced by the way in which the CPS-agent participates within

---

85 See § 1.4.1.2.
86 See §1.5.2.
INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

the ritual. Therefore, Lawson and McCauley divide religious ritual in two kinds of religious ritual: special agent rituals and special patient or special instrument rituals. This division is based on where the presence of the CPS-agent is essential within the ritual, in other words what makes an element special. The main difference is that “Only special agent rituals’ consequences are permanent, since in these it is CPS-agents who have acted, either directly or through their intermediaries. These are the only rituals whose consequences might ever need reversing.” For example, a marriage ceremony – a special agent ritual – has to be performed only once and can only be undone through new rituals. A special patient ritual, such as harvest offering, has to be repeated every year and because of its limited durability has no need for reversal. Furthermore, substitution in certain parts of the ritual will be less problematic in special patient and special instrument rituals than in special agent rituals.

Lawson and McCauley’s theory of religious ritual is interesting because it defines and analyses ritual on the basis of only a few comprehensible aspects. There are, however, also some serious flaws in their work when they propose that they can predict the general form of rituals on the basis of it either being a special agent or special patient/instrument ritual. The question is why pay much attention to the religious ritual theory of Lawson and McCauley, when it has flaws? To me there are several reasons why this theory is more appealing than others. First, their definition of ritual has clarity and is applicable in archaeological contexts. Secondly, the division in special agent and special patient or special instrument ritual is very important. This can give insight in which part of a ritual judgement will be placed and will therefore be under stricter control. Thirdly, this division gives an insight into the temporality of ritual. And lastly, they have pointed to several aspects that are of relevance for any theory of ritual and this should not be disregarded in future research. The challenge lies in using their theories potential for understanding past religious ritual and amending it in such a way that it will broaden its scope.

1.5.1 RELIGIOUS ACTION IN RELATION TO SOCIETY

Looking at religious ritual as an ordinary social action with the participation of a CPS-agent has opened up new avenues in theory-forming. Research into the relation between specific religious action and other actions in a society may lead to a better understanding of both. Religion is not a free floating extra conceptual layer; it is firmly embedded in the everyday-world of people. Religion is thought of as relating to events which have to be dealt with in a specific way. Religious ritual is part of a symbolic-cultural system, which is different from everyday engagement with the world. However, for the rituals to have meaning they have to be related to everyday knowledge. Besides, a lot of everyday actions are not religious in themselves but are guided by religious concepts about how and where things ought to be done. In connection to Sperber it was already mentioned that symbolic knowledge is knowledge about encyclopaedic knowledge, which is about the world. In other words, symbolic action makes relations between different domains of the everyday world which are not intrinsic to the encyclopaedic knowledge about these domains. Symbolic knowledge may explicate that through similarities or differences, different domains are connected and that certain contexts ask for an approach which takes account of these relations.

Religious ritual – and religion for that matter – should not be analysed separately from the everyday world; for religious ritual through its use of symbols establishes relations in the everyday world, which will guide further action. Religious rituals that do not relate to the social world of everyday life will be of little importance to the people that perform them. When these rituals are not prescribed by doctrine it is not likely that they will be kept in use. On this note it should not be surprising that ritual objects are not necessarily very different from ordinary objects. In this view it is rather the other way around, for ritual objects to have any significance they have to relate to the everyday material culture of a society. It also becomes clear that the analytical division between different cultural institutions will not be perceived as sharp by the participants of a culture, when religious ritual not only affects their whole world, but is meant to do so.

1.5.2 THE PLACE OF OFFERING IN RELIGIOUS RITUAL

In this thesis offerings in low-lying wet part of the landscape are studied. Here offerings will be discussed in a general manner and in the next sections specific aspects of offerings will be discussed. Offerings are a form of exchange between people and CPS-agents. In an offering a CPS-agent receives something from a human agent. Through the exchange a relation is established between them, but unlike relations between people, the CPS-agent is only visible through cultural specific phenomena. The position of the participants varies in different circumstances. On the one hand, the relation with the CPS-agent is not always clear. On the other hand, the offering creates a bond between both parties.

In the model Lawson and McCauley present offerings are special patient rituals. They attribute all kinds of characters to this kind of religious ritual. They are irreversible, frequently performed, low on sensory stimulation. The characters frequently performed and low on sensory stimulation appear to follow from the irreversibility of offerings, but this is not necessarily the case. An aspect of offerings that can be of interest for the analysis of pre- and protohistoric offerings is that well-formedness in special patient ritual is not as important as in special agent rituals. Offerings have therefore the possibility of substitutes when it comes to the material component.

---

89 The term offering is chosen as it is relatively neutral in relation to terms such as sacrifice (animate materials) or votive offering (inanimate materials). Bradley (1998 Ch.1) gives a short overview of the use of these concepts. Offering is also a more direct translation from the Dutch ‘offer’ and German ‘Opfer’ which encompasses both animate and inanimate materials.


92 McCauley and Lawson 2002, 32.
Figure 1.2 shows the different elements that are involved with offerings. The lines are dashed as the elements are influenced by each other and should be studied in relation to each other. For analytical purposes it makes it clearer to examine the elements separately. In the next sections each element will be briefly looked into at both a general theoretical and an archaeological level. Time and event are combined when the different time paths are discussed. After the separate elements are discussed a landscape perspective will be given that integrates the elements and guides further analyses.

1.5.3 THE MATERIALITY OF OFFERINGS

As mentioned above, offerings are a type of exchange that creates a relation between people and CPS-agents. It is fruitful to view offerings as analogous to the exchange of gifts instead of commodities, as there are social relations involved and the outcome of the exchange is uncertain. The acceptance of a gift is often not free from obligations towards the giver, nor is it always possible to refuse a gift. One of the most important characteristics of gift-exchange is that not just anything can be considered a good gift. Gifts are value-laden. And the biography of the object can be importance for its selection. The cultural biography of objects, is a term theorized by Kopytoff. In short, things in a society have an expected trajectory of use and a cultural value, which is an important factor in the possibilities of exchange. Since the introduction of the term cultural biography it has been widely used in anthropology and archaeology.

The gift relates to at least three different elements of the offering practice: the human agent on whose behalf the offering is done, the CPS-agent and the event. The offering, respectively, has to belong to the human agent, the offering must be recognised by the CPS-agent and it must refer to the event to make clear what is wanted or achieved. The exact offering will vary in accordance to which element receives the most attention, the material culture available and the cultural-symbolic system of the participants. Some types of offering will have precise prescriptions about the objects to be used. But if the symbolic dimension of offerings is taken into consideration it is also possible that the objects used need to conform to certain domain characteristics, such as a domestic tool or wild animal. As mentioned above, symbols make relations between different domains, which lead to a certain degree of exchangeability between those domains. Within a cultural-symbolic plane there will be a dynamic view, which allows for variability, but there will be limits to what is acceptable. Not only is the type of object of importance, so is its state – perfect or obviously imperfect, complete, parts, or complete and then destroyed. Certain objects will be excluded from offerings because they are deemed unfit for use in this context. But whatever choice is made it should not be forgotten that the objects used in offerings come from the social world of humans. It is a selection from all possible objects within a society. Therefore, to understand the selection made for the offering there always has to be a link to the material world of the agent who makes the offering.

From an archaeological perspective offerings are one of the most promising elements of religion that can be studied, because, by definition it involves an exchange of goods. Goods are not offerings because of some inherent quality. The cultural context defines which goods can be considered as offerings for specific occasions. Offering sites, therefore, always consist of a selection from all possible goods. The definition of these particular selections is the first step in understanding offering sites. On the basis of patterns of similarities and differences between these selections, it may be possible to grasp certain symbolic domain-transferring relations. This will be achieved through tables which list different find categories per offering site or/and offering if possible and the state of the goods when deposited. What is of the utmost importance is that the study does not focus on any particular kind of goods, but looks at all the goods in their combined occurrence. In the cognitive perspective

---

93 See Mauss (1967 [1925]) on obligation of returning a gift and Appudarai (2001 [1986], 11) on difference between gift and commodity.
94 Kopytoff 2001 [1986].
95 Turner, 1995, 41.
96 The substitution of a cow with a cucumber, outwardly unrelated objects, is a well known anthropological example of exchange between different domains through symbolic thought (Lawson and McCauley 1996, 162 and McCauley and Lawson 2002, 32).
97 See § 1.4.1.1.
CHAPTER 1

Boyer stated that we have five main ontological categories. Some tables will be ordered according to these categories in order to see if they form specific relations.

1.5.4 THE LOCALITY OF OFFERINGS

As any social action offerings take place in a particular place which is connected to an appropriate context. This place or locality can be connected in different ratios to the three different elements of offerings: the offerer, the CPS-agent or the event and has to be accessible for both the offerer and the CPS-agent. The landscape will therefore have its effect on the possibility of the performance of certain rituals. This is not to say that the landscape defines religious practice, but puts certain limits on the successfullness of particular actions. Connecting specific CPS-agents to particular locales where there are no inscriptions may not be that easy. Different CPS-agents can be connected to water, mountains, trees etc. and one CPS-agent can be met in different places. The focus here, on watery contexts will, therefore, not engage with all offerings to all CPS-agents in the research area or to all types of offering to one particular CPS-agent. Locality can refer to a specific place and a specific kind of place, for example, respectively, the river next to the big tree or the river. Furthermore, a watery context is not a uniform phenomenon. Water or wetness can have many different forms, which will add certain qualities to the perception of place. Open water differs considerably from a wet, but accessible, peat area. Flowing water has directional qualities missing in still-standing water. Salt and fresh water can not be used in the same manner and contain different life-forms. And then there are the seasons and tides, having their effect on the water, changing its shape, form and direction. The locality of the offerings will probably be affected by the different properties of the watery context. It is therefore important, not only to look at the equation dry or wet, but also at the kind of wetness. This study is concerned with offering sites in a wet context, so it appears obvious that the place is water. Water is however not a simple category when encountered in an estuary environment, like the Oer-IJ. It can take many forms from raging floods to quiet pools. It can be transparent and obscuring. The measure of movement, direction of flow, clarity, openness and presence of a CPS-agent can all be of major influence on the choice of a particular place. Historical events can also lead to the forming an offering site. Many offering sites in wet contexts are dry when excavated. A reconstruction of the environment is necessary to be able to construct the physical aspects of an offering site. The offering sites will be ordered in tables which deal with the type of water context, the flow, openness, the position of the deposition as seen from the shore and its position within the wider human-made environment. In this way it may be possible to see whether certain parts of the landscape were favoured for the practice of offering.

1.5.5 TIME

As mentioned above Lawson and McCauley use the time concepts of frequent and infrequent ritual, which can give us insight into the temporality of a specific type of ritual. They make the observation that “From the standpoint of individual participation, many rituals are non-repeated; however, from the collective standpoint of the community, all rituals are repeated…” Time has always been important in archaeology, but usually it was the time of chronologies. The perception of time has only received attention in the last twenty-five years. Time, as perceived, is complex in that it combines at least two different motions – a straight line and a circle. Where the line stands for the ongoing accumulation of time with it direction towards the future from a persons birth to death and the circle for the repetition of time in which events keep on reoccurring the birth and death of different people, our everyday activities and the passing of the seasons. As becomes clear from the example of birth and death, depending on the perspective a life can be seen as having a direction in time, but the ac-

99 See § 1.4.1.2.
100 CPS-agents associated with very specific localities like mountains, for example, could not be easily reached in the Oer-IJ estuary.
101 McCauley and Lawson 2002, 156.
102 The three major publications which have had effect in archaeology have been; Pierre Bourdieu 1977 Outline of a Theory of Practice; Ferdinand Braudel 1975 The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II; and Christopher Gosden 1994 Social being and time.
cumulation of different lives is a cyclical movement, where continuously people get born and die. Lawson and McCauley’s concepts of reversible and irreversible religious rituals and the consequential repetition of the later type relate more to the efficacy of the religious ritual than to the concept of linear or cyclical time. For example, offerings (as special patient rituals) are irreversible, but are not necessarily repeated in a cyclical way. They can be related to a life-changing moment, such as healing after serious sickness. In other words, the (ir)reversibility of a ritual can give some indication of the time-path involved, but is not a determining factor.

From an agent perspective the religious rituals closely associated with the linear or cyclical time are, respectively life-changing rituals and seasonal or periodic rituals. But there are also incidental rituals, which are closely associated with events rather than time perception, although these rituals often have a distinct time-path – (promise) event offering – which has to take place within limits. From a societal perspective nearly all rituals are cyclical and even incidental rituals will reoccur, although not at a regular interval.

To archaeologists, who have a societal perspective, most rituals will have a cyclical or recurring time-pattern. I will try to clarify the relations occurring in the three types of ritual – life-changing, seasonal/periodic or event related – from the agent perspective.

1.5.5.1 LIFE-CHANGING RITUAL WITH A LINEAR TIME PATH.

Since the publication of Arnold van Gennep’s ‘The Rites of Passage’ life-changing rituals have received much attention. The focus in archaeology has mainly been on the final stage – death and burial – an easily distinguishable process. It is often presumed that the social status of the person is emphasized in one way or the other during burial. An important proposition is that every stage in life is accompanied by certain material items that will be deposited with the dead to mark their position. Outside the burial context the other life-changing moments and their associated rituals are presumed to be near invisible. However, Fontijn has shown that bronze depositions in water may be associated with life-changing rituals.

By definition life-changing rituals change the social position of a person, which makes these rituals into social events. A person cannot change her/his position in isolation. There has to be a special agent who can make the change and the social group has to witness this or made aware of this change. Not every ritual needs the same group of people. The early childhood rituals could be a family affair. Rituals concerning reaching maturity should have a wider audience – the community, – marriage or the forming of a new household could involve an even greater social group when the persons involved belong to different communities, and the social group involved in burial rituals will vary according to the social position of the dead. The place needed to accompany all these different social groups will be relevant for the placement in space of these rituals.

In short, life-changing rituals have a predominant social aspect and mostly take place in a social context, where the new social positions of the persons involved is often expressed by specific material attributes.

1.5.5.2 SEASONAL OR PERIODIC RITUALS WITH A CYCLICAL TIME PATH

Pierre Bourdieu’s was one of the first researchers that combined seasonality with the structure of society and everyday practice. In his analyses of the Kabyle household, time, place, material culture, life-stages, activities and values are transformed into one cyclical scheme. Here, of special importance, is the way that everyday activities operate in two cycles. On the one hand, the day to day events that have to be fulfilled. On the other hand, the change in these daily activities through the seasons. These cycles of time are closely related to the movement of heavenly bodies. The heavenly bodies move into certain directions in space and therefore can be used to give directions to place. Place can be meaningful bound to time through the use of orientation on heavenly bodies. Religious rituals related to seasonality may, therefore, also have directions incorporated

103 For example, Fowler 2004, especially Ch. 6, Arnold and Wicker 2001, and Arnold 2006.
105 Fontijn 2003, figure 11.3 and 12.3.
107 Bourdieu 2002 [1977].
into them. Seasonal rituals are also linked to place in another way. Every season has its own set of activities that will be performed in different locales. Whether literal or conceptual, in rituals these activities and their place will be referred to. It is also probable that associated material culture is used that is connected with these specific activities or places. Seasonal rituals that are closely related to the farming world probably take place when changes in activities take place, demarcating time and actions. Specific rituals can also be related to the passing of the seasons itself.

Religious rituals are always part of a larger cultural-symbolic system and there are probably links or transformations between all these rituals (including the life-changing rituals) within a society. What these links and transformations are differs between cultures.

Religious rituals associated with the seasons or seasonal activities can have a local character, involving small communities. Another type of religious ritual is the periodic ritual, occurring once a year or every few years. This type of ritual usually involves large communities and is part of a range of activities, such as annual fairs, justice and the maintenance of social bonds. These are the moments when social competition comes to the fore and have the potential for very elaborate religious rituals. This can lead to large quantities of goods or special goods being offered. The social group involved, can be very large and needs to be accommodated. Even if not all people participate directly in the religious ritual they still need to be in the vicinity. Large open places or demarcated open-air sites would be necessary.

1.5.5.3 EVENT-RELATED RELIGIOUS RITUALS WITH INCIDENTAL TIME PATHS

The cognitive perspective showed that people tend to see agency in events that they do not understand immediately or that require special attention. Most of these events are unpredictable and some have a far reaching impact on peoples’ lives. If CPS-agents are accorded responsibility for these events some sort of acknowledgement has to be given by human agents. Although the occurrences of these religious rituals have no specific time interval, the religious rituals themselves have specific time paths, depending on the situation. The ritual can be performed in anticipation before an event will occur or as some kind of payment or thanksgiving after the event happened. There will, however, be a time-interval between the event and the offering. The place where the religious ritual is performed can depend on the event and/or on the place of the CPS-agent who is responsible for the outcome. The material culture used will be closely related to the event and the responsible CPS-agent, as both aspects will already be interlinked. The events may be unpredictable in themselves, but the response can be based on cultural rules that will result in the sporadic occurrence of similar religious rituals.

In archaeology the question of time can be answered in its simplest form with a date or time-range. This refers usually to the offering site as a whole. An offering site can be used over a long time and involve many separate offerings. The way in which the offering site is formed over a period of time can give insight into the timeframe used. In other words, it may be possible to distinguish offerings connected to cyclical or incidental events. To make these distinctions visible a table will be made which shows the duration of the offering site in combination with the type of deposition – at once, continuous or in bundles. With these last two types it is important to identify patterns between separate depositions, when possible that can tell something about the composition of separate offerings.

1.5.6 HUMAN AGENTS

Who offered the goods is of importance for the understanding of any offering. Religion is theoretically approached from a social perspective that sees all religious practice as social action. Therefore it would be inconceivable to talk about offering sites without the agents involved. The identification of these agents is,
However, not easy and will be based on many generalities.
The placement of an offering site can give an indication of the social group involved. But the difficulty with offering sites in wet contexts is that they are almost never clearly demarcated. The position in the wider landscape can be of help here. For example, placement within or near a settlement context may point to local use. The size and importance of the settlement can be an indication of the importance of the offering site and its related social group.
The best indications derive from the complete social domain, with its roles and rules, of a society. And therefore it is important that offering sites are not investigated on their own but as part of a society. Identifying an offerer is less speculative if it is clear what kind of social persona takes part in the society as a whole.

1.5.7 CPS-AGENTS

The identification of a specific CPS-agent will be very difficult when there is no textual evidence. But as Boyer and Ramble explained above\textsuperscript{11} CPS-agents consist of general elements and specific religious concepts or infills. Although the religious concepts may be very difficult to determine, the general elements may be less resistant. To identify general elements that define a CPS-agent means to identify symbolic complexes which reoccur or are very specific. This is not just an attempt to avoid naming CPS-agents, but may help to get a better grip at the multiplicity of prehistoric religion. In the shift from cultural infill of a CPS-agent to general elements that define a CPS-agent, widespread cultural symbolic entities may become visible. Locally named CPS-agents may be seen as transformations of religious concepts that retain similar general elements. The cognitive study of Boyer and Ramble proposed that entities with too many breaches and transfers of domains will have less chance to become incorporated within a culture. It can therefore be proposed that separate CPS-agents do not breach or transfer many domains and in this way form relative coherent identities. The abilities of a CPS-agent can, however, be very diverse because certain breaches or transfers can give considerable power. For example, invisibility is more than not being seen. It means the CPS-agent can listen in unnoticed or make people trip and fall.
To summarize, in pre- and protohistoric archaeology it will be near impossible to identify the cultural infill of specific CPS-agents, like their name. The general elements of a CPS-agent could possibly be identified through analysing recurring symbolic complexes.

1.5.8 SUMMARY OF OFFERINGS

Offerings are specific religious rituals that involve the value-laden exchange of goods between human and CPS-agents. The what, where and when of the offering will depend on three elements: the offerer, the CPS-agent and the event. Offerings are connected to the social world in that they are meant to change the world. Because offerings are value-laden, these relations are likely to be expressed in a symbolic form. Any understanding of offerings has to involve these different aspects and be sensitive to the complex of relations involved.

1.6 A LANDSCAPE PERSPECTIVE

In the previous sections it has been argued that within the cognitive and social perspective religion and ritual are understood to be part of the everyday world of people even when religious practices take place in a separate place. To understand the place of the offerings in wet low-lying areas in relation to the everyday world a landscape perspective is added. This perspective will help to integrate the separate elements of the offerings as described above.
There are again many definitions of landscape available.\textsuperscript{114} Here I will combine several definitions as they each place emphasis on different aspects that are of importance for the analyses of offering sites. The European Landscape convention has defined landscape as “an area, perceived by people, whose character is the result of

\textsuperscript{113} See § 1.4.1.2.
\textsuperscript{114} For an overview, Ashmore and Knapp 1999 and Bender 2006.
the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.” Perception means at the same time belief/opinion and an awareness of things. According to Merleau-Ponty perception is always a bodily experience as people inhabit the world. People experience their world through the practices they perform within that world. These practices take up place and time. Time gives a landscape its depth as practices in specific places refer to the practices that went before and enables and constrains future practices. These practices in specific places are linked to narratives and worldviews which circulate within a society. Tilley sees landscape as “a series of named locales, a set of relational places linked by paths, movement and narratives.” According to Bender the landscape is besides all these things also a gendered and political landscape in which a person’s position influences the ability to perform certain practices or experience certain things. It follows from all these different approaches to the landscape that in a landscape perspective practices through space and time can be considered in a detailed manner on different scales and from different angles. Below the influences on the approach taken in this thesis will be put forward.

This thesis draws on the work of J.D. Hill in the sense that his contextual approach is seen as very relevant for understanding offerings in the Oer-IJ area. In short, Hill not only looks at the similarities and differences between different archaeological contexts, but is also concerned with how these deposits were created. Several researchers have continued in line with the work of Hill. Especially the study of fragmented objects has received attention in recent years, especially in relation to personhood. These studies, however, also include landscape and ritual and domestic practices. From the studies concerned with fragmentation it can be taken that a broken object is something that needs to be analysed not just to reconstruct the whole object it was part of but also to analyse the use of broken objects in the enchainment of social relations. Following Chapman and Gaydarska, broken objects can bring into mind people, objects and places that are not present and the placement of these broken objects within the landscape would be an important social practice. Furthermore, fragmented objects – even waste – are seen as compelling symbolic carriers of meaning in ritual practices such as rituals associated with death, regeneration and life-cycles. Due to the nature of his dataset, Hill concentrates on settlements. Brück and Chapman and Gaydarska look at the other parts of the landscape as well, but mainly burial contexts.

Another influence on this thesis is Therkorn her work on Noord-Holland, including the Oer-IJ area. In her work parts or fragments – especially feet – are considered as symbolically important in ritual depositions. However, Therkorn is most interesting when she looks at a broader scale. She relates ritual depositions in pits and linear features to a cosmological vision of the landscape in which the heavens play an important part. The cosmological vision encompassed economic and ritual activities and enabled the tracking of time and the seasons within a specific cultural framework. The year can be followed in the movement of the star constellation in the sky. At the beginning of the new year in January Horse starts to rise. The summer solstice is associated with new calves, the rising of the Pleiades and Cow. The harvest is associated with the rising of Greater Dog and during the slaughter period of November Thor/Donar rises, as Cow dies on the western horizon. The constellations Horse sometimes with rider (Pegasus), Cow (Taurus), Greater Dog (Canis Major) and, Donar/Thor (Hercules) were recreated in pits and linear features around the settlement. The pattern of Horse can also be associated with linear features to the west that may represent the Milky Way. Besides a spatial

115 Clark, Darlington and Fairclough 2003, 6-7.
117 Merleau-Ponty 1995 [1945].
118 Giddens 1985.
120 Tilley 1994, 34.
121 Bender 1998 and 2006.
122 Hill 1995, 95 and 98 a.o.
125 Chapman and Gaydarska 2007, 111.
127 Therkorn 2004, § 3.1.
128 Therkorn 2004, Ch. 6 and 7. See also, this thesis § 3.5.4 for a placement within the research tradition of the Oer-IJ area.
patterning there is also a material patterning in the ritual depositions within the pits and linear features with preferences for specific depositions per star-constellation. The features associated with the Milky Way divide the landscape into an inner and outer part of the settlement and the otherworldly (the heavenly landscape). Of special importance for this study is the linking of economic, seasonal and ritual practices into one framework this places religion in direct relation to all other elements of the society under study. This thesis lies somewhere in between these two approaches as it will look at the landscape of the Oer-IJ as the resource and outcome of peoples ideas about that landscape. Analyses will take place at three levels: the offering sites, the offering sites in relation to other sites in the Oer-IJ area, and the relations with the areas outside the Oer-IJ area. The level of analysis applied will be determined by the questions that are posed.

1.6.1 THE OFFERING SITES

At the level of the offering sites the practice involved with offerings in relation to the specific place can be analysed. As this research deals with offering sites in wet low-lying parts of the landscape it may seem that the question of where in the landscape ritual depositions took place is already answered. This is, however, not the case as, in the estuary landscape of the Oer-IJ area, water comes in many shapes and qualities. In chapter 4 the offering sites will therefore be grouped together not in archaeological periods or similarities in performed offering, but they are ordered in specific types of watery landscapes. This ordering will also be helpful in chapter 5 as the predictive maps will be based on landscape features in combination with archaeological sites and cultural rules.

The offering site itself is viewed as a place for specific ritual practices. The use and spatial structure of these places will be analysed at a small scale level. Hill sees how a deposit is created as a possible criterion for establishing ritual practices and the how could be more important than the when and what. The how of offerings can be explored with the concept of placement. Placement involves at the same time the manner and the specific place where an object is deposited. In placement the element of position is of importance as a position shapes a relation. Objects placed together can form symbolic connections. Patterns in deposition practices can be analysed when the different offerings are considered together. Hill showed that no preselection of materials should be made when studying ritual deposits. The same applies to establishing which characteristics, such as colour, origin, and texture, associated with these materials has cultural significance. The placement of different or similar objects together, whole or fragmented, can inform us on the meaningful relations used within the society under study.

The term site can be confusing in a landscape approach as a landscape is a continuous concept even when boundaries are present. It should therefore be clear that here with an offering site an archaeological site is meant in the sense that it concerns the excavated area or the archaeological find spot where a specific practice took place. In other words “offering site” is shorthand for “a place where an offering took place”.

1.6.2 THE OFFERING SITES IN RELATION TO THE LANDSCAPE OF THE REGION

The composition of the offering can be studied by just analysing the deposition itself, however, it can not be determined if we are dealing with a specific selection until we look outside the offering sites. To fully understand a selection, like an offering, it should be clear what the totality of choices was. In reality the totality of choices can not be defined as the archaeological remains are fragmentary. This does not mean that analysing selections in archaeology is futile, but that it has to be understood that the total picture is already a selection that is either formed consciously or unconsciously by cultural and/or natural processes. In other words, a selection can only be understood in comparison to a totality and the nature of this totality determines what kind of comparisons can be made.

Offering sites should therefore be studied not only in relation to other kind of sites but to the wider landscape in general. It is not just a question of what was selected, but also from where the selection was taken. Research has shown that when obtaining raw material for the production of artefacts besides practical qualities, the

129 See § 1.4.2.3.
130 Hill, 1995, 98.
location of its origin and associated narratives may also have been of importance.\textsuperscript{131} But also the origin of complete objects that where exchanged could be of significance.\textsuperscript{132}

In chapter three a background to the Oer-IJ area is given that provides us with an insight into what could be locally obtained and from what part of the landscape. The relation between the offerings and the surroundings are proposed in chapter 4. At this level possible meaningful connections can be made between the offerings and the surrounding landscape. People’s perception of the landscape they lived in may come to the fore when the selections they made and the practices involved are analysed. The spatial and temporal positions between different and similar practices will be important for people’s understanding and subsequent use of their landscape. But also links could be established between different parts of the landscape either through use of materials or similar practices.

1.6.3 RELATIONS WITH THE AREAS OUTSIDE THE OER-IJ AREA

An archaeological region is a construction of the present and the people of the past would not have been aware of all the boundaries we map. Although it can be argued on archaeological grounds that the main daily activities people undertook took place within this region people would have travelled outside the region.\textsuperscript{133} And they probably felt part of a wider society as cultural connections can be established over quite some distances.\textsuperscript{134}

The offering sites will therefore be analysed in relation to the offering sites of North Germany, Denmark and South Sweden as described in chapter 2. The way a landscape is perceived also depends on the knowledge or experience of other landscapes. In chapter 4 attention will be paid to the incorporation of foreign/imported objects within the offering sites. The way in which foreign/imported objects were incorporated into the local life world may give an indication not only of how they perceived the outside world but also how they perceived their own landscape.

To summarize, the landscape will be viewed as a locality in which certain activities were performed in specific places and as a resource from which people drew certain materials to create a narrative about their perception of the landscape.

\textsuperscript{133} Van Heeringen 1992.