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)
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ENGLISH SUMMARY

BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

This thesis is part of the NWO1 stimulation programme ‘Protecting and developing the Dutch archaeological-historical landscape’ with the aim to make a scientific contribution to the present-day policy issue of embedding archaeological-historical values within the environmental planning process.2 Two key concepts within the programme are ‘the biography of landscape’ and ‘thinking and doing’. The concept biography of the landscape is chosen for its capacity to form internal integration between the different cultural-historical values as they are studied within archaeology, historical geography and architectural history. The biography of the landscape is also seen as a bridging concept between cultural history and the environmental planners. The concept of thinking and doing is related to action research in which the collaboration between policy making and research is studied.

Within the programme four regional projects are initiated that are situated across different parts of the Netherlands. 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’ (Oer-IJ project) is one of the regional studies.

The Oer-IJ area is situated between the Noordzee coast and the modern cities of Alkmaar, Amsterdam and Haarlem (figure 1.1). The Oer-IJ project has three research strategies: archaeological-historical studies into the developments of the area from 2000 BC onward and the formulation of habitational/land use models and predictive maps; action research into the application of the concept of the cultural biography of landscape within archaeological heritage management of the region; and applied research that assesses the physical quality of an archaeological monument and how this can be monitored in the future. The archaeological-historical studies will produce the characteristics for the cultural biography with ‘water’ as a binding theme. This thesis is one of the archaeological-historical studies and focuses on the pre- and protohistory of the area. Gerard Alders studies the region from the Early Medieval Period onwards, Heleen van Londen is responsible for the cultural biography of the landscape and action research, and Liesbeth Theunissen has undertaken the applied research.

AIM OF THE RESEARCH

During the last two decades several large scale sites that have been excavated in the Oer-IJ region 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. This absence is partly due to the lack of integration of these sites into the habitation/land use models of the Oer-IJ region and the consequential absence in predictive models and maps that are an important tool in archaeological heritage management. Furthermore, the emphasis on settlements in predictive models of the Holocene area has led to a focus on the higher parts of the landscape, which minimizes the change of discovery of use of the wet lower lying parts of the landscape. Moreover, there is little attention for religion and religious practices in Dutch archaeology.

The aim of this research is to analyse all the offering sites in wet low-lying areas in the Oer-IJ region 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 and as building blocks for the characterization of the Oer-IJ region.

1 Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research.
CHAPTER 1

This chapter describes the theoretical background following three perspectives, respectively a cognitive, a social and a landscape perspective. The cognitive perspective is chosen for its clear definitions and explanations of ritual and religion without a specific cultural infill. The social perspective views religion as a social phenomenon and studies religious practices as actions that are embedded in the social world. As actions take up place and offering sites are studied in relation to the landscape a landscape perspective is used that integrates the other perspectives. The landscape approach guides the archaeological interpretations and predictive maps.

Religion is defined as “a symbolic-cultural system of ritual acts accompanied by an extensive and largely shared conceptual scheme that includes culturally postulated superhuman agents.” Religious rituals are defined as actions in which CPS-actors have a role and that lead to a change in the religious world. According to Boyer people have intuitive assumptions about the characteristics of things based on the ontological category to which they belong. Moreover, the number of ontological categories is limited to animal, person, tool (man-made object), natural object, and plant. A characteristic of CPS-actors is that they transgress the ontological categories. CPS-actors are social persona with specific attributes that demand specific social interaction. Religious rituals, such as offerings, are analysed as any other social action within the framework of Giddens’ concept of the ‘duality of structure’ in which actions constitute social institutes and social institutes influence actions. An offering is an action that consists of an exchange between persons and CPS-actors. Offerings are analysed in relation to several elements (themes) that make up an offering with an emphasis on the archaeological components. The themes are: time, locality, the offering, the event, person, and CPS-actor.

The landscape approach not only analyses the location of the offering sites, but also relates the offering to the broader social world. This will take place at three spatial levels. At the level of the offering site the specific landscape elements in which the offerings take place will be studied and the placement of objects within the offering sites. It is assumed that the together or separate placement of objects can inform us about meaningful relations. At the level of the region objects inside and outside the offering sites will be studied to determine selections. Furthermore, the specific location within the region from which objects can be taken will be analysed to establish if there are possible connections within the landscape. Besides the spatial relations between offerings and other (non)ritual practices will analysed, where, especially, the relations with everyday practices can be important for the interpretation. The last level exceeds the region; here it is important that knowledge of other landscapes can influence how people experience their own landscape. The emphasis will be on the meaning of imported objects and their characteristics and the way in which they are used within offerings.

CHAPTER 2

Following the idea that the characteristics of specific offerings cannot be determined in advance, in this chapter an overview will be given of offering sites in wet parts of the landscape of Northwest Europe, and particular North-Germany, Denmark and South-Sweden. This region is chosen as it has a long research tradition, including excavations, into offering sites and the Oer-IJ is situated at the western edge of the Germanic world. Hundred offering sites, which are described in the main literature as such, are analysed according to the themes as given in chapter 1. The most used classifications of offering sites are described and evaluated. These classifications based on type-sites are problematic and a different approach is taken up in this chapter which uses the ontological categories. Although some trends could be established, each offering site has a unique combination of characteristics.

In the literature there is a stronger emphasis on metal objects than on organic objects. And in general objects receive more attention than the landscape contexts in which they are found. This bias is partly due to the (small scale) character of most excavations that are focusing at artefact depositions.
CHAPTER 3

In this chapter a general background of the Oer-IJ is given. The research history of the Oer-IJ area is described in order to place the present study in its wider context. Furthermore the geological and ecological developments are given. The emphasis on geology and ecology is necessary as they are the base for the reconstructed landscapes of the past on which the predictions in chapter 5 will be based. Therefore Peter Vos has made six new palaeogeographical maps and a geolandscape map and he has described the geological development of the area. This contribution is translated by the author of this thesis and placed integral into the thesis. From chapter 1 it follows that offerings are part of the socially lived world of people. For a better understanding of offering sites the socio-cultural development of the Oer-IJ area is given, in this way offering sites can be placed within their socio-cultural context.

CHAPTER 4

In this chapter the offering sites in the low-lying parts of the Oer-IJ region are studied. All 499 known sites from the literature are analysed according to the criteria, locality, place(ment), time and similarities and difference with other find complexes. On the basis of this analysis 22 locations are interpreted as offering sites. An offering site is a location where an offering took place. In chapter 2 the infrequent study of the connections between offering sites and the wider landscape is seen as problematic. In order to overcome this problem the 22 offering sites in the Oer-IJ area are divided into four groups on the basis of their location within the landscape. These four groups are: peaty/marshy areas on or next to (former) coastal barriers, large peat areas in the eastern part of the Oer-IJ area, creeks, and low-lying parts on the side of the Oer-IJ streambed. A short description of the offering sites is given, including the reason for defining it as an offering site. Next the offering sites will be analysed according to the themes as described in chapter 1 and an archaeological model is formed (figure 4.48). It will be shown that the choice of location of the offering sites changes through time. This change is probably related to the idea that offerings need to take place in fresh water. Furthermore there seems to be a preference for the wet parts of the landscape that have a visible limit. In the early periods offerings take place in areas that have no buildings in it. Only in the Roman Iron Age offerings start to take place in areas that are already cultivated to some extent. During the early periods most of the offerings are singular and cover a small time span. From the Middle Iron Age onward most offering sites contain different types of object and the sites are used over a longer time span. On the basis of the social structure, the location of offering sites, the characteristic of the offerings, and the lack of a need for ritual specialist it seems likely that all members of a household used the offering sites. There is no standard offering in the Oer-IJ area. However, there seems to be a preference for: head and leg elements of animals, especially of horse, dog and cattle; loose human bones with a more strict selection of bones from the head and extremities; hard, red and white objects from outside the Oer-IJ area, like stones and Roman pottery and tiles; wood from different parts of the landscape within the Oer-IJ area; and different types of soils for the shaping of earthen works. Through the use of specific colours, elements from different parts of the landscape, and specific parts of humans and animals in the wet offering sites of the Oer-IJ area complex narratives were constructed.

CHAPTER 5

In this chapter qualitative predictions about the location of offering sites in wet parts of the landscape are made with the hope that they will be implemented in the archaeological heritage management of the region. Fourteen questions are formulated that are related to the predictive model and its application. These questions and their answers could help with the use and evaluation of the predictive model in the future. The base report of Van Leusen et al., produced within the NWO programme, is used as a guideline. The six themes they discuss in order to develop the quality of predictive models are followed within this chapter. This means that the following aspects will be gone into: quality and quantity of the data, landscape factors, the use of socio-

5 Van Leusen et al. 2006.
cultural factors, high spatial resolution, spatial statistics, and testing. The last two themes will have to be dealt with in future research.

Five assumptions have been made in relation to the predictive model of the Oer-IJ.
1. Human activities are patterned in various ways and scales.
2. During the period under study offerings were not made in salt water.
3. During the period under study the offering sites were situated near fields and settlements.
4. During the period under study there appears to be an association between barrows and embankments and offering sites.
5. Although during the period under study anything could be considered an offering, there are certain preferences.

Two types of predictive models were made. The first type is based on socio-cultural rules in relation to the landscape. On five diachronic palaeogeographical maps (figure 5.4-5.8) zones where offering sites are expected are shaded in grey tones. These maps are brought together in a colour map (figure 5.9) where each colour indicates a specific prediction instead of a quantitative scale of expectation. The second type of predictive model takes at its starting point known archaeological sites and the landscape elements that are still present directly underneath the topsoil. A geolandscape map (fold out map 1) is developed with an emphasis on old water ways. This map does not include the dunes as they are a protected area and the southern part of the Oer-IJ area as it is largely covered by built-up areas. Each archaeological site is represented on the map with a dot and a number. When the site contains more or other archaeological elements than pottery sherds an open circle with a diameter of 250 m is drawn around the site. If within the circle a(n) (old) water way exists the circle is filled in with a grey colour. Where grey circles overlap the colour darkens and the change to find a possible offering site increases.

The chapter closes with two examples of the design/lay-out of the present-day landscape in which a connection could be made between the present, (prehistoric) practices and offering sites.