From the Assendelver Polder to Oer-IJ Estuary Project

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Introduction
Roel Brandt was one of the directors, with Sander van der Leeuw and Bert Voorrips, of the Assendelver Polder Project (APP), initiated in 1978, as Van der Leeuw has outlined in the first chapter of this volume in his concise description of the project’s international background, aims and methods, personnel and task divisions. In these following pages, I want to go into three aspects from my perspective over the last twenty-seven years. Firstly, as one of Roel’s graduate students, in doing fieldwork in Assendelft, when Roel in his role as the director of the fieldwork also instigated a modernisation of excavation and recording techniques at the Institute for Pre- and Protohistory (IPP), University of Amsterdam. Secondly, some aspects of effected change will be mentioned in the theoretical emphasis of the APP implemented during the years 1981-1985 through APP directors working with their graduate students/recent graduates at the IPP. During this same period, Roel Brandt also extended the APP field of inquiry by broadening the scope of the project to the Oer-IJ estuary, in general. Insights gained during excavations carried out during the APP as well as the infusion of social theory provided a springboard towards putting those results into the context of a regional setting. Thirdly, just three points will be made on these later excavations in briefly illustrating how the original APP aims and interpretations are still reverberating within the Oer-IJ estuary research area, twenty-seven years later. Mentioned are facets of taking land into use, specifics on APP perception in regards to peat landscapes through more recent fieldwork within the Assendelver polders, and particulars of what I have termed the 'Roelmowadi tradition'. This last consists of three specific features - a spatial syntax of marking landscape - confined to only part of the Oer-IJ region, but with good parallels as far away as Scandinavia. Thus, from the directors bringing a scope of internationality to the APP, in the framework of research aims, methods in fieldwork, and theory, to widening the spatial scale to excavations of the Oer-IJ estuary region, the scale must be broadened again. It was all put into motion -through instigating, innovating, facilitating and motivating - by Roel Brandt during the last years of his full-time academic career at the University of Amsterdam.

1 See also e.g. Van der Leeuw 1987 for a more detailed summary, and for the analyses of the sites with ecology, cf. Brandt, Groenman-van waateringe & Van der Leeuw 1987; Meffert 1998.
2 At that time there was no undergraduate study of archaeology within the Netherlands. A four-year candidaats degree (c. Bachelors) was first taken within another subject, before one did a doctoral study (c. Masters) in archaeology.
Little was known of the Oer-IJ estuary area twenty-seven years ago. Within the Assendelver Polders, the constant vigilance by the amateurs of the Zaanstreek had revealed more than 60 sites of the (Roman) Iron Age through field-walking along the upcast from freshly cleaned field ditches. Through the years, the broad, linear pattern of suspected habitation traces on peat had remained constant, and it extended up to Krommenie, where sites were also present.

There had also been five excavations of farmhouses done by the start of the project in 1978, and it was known that preservation was excellent.

To the west of the peat area, nothing was known of traces to be found on the creek levee system, a modest tributary network connected to the main Oer-IJ estuarine channel, further to the west, lying outside of the Assendelver polders (fig. 1 and 2).

There was also little known of the wider region of the Oer-IJ estuary. Up to 1978, larger excavations had been carried out by the State Service for Archaeology (ROB) of Iron Age/Roman Iron Age settlement remains by Santpoort-Spanjaardsberg and within the Corus terrain (Velsen-Hoogovens), as well as a Bronze Age barrow complex in Hofgeest, now part of the Velsbroek. These early excavations had revealed the proverbial tip of an iceberg which has been further uncovered in a continuing stream these past decades. Figure 2 shows where main excavations have occurred within the Oer-IJ region after 1978 that have shown Iron Age/Roman Iron Age traces. In the following, I will limit myself to a few points on prehistoric traces, although the medieval period was also taken up within the APP.

Consideration how little was then known of the area, an enormous amount of information was generated during the total of eight months spent in the field (in 1978-1982) during the APP when more than five hectares were excavated at fifteen locations with prehistoric traces, and other sites were located through survey done by core-boring.

### Towards a coherent recording system

The layered approach, to an extent based on Flannery’s research framework in Mesoamerica, as Van der Leeuw has set out in this volume, was taken up during Assendelft fieldwork as that used to approach details of house and settlement features, and inter-site relationships. For this region, however, the framework turned out to be too simple, as will be mentioned below.

First the fieldwork had to be done. Brandt was in charge, within the set-up of practical activities in achieving the aims, and as a task division among the directors of the project. How much of certain sites should be excavated was based on a combination of judgements on known find-spots, those indicated by new survey by core-boring and ongoing excavation results.

The APP is where Brandt also implemented changes within the IPP affecting the structure of recording, and importantly in having a system developed which could accommodate site documentation in a Holocene situation with stratigraphy representing cyclical, changing environments. Whatever the site situation, however, the system used at the IPP needed an enormous makeover in style of documentation, with increased interpretation in the field which could accommodate site documentation in a Holocene situation with stratigraphy representing cyclical, changing environments. Whatever the site situation, however, the system used at the IPP needed an enormous makeover in style of documentation, with increased interpretation in the field which

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3 See Van der Leeuw 1987: 3 (fig. 1.3).
5 Modderman 1961; Jelgersma et al. 1970; Woltering 1979 respectively.
6 See Lange, Besselsen & Van Londen 2004 for the Archeologische Kennisinventarisatie of the Oer-IJ estuary, which also contains the latest series of periodised, palaeo-morphological maps by Vos and Soonius.
7 Seven medieval house sites as well as the oldest church in Assendelft were done during the APP: see Besteman & Guiran 1987.
8 Flannery 1976.
commensurately related to ending the hegemony of the field technician approach to excavation. How excavations had been done was, up to the APP, largely a technical matter, decided upon by the technical field staff who were not concerned with interpretation or acquainted with results obtained elsewhere which might influence field procedures. Excavating was just done more or less by rote, mainly by unskilled labourers hired to dig off layers by arbitrary levels and/or shovel-clean. There had been open area excavations (such as Hoogkarspel), done by hydraulic-excavator, with at times a very small contingent of students. These largely inexperienced students were required to do a protocolboek as part of their course work, but there was not always a harmony struck between purpose and method within a hierarchy of positions where the technical field staff held sway. Usually, the member of the academic staff responsible for interpretation visited the site only once a week to talk with the field technician, and perhaps the student doing course work. ‘Recording’ was done in day and week reports where features were described, if at all, and it is quite enervating to attempt to work out what the basic data was from these older excavations where information is arranged according to the day or week the traces were uncovered.

Undoubtedly this was all a matter of expediency given the lack of funding, but there was also a prevalent mentality that gathering primary data was purely a technical matter, to be done only by certain people within a hierarchy of tasks where the actual digging was the least important. Information on stratigraphy and retrieving find-materials was totally haphazard through digging layers and collecting materials by arbitrary level. This applied both to the horizontal dimension, with materials from different layers and features winding up in one bag, and at the scale of an individual feature which was chopped through, whereby different feature layers were not distinguished, nor what these different layers represented.

For the APP, Roel Brandt wanted a different system based on his experience and through his international orientation, particularly towards Great Britain and the United States. In addition to the greater integration of knowledge between archaeologist, geologist and ecological specialists expected during fieldwork, it also involved altering the ‘least effort’, traditional, IPP recording system. The recording system went hand in hand with the type of qualified personnel needed in the field throughout daily and ongoing interpretation, and also where the tradition of ‘absentee director’ would - at least for the APP, and later Oer-IJ excavations - become of a time past.

Prior to the start of fieldwork, I was given the job by Roel, as part of a student assistantship, for designing the basic field-recording system. It became based on my field experience in the United States, Great Britain and the Netherlands. Combinations could be made of the better points of each system with which I was acquainted. With the help of Aniek Abbink, we strived for a flexible system, where information was to be recorded on pre-printed forms, and which could accommodate the most complicated type of site as well as the simplest. Information on forms was designed for both inter-relating by hand as well as for computer input. Especially the ‘feature forms’ were basic to forcing (encouraging?) one in the field to write down primary observations on features, the interrelationships of features, including natural and cultural layers, the archaeological context of materials and state, how materials had been deposited in features, and how the intra-feature layering had arisen.

While this was basic to systems used in Great Britain and the United States, for example, it was without the abhorrence of missing artefacts as the Dutch system incorporating hydraulic excavators was retained, but there was an attempt at a sampling strategy. Qualified personnel in the field were necessary during the APP to make ongoing decisions, according to ongoing interpretation of basic data, which was recorded as objectively as possible, without leaping to interpretation. There was enough - generally experienced personnel to keep pace with the areas uncovered by the machine man in his hydraulic-excavator, and there was time to excavate features by hand when necessary, and three-dimensional excavation techniques were introduced.

As there were not enough experienced people within the IPP to accomplish APP fieldwork (or other aspects of the project), an announcement was placed in the international calendar of foreign excavations with a call for volunteers who would be supplied with room and board during the field seasons. The call to work in Assendelft was answered mainly by some of the roving bands of British, experienced volunteer archaeologists. Excavating three-dimensionally mainly with trowels and getting dirty was the norm in Great Britain, and a long tradition. For the Assendelver sites, this was certainly an advantage, and particularly essential

9 Also taking part were volunteers from Ireland, the United States, Finland, France, Australia and Cameroon: cf. Van der Leeuw 1987: 4.
10 Sir Mortimer Wheeler is credited with introducing the British system of volunteer archaeologists who were paid a small daily stipend on his excavations at Maiden Castle during the 1930s, and who supplanted, in the main, the workforce of hired labourers.
for the peat sites. Site Q, for example, could be excavated in ten
days because of the five British volunteers experienced in three-
dimensional excavation techniques, obviously necessary when
posts, wattle-walling, floor layers and materials on them are
preserved (fig. 3). On the other hand, these volunteers generally had no idea what
to do with the Dutch type of razor-sharp shovel, or the immensely
profitably way it can be used, but they learned. In working with
the experienced drivers of the hydraulic-excavator, layers could
also be taken off three-dimensionally at the sandy clay sites when
warranted, in the process of working with these machine drivers
in achieving clarity of the traces. During previous IPP excavations,
the main aim seemed to simply do a number of square metres
per day, while achieving a nice level surface. Some of the British
were aghast at how much was ‘destroyed’ at the creek-levee sites
where the Dutch methods of excavating were retained through not
laboriously excavating everything completely, or by hand.
The ending of the hegemony of the technical field staff at the IPP
in deciding on how excavations should proceed had much to do
with Brandt’s recognition that interpretation in the field in regards
to the aims of a project had to proceed hand-in-hand. At the sites
to be only partially excavated, decisions had to be made on a daily
basis on which areas to excavate to reveal the most information in
conjunction with that already recovered at that site and in relation
to what had been found at the other sites. This was a sampling
strategy in itself where, it again must be stated, little was known
of traces in the Assendelver polders, except for the small areas of a
few farmhouses excavated prior to the APP.
An attempt was made at gaining a good balance between choosing
on the one hand to excavate as much as possible of a site, to gain
an overall view of activities through feature extent and types, but
this also required decisions on how much time was spent collecting
deposited materials. As said, haphazard collection of materials was
a tradition of previous IPP excavations, and a strategy was needed
to deal with how much of the features should be excavated to
gain a representative sample of the materials deposited in them.
Keeping to the Dutch tradition of not excavating features totally,
sampling strategies were developed, influenced by American
practices and statistics. Just as with materials deposited in features/layers, the idea was to
develop as well a valid method for soil sampling for environmental
and crop indications, and the strategy was decided upon with
Willy Groenman-van Waateringe for the samples to be taken in
the field. Kees Troostheide, her assistant, did the sieving for
macro-remains during the field seasons as well as the pollen
identifications. Site supervisors were kept informed of the results,
and whether the strategy was proving worthwhile or should be
changed. For approaching the habitation traces, there was also
input through the visiting Irish researcher Ann Lynch, studying
ecology at the IPP, in developing a sampling strategy for cultural
deposits with macro-remains such as house floors and post-holes.
Tool marks on wood and woodland management was also put
on the agenda through contact and working with the English
researcher Maisie Taylor, and this also affected how wood was
collected, at both the peat and creek-levee sites.
There was constant vigilance by the project directors in keeping

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12 Abbink & Voorrips 1980.
13 Cf. e.g. Groenman-van Waateringe & Troostheide 1987; Pals 1987.
abreast with developments in the field, in assessing results within the project design and in co-ordination with ongoing analyses. For the supervisors of the fieldwork, Aniek Abbink, Annelou van Gijn, and myself, Brandt’s role at all levels was enormously stimulating and certainly facilitating in keeping things running smoothly - from getting ‘plastic’ graph introduced for field drawings, to arranging portophones for communicating with each team of the Assendelver enterprise - but especially as director of excavations in his role within ongoing interpretations. He did this with people, in a non-autocratic or competitive manner. He digested information, judged varying options and made decisions - all very quickly - to get things done. He actually, after the initial decision to take you on board, trusted you to inform him correctly, while giving him a number of options for further procedures, on which he then very quickly decided on the course to be taken, according to his position of over-seeing excavations. He led with his ears, rather than his mouth. Critical reflection was a constant feature of the summers spent in Assendelft, within the spiral towards understanding the archaeology, and later into the presentation and the publication phase, where again Brandt’s interest in achieving quality also included working with graduate students of the IPP.

Methodology and didactics: social theory
Brandt had much to do with integrating new impulses coming from recent social theory during the APP analyses and publication phase. Again, from the perspective (and perception) of a graduate student, one can emphasize Brandt’s didactic-academic qualities during the years 1981-1984. New modes of approaching archaeology entered the scene mainly through international contacts with archaeologists, and through to other disciplines, mainly through books. At the micro-level of the IPP, Brandt sparked innovations because of his international orientation and in keeping his ears open.

Roel’s bachelor study (candidaats) had been Human Geography, and that may be a starting point for understanding why he was so susceptible to new impulses from social theory of the type which began to play a prominent role in analyses and interpretation of the Assendelver data. He in any case greatly promoted exploring new theory and methods, through encouraging graduate students to do it. As there is some misconception on this within the battle of views on paradigms and Dutch archaeology as history, I will detail a few points on this micro-scale of developments, which show how actual transformation occurred, from within the APP. One of the supervisors of the APP fieldwork, Aniek Abbink was doing her MA thesis, completed in 1983, through combining the studies of her candidaats Human Geography with an MA in Cultural Prehistory in a critique of New Archaeology and New Geography. This she did through her years of interest in Marxist and neo-Marxist theory, but through the inherent dilemmas couched therein she was looking for better approaches. Her supervisor for the Human Geography component was Petr Dóstal. He suggested she read Anthony Giddens (1979) Central Problems in Social Theory as well as works by Derek Gregory and Tommy Carlstein.

Interesting combinations became available for archaeological analyses through structuration theory and time-space theory. Everyday practice, human agency, norms and traditions within social reproduction became catch-phases at this time, towards refining interpretation within archaeology, and at the practical level of the APP analyses. Importantly, ‘environment’ could also be approached as a social construct through the neo-structuralist current within human geography. Abbink’s co-supervisor was Sander van der Leeuw and they had lively discussions considering his more behavioural, systems-analysis approach.

Within this same period, Roel came back from a short visit to Cambridge in 1982, with a book that he gave to me saying it was seen as a hot item there. It was Pierre Bourdieu’s (1977) Outline of a Theory of Practice. As I was doing my MA thesis on the housing of the Assendelver Polders through a structuralist, anthropological perspective of enclosed space, this book was of course of immense importance through Bourdieu’s approach to ‘culture’ as habitus, and the important place of the dwelling therein.

At the same time, Roel had become acquainted with Maria Garthoff-Zwaan, who had recently completed her MA thesis on Middle Dutch texts within a mentality studies approach. Roel stimulated her interest in developing ideas further for their use within archaeology, and specifically for APP analyses. The scope of analyses could be broadened in regarding past selection of materials and perception of the environment within the longue durée, as developed by the French Annales historians, and particularly in the understandings of outillage mental or expérience vécue that slowly arises in combination to people’s natural environment, material conditions and quality of existence.

So, here we have structuration theory, structural anthropology

15 I might also add that Roel introduced a daily stipend of fl.35 for the supervisors during the APP, which was the start of a two-tiered system implemented at the IPP, and serving as an encouragement for those experienced in fieldwork to take part in excavations after they had completed the required course work of minimally 18 weeks.

16 Cf. e.g. Slofstra (1994) and Louwe Kooijmans (1994) generalizing Dutch archaeology; Hodder (e.g. 1986: 9-10) on transformations.

17 The Cambridge connection had arisen in the late 1970s; Ian Hodder had also been induced to be a guest lecturer at the IPP for one-half year, in 1979.

18 Anthropology had been my bachelor study in America. Both Roel Brandt and Bert Voorrips were my supervisors.

19 Garthoff-Zwaan 1986; cf. e.g. Ariès 1978; Febvre 1954.
and ethnohistory - all with evident interleaving facets - as a new package of analytic possibilities entering the APP in the early 1980s, activated and encouraged by the directors and certainly enlivening the interpretation process and bringing about new approaches to analyses. That is, change for understanding was a feature of the APP, within a dialectic approach through reflecting on the inadequacies of existing approaches for interpreting the data. See, for example, the volume Gedacht over Assendelft. Despite the 1986 date, it is the product of interpretation going on within the APP from 1981 to 1984. Most of the papers included had been presented at the TAG conference in 1984, taking place that year in Cambridge, when APP directors and graduates formed a ‘Dutch’ session. Perception was a keyword and a main theme within this stage of interpreting APP results. Through the combination of data and theory, one attempted to escape - or at least to become aware of - imposing ‘common sense’, modern perception in interpreting the past.

Structuration theory was introduced in relation to structures of allocation and authorization, symbolic and structural analysis and environment (Abblink), dwellings could be analysed as part of habitus, space perception, and gender (Therkorn) and an ethnohistorical approach was shown to be useful for bringing a cultural dimension to selection of natural materials (Garthoff-Zwaan). The wider area and what the various landscapes had to offer, within a model of environment and economic dynamics, was developed by Brandt and Van Gijn for the Oer-IJ region. For the even greater time and regional scale, Roel also applied ‘perception’ to the Bronze Age of Hoogkarspel, touching on the more modern Dutch history of wrestling with water as inculcating previous, and implicit, interpretations of the past. Vera Beemster, an IPP graduate student of ecology, took the theme of perception within her analysis of ecological sampling and inherent assumptions. Van der Leeuw also considered structuration theory and possible combinations for archaeology within his focus on system and cognition theory for regarding aspects of categorization and making judgements, routinized and non-routinized practice, through to transformed concepts, and in non-transforming concepts in regards to control of the environment. These were all apparent departures from a ‘processual archaeology’, however one defines it, as developments, through working together with the possibilities afforded through the Assendelver data, in combination with relatively new social theory.

And, then through broadening the scale of data collection, to gain greater understanding of the region.

‘Multi-vocality’, in theory and mode of interpretation, was a term certainly not current in the early 1980s, but it applies very well to the APP. The project would become known as ‘Landscape archaeology’, which has remained the theme of the broadened excavation scale of Oer-IJ estuary region, not just as an interesting way of actually saying ‘settlement archaeology’, but in attempting to delineate dynamics and traditions as past perception, in use of various settings - micro and macro - and in relation to consciousness of the short-comings of modern perception on settings of the past. Brandt realized at the same time that the past of the Assendelver Polder could not be understood by regarding the Assendelver polders, only, an unexpected outcome of the APP fieldwork.

From Assendelft to the Oer-IJ region: cycles of land use

After 1982, Brandt facilitated carrying on the aims of the APP by widening the focus to enfold other Holocene eco-zones of the region within the excavation programme of the IPP. As director of the Oer-IJ Estuary Project, he arranged for excavations within the areas of Schagen and Uitgeest, the Velsenbroek, Krommeniewoud Polder and the Uitgeesterbroek Polder during the years 1983-1988. In contrast to the Assendelver project, which was funded through a large grant, these rescue excavations were carried out on limited budgets, with consequences for personnel and support. And, if I seem to be citing myself quite a lot in some of the following pages, it is because I carried on, through a series of contracts, arranged by Roel, with these excavations, carried out with the growing number of IPP students and a few Dutch volunteers. The remainder of the APP team had disbanded, and moved off to different activities and jobs, as the job-market for archaeology did start to improve, by 1985.

One had numerous sites to choose from within the province of Noord-Holland through plans for housing and industrial estates and expansion of the roadway infrastructure. Through contact with the provincial archaeologist Flip Woltering (ROB) and amateur archaeologists, Roel choose sites for excavation for addressing the continuing aims of the project as well as in a greater emphasis.
on diachronic developments. At the same time, the various environmental zones of the Oer-IJ could be explored, all with excellent preservation and up to a 2.5 m deep stratigraphy. Chronology would become broadened by more than 2000 years, from the earliest traces in the Velsbroek c. 1900 BC, to the latest in Schagen c. 350 AD, but also with a growing attention to prehistoric traditions distinguishable in Medieval traces. The relationship between a dynamic Holocene environment and what people did with it through the long term had been taken up within the APP interpretations. One facet here is that the Assendelver polders had not only been used for permanent habitation. It is one of the most important results of the APP.

Flannery's settlement layers were too confined for interpreting land use of this changing Holocene area as shown by the fieldwork results. By being specific in the aims during the initial APP, some aspects of land use came to the fore in being different to that expected. That with hindsight was logical - Assendelft is not a region of Mexico, where the terrain is static. They did things differently here. From the original research design through to fieldwork, there arose a shifting emphasis through appreciating the combination of the changing physical landscape and the various combinations afforded, in addition to that of founding permanent habitation complexes. This was a facet unknown, and unsuspected, at the initiation of the APP. There was the assumption we would be excavating a permanently settled landscape, something certainly imbedded in, and the focus of, Dutch archaeology twenty-seven years ago.

The understanding of a form of gradual colonization started in Assendelft at site N, in 1981, where a deep section through the creek was made, as geologist Peter Vos needed more information on the build-up and dating of the creek levee system for his palaeogeographic reconstructions. During APP fieldwork, we had recognized that the phase of dwelling on the creek levee sites was after the creek system had silted up. The creek section at site N became important, not only for geology, but also as deposits had been made in the creek when it was still functioning as open water and the levees were building up through regular flooding. Recovered deep in the creek bed was pottery and bone, including worked bone artefacts, with a dating in the earlier Iron Age. These were traces of people using the area before it was permanently inhabited and features pre-dating those contemporary with housing on the banks could be put into perspective, as well, for most of the other sites excavated on the creek levees. Conceptualising a sequence of land use, rather than just permanent settlement, became a key to understanding the region. Within the dynamics of the environment, the different environmental/ecological zones of the region, with a range of resources, were examined for the opportunities afforded, within a time-space approach. At the small scale of the Assendelver polder levee sites, a pattern could be established within the different phases of the levee sites, where large (livestock) enclosures and/or cultivation traces generally preceded traces of permanent settlement. A model was also formulated for the larger region of land use-sequences, including transhumance to permanent settlements within the Assendelver polders, and then back again to the west, to higher ground of the Oer-IJ region.

Fieldwork outside of the Assendelver polders showed these main facets to be a tradition of how areas were generally taken into use within the Oer-IJ Estuary. After the lesson learned at site N, low lying areas and all creeks became important at excavations subsequent to those of the APP. Landscape was not just a ‘settlement’ but was the totality of physical combinations, high and dry as well as low-lying areas, to fill in the lacunae of landscape use and marking. As at site N, (votive) deposits in open creeks and low-lying areas were found to be part of a tradition during initial land use, whether in the Velsbroek in the Late Neolithic and Bronze Age, or in the later Iron Age/Roman Iron Age of the Uitgeesterbroek Polder and Uitgeest. Activities associated with first use as grazing grounds and/or cultivation could be delineated and they were all prior to permanent habitation, and thus in line with that delineated for the Assendelver polders, and a pattern began to emerge. These economic traces are always accompanied by a (ritual) marking of the landscape, and marking seems primarily associated with watery areas.

While Roel was arranging to have excavations done, and getting funding, within the Oer-IJ project from 1983 to 1988, he had increasing less to do with additional practicalities of fieldwork, as he was pioneering areas of archaeology, other than the Institute’s landscape of academia. He was setting up RAAP. Taking the survey experience from the APP, dozens of new sites were recognized within the larger region. Brandt’s interests in further developing survey techniques were combined as well within the Oer-IJ through

25 See Vos 1983 for this earlier model. For the latest interpretation, where the Oer-IJ outlet to the sea is now understood to have been by Castricum, rather than the more northerly Egmond, see Figure 2 (this paper) for one of the period reconstructions, or Lange (et al. 2004) with this and the other periods.
his research and development program and later excavations. They could be used as a testing ground: for example, in 1986, a team came to do phosphate analyses of an excavated house site in the Velsbroek; in 1987, at Uitgeesterbroek Polder 18, resistivity survey was done on an area subsequently excavated; in 1997, when we were revisiting Assendelft, micro-morphological analyses were done by RAAP.

Assendelft revisited: revising the perception of peat possibilities

As part of the Oer-IJ Estuary Project, we again excavated in the Assendeler Polders during 1996/97. This time, the opportunity to carry out fieldwork was due to a housing estate, the Vinex location Zaandelft, which was to cover c. 96 ha of the northern part of the polder’s prehistoric peat landscape. There were nine AWN find-spots known from the ditch sides within this area, and kilometres of trial trenches were done during 1996 to establish the nature of the traces in between the field ditches. Dating to the Iron Age and Roman Iron Age, farmhouse sites were indicated, everywhere, and there were other features such as pruning waste, quite a few cow paths, dug gullies and a few pits.

Before and during the APP, farmhouses located on peat had been excavated, but only a limited extent of the immediate surroundings could be uncovered. And, generally, c.1980, archaeologists were wondering why people settled the peat area anyway. Ironically, the dozens of find-spots within the Assendelver Polder and Krommeniewoud Polder were recognized only because the local group of amateurs had been field-walking for decades, examining the upcast from the cleaned, grassland ditches. Professional archaeologists did not consider looking at peat areas as they were seen as completely ‘marginal’ for settlement within the prevailing archaeologist, geologist and ecologist mentality twenty-five years ago. Larger scale excavations were needed to see how the features interrelated with dwellings. Essentially, the 1996 trial trenches in the peat indicated a normal array of features such as was known from the creek-levée sites uncovered during the APP.

In 1997, a total of four hectares was excavated at two of the complexes. I will not go into details, but just relay some information on the main conclusions, in relation to the original APP interpretations and something of the then modern perception of peat. Most importantly, if the results of the four ha excavated may be generalized, and integrated with ill-understood facets of the original APP peat sites, it seems highly likely that oligotrophic peat had been colonized. The line delimiting oligotrophic and fen peat (fig.1) could well be the result of the prehistoric colonizers of the area winning peat, and creating an altered landscape. Up to these excavations in 1996/97, the fen peat and oligotrophic peat delimitation was seen as solely a geo-ecological phenomena. Through the site Q farmhouse site, the interpretation was that farmhouses had been built on oligotrophic peat ‘cushions’, as slight rises within a general fen peat landscape. Now, the areas of oligotrophic peat on which the farmhouses had been erected were determined to be that which had not been cut away during land use and settlement of the more general, but shallow, raised bog. By stripping large areas, we could determine that large areas had already been stripped in prehistory. Easily distinguishable were the actual cuts in the peat and the remains of the bases of prehistoric peat stacks of oligotrophic peat (fig.4). At the better preserved of the two areas stripped, recovered were successive farmstead complexes covering more than two ha. Among the features uncovered were field systems of dug gullies; fields for cultivation which had been raised and enriched with quantities of small pot sherds and ash; an open sided out-building -roofed over, but without walls - associated with a large burning pile next to it; paths and drove-ways, sometimes heightened with pot-sherds, linking the various areas together; and, the complete remains of the latest farmhouse, with intact hearth, adjoining a five-sided livestock enclosure built of posts (fig.5).

The farmhouses had been covered with low mounds of turf after the superstructure had been dismantled, a normal feature of the Assendelver polders (see below). All of these traces could be recovered, as the surfaces were intact. Wood was also well preserved, even though only 25 cm under the modern ground level. Use of the more northern complex extended into at least the mid-3rd century. Thus, also recovered was the latest prehistoric site yet found within the peat area of Assendelft, and it was in the north. Fuel for cooking and heating would most probably have been the primary use of cut peat, but also for pottery firing and for raising floor and byre areas. Of course, inhabitants of the creek levee sites, adjacent (to the west) of the peat area and dated mainly to the 1st century AD, would be exploiting peat as well. We did realize during the APP that peat was used for burning, through the combination of orange ash and lack of charcoal at the levee sites.

32 Therkorn & Besselsen 1998; Therkorn, Besselsen & Oversteegen 1998: to be reissued in 2005 as an AAC Project Bureau publication.


34 Therkorn et al. 1984. See site Q for turf used in renewing the floor and as stall litter, as infill of the double wattle walling, and the charred turf found in the hearth.
Not considered was the physical effect on the landscape, however. A very rough estimate can be made of how many families may have been responsible for exposing the c. 900 hectares of fen peat (ignoring possibly exposed back swamp deposits, fig. 1): for household fuel only, seventeen contemporary households during the period 600 BC-300 AD. This is undoubtedly inexact and of course there were probably not seventeen households initially but a gradual increase in the number over time in line with population growth. It does give some indication, however, that one does not have to factor in hoards of people to account for changes of a geological environment into a culturally altered landscape. But, perhaps the main point here is that people appear to have been altering their landscape on such a large scale in prehistory such as to fool geologists, and archaeologists who do not question geologist interpretations, which also - and can only - include assumptions on past use and perception. It now appears the 'geology' of the Assendelver Polders is a more complex mix of cultural tradition of peat cutting during the prehistoric period than modern perception allowed during the initial APP, even though the signs were there.

Also interconnecting back to the original APP is an indication of why there is a broad band of find-spots within the peat area (fig. 1). It could be the result of a pattern of a fairly regulated shift of housing location in combination with peat winning. As well, the apparent distribution of Early Iron Age farmsteads in the south of the polder in relation to the latest in the north may indicate the direction of colonization.

35 Using the following estimates: 0.12 m³ fuel used per day (informant from Vriezeveen); a peat layer at least 15 cm thick, fresh to dried peat ½ volume, farmhouse duration of c. 20 years = 1.17 ha exposed per farmhouse generation.

36 Site J (fig. 1) is a case in point: within the peat area, trial trenches were put through a field during the original APP while searching for a dwelling which had been partially excavated by the Archeologische Werkgemeenschap Nederland. These trenches had similar signs of field system gullies and cow-paths, and traces of activities on the peat. Now they can be put into a wider context of similarity to the areas excavated in 1997.
Landscape as the canvas of habitus: the Roelmowadi tradition (and people?)

This section may have to do with colonization through defining sameness and difference, in three feature traditions within the Oer-IJ research area. These three traditions were regularly distinguished at the APP sites, and were surprising results of the original APP excavations. Outside of the Assendelver polders they have been distinguished since at some Oer-IJ sites, and they also occur far outside of the region. The acronym of these features is: digging ditched enclosures with strange forms, rounded and elongated; the tradition of erecting mounds over abandoned dwellings; and, the wall-ditch form of housing: the Roelmowadi tradition.

The Oer-IJ estuary has turned out to be a wetland oasis for interpretation, exactly because Brandt had the prescience of mind to continue on with APP aims within the larger region, and to facilitate getting excavations done. Together with the large ROB excavations carried out in the region and other areas of the province of Noord-Holland during the past twenty-five years,37 one would certainly think enough has been excavated to start considering ‘style’ of digging features and moving earth as representing different, synchronic, traditions within the region. Such different traditions could well indicate different groups, with different origins, and/or, for example, transforming beliefs not shared by everyone.

Underlying archaeologist expectations of typologies such as those mainly concerning pottery and housing, style of digging features into characteristic shapes and raising mounds would be an appropriate way in distinguishing marking and engraving landscape as the canvas of habitus. It might also, in reference back to original APP discussions of features, facilitate the definition of significant expressions, as “combined and relational spatial patterns can be regarded as the spatial structure or spatial grammar of a social structure.”38

The Roelmowadi tradition does not seem to be present to the southwest of the main Oer-IJ channel, but it is also certainly not everywhere in evidence in Noord-Holland to the northeast of the channel. The quantitative judgement on the three feature traditions was tipped during the Broekpolder excavations, concluding in 2000, which balanced the extent of areas uncovered to either side of the main estuarine channel.39 This also brings up a point in the perception within the original APP and subsequent Oer-IJ Project as encompassing a ‘region.’ It certainly is a united research area, but it now seems likely the Oer-IJ channel was a past border, a disconnection of the landscape in some ways. There are other indications, but I will just go into the three distinctive features here, briefly, while much more work will be needed in further definition of dating and distribution within and outside of the region, before addressing meaning.

### Rounded-elongated enclosures

The ‘strange’ forms of rounded/elongated enclosures formed by ditches, 0.70 - 1.25 m deep, enclose an area varying from about 150 to 400 m². They appear to be absent on the south-western side of the Oer-IJ channel, except for one possible exception in the Velserbroek of the earlier Bronze Age. On the north-eastern side, they are present within the Uitgeesterbroekpolder, and date to the Later Iron/Early Roman Iron Age, and - as some of the Assendelver examples of the Roman Iron Age - they were clearly set out through principles of arcs and the radii of circles (fig.6).

### Mounds

It appears that covering dwellings with mounds was not done to the south-western side of the Oer-IJ channel. A consistent result of the original APP fieldwork was that, after dismantling the dwelling superstructure, but keeping hearth intact, low mounds of earth and sherds, only about 25-30 cm thick, were erected over the area of both three-aisled farmhouses and ‘wall-ditch’ houses. The mounds were found over the dwellings of the creek levee sites. As mentioned above, mounds over structures were also found at the peat site during the 1996/97 campaigns. A mound over the site Q dwelling is now also considered, by re-considering the layer of re-deposited turf found covering the farmhouse. Excavations subsequent to those within the Assendelver Polders revealed mounds over dwellings in Uitgeest, and many 3rd-4th century mounds are known from the Schagen area.40

During the APP, these things were termed 'platforms'. Abbink had argued this in relation to the terp idea and the ‘frustrated terp’ interpretation put forward by Van Es for mounds over dwellings at Paddepoel.41 The low mounds over houses recovered in Assendelft could not have been for protecting against water, as Abbink argued in her exposé of the ‘wet feet theory’ through the inherent physical and theoretical pit-falls of that functional-deterministic

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38 Abbink 1986: 27.
39 Offenberg 2003; Therkorn et al. forthcoming.
40 For site Q, Layer, 4, fig. 6 in Therkorn et al. 1984; Therkorn, Van Rijn & Verhagen 1986; Therkorn 2004.
41 Van Es 1969.
explanation. Why dismantled dwellings were mounded over remained unclear, but suggested during the APP were facets of preserving the integrity of the house through marking the dwelling site, as well as visibility. ‘Mound’ might now be seen as a better term, perhaps, as interconnecting with ‘barrow mound’, and that is the direction meaning can be sought, within a landscape interpretation and cosmology. One can read about that, but here I just want to note that mounds simply cover and bury a dead house. Undeniably, some of these areas were used for economic activities subsequently. The key is given however by the mounds found just covering the dwelling, and not (apparently) used for another purpose. At times, a much larger area than the farmhouse was raised with sods and ‘rubbish’ - all those sherds and bones found in the 4th century Schagen mounds - for example, and then set afire. Two mounds were in any case used for cultivation as established at one Schagen site through ard-marks. Within grazing grounds, the mound over the site P dwelling of the Assendelver polders was also an area for livestock as perhaps indicated through phosphate analysis. The small hearth atop the mound at the site in Uitgeest might indicate something like a herder’s fire, which could apply as well to fires atop an actual barrow mound (i.e. with a real grave), or not. Multiple meanings in understanding these traces must be considered, also in conjunction with distribution. The Iron Age and Roman Iron Age tradition of raising low mounds over dwellings is of course not a phenomenon, a tradition, restricted to one side of the Oer-IJ channel. Paddepoel was mentioned above. And elsewhere ‘real’ dwelling mounds, terps, could be reconsidered by bringing water back into the equation. Terps are mounds, and they also cover earlier dwellings. Thus, mounds in some situations might be handy for keeping one’s feet dry, too. Back to the earlier periods of the Bronze Age: what about those mounds of Hoogkarspel and Bovenkarspel of the Bronze Age (see Fokkens, this volume)? I have yet to see concrete evidence that dwellings were on mounds there, and that which I long ago excavated (for Brandt) was certainly covering a small structure. Further away, within Bronze Age Jutland, mounds are also found covering dismantled dwellings, in this cited example, also accompanied by a grave. Where and when, and then why, must be put in a wider perspective for this, possibly primarilly religiously motivated, burial of dwellings.

Wall-ditch houses

Perhaps most interesting as a very specific, and unmistakable tradition is that of the wall-ditch dwelling, first distinguished within the Netherlands during the APP. A ditch forms the wall and the walls were formed from stacked sods set into these dug ditches. In general, there were no roof supports indicated within the enclosed area through posts or post-holes, whereby it seems the roof was carried at the wall-line. Internally, hearths were sometimes preserved, and were of the normal domes of sherds covered with clay, as recovered within the three-aisled post structures. The wall-ditch dwellings were also at times surrounded by larger enclosures - of the strangely shaped, rounded-elongated variety, and they were also covered with mounds after habitation had ended. Thus, it is here that the three Roelmowadi features, within the Assendelver polders come together. Although an interpretation was put forward that the wall-ditch mode of housing was a native reaction to the short duration of Roman presence at Velsen, it was recognized, however, that the wall-ditch house was known from elsewhere. Little attention was given to the distribution during the APP publication phase, as ‘migration’ was certainly an unpopular subject then. At the time, wall-ditch houses were known at least from the coastal areas of western Jutland, south-western Sweden and south-western Norway, and dated to the later Bronze Age. These coastal Scandinavian dwelling plans are near exact replicas of what was uncovered within the Assendelver Polder.

44 Therkorn 1980. Van der Leeuw (1986: 85) did suggest, tentatively, that the Assendelvers came from the West Frisian estuary (Hoogkarspel/Bovenkarspel) region.
45 E.g. Sherratt 1994: 249.
47 Through these similarities with the ‘normal’ three-aisled dwellings, but also through the sameness in quality of find-materials, Therkorn & Abbink (1987) thought these dwellings were probably used the year round, but through quantity of materials, not as long as the post structures, while Meffert (1999) has described them as seasonally used. Abbink and I do not find his argument convincing.
Following these three traditions will require moving out of the Oer-IJ region, to others, and even going international, for addressing these types of old-fashioned questions on distribution but within an approach of multiple meanings, and without deterministic or teleological explanation. I have put off doing it for phenomenological reasons as it may lead to distinguishing a group from an area from whence my ancestors came, something I have always found unsettling in regards to double-hermeneutics and modern forms of past ancestor worship. But, it is an interesting subject - of spatial syntax as feature style - and it will be followed up to further define if there is a Roelmowadi.

**Conclusion**

During the APP, little thought was given to the ancient group of Assendelvers, where they came from, or where they went. There was certainly no regional, tribal, rootedness or attachment to the region by birth, or romanticism, shown by any of the directors or their assistants to that which we were digging up and interpreting, in regards to ‘the ancestors.’ There was also nothing apparent of modern tribal tactics. Never with Brandt, nor the other directors of the Assendelver Polder project, did one have the discomforting idea of following tribal leaders within a control-ideology in competing against other tribes within the institutionalised Netherlands, or of their using archaeology as a vehicle primarily for their own personal status.

The international orientation of and approach to the APP seemed to be more of a state of mind, fed by exceptional directors. Rather than digging up European heritage, the polder area can be likened to a practical fantasy island, only a 25-minute drive from the university. It was used as a testing ground in various ways, some of the facets just touched on here, for improving fieldwork, survey, interpretational frameworks, integration of specialist fields, and from my perspective then, as an inspiration for graduate students. Moreover, on a more socio-economic note, genderism was obviously not a feature of the APP. It was certainly not the norm c. 1979 to give women prominent responsibilities in actually supervising site excavations, and additionally, in including women - other than for very specialized subjects - within subsequent processes of analyses and publication.

Fieldwork outside of, but also years later again within the Assendelver Polders has served to define, extend, redefine and move some interpretations forward, and to refine others formulated during the APP. Roel left behind in various ways a valuable and continuing legacy within the research area, and we are still not finished with developing research approaches and quality in field methods in trying to understand this bit of regional archaeology.

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