

# Making Places, Making Lives Landscape and Settlement in Coastal Wetlands



Neue Studien zur Sachsenforschung 14



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Making Places, Making Lives.  
Landscape and Settlement in Coastal Wetlands

Proceedings of the 72<sup>nd</sup> Sachsensymposium,  
9-12 October 2021 Castricum-Alkmaar

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# Neue Studien zur Sachsenforschung Band 14

Herausgegeben vom Braunschweigischen Landesmuseum

in Verbindung mit dem Internationalen Sachsensymposium

durch  
Babette Ludowici

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Making Places, Making Lives.  
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Proceedings of the 72<sup>nd</sup> Sachsensymposium,  
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Edited by Annet Nieuwhof, Egge Knol and Henk van der Velde

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Alle Beiträge wurden einem Verfahren zur Qualitätssicherung  
(peer review) unterzogen.

Umschlaggestaltung: Annet Nieuwhof  
Satz und Layout: Annet Nieuwhof

Redaktion: Annet Nieuwhof, Egge Knol, Henk van der Velde

Bibliografische Information  
der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek:  
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation  
in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie;  
detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über  
<http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

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Abbildungsnachweise liegen in der Verantwortung der  
Autoren

Verlag Uwe Krebs, 38176 Wendeburg  
Druck: oeding print GmbH, Braunschweig

ISBN 978-3-910570-04-7  
ISSN 2193-4185

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## Preface

This 14<sup>th</sup> volume of the series *Neue Studien zur Sachsenforschung* contains 15 papers that were presented at two meetings of the Internationales Sachsensymposium, the 71<sup>st</sup> and the 72<sup>nd</sup>, which both took place during the years of the Covid-19 Pandemic. The 71<sup>st</sup> meeting was initially planned as a normal physical meeting, but had to be postponed due to a resurgence of the pandemic. The 71<sup>st</sup> meeting therefore was a short online meeting, held in the evening of the 16<sup>th</sup> September 2020. It was a joyous gathering with several presentations, attended by about 80 members who were happy to see each other again after a long period of isolation, even if only on their computer screens.

The 71<sup>st</sup> meeting had been planned to take place in the province of North-Holland, the Netherlands, in Alkmaar and especially in Castricum in the Provincial Archaeological Centre and museum *Huis van Hilde* (House of Hilde). We could finally meet at this location during the 72<sup>nd</sup> meeting, which took place between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> of October 2021, in an interval between two lockdowns. As the pandemic was not yet over, a relatively small number of 54 first-millennium researchers were able to attend physically, while another 30 followed the programme via livestream. Participants were not only members, but also PhD students and recent graduates who presented their research.

North-Holland is the northwestern-most province of the Netherlands; it is a coastal region with wetlands that largely formed during the late Holocene. Castricum, at the foot of the coastal dunes and near the former Oer-IJ estuary, was an appropriate location for a symposium on the theme of landscape and settlement in coastal wetlands, under the title *Making places, making lives*. The choice of this theme and location was inspired by the "North-Holland-in-the-First-Millennium" project, initiated by Rob van Eerden, provincial archaeologist of North-Holland. He and Johan Nicolay (University of Groningen) together made this into a comprehensive project in which many researchers from various disciplines participated, together writing a new history of this region during the first millennium AD. The project concluded in 2023 with the publication of *Noord-Holland in het 1e Millennium*, edited by Nicolay and Van Eerden. The project was nearing completion at the time of the conference. The keynote lecture by Johan Nicolay and several papers during the conference presented the results of this project.

Geographically, the contributions to the conference covered a much wider area, from the Celtic Sea to the Baltic Sea. Contacts and connections along the coast and across the

North Sea, connections and exchange with inland regions that were under Roman or Frankish influence, discontinuity and resettlement, and the subsequent formation of new groups and creation of new identities were themes that kept recurring during the conference and also in this volume. The Introduction that opens the book elaborates on these themes and explains how the book is structured.

The conference organising and scientific committee consisted of Rob van Eerden (Province of North-Holland), Peter Bitter and Nancy de Jong-Lambregts (City of Alkmaar, Archaeological Centre), Arno Verhoeven and Menno Dijkstra (University of Amsterdam), Annet Nieuwhof (University of Groningen,y), Egge Knol (Groninger Museum) and Henk van der Velde (ADC, Amersfoort). The practical organisation was in the hands of Menno Dijkstra, Egge Knol, Henk van der Velde and Carla Jansen (Marbles Events).

This volume is edited by Annet Nieuwhof, Egge Knol and Henk van der Velde. We want to thank the authors for their willingness to publish their contributions in this volume. It was quite a time-consuming process, not least because all contributions were double peer-reviewed. We also want to thank all reviewers, and our British colleagues who were willing to correct the English texts: Diana Briscoe (London), Helena Hamerow (Oxford), Catherine Hills and Sam Lucy (Cambridge) and John Hines (Cardiff). We have enjoyed working on this book, even though it took three eventful years to complete.

Financially, the conference was made possible by the *Provincie Noord-Holland*, the *Gemeente Alkmaar*, the North-Holland Archaeological Centre *Huis van Hilde*, the University of Amsterdam, Leiden University and the *Stichting Roel Brandt* (ADC-ArcheoProjecten). Publication costs were covered by generous contributions from the *Provincie Noord-Holland* and *ADC-ArcheoProjecten*, Amersfoort.

Finally, we dedicate this volume to our dear colleague Babette Ludowici, thanking her for her great commitment and achievement as editor of the NSSF series in the past years.

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## Contents

<i>Annet Nieuwhof</i> Introduction: Making places, making lives	9
<b>Part one: Coastal Communities and Connectivity</b>	
<b>North-Holland</b>	
<i>Peter C. Vos and Rob A. van Eerden</i> Millennia of coastal dynamics and human interference: landscape development in the province of North-Holland during the Late Holocene	13
<i>Johan A.W. Nicolay</i> Making places, making lives. North-Holland in the 1 <sup>st</sup> Millennium	28
<i>Annet Nieuwhof</i> Pottery development and habitation history during the Roman Period in the province of North-Holland	47
<i>Jan de Koning</i> Occupation in North-West Frisia (North-Holland) between AD 400 and 900 from a pottery perspective	62
<i>Menno Dijkstra</i> Early medieval house building traditions in the western Netherlands: an update and a search for its origin	76
<b>From the Celtic Sea to the Baltic Sea</b>	
<i>Egge Knol</i> The early medieval cemetery at Hogebeintum, the Netherlands (AD 400-730)	95
<i>John Hines</i> The Fenland and the early medieval transformation of the East Anglian Fen edge: evidence from RAF Lakenheath, Suffolk	121
<i>Nelleke IJssennagger – van der Pluijm</i> Intercoastal cultural zones in early medieval Europe. Long-term making of places along North Sea and Celtic Sea coasts	133
<i>Bente Sven Majchczack, Ruth Blankenfeldt, Dirk Bienen-Scholt, Hanna Hadler, Fritz Jürgens, Stefanie Klooß, Antonia Reiß, Dennis Wilken, Claus von Carnap-Bornheim, Wolfgang Rabbel, and Andreas Vött</i> Living on the Halligen tidal islands of North Frisia: land-use and exploitation of a unique salt-marsh landscape in the Middle Ages	143
<i>Aleksandr Chochlov, Konstantin Skvorcov, Jaroslaw A. Prassolow</i> On the contacts of the inhabitants of the unfortified settlement Privol'noe-1 on the Kaliningrad Peninsula at the end of the 11 <sup>th</sup> -13 <sup>th</sup> centuries AD	161

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## **Part two: Mobility, Economy and Exchange**

*Henk M. van der Velde and Lisette M. Kootker*

Looking for a place to stay: tracing human mobility in the Lower Rhine frontier zone during the Roman Period 171

*Roeland Emaus*

On byre-houses and husbandry: post-Roman settlement and landscape transformations in the Central Netherlands 185

*Karen Høilund Nielsen*

The tale-telling glass beads 203

*Mette B. Langbroek*

Journeys through time and space: beads travelling from distant shores and back again 217

*A.W.A. (Wim) Kemme*

Variety is the spice of life. Towards a pluralistic understanding of the Carolingian economy 229



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## Introduction: Making places, making lives

Annet Nieuwhof

### Introduction

The 72<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the Internationales Sachsensymposium, which took place in October 2021 in Castricum in the Netherlands, was organised around the theme *Making Places, Making Lives. Landscape and Settlement in Coastal Wetlands*. Castricum, at the foot of the coastal dunes and situated near the former Oer-IJ estuary, was the ideal location for a conference with such a theme.

The coastal areas of the southern North Sea became inhabited long before the beginning of the common era. They consisted of dunes and beach ridges, extensive salt marshes and, more inland, swampy areas where peat formed under the influence of high water tables and poor drainage. These were dynamic landscapes, where wind and seawater shaped the land. The salt marshes were regularly flooded, treeless because of high salinity, and changeable in shape: expanding in some areas but prone to erosion in others. Despite these circumstances, people settled here and even thrived, adapting to the landscape by digging ditches and building artificial dwelling mounds (*terpen, wierden, Wurten, Warften*), and taking advantage of the extensive grazing grounds for their cattle and sheep, and of the fertile soil that made arable farming possible in higher parts. They also made use of the opportunity to travel by water and maintained contacts with communities elsewhere along the coast, over quite long distances.

The human habitation and archaeology of the coastal wetlands cannot be properly understood without considering the landscape. What boundaries did the landscape set for human habitation, and what possibilities did it offer? How did people create places to live, and a sense of place and belonging? How did they shape their lives? Were they connected to other communities? How resilient and flexible were they when natural or other circumstances changed? And what lay behind the small-scale and large-scale migrations in different periods in the first millennium? Were these driven by push or by pull factors, and were these natural, social or political? Were natural circumstances deteriorating, climate perhaps or drainage problems, or were there political reasons for leaving the homelands, or a combination of natural and socio-political causes?

### Coastal communities and connectivity: North-Holland

Castricum is home to the Archaeological Depot annex Museum *Huis van Hilde* (Home of Hilde) of the province of North-Holland. At the time of the symposium, this was the centre of a multidisciplinary research project that focused on the habitation history of this part of the Netherlands during the first Millennium. This project has now been completed with the publication of the two volumes (in Dutch) of *Noord-Holland in het 1e Millennium*, edited by Johan NICOLAY and Rob VAN EERDEN. One of the main research questions of the project was what happened at the end of the Roman Period. There are indications that the area was abandoned in this period, but when did this occur? Was the area really deserted, and when and by whom was it repopulated? The project has led to many new insights into the habitation history of the dynamic landscape of the northwestern coastal area of the Netherlands. In any case, it is clear that before and after the settlement gap that occurred here in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, the inhabitants of this remote area – at least from an inland perspective – did not form an isolated community, but were connected to the wider world in many ways. The first five chapters of this book present the results of studies that belong to this project, thus making them also available outside the Dutch-speaking archaeological community.

The central role of the landscape is apparent in the first chapter by VOS and VAN EERDEN, on the landscape of the late Holocene and the important role of human interventions, which sometimes had disastrous consequences especially where peat was drained and exploited. The new palaeogeographical maps presented in this chapter provide the basis for the habitation history of this region. NICOLAY, in the written version of his keynote lecture presented at the opening evening of the symposium on October 9<sup>th</sup> 2021, delves into the way group identities emerged in the Early Middle Ages, and the role of material culture, dealings with the dead and religious beliefs in this process. Pottery, not only as an archaeological tool for dating, but also as an indicator of cultural relations and social networks, is the subject of the chapters by NIEUWHOF, on the pottery of the Roman Period, and by DE KONING, on the pottery of the new early medieval population. DIJKSTRA, in the fifth and final contribution from the North-Holland in de First Millennium project, gives an overview of early medieval housebuilding traditions in the western Netherlands and its implications for the origins of house types and people.

The coastal perspective then widens, to other sites in the North Sea area and even further, from the Celtic Sea to the Baltic Sea, and into the later Middle Ages and early-modern period. As in the North-Holland contributions, the landscape and its implicit or explicit connectivity are important themes in all these contributions. Ample evidence of cultural relations and exchange of some form with the wider world is found in all these areas and settlements. KNOI opens this part with a paper he presented during the online 71<sup>st</sup> Sachsensymposium of 2020, about the cemetery in the terp of Hogebeintum in Friesland, a terp that was repopulated from around AD 400, almost certainly by migrants coming from the northeast. This early medieval cemetery, which was discovered and excavated in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, was a mixed cemetery with cremations and inhumations. With its numerous and often well-dated finds that often show long-distance relations, it is an important comparison site for the study of early medieval burial customs and socio-cultural networks.

The burying population of the early medieval cemetery excavated in East Anglia at the RAF Lakenheath airbase are argued to come from the same region as the population of Hogebeintum and to be were immigrants from the coastal areas of Lower Saxony and the Jutlandic peninsula. HINES describes the female dress accessories from the graves, parallels across the North Sea, and their role as indicators of the immigrant population's growing connections to communities to the west of the Fenland. These in turn were at the basis of the emerging East Anglian kingdom.

The many connections across the North Sea show that the coastal areas along the North Sea formed a maritime cultural landscape. IJSSENNAGGER-VAN DER PLUIJM pays attention to two such 'intercoastal cultural zones': in addition to northwestern Europe around the North Sea also the connected coastal zones of Cornwall and Brittany bordering the Celtic Sea, to show that such intercoastal cultural zones stayed in place even if political borders shifted.

The area of the Halligen on the west coast of Schleswig, part of the North Sea network, is a salt marsh area with terps that date from the Middle Ages. MAJCHCZACK et al. describe their new survey and geomorphological research here. This area is prone to erosion, not in the least because of intensive medieval salt extraction from peat layers. Like in North-Holland, the exploitation of peat layers caused subsidence and made the area vulnerable to inundation. Large parts of this salt marsh area finally drowned.

A settlement with connections far and wide, even as far as western Europe, was Privol'noe-1 on the Kaliningrad Peninsula, not far from the Baltic Sea. CHOLOV et al. discuss the finds from this site that show these connections. The settlement appears to have been suddenly abandoned, in a political situation where military raids and warfare were common.

The last part of the book contains diverse contributions. The first of these, by VAN DER VELDE and KOOTKER, approaches the theme of mobility in the Roman Period in the Dutch part of the lower Rhine zone by comparing and combining archaeological and isotope data. Their aim is to arrive at a more balanced picture of human mobility than isotope research alone allows.

EMAUS discusses an often overlooked subject: the requirements that a viable cattle herd must meet. The sizes of the byres in byre-houses have consequences for the economy and for social organisation. Most byres are not large enough to house a viable herd. They imply regular exchange of animals with neighbours and, in particular if byres and settlements are small, with other communities. Thus, byre sizes are indicative of the existence of exchange systems.

Two chapters, one by HØILUND NIELSEN and one by LANGBROEK, are dealing with glass beads from graves and settlement contexts, from the Roman and Early Germanic Iron Age in Denmark and the Merovingian Period in northern Gaul respectively. Both authors emphasise that glass beads for a long time have not been paid the attention they deserve in archaeology. However, they may have multiple meanings and 'tales to tell': not only as commodities but also as heirlooms and objects with biographies of their own. As beads were not produced locally, they were necessarily acquired by exchange or trade, probably in the form of strands, as HØILUND NIELSEN shows. LANGBROEK argues that the rural population actively participated in networks of long-distance trade.

This non-elite perspective is also at the basis of the concluding chapter by KEMME, on the circulation of goods in the Carolingian economy. He investigates the possibilities of surplus production and the import and distribution of millstones and wheel-thrown wares in the Netherlands, and concludes that both the demand of non-elite rural communities and the actions and preferences of other groups shaped developments in exchange patterns in the Carolingian Period.

Despite the wide range of contributions, there are many connecting themes in this book: the landscape and the influence of human intervention; evidence for coastal socio-cultural networks; indications of trade and exchange; human mobility and flexibility; continuity or discontinuity of habitation and possible causes of abandonment; and personal and group identities and the role of the material culture in shaping and expressing these. They represent a multitude of old and new, often combined approaches and techniques, from creating chrono-typologies and using historical sources to isotope research and geophysical survey. A rich narrative about the way people in the past shaped their places and their lives emerges from all these different approaches.

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