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Kooijmans, L.P.L.; Jongste, P.; et al., ; Jongste, P.F.B.; Kooijmans, L.P.L.

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A NEOLITHIC SETTLEMENT ON THE DUTCH
NORTH SEA COAST *c.* 3500 CAL BC

EDITED BY LEENDERT P. LOUWE KOOIJMANS
AND PETER F.B. JONGSTE

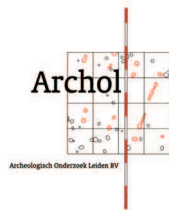


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Preface

During the development of a new, large wastewater treatment plant for The Hague and environs (AHR), the *Hoogheemraadschap* (Polder Board) of the Delfland region in 2000 formed an archaeological project group whose responsibility was to promote the interests of archaeological values in the planning area in accordance with present-day standards. At the time no-one suspected that concealed beneath the surface of the building plot was one of the most informative Neolithic settlement sites in the Netherlands. It is thanks to the project group's vision that the site could be excavated according to high research standards prior to the building work. Because a site of such an age and quality was entirely in line with the research programme of the Faculty of Archaeology of the University of Leiden, a strategic alliance was soon formed. A team of the best researchers was composed, which, according to the 'design and construct' principle, first formulated the research design and subsequently carried out parts of the research itself. Archol BV, which had previously successfully completed two comparable complex projects along the route of the new Betuwe railway line, was made responsible for the project's management. Fully aware of the great value of the archaeological remains that were inevitably to be disturbed, the Delfland *Hoogheemraadschap* agreed to finance the relatively costly excavation. This led to a unique private-public cooperation project. The publication that now lies before you presents the results of this project. The research team's aim was to show how successful such a form of cooperation can be, and to demonstrate the added value of a strategic alliance between on the one hand professional, 'commercial archaeology' according to the currently required documentary quality standards and, on the other, in-depth analysis and knowledge of academic archaeology.

The Neolithic settlement of Schipluiden-Noordhoorn owes its importance to a combination of factors.

In the first place, the site dates from an interesting period – a period in which the native population gradually switched from a way of life based on hunting, fishing and gathering to one based on arable and stock farming. The hunters slowly evolved into farmers. Schipluiden is a good reference point, showing us what stage the development of an agricultural

society had reached 1500 years after farming had been introduced in the Netherlands.

Secondly, in this particular period, the site's environment – the coastal area and in particular the Delfland region – underwent a fairly drastic change. Within a relatively short space of time the mud flats behind an open coastline that had characterised this area for many centuries evolved into a vast freshwater swamp sheltered from the sea by a belt of coastal barriers bearing low dunes. The Schipluiden site presents a detailed impression of how people lived there under those specific conditions, and at the same time raises the question as to what extent the resulting picture of a community can more in general be used as a model for, or be seen as representative of, societies in those days.

In the third place, the site itself is interesting, too, due to its situation in an area in which, under the influence of the constant rise in sea level, sediments were laid down in a relatively stable environment. In the centuries after the period of occupation, expanding peat sealed in the entire site, preserving its remains and preventing contamination with younger finds. The fact that the deposition of artefacts extended into the wet swamps surrounding the settlement means that the site is of great informative value. It is precisely these wet peripheral zones that make all the difference – it is in these zones that artefacts and refuse of perishable materials have survived, and those remains provide a very detailed picture of the occupants' material culture and subsistence system and the site's natural environment. The natural stratification in this zone moreover enables us to divide the period of occupation into phases, and thus study the occupation and the landscape through time. It was mainly the landscape that changed drastically, and not the occupants' way of life. The phased chronology also provides us with a basis for making statements about the structure of the settlement.

Of course all that glitters is not gold. The settlement itself lay on a dry dune, on which virtually no organic matter whatsoever has survived, and it was used for such a long time that it is almost impossible for us to identify any patterns in the jumble of features. Some 3000 years after the occupation period the dune narrowly escaped complete destruction by a large-scale marine ingress. Only its tip

was affected; the greater part of the dune and the old settlement site were fortunately spared.

Of great importance for our interpretations was that we were able to excavate and record not quite the entire site, but nevertheless a very large part of it according to the present state of the art. Uncertain hypotheses concerning parts that could not be excavated were thus restricted to a minimum, and we were able to set up a quantitative model of the local

group. A complete site and a detailed associated database are the best any excavation team can hope for. Thanks to previous excavations of other settlements of the same regional community we were finally able to obtain an understanding of prehistoric society that goes beyond that of this local group.

The editors