

Neolithisation at the site Brandwijk–Kerkhof, the Netherlands

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Another example of partial neolithisation

W.A. Out (2008)

"Neolithisation at the site Brandwijk–Kerkhof, the Netherlands:
natural vegetation, human impact and plant food subsistence"
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"The botanical data from Brandwijk reveals new information on the Neolithisation process in the central Dutch wetlands: there is evidence for introduction of *Tricium dicoccum* (Emmer), *Hordeum vulgare* var. *nudum* (Naked Barley) and *Papaver somniferum* ssp. *setigerum* (Poppy) between 4220 and 3940 cal b.c. There are, however, no strong indications of local crop cultivation at the site itself and the details of the process of introduction of crop cultivation remain unknown. Considering the function of the site, the variety of wild food plants and the indications against local crop cultivation, the importance of crop plants in subsistence seems to have been limited."

The cultural setting

"The Neolithic started in the Netherlands with arrival of the fully Neolithic Linearbandkeramik culture in the southern loess region of the Netherlands at ca. 5300 cal b.c., resulting in a long–lasting open frontier between Mesolithic and Neolithic societies. From ca. 4750 b.c. onwards, the Neolithic Rössen culture was present in the loess region, followed by the Michelsberg culture at ca. 4300 b.c. In the remaining parts of the Netherlands, the Neolithisation process was gradual, characterised by introduction of pottery

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at ca. 5000 b.c., introduction of domestic animals at ca. 4700 b.c. and introduction of crop plants at least by ca. 4300±000 b.c., although earlier introduction of crop plants (after 4500 b.c.) cannot be excluded. It is not, however, known how far this reconstruction of the gradual Neolithisation process, based on wetland sites where preservation of organic remains is excellent, is representative of southern and eastern sandy regions in the Netherlands.

Brandwijk–Kerkhof (Alblasserwaard, Zuid–Holland), named Brandwijk here, is a site of the Neolithic Swifterbant culture. This culture covered large parts of the Netherlands as well as wetland regions of northwestern Belgium and northwestern Germany in the period 5000–400 b.c. The site was occupied periodically from ca. 4600 to 3630 cal b.c. Other sites in the Alblasserwaard that are highly comparable with Brandwijk are Hardinxveld–Giessendam Polderweg (5500±000 b.c.), Hardinxveld–Giessendam De Bruin (5500±500 b.c.) and the Hazendonk (4000±500 b.c.).

All sites are interpreted as places where people came primarily for hunting, fishing, fowling and gathering. The first two stages of the gradual Neolithisation process are present at Hardinxveld–Giessendam Polderweg and De Bruin and are characterised by introduction of pottery first and domestic animals later, while cultivated plants are absent. In contrast, the Hazendonk is a fully Neolithic site. Interestingly, the Brandwijk site fills part of the gap in time and data between the Hardinxveld–Giessendam sites and the Hazendonk. In order to study the developed stage of the Neolithic at Brandwijk, pollen and macrofossil data from the site are presented here."

Abstract

"Brandwijk–Kerkhof (ca. 4600 to 3630 cal b.c.) is a Neolithic site, located on a river dune in the Dutch Rhine/Maas river area. The natural vegetation and human impact upon it have been investigated by analysis of pollen and macroremains from four cores that are located at increasing distances up to 20 m from the site. The relationship between the strength of human impact on the vegetation and the distance of the cores from the river dune has been investigated as well.

The results show that the natural vegetation on top of

the river dune consisted of deciduous woodland, while in the surrounding wetlands alder carr and eutrophic marsh vegetation dominated. Human impact of limited strength resulted in more open and disturbed vegetation. There is no correlation between the strength of the evidence of human impact in the pollen diagrams and the distance of the cores from the river dune.

The evidence for presence of crop plants from the cores is compared with evidence from the excavation. The first presence of crop plants from ca. 4200 b.c. onwards corresponds with data from other Dutch wetland sites. Large-scale local crop cultivation cannot however be demonstrated."

Keywords Pollen analysis – Botanical macroremains
Human impact – Neolithisation – Crop cultivation
Swifterbant culture

BTW. This issue (Jan 2008) of *Vegetation History and Archaeobotany* is in honour of Prof. Corrie Bakels on the occasion of her 65th birthday.

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