

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	Schokland and its surroundings
<i>Location</i>	Noordostpolder, Flevoland
<i>State Party</i>	The Netherlands
<i>Date</i>	21 October 1994

Justification by State Party

The island of Schokland is the last culture-historical and physical reminder of a typical micro-society in and on the coasts of the former Zuyder Zee. Reminders of these societies have either completely disappeared or are no longer recognizable as a result of the Zuyder Zee works, in which a marine inlet with a connection to the open sea became a freshwater lake known as the IJsselmeer. Also, expansion as a result of the reclamation of new land within the IJsselmeer has made these micro-societies disappear. Archaeologically, such reminders are no longer traceable owing to, for instance, the construction of new housing estates. **Criterion iii**

Schokland and its surroundings is an outstanding example of the prehistoric and historic occupation of a typical wetland, especially in relation to the reclamation and occupation of peat areas. It is precisely because of these occupation and reclamation activities that large areas of land were lost. The formation of the Zuyder Zee itself can also be considered to be a result of these historic activities. Schokland is the last vestige of a once much larger area of occupation. The history of this larger area is excellently represented in this small area, with its settlements, cemeteries, terps, dykes, and parcel systems. Continuing agricultural mechanization and the dehydration of deeper levels constitute a constant threat to the quality of the cultural and organic remains. **Criterion v**

Schokland and its surroundings remind us of the fact that small interventions by man on the natural environment can lead to unintended negative results. Schokland bears witness to a natural disaster of unprecedented dimensions that took place in the wet heartland of the Netherlands in the late Middle Ages. Reclamation and agricultural activities and the associated dehydration made the large peat area in the centre of the Netherlands more vulnerable to erosion, caused by a number of peat rivers, and especially by the Waddenzee in the north. As a result of this erosion a very large area of land was lost, which could recently be reclaimed, and then only in part. This new reclamation was carried out with the expenditure of great effort and expense. Schokland not only reminds us of the historic reclamation activities but also of the grim battle against the rising water that seemed lost in 1859 when the island was finally evacuated. This battle was eventually won when new land around the island was reclaimed by the Zuyder Zee works and it became surrounded by a new cultural landscape. In this respect Schokland should be looked upon as a concrete symbol of, on the one hand, the general struggle of man against the elements and, on the other, the characteristic Dutch battle against water. **Criterion vi**

Category of property

In terms of the categories of property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, Schokland constitutes a *site*.

History and Description

History

The earliest evidence of human presence in this area, as revealed by archaeological excavations, dates back to the Late Palaeolithic Period (c 10,000 BP), with visits by hunter-gatherer communities, which increased in the succeeding Mesolithic Period. Permanent occupation is witnessed by settlements, cemeteries, and agriculture during the Neolithic Period and Early Bronze Age (c 4200-1800 BC); however, this occupation was not continuous, being interrupted by transgression phases when the inhabitants were forced by rising waters to leave the area.

There is little evidence for later settlement until c AD 1000, when drainage of the peat around Schokland began, the water being drained into the freshwater basin of the Almere; pottery finds indicate that the island was completely reclaimed by c 1300. However, drainage of the peat and tilling of the land caused the peat layer to oxidize and shrink, resulting in sinking of the ground surface and increasingly wet soil conditions. To overcome this problem small, low dykes were built to keep drainage water out of the drained area: some of the outermost of these can be dated to the end of the 12th century.

At the beginning of the 13th century strong marine influences in the Almere were beginning to have an impact. At this time Schokland was still connected to the mainland by a peat ridge stretching to the south-east, which means that this area has to be considered as a polder, until around 1450, when the ridge eroded and Schokland became an island, like neighbouring Urk, which had been one since the 12th century. The distribution of terps (man-made settlement mounds) and dykes from this period shows that land was being lost, much of it during storms such as that recorded in 1170.

A number of the terps lying to the east of the island were abandoned around 1400, work beginning on the creation of new terps at Oud Emmeloord, Middelbuurt, and Zuidert. This was accompanied by a change in the economic basis of the communities from agriculture to fishing. At the same time the Almere was transformed into the Zuyder Zee. This loss of land and battle against the sea continued throughout the succeeding centuries, with the main losses being incurred on the west and north of the island. Protection became too great a burden for the local population, and so financial help was provided by the provincial council of Overijssel by means of a shipping tax, largely because of the importance of the fire beacon on the Zuidpunt. In 1710 Holland and Friesland gave additional financial support because of their economic reliance on the shipping routes that this beacon served. In 1660 Amsterdam, then the world's major port, obtained possession of Urk and Emmeloord and assumed the responsibility for their maintenance. During this time the four terps on the island were heightened and extended, using clay, manure, reeds, and sea-grass; the remainder of the island consisted of wet meadowlands.

Despite all these measures, the dykes and revetments were unable to prevent further inroads during the 19th century. The stone dyke designed to protect the entire island, construction of which began in 1804, proved too weak to provide continuing protection, because of the subsoil on which it was built, and storms and drifting ice regularly destroyed sections of it. The income of the inhabitants who remained on Emmeloord, Middelbuurt, and Zuidert from fishing decreased steadily, and so it was decided to evacuate the island, an act which took place in 1859. Only a handful of buildings, including the church on Middelbuurt, were not demolished, and were used as service buildings for coastal defence work throughout the following century. Schokland's role was that of a breakwater protecting the coast of Overijssel and as a refuge for shipping.

Following the passing of the Zuyder Zee Act in 1918 and the three subsequent acts designed to regulate its reclamation the Noordostpolder in which Schokland is located was the second to be reclaimed. The last gap in the surrounding dyke was closed in December 1940 and the polder ran dry in 1942. Schokland, which had been an island for nearly five centuries, became part of one of the largest cultural landscapes of the present era, the IJsselmeerpolders.

Description

The soil in this area consists of coversands, an ice-pushed ridge of boulder clay, Pleistocene river dunes, and Holocene sediments, including the buried course of the Overijsselsche Vecht river and its tributaries. A post-Pleistocene rise in sea level resulted in an increase in peat formation and a corresponding decrease in the surface area of sandy soils. From c 3500 BP to around AD 1000 the area was entirely covered by a peat moor with a sedimentary layer of clay c 30 cm thick overlying it and providing the basis for medieval and post-medieval

agricultural settlement. Thick layers of marine clay were laid down between the dykes constructed from c 1200 onwards.

Following the reclamation of the Noordostpolder, the area proposed for inclusion on the World Heritage List consist largely of flat arable land lying c 3m below NAP (Normal Amsterdam Level). On the former island there are the remains of four large terps (*terpen, werven*) - Oud Emmeloord, Middelbuurt or Ens, Zuidert, and Zuidpunt. A former Dutch Reformed church built in 1834 is preserved on top of Middelbuurt and the foundations of two 14th and 15th century churches survive on Zuidpunt.

Management and Protection

Legal status

Ownership of the area covered by the nomination is divided between the Netherlands Government (Finance Department; Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries; Forestry Commission), the Local Council of Noordostpolder, and private individuals.

Schokland and its surroundings was designated as a Soil Protection Area (*Bodembeschermingsgebied*) under the provisions of the 1987 Soil Protection Act in 1984 by the Provincial Council of Flevoland. The object of this designation is to protect the quality of the soil in view of its abiotical, biotical, and culture-historical (archaeological) importance.

Since 1993 the whole area has been designated as an Archaeological Report Area (*Archeologisch Meldingsgebied*), which means that any proposed disturbance of the soil or subsoil, other than in normal activities, must be reported to the State Service for Archaeological Investigations (*Rijksdienst voor het Oudheidkundig Bodemonderzoek - ROB*). Seven monuments are protected under the terms of the Monuments Act 1988, five of them archaeological monuments listed by ROB, the sixth (the former church on Ens) is a protected building listed by the State Service for Historic Buildings (*Rijksdienst voor de Monumentenzorg*), whilst the foundations of the two churches on Ens are covered by both sets of protection.

The area is also covered by a number of other forms of legislation and planning. The island is designated as a *Relatienota* reserve area, where endeavours are made to obtain appropriate lands by means of voluntary agreements for a land-management nature protection association. Under the Water Management Plan now in draft form the groundwater itself will acquire the status of "Water with a particular ecological value." Schokland forms part of a core area within the Ecological Main Structure within the Nature Policy Plan for the whole of the Netherlands, intended to give priority to the preservation of the geological, culture-historical, and perceptual elements of value in the area as a former Zuyder Zee island.

In the 1993 Flevoland Regional Development Plan Schokland is designated both as a "Landscape of Particular Value" and as an "Area of Archaeological Importance," whilst the Local Council Zoning Plan for the Rural Area of Noordostpolder, created within the framework of the Physical Planning Act, Schokland is designated for primary use for agriculture, which requires the securing of permits for any other form of activity.

Management

There are at present three landowners in the Schokland area. The policy of the authorities involved is to concentrate the management of the area as much as possible in the hands of one body, the Stichting Flevolandschap, a private nature-protection trust set up for the Province of Flevoland to acquire, manage, and develop the nature reserves, woodlands and landscape elements characteristic of the area. It is financed through subsidies from the provincial administration, the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries, donations, and income from leased property. An integrated policy is being formulated by the Stichting and the relevant governmental bodies.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

Conservation effectively began once the drainage process was completed. The Middelbuurt church and the foundations of those on Zuidpunt were given legal protection in 1965, and work began immediately on their conservation and, in the case of the Middelbuurt church, restoration. This involved reconstruction on foundation slabs to prevent further subsidence. The former harbour basin with jetties and ice-breakers on the Oud Emmeloord terp has been reconstructed, along with part of the revetment around Middelbuurt terp.

In the area around the island soil shrinkage is slowly revealing the earlier relief patterns, and former terps, dykes, prehistoric levées, river courses, and ice-pushed ridges are becoming visible. Increasing mechanization of agriculture constitutes a threat to this ancient landscape (which lies outside the nominated area but within the buffer zone).

Authenticity

In this case the authenticity of the nominated site resides in its very existence. The nomination dossier is subtitled "Symbol of the Dutch Battle against Water," an apt description of Schokland and its authenticity.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

ICOMOS consulted Professor Frans Verhaeghe (Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium), a leading medieval archaeologist and specialist in the archaeology and early history of the Low Countries, on the cultural importance of the property. He was also a member of the ICOMOS mission that visited the site in March 1995.

Qualities

The struggle of the people of the Netherlands against water has endured more than a thousand years, and still continues today: without constant vigilance more than half the present area of the country would be entirely submerged or subject to periodical inundation. Schokland forms part of a large peat island that gradually decreased in size between c AD 1000 and the mid 19th century as a result of the gradual encroachment of the Zuyder Zee, until it had to be evacuated in 1859.

As a result of the colossal reclamation programme that began in the early years of the 20th century, Schokland and the settlement mounds and other human interventions that surround it stand above the flat lands of the reclaimed Noordostpolder as mute testimony to the skill and fortitude of the Dutch people in the face of this never-ceasing natural threat.

Comparative analysis

The efforts of the people of the Netherlands to protect their lands from the sea are without parallel anywhere in the world for their extent, innovativeness, and long history. The reclamation of the Zuyder Zee marks the apogee of that struggle. On a world scale therefore there is no comparable site. On a national scale the only two comparable properties in the Netherlands are the former Zuyder Zee islands of Marken and Urk. In both cases, however, the scale and impact of intensive modern building activities have substantially diminished their culture-historical and landscape importance when compared with Schokland, where no such activities have been allowed to take place.

ICOMOS recommendations for future action

The area proposed for inscription on the World Heritage List includes an area zoned as "Recreation area," as part of the municipal plan. This includes five important buried archaeological sites directly related to Schokland itself. ICOMOS considers that it would not be appropriate for any eventual World Heritage site to include a feature of this kind. It recommends therefore that steps be taken to change this situation, preferably by revocation of the

authorization of a recreation area; if this is not feasible, this area should be removed from the proposed World Heritage site, but with adequate measures introduced for the continued protection of the buried archaeological sites. Subsequent to the meeting of the Bureau of the World Heritage Committee in July 1995 the Netherlands authorities provided evidence that the field concerned would not be considered for recreational use.

It is important also that the overlapping protection and management plans at national, regional, and municipal level should be harmonized so as not to conflict with the long-term interests of the site.

Significant evidence of early human settlement in the form of terps and other man-made features have been identified and continue to become visible in areas lying outside the designated area. ICOMOS hopes that the Netherlands authorities will take steps to ensure that these are afforded statutory protection so as to ensure that this evidence of a wider cultural landscape is not destroyed.

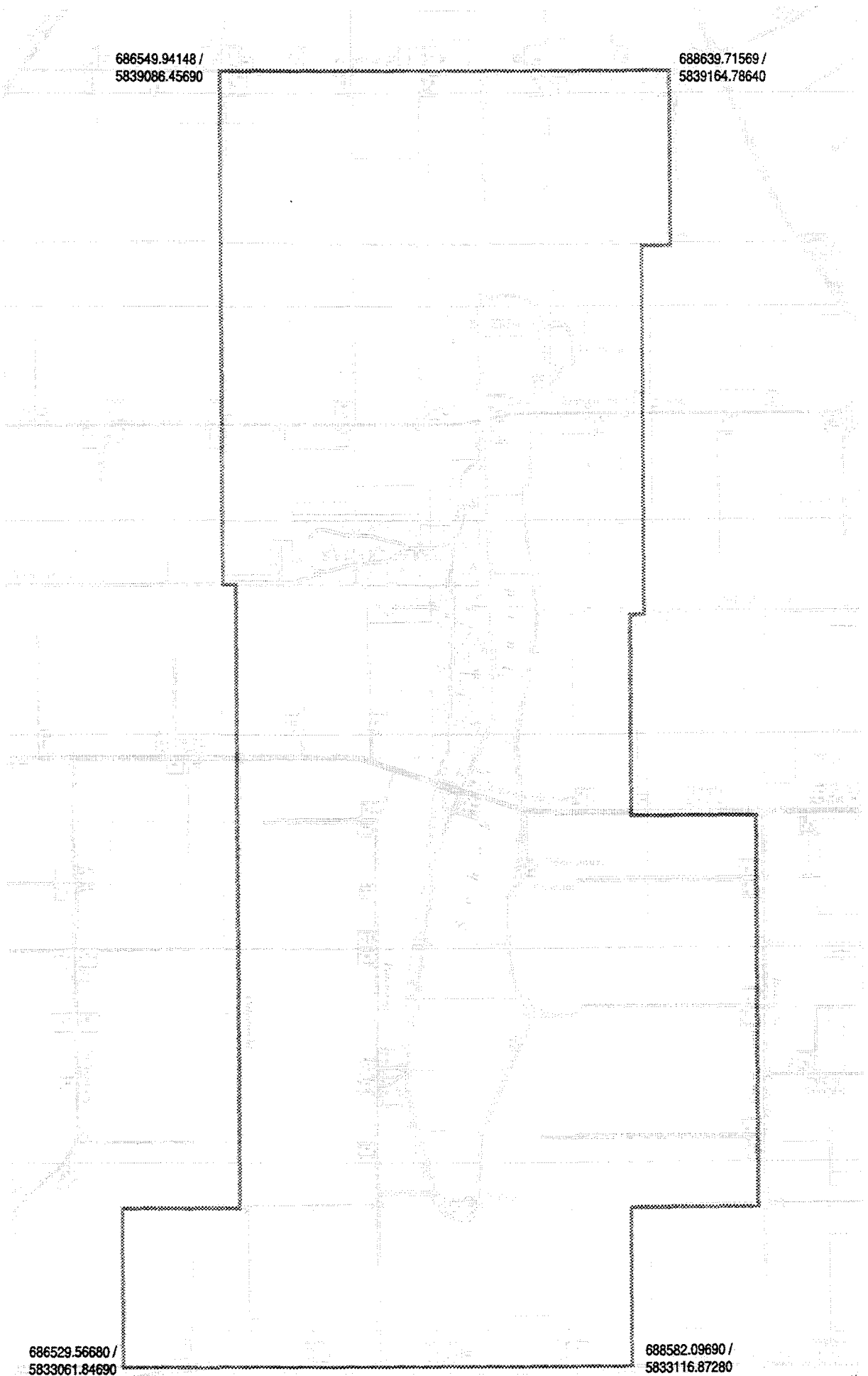
Recommendation

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria iii and v*.

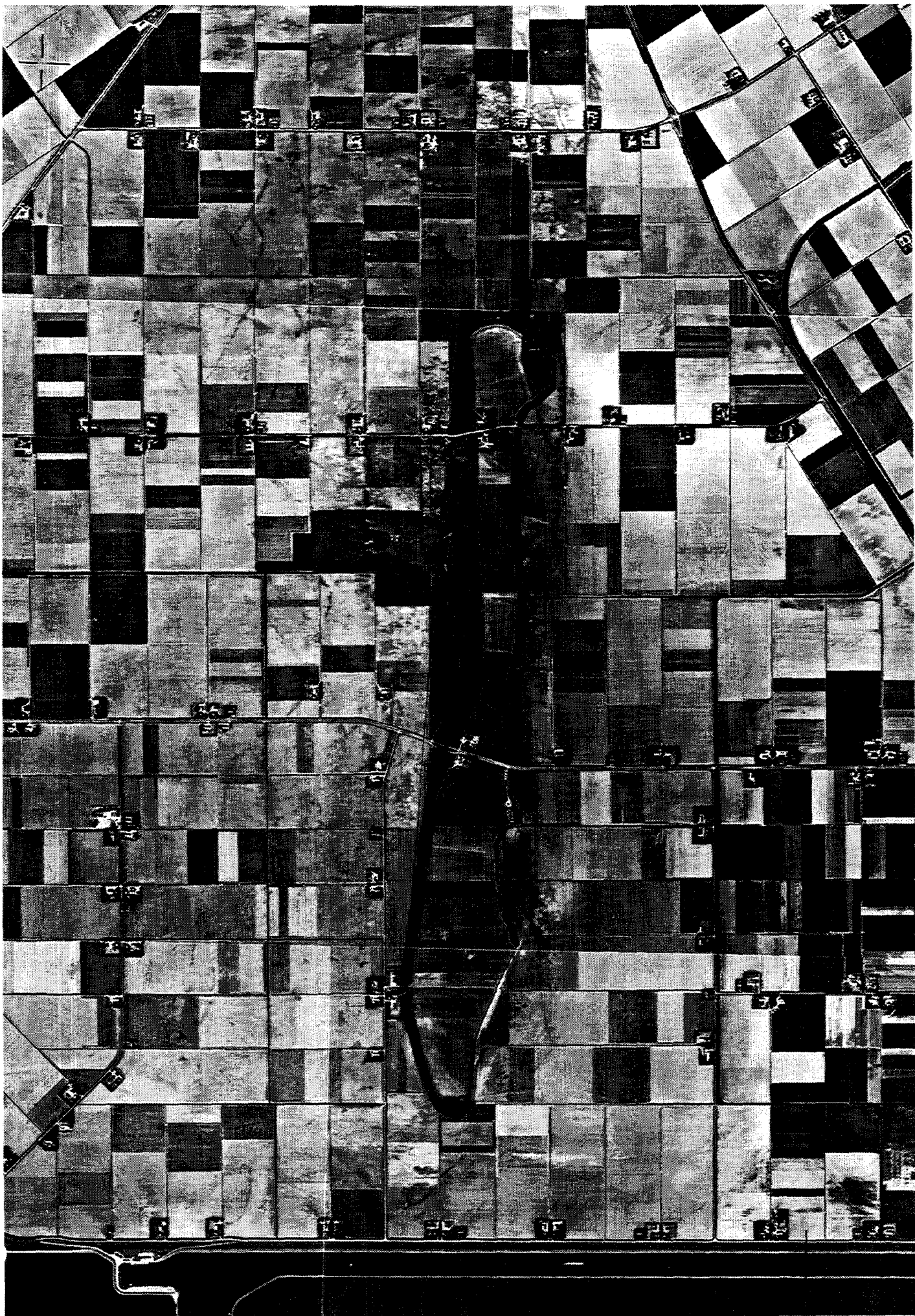
Schokland and its surroundings preserve the last surviving evidence of a prehistoric and early historic society that had adapted to the precarious life of wetland settlements under the constant threat of temporary or permanent incursions by the sea. It lies within the agricultural landscape created as a result of the reclamation of the former Zuyder Zee, part of the never-ceasing struggle of the people of the Netherlands against water and one of the greatest and most visionary human achievements of the twentieth century.

ICOMOS, September 1995

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Schokland : plan indiquant la zone proposée pour inscription /
Map showing the nominated area



Schokland : photographie aérienne de la zone indiquée sur le plan /
Air photograph of the area shown in the map



Schokland : Terp Ens-Middelbuurt vu du sud-est avec l'église et le revêtement postérieur reconstruit /

Terp Ens-Middelbuurt from the south-east showing the church and the reconstructed post revetment