

The 'Malta Convention' and the future of the historical landscape

Dramatic changes are awaiting the Dutch landscape in the coming decades. The process of modernization, which from the 1950s on has been thoroughly transforming the traditional, small-scale landscape of the Netherlands, has in recent years undergone such an acceleration that soon little will be left to recognize even of today's landscape. Rapid demographic growth is causing a spectacular new wave of urbanization, especially in the west and south of the Netherlands. The growing market economy is claiming huge amounts of space, through the development of, among other things, sea and airports in Rotterdam and Schiphol, and the associated infrastructure in the form of new railways, motorways and office parks. 'Holland, your distribution centre' is increasingly getting to look like one huge business estate, and further internationalization and globalization of the economy will probably only intensify this development.

The reason why such a geographical process merits attention in an archaeological journal is that it will have distinct consequences for the historical dimension of the Dutch landscape. The usurpation of space by urbanization and the economy entails a less recognizable and de-historicized landscape. It is in this context that the archaeological heritage is also being lost. It is estimated that since the 1950s some thirty percent of the Dutch archaeological record has been destroyed. Some people fear that a few decades from now scarcely anything will be left of the Dutch archaeological record.

In the debate about how the final demise of the archaeological record and the historically evolved cultural landscape might be averted, more optimistic voices are also making themselves heard, however. Many archaeologists have pinned their hopes on the positive effects of the so-called Malta Convention, which concerns the protection of the European archaeological heritage. The introduction of the principle that the destroyer pays, the 'instigator principle', will, it seems, soon make it possible to fund intensive forms of protection and archaeological excavation. Here and there the idea is even creating a degree of euphoria: 'Archaeology is a growing market; here lies our chance!'

Another ray of hope without doubt is the fact that within Dutch archaeological heritage management, which in the Netherlands has traditionally been entrusted to the State Service for Archaeological Investigations (ROB), new views have recently been developed, which may count on wide support within the archaeological community. Many are optimistic that if new financial means come available ('Malta'), these new approaches may actually lead to a more efficient and successful system of archaeological heritage management.

Yet there are doubts as well. Even if the Dutch parliament has the nerve to accept the

financial consequences of 'Malta' and for once allow cultural interests to prevail over economic ones, it remains an open question whether Dutch archaeology will be able to exploit the new legal instruments to the full.

Archaeological Dialogues has found two Dutch colleagues prepared to contribute a number of critical comments on the introduction of 'Malta' and the new management philosophy with regard to the archaeological heritage.

In his contribution, Roel Brandt expresses his opinion that Dutch archaeologists are insufficiently aware about what fundamental changes 'Malta' is about to cause in the Dutch archaeological establishment. Since relations between the various clients (the business world and various levels of government) and archaeology will become distinctly more business-like, an archaeological infrastructure will soon be needed that is geared to deal with the administrative, economic and legal reality. This requires a dramatic change in culture within a discipline which up till now has led a sheltered existence within the safe domain of science. Inevitably, the increasing market-orientation of archaeology will also lead to forms of commercialization in the business of excavating. This poses the problem, among other things, of how scientific standards are to be maintained within our discipline. Such comments show that 'Malta' is definitely no panacea for the problems archaeology is experiencing. Brandt emphasises that 'Malta' is a *must*, but makes it clear that its introduction also raises many questions relating to organization and content, for which Dutch archaeology is still virtually unprepared.

Jan Kolen's contribution focuses on the question as to what direction archaeological heritage management will take in the future. The general opinion is that as much as possible of the archaeological heritage should be protected, although not all of it can be preserved. Beyond this point, two notions dominate the debate about the form to be given to heritage management in the future. First, there is a generally felt need for thorough selection and priority-setting among sections of the archaeological heritage, and secondly, the desire to change from site-based protection to the protection of archaeologically valuable landscapes. This has sparked a lively interest in the idea of archaeological reserves and history parks. Kolen's criticism of any attempt to create such reserves in the framework of archaeological heritage management is primarily of a culture-philosophical nature, but it also has direct political and culture-political relevance. In his paper, Kolen makes it clear that the establishment of culture reserves is part and parcel of the national planning policy, oriented towards functional segregation in space. This will on the one hand produce 'high-dynamic' areas in which development is free to follow the dictates of the market economy, and on the other hand 'low-dynamic' areas of a reserve nature, destined for nature conservation and ecological rehabilitation. Culture reserves would belong in this low-dynamic category. The effect of such a segregation of functions, however, is to deny the value of the traditional cultural landscape (including the archaeological record) outside the designated zones. An archaeological heritage policy centred on culture reserves therefore seems to mean no less than a legitimization of essentially market-determined land use, which will result in the neglect and de-historicizing of the Dutch culture landscape as a whole.

Kolen also makes an explicit point on the culture-political aspects of the issue. He thus

elevates the debate about conservation of the archaeological heritage and the culture landscape to a plane as yet unexplored in the Netherlands, although in recent years it has been undertaken in Britain and Denmark (cf. L. Macinnes and C.R. Wickam-Jones (eds), 1992: *All natural things. Archaeology and the Green Debate*, Oxford).

In coming issues, archaeologists of various nationalities will discuss this problem in a broader international perspective. The editors will also be happy to receive readers' reactions to the contributions by Kolen and Brandt for publication in future issues of *Archaeological Dialogues*.
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