

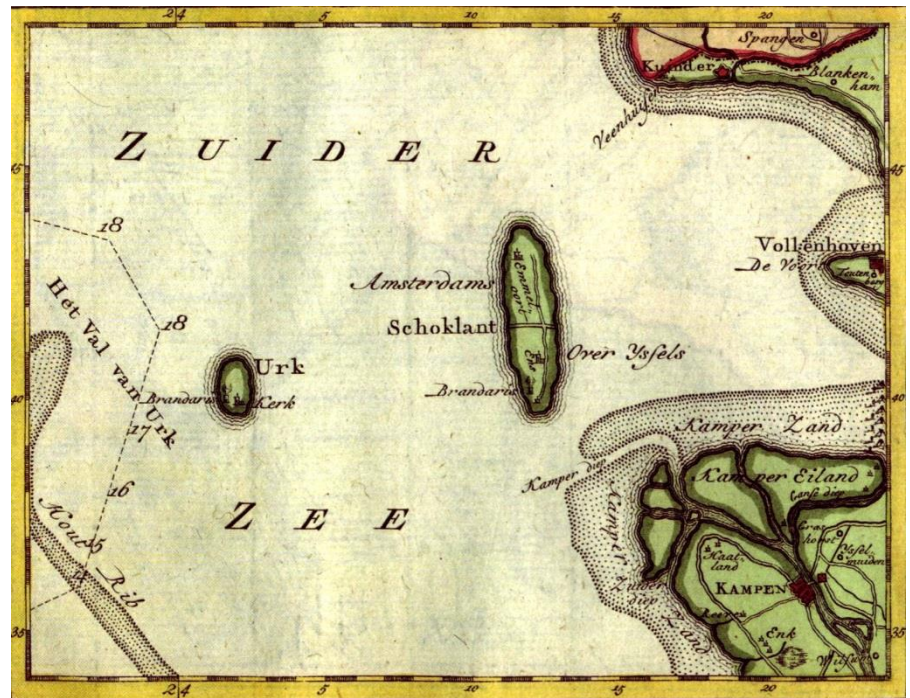
Urk and Schokland



- Two island communities in the Zuiderzee (Shallow Sea) of the Netherlands (Holland).
- The struggle of the people of the Netherlands against water has endured, for more than six 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 periodic inundation. (UNESCO)

Urk

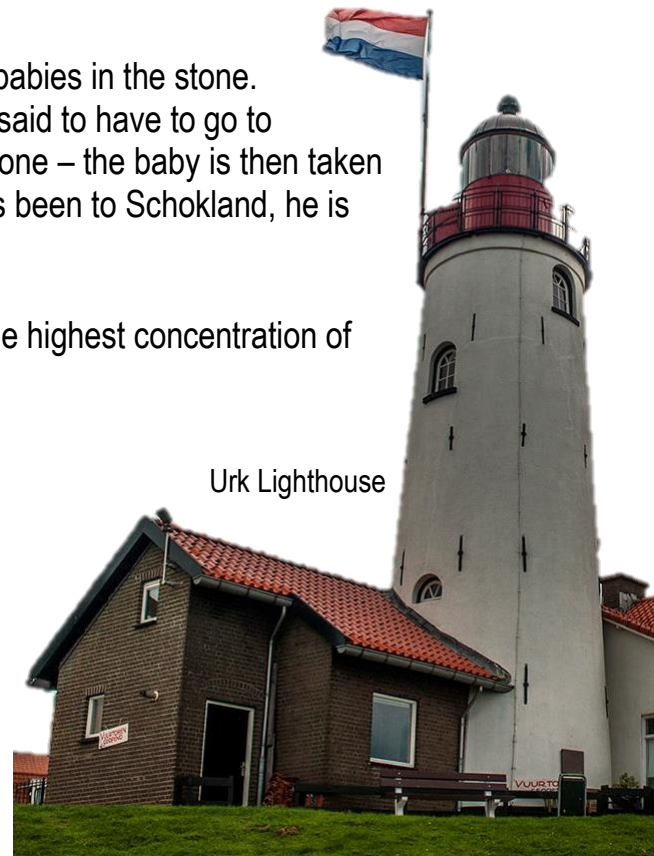
- Urk is first mentioned in historical records dating to the 10th century, when it was still an island in the Almere, a lake that would become part of the Zuiderzee in the 13th century after a series of incursions by the North Sea.
- For centuries the fishing boats of Urk left its harbour and set out to seek their fortune in the fisheries of the North Sea.
- One of the oldest and most distinctive dialects of Dutch is the language spoken in Urk. Nearly everyone in the village speaks this dialect and uses it in daily life. The dialect deviates considerably from contemporary standard Dutch and has preserved many old characteristics that disappeared from standard Dutch a long time ago.
 - Prior to the Second World War Urk could only be reached by boat. Radio was unknown, and the poor population didn't have much money for newspapers and books. Until the modern era, primary education for the children typically lasted only two years; afterwards, children had to help maintain the family and formal schooling ended.
- Because living conditions in Urk in historical times were very poor, young girls (typically about age 11 or 12) would frequently leave the island to become domestic servants, mostly in or around Amsterdam.
- When Napoleon occupied the Netherlands, many French words were incorporated into both standard Dutch and Urkish. Just as for standard Dutch, French words often changed form when incorporated into Urkish. The Urkish dialect has always been primarily a spoken language, and there are not many old texts written in the dialect. Only in recent years have people begun to write prose and poetry in the Urkish dialect. There are Urkers who have translated Bible books into Urkish, such as the book of Psalms.





Urk, ca. 1920s

- Urkers often tell their children that there are two kinds of people-- vreemden (strangers) and Urkers (people from Urk). Strangers are usually born from a cabbage, or a stork brings them to their new parents, but Urkers come from a large stone which lies about 30 metres (98 feet) from the shores of their island.
- In the tale, a stork comes all the way from Egypt to put babies in the stone. When the baby is about to be born, the baby's father is said to have to go to Schokland to pick up the key that gives access to the stone – the baby is then taken out of the stone. When an Urkish man is asked if he has been to Schokland, he is actually being asked if he has children.
- Urkers are traditionally very conservative – they have the highest concentration of Protestant churches in the country.

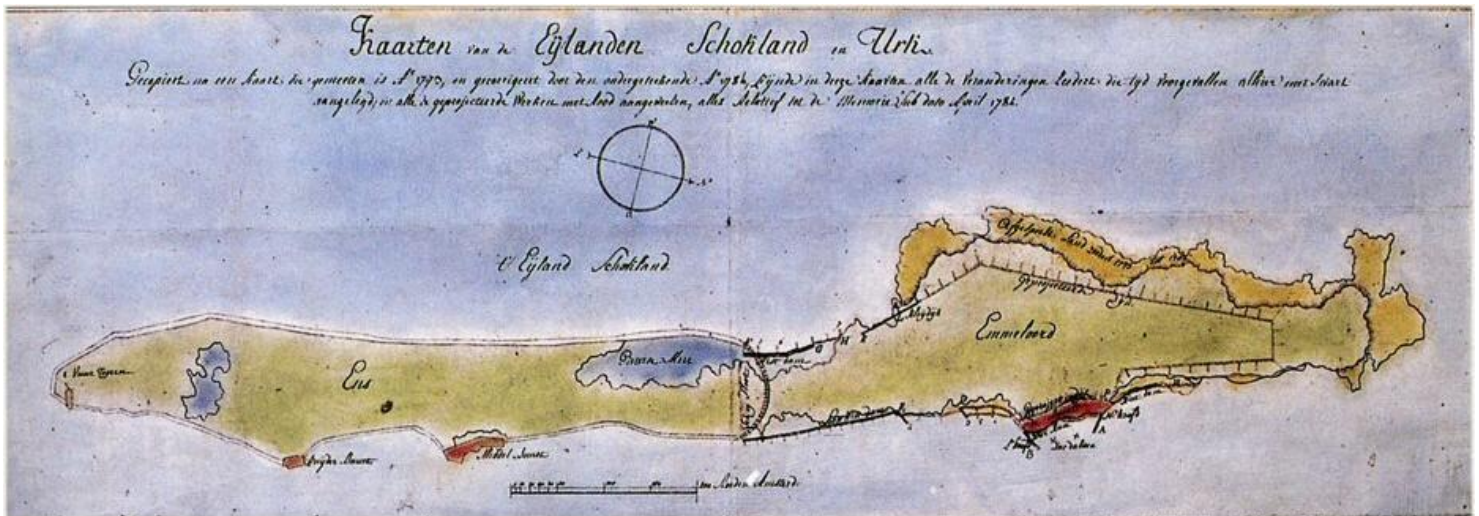


Urk Lighthouse

jib. The shores of Friesland faded away, leaving only a line of clumps floating in a silvery haze; then, as these disappeared, **Urk Island** rose like a cloud on the horizon, and presently became plainly visible — a curious mound of gravel distinctly unlike any part of the mainland, crowned with its serrated group of houses and the lighthouse on the green. As we had visited **Urk** twice before, and knew well its brawny fishermen and amazonish but comely women, we did not now land. In manner, customs, and dress, and also in lack of household cleanliness, the **Urk** islanders are a tribe apart from the Dutch.

From "The Living Age," 1889.

Schokland (Source Musuem Schokland)



- Until around 1450, Schokland was not, in fact, an island but a swampy peatland with a few dry hills here and there. The whole area around Schokland was probably prepared for agriculture even before the fourteenth century. When the rising water washed away large pieces of the peatland, it became a peninsula. Schokland only became a real island when the Zuiderzee swallowed up the last connection to the mainland.

- People were already living on Schokland 12,000 years ago. They lived there as hunter-gatherers and fishermen. During the Middle Ages (500-1500 AD) there were mainly farmers here who kept cattle and grew cereal crops. From the 12th century inhabitants lived on the man-made mounds (terpen): Zuidpunt, Zuidert, Middelbuurt and Emmeloord. At high tide or during a storm tide these hills were the only safe places on the island. During the 17th century, agriculture declined because of the loss of land to the sea through erosion. Trade, shipping and, above all, fishing became more and more important.



Schokland, ca. 1860

- In 1859, the islanders lost their battle against the water for good. The inhabitants were ordered to leave the island by Royal Decree. Not only because of the continuing danger of floods, but also because of the poverty. Around 635 'Schokkers' moved to the mainland, but some remained.

Question: Using our class website, click on the links that will take you to a view from either Urk or Schokland.

Using the Hub, answer the following two Questions?

1. What happened?!
2. How do you think what happened to Urk and Schokland in the 20th century changed their identity and relationship to that space?