



Religious and Secular Ways of Coping with Storm Tides in Early Modern Northern Germany

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The study focuses on the relationship of 17th century inhabitants of the North Frisian marshlands to nature – or more precisely – to the sea.

As this relationship is thus not limited to the mere physical impact which each side exerted on the other, the aim of the present survey goes beyond the description of physical circumstances. It focuses on the marshland inhabitants' perceptions of the ocean, it will ask for their concepts concerning the sea and its effects on their environment and scrutinizes how they themselves conceived of their relationship to the sea and their own possibilities to prevent themselves from harmful stormtides.

In many studies on the history of this region and its inhabitants, this relationship is repeatedly described as a hostile confrontation between humanity and the sea. This assumption, perpetuated by a large body of older secondary literature, has not only been retained in recent survey works; it can also be discerned in more critical studies which claim to offer new paradigms of coastal society. By taking for granted the assumption of a combative relationship between coastal dwellers and the ocean, and by working from the same body of published sources, the authors of these critical studies have been prevented from adopting new perspectives on humanity's encounter with the sea throughout history.

Rather than presupposing a primal opposition between people and the sea, the present study aims to understand coastal life in the seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries from the perspective of coastal dwellers themselves. How did they see the world, and how did they position themselves and the sea in the context of their worldview? The study focuses on different positions on behalf of the question, whether men is allowed and able to prevent himself from the danger and harm that the sea exerts on him. The spectrum of these positions is spread from predominantly religious concepts to more secular concepts with strong emphasis on human's ability to protect himself against harmful stormtides.

By doing so the study can give rise to a more multi-faceted understanding of humanity's encounter with nature in the Early Modern.