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Central because Liminal

IJssennagger, Nelleke Laure

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# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

## 1.1 Scope and aim of the PhD thesis

Looking at a map of Viking Age Europe, you will often encounter a great blank spot where Frisia was situated. This is even more clearly the case when we look at distribution maps of Viking finds or maps that indicate areas of importance within the Viking world or Viking sphere of influence (cf. Williams et al. 2014, 12-13). Often historic Frisia, which is generally considered to have stretched from the coast of Belgium along the entire Dutch coast up to the river Weser in Germany (Henstra 2012, 3-5), is not even named as an area at all, but is simply considered part of the larger Frankish world. This is due to, on the one hand, the incorporation of Frisia into the Carolingian realm during the eighth century and, on the other, to the scarcity of 'Viking' finds that traditionally have been mapped in the area and that could corroborate historic and literary references. But was Frisia in the Viking Age really such a blank spot on the map and simply part of Francia, or is this idea perhaps a self-fulfilling prophecy? If we would assume that there is little reason to expect traces of activity related to the Viking sphere due to a scarcity of archaeological evidence and a lack of useful textual evidence, since few of the texts are contemporary, and consequently do not further investigate, then the spot will remain blank. Today, however, with metal-detected finds piling up, with new and changing understandings of the Viking Age, the Viking 'diaspora' and dynamics of exchange, as well as with new research into various categories of material, it is necessary and possible to review this image. This new look at material culture in combination with a fresh look at a wide range of written sources, directed at unravelling what they actually can tell us of the relation between Frisia and the Viking world even if they are not contemporary, can help us review the image of Frisia in relation to the Viking world. After all, 'Frisia' and 'Frisians' do frequently appear in Viking Age or related stories, poetry and runic inscriptions, as is well recognised, and seem closely connected to the Viking world of the North Sea from that perspective. For instance, throughout the textual sources, we read of Vikings going back and forth to Frisia and hear of Frisians in the Viking world. From this we may infer that there was a social significance to the connections between Frisia and the Viking world for both Frisians and Vikings, which would have left traces in both written sources and material culture. It is this social significance that we are keen to find and study in this PhD thesis.

We can capture the socially meaningful relations between the Frisian and Viking spheres, and the extent to and ways in which these areas and the people in them connect and cohere, with the term connectivity (Horden and Purcell 2000, 123), which will be explained more fully later on. Since we are so used to finding stories of travel and connections, we do not always see or question the relevance or social meaning of this embedded travel, exchange and unity of areas in the Viking Age. Whilst, in fact, studying and determining the ways in which the connections are socially embedded can reveal the degree and extent of their connectivity. As Søren Sindbæk (2011, 41) points out for the Viking Age in general:

*“Long-distance interaction and wealth brought by this means are so ingrained in*

*modern perceptions of the Viking Age that their significance is easily taken for granted. Yet the very abundance of movement and exchange evident to archaeologists or numismatists, historians or geneticists, begs a question: why, in an early medieval society, did long-distance interaction come to be socially meaningful?"*

Indeed, we have to question what the nature of the exchange between the Frisian and Viking spheres of influence and activity was, and to what extent the interaction penetrated society and everyday life. If we can unravel why this was meaningful, we can understand the degree of connectivity. We can do this by trying to extract the perception of these interactions from written sources in combination with the study of material culture. This is based on the idea that the archaeology can highlight the extent to which Frisia was positioned in the Viking sphere, whilst written sources can perhaps provide us with an idea of how the connections were perceived, framed and embedded in social structures and in history.

The aim of this PhD thesis is to research historic Frisia within the frame of the Viking Age North Sea world and to highlight the degree of connectivity, as well as the way it is reflected in the sources, between the Frisian coast and the Viking sphere. This will be done through a multidisciplinary approach based on case studies and including historiographic, literary, legal and material sources. As such, it is not only archaeological-historical in nature, but also literary-critical. By bringing together evidence for the Viking Age in Frisia, and by zooming out of the traditional Frankish or Continental frame and zooming in on the North Sea context, we can review Frisia in a wider Viking world perspective. Needless to say, this does not diminish the already established picture of Frisia within Francia but adds another perspective to it that can illuminate Frisia's position in the Viking Age. To do so, one of the most challenging aspects of this PhD thesis is to create a methodological tool by which such an interdisciplinary study is possible and meaningful, and can go beyond the many biases of the sources and the subject.

## **1.2 Earlier studies and present state of research**

As the study of the Viking Age is a multidisciplinary and international field par excellence, research related to the topic includes a multitude of disciplines, traditions and regions. Within such a broad field, it is impossible and irrelevant to discuss all developments, so we will limit ourselves to presenting a number of key aspects and developments from previous and current research.

Traditionally, our understanding of the southern North Sea coastal area – as historic Frisia is sometimes referred to in research – in the Viking Age is based on information from, primarily, the Frankish written sources, as well as some Anglo-Saxon ones. Two of the earlier scholars to coherently study the historical and literary sources on Vikings in the Low Countries or in the Frankish realm were Walter Vogel (1906) and Jan de Vries (1923). They both paid much attention to the depiction of the Vikings on the Continent in these sources. The range of annals and vitae that these scholars studied describe Viking activity and political events in Frisia, and this information has long been the absolute framework in which all ideas and

archaeological finds were placed. More often than not, this was done with the example of the English Danelaw in mind, and as long as the evidence in Frisia was not comparable to it, then there was no ‘Viking Age’, no considerable Viking presence and no real Viking imprint in Frisia or the Netherlands. This does not mean that a temporary presence of Vikings, on raid or trading trip, was doubted, just that this was not considered enough to justify seeing it as ‘a Viking Age’. But what this phenomenon of ‘a Viking Age’ should be and which boxes need to be ticked before we could rightfully use the term ‘Viking Age’ as a phenomenon rather than just a time frame, usually remains unclear. As I have argued elsewhere (IJssennagger 2015a, 138-9), I believe one could make a claim for a Viking Age as a phenomenon in the Netherlands and particularly in Frisia, but then on the basis of its own relation to the Viking world and within its own framework.

In 1971 a working group at the University of Amsterdam set out a project to critically review the written sources and all finds in the Low Countries that could possibly be Viking, and to compare them to the Danelaw situation. The aim was to see if there was a Viking influence in the Low Countries similar to that in England, but the answer was no (Van Regteren Altena and Besteman, 1971). Naturally, one of the key issues when critically studying a list of objects to look for Viking influence, is the question ‘What is Viking?’ We can equally question if such a term is helpful at all, but whether it is or not, we always need to define what we consider Viking and which criteria we use to examine objects. In her 2004 article, Annemarieke Willemsen included a list and discussion of Viking finds from the river area in the Netherlands, including Dorestad. Willemsen similarly faced the question of when an object can be termed a Viking find, and she chose the following solution:

*“In this essay, the problem of ‘what is Viking’ is deliberately and on the whole neglected, in favour of a survey of those finds that indicate the presence and influence of the Vikings in the river delta of the Netherlands, whether those objects were traded, raided, left or lost by the Norsemen.”*  
(Willemsen 2004, 65-6)

This approach opens up the possibility of including objects that may have been manufactured on the Continent or elsewhere, but display clear influence by the Vikings, either through use, type, decoration, treatment or the like. It is fair to say that we often don’t know for certain where an object was made, and this problem is overcome by a wide approach to what is classified as Viking. Whilst not neglecting the question of what is Viking, a somewhat similar approach is taken in this PhD thesis by looking at objects that show a clear connection to the Viking sphere as an area of origin through typological and stylistic aspects, as well as in their distribution. This does not mean that an object has to actually have been made in, for instance, Viking Scandinavia, but that it or its decoration and idea, stem from or are strongly related to the Viking sphere, whether in Scandinavia or beyond. The reason this approach can be taken is that we are not studying the presence of

Vikings in Frisia (or the Netherlands), but the connectivity between the Frisian and Viking worlds, and the extent of their spheres of influence.



Fig. 1.1 The falsified Viking hoard of Winsum. Fries Museum Leeuwarden, Coll. Provincie Fryslân.

That there has been an interest in finding tangible evidence to corroborate the presence of Vikings in the Netherlands at large, even though only temporarily, can be shown by the example of a false Viking hoard from the modern-day province of Friesland, which was part of historic Frisia. This hoard, which was said to have been found in the terp or dwelling mound of Winsum, came to the Fries Museum

(Museum of Friesland) piece by piece between the end of the second World War and the 1960s. All items came from the collection of one man, who also sold objects to or traded items with other museums and collectors. The objects, said to be part of the Viking hoard, were eagerly taken in by the museum curators, as they were seen as the first physical evidence of Viking presence in Frisia. However, when objects of various materials kept arriving, at increasing prices, and when a research project showed that they included several pieces of objects otherwise seldom found, some decorated with doubtful runic inscriptions, suspicion arose as to the authenticity of the pieces. Research led to the generally accepted theory that the objects may have been created in a National-Socialist educational context (Van Regteren Altena 1971; Elzinga 1975; cf. Boeles 1951 (particularly 442-3) for the first publication of the hoard). Apart from the ideological inspiration that formed the basis for the initial creation of the objects, financial incentive – the first objects were such a success, and traded for valuable objects, that it was profitable to supply more – may, in fact, have played a part in continuously supplying the museum with objects. The whole affair, in any case, has caused awareness both of the danger of actively looking for specific types of objects and to the potential for ideological connotations and financial motivations.



Fig. 1.2. Falsified Viking dragon head related to the Winsum hoard. Fries Museum Leeuwarden, Coll. Provincie Fryslân.

It was not until 1996 that the first, undisputed material evidence of Viking presence in Frisia and the Netherlands as a whole was identified, in the form of the first Westerklijf hoard. This hoard, which was followed by additional parts in the 1990s and by a second hoard in 2001, was found on the former island of Wieringen and was clearly a Danish silver hoard. The first and second Westerklijf hoards neatly coincide with the Danish presence on Wieringen as known from the

written sources and display the developments in Viking economic practices or the system of transactions (Besteman 2004a). Ever since, material evidence, mostly in the form of single finds, has turned up and been added to the picture, whilst some older finds were 'rediscovered' in light of new finds. Amongst the older finds are those from Dorestad, the most obvious place in the Netherlands to look for Viking traces on the basis of the written sources and its importance in international trade. The excavations of Dorestad and the material it has yielded have been subject to ongoing research and publication (see, for example, the publications of Van Es and Verwers 1980, 2009, 2015, Prummel 1983 and Willemsen and Kik eds. 2010). The old collections of the Fries Genootschap and Zeeuws Genootschap, both old antiquarian societies, have recently been revisited, partly in the context of this PhD thesis but also by others, and revealed some finds related to the Viking sphere that earlier had gone unrecognised as such. The fact that these objects are now recognised partly reflects that there is more knowledge due to greater availability of the international Viking material which helps identify such finds here. In addition, the archaeological landscape has changed dramatically over the past decades, creating new possibilities for studying finds. One such possibility is through recording schemes, of which the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) in England is the most prominent and which is now being followed by schemes elsewhere in Europe. This includes the Portable Antiquities of the Netherlands (PAN), which is being installed at the moment of writing.<sup>1</sup>

Likewise the field of Viking Studies has evolved and become even more interdisciplinary than before. For instance, one of the most important aims of the publication *Cultures in Contact: Scandinavian Settlement in England in the ninth and tenth Centuries* in 2000 was to 'open up new interdisciplinary dialogue in Viking Studies', as is reflected in the various disciplines represented in it, and to study 'What were the implications of setting cultures in contact, and how is this reflected in the surviving material, documentary and linguistic evidence?' (Hadley and Richards 2000, 3). This question is still at the basis of much research into the Viking Age and the Viking phenomenon, whilst the field has indeed become even more interdisciplinary and grown to include more regional studies contributing to it than ever before. The field has perhaps also become a more theoretical one, focussing on aspects of culture contact, identities, selves and others, DNA- and isotope analysis and the idea of a diaspora. Research directions have been sparked by new finds and distributions, as is the case with numismatics and metal-detected finds, as well as by new techniques and possibilities in the natural sciences. These allow researchers to investigate both geographical origins of people and of objects. The analysis of imports has always been important for Viking Age studies. Besides the well-known work of, for instance, Egon Wamers (cf. 1985), recent studies have also contributed (cf. Hanne Lovise Aannestad (2015), Maria Paanum Baastrup (2012), Gabor Thomas (2012), to name a few). Studies based on the data from the PAS, such as the work of Jane Kershaw (2009; 2013), have contributed much and

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<sup>1</sup> PAN is launched after the research for this thesis was completed, and so apart from some additional finds for future reference, the data from PAN could not be incorporated in this study.

changed our image of the Viking Age. Within the Netherlands, we can on the one hand see a development from studying Viking influence in general to the study of more local or regional Viking-related phenomena, placed in a wider Viking context. The present PhD thesis, but also the new research into the ring-fortresses along the coast (Ten Harkel 2013; Tys et al. 2016), are exponents of this shift in focus. On the other hand, we see a shift towards seeing Vikings in a Low Countries perspective again, including the Belgian coast, related to wider phenomena. The recent studies in Scandinavia and in Great Britain, particularly the inventory and analysis of Kershaw (2013), can be used to draw upon for analysis of finds in Frisia and the Low Countries.

The most famous and thorough study of the Frisians is, of course, still Stephane Lebecq's *Marchands et Navigateurs Frisons* (1983). But over the past couple of years, much new research in the field of Frisian studies has come to add to this picture, particularly with an international focus. In addition, we see that there is a new focus on the North Sea world as an area of study from the pre-Viking into Viking Age, with Frisia as part of it. After Braudel's *Mediterranean* (1949) and Horden and Purcell's *The Corrupting Sea* (2000), we have now started looking at the North Sea as a coherent area of study again in a similar way, such as in the publication *Frisians and their North Sea Neighbours* (Hines and IJssennagger eds. 2017) and *North Sea Archaeologies* (Van De Noort 2011), as well as the more popular and journalistic *On the Edge of the World* (Pye 2015).

The Vikings, Frisians and the North Sea have all proved attractive subjects for non-academic studies and popular publications, whether they be books by amateur researchers or publications that are more journalistic in nature, some of which have attracted quite a lot of attention.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the Vikings have been the topic of a number of exhibitions. Naturally, the Vikings nowadays attract the most attention through their depiction in some of the most popular TV series. It must be noted that these TV series, but also films and games, do try to be increasingly detailed and historically accurate, and therefore seek out collaboration with experts. This positive development stimulates both research and outreach and could be an important part of the future of Viking studies.

What these developments clearly show is that the time is right for putting research results and information from different disciplines and areas – Viking, Frisian, North Sea – together and that this can provide new insights in the future. This PhD thesis is intended to serve as a contribution to this development, and as a starting point to expand research on these themes further.

### 1.3 Connectivity and the Viking Age

The basic premise of the current study is that in a time of considerable interconnections, the cross-cultural interaction is reflected in archaeological, iconographical, historical and literary sources. The interaction is believed to have become socially meaningful and embedded to such an extent that we can call it *connectivity*. The

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<sup>2</sup> Apart from the book by Michael Pye (2015) we can also name the example of Luit van der Tuuk (2015) in the Netherlands, both of which are of a non-scholarly and general nature for a wide audience.

much-used term connectivity, which is not often defined in studies, is in this PhD thesis defined in short as the extent to and ways in which areas and people are connected and cohere so as to become socially meaningful aspects of those societies involved. A short introduction to connectivity will suffice here as the concept will be further explored in the theoretical framework of Chapter 3, but we can stress here that connectivity should not be seen as synonymous to contact or connection, as it goes far beyond that. It is a matter of coherence between areas and people that goes down to the core of the social structure, and that is embedded in and also determining for the society. It also refers to the specific nature of the infrastructure, namely to the possibility and acceptability of being mobile and using this mobility. Maritime mobility is an aspect that has always been connected to the early medieval and Viking Age Frisians, as it has to the Vikings and this makes Frisians sometimes hard to grasp. This socially embedded mobility and coherence between the spheres around the North Sea creates a unity which is reflected in the various sources including texts and objects, whilst the areas simultaneously remain internally different. Therefore, we need to address Frisia's relation to the Viking sphere in its own terms and frame, when we search for the traces of connectivity.

Looking at the representations of connectivity in an interdisciplinary study may tell a more nuanced story of the cross-North sea relations and coherence than the traditional – that is Frankish – textual sources alone, and may, therefore, give us a better idea of the areas with which Frisia coheres, and how. This idea was also expressed by Dries Tys and Chris Loveluck (2006, 161) in their study of sixth- to eleventh-century cross-Channel contacts:

*“Hence, we see elements of the expression of a common, maritime group identity in the relative abundance of exchanged material in coastal zones, distributed both across the Channel and along the Continental coastline. Greater affinity with other maritime groups, in certain instances, rather than with the social elites based inland, may also have promoted rather different links than textual sources suggest in coastal locations.”*

Indeed, that the relations between the maritime ‘Frisians’ and ‘Scandinavians’ – or rather people from Frisia and people from the Viking areas or spheres, including the various people of different backgrounds that the terms ‘Frisians’ and ‘Vikings’ encompass, which will be explained in more detail further on – were far more complex than we know from the annals has been suggested. But the question remains how complex they were and what interrelations affected Viking Age society. Due to the close connections, overlapping spheres of influence and contact situations which occurred in Scandinavia, on the Continent (in Francia) and also in the Insular world, the Frisian-Viking interrelations can hardly be seen separately from the contacts with and within the Anglo-Saxon and Irish world. Therefore, we should look at the Frisian-Scandinavian-Insular encounters and the extent to which their spheres of influence overlap. In doing so, we are looking for the structure of the relation between the Frisian and Viking spheres, rather than for incidents or events,

even though they are the most recorded and can in fact point us to the structure as well. But, these incidents have been determinative and framed our understanding of the Viking Age for Frisia, whilst they were not always representative. Our approach of looking for more structural relations will allow us to study how the interrelations are reflected in the different sources and what social meaning they may have had or been given.

That the Viking Age is a time of considerable mobility, and thus has great potential for connectivity, is beyond doubt. The period takes its name from the seafaring Scandinavians known as Vikings, who left their imprint on Europe through their overseas activities and 'diaspora'. In general, the Viking Age is dated between the late eighth and the early or mid-eleventh centuries, but it is acknowledged that its dates very much depend on which area one is looking at. The traditional or 'official' dates are derived from an English perspective, with the AD 793 Viking attack on Lindisfarne, as recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (ASC) as the starting point. Dating the start of a period or 'Age' based on such an incident as the attack on Lindisfarne that we know from the written sources has proven problematic. First of all, the precise date has been brought into question because in 789 the ASC lists an episode in Dorset which looks like a Viking attack as well. According to the chronicle, three ships of Northmen came for the first time, although the English first believed they were traders. So the reeve rode to them to take them to the king, but he was slain (ASC s.a. 789, ed. and trans. Swanton 1996, 54-5; Yorke 1995, 107). This episode has at least called into doubt giving the Viking Age a precise starting year based on surviving references and a single event. For Frisia, the first recognised and recorded Viking attack is in 810, but the events leading up to it are of equal importance for what we can call a Viking Age here, despite the fact that the Viking Age is not an official period in Dutch archaeology and history. In addition, the effect of the Viking Age and the close relation with the Viking homelands or sphere can be seen to continue after the traditional end date of 1050. Therefore, we will consider the Viking Age to be the period from the late eighth century to mid eleventh century in general, but will also take into account the pre- and post-Viking Age in our discussions.

Besides asking why long-distance travel became socially meaningful as Sindbæk does, one could also question when it became socially meaningful. This is hard to pinpoint, but it is clear that long before the Viking Age, long-distance travel and contact across the North Sea had significance, albeit in different circumstances and on a different scale. Even from as far back as Palaeolithic and Mesolithic times, traces of interregional contacts and exchange are known in north-western Europe. Since around the beginning of the Christian era, both the North Sea and the Baltic Sea were important areas for networks of exchange (Jöns et al. 2013, 360-71). In the Roman Period, there are indications that Frisian legionaries were present in England (Galestin 2007/8, 687-707), and close connections between Frisia and England became clearly established after the Roman Period, as a result of the Germanic migrations. Intensifying contact in the early medieval period is displayed particularly in the abundance of rich archaeological finds, and it has even

been argued that gold finds from Westergo (Central Frisia) show a formation of regional power with close relation to, or perhaps even within, the Scandinavian sphere of influence (Nicolay 2014; 2005, 37-103). The close relationships between Dutch and German Frisia, Anglo-Saxon England and Scandinavia in the early medieval period have, in any case, led to cultural similarities which often are described with the term 'North Sea Culture' (Kramer et al. 2000; Heidinga 1975). Despite references to continuing, and again intensifying, contact within this North Sea area in the Viking Age, this presumed situation or period of a shared North Sea Culture does not usually include the Viking Age (Heidinga 1975, 6-7). It seems a generally accepted idea that the early medieval North Sea world with its shared culture, in which the Frisians played a paramount role, faded away when Frisia became integrated into the Christian Frankish realm so that it no longer shared a cultural sphere with its North Sea neighbours. Although, naturally, the incorporation into the Frankish realm provided a dominant cultural sphere, the idea of losing a shared cultural sphere around the North Sea is partly dependent on the definition of 'North Sea Culture' and of cultural entities and their boundaries. As such, it can and needs to be questioned. Whether indeed there is less coherence in the North Sea world after the Carolingian incorporation and Christianisation of Frisia, or whether a different image emerges when we look at the sources again critically and combine them with new evidence, will be the focus of this PhD thesis. The extent to which there still is a shared cultural sphere around the North Sea in the Viking Age, regardless of whether we call it North Sea culture, Viking world, Frisian culture or something else, is a question that is inherent to the central research question in this PhD thesis.

#### **1.4 Research questions and structure of the research**

The central research question in this PhD thesis is to what extent and in what way Frisia displays connectivity with the Viking Age North Sea world and how this is reflected in material and textual sources. To be able to answer this question in the conclusion we will use the following sub-questions. First, we will examine whether and how the North Sea connections from the pre-Viking centuries are still present and meaningful in the Viking Age. This will be done by studying how these connections are reflected in the various written sources over time. In a similar way we will look at the representation of the Viking Age connections between the Frisian and Viking spheres. Through both the written and material sources, we will investigate which areas and spheres these are primarily connected with. Moreover, we will study a number of selected material traces to answer the question of how they refer to the Viking world, where they occur and in what way they relate to the Viking sphere. Naturally, we must also seek to determine how we can meaningfully connect the textual and material references from these different moments in time. Finally, we have to question how the image that arises from our analysis of Frisia in relation to the Viking sphere relates to the established picture of Frisia as part of the Frankish realm.

These general research questions are divided over the various chapters of the

PhD thesis and sometimes broken down into more detailed questions again, so that they can be satisfactorily addressed. Dealing with various types of sources, and with a large area and period, most of these questions will be answered through case studies. For example, in the material case studies, we constantly ask how an object refers to the Viking sphere, where its parallels are found as presented in the form of distribution maps, if and how we can place it in a larger context of similar or related finds, and what we can infer from it. Here it should be stressed that the information collected in this PhD thesis is not of statistical relevance and is not a quantitative recording or analysis. On the contrary, it is a qualitative analysis of a number of selected sources and case studies, directed at documenting types of connectivity echoed in a variety of media. Where the textual sources are analysed, we question where and how connections between the Frisian and Viking spheres are represented, how we can interpret them, if we can connect them to other sources and references and which themes we see recurring in them, in order to infer the social significance. In terms of our methodology, the main challenge is establishing how we can approach and connect the diffuse body of sources, whilst the historical-archaeological framework aims to answer the question of how Frisia develops in relation to and is touched by shifting spheres from the pre-Viking to post-Viking Age.

### **1.5 Delineation of the research area and period**

It should be evident by this point that this PhD thesis focusses on Frisia, the North Sea world and the Viking Age. To be able to use these highly complex and fluid concepts or terms, we need to first present a definition and demarcation of them.

We have already established that the Viking Age as we consider it here dates from the late eighth to late eleventh century, but that what we consider a Viking Age may depend upon location and perspective. Furthermore, it is important to clarify that throughout this PhD thesis, the term Viking Age will primarily be used as a time frame as it is recognised in a European context, and not as implying a Viking impact per se. Wherever it is used as a phenomenon, as 'a Viking Age' meaning a Viking impact, this will be made explicit. For the purpose of this PhD thesis, which is to study Frisia in a wider North Sea perspective to establish the connectivity between the Frisian and Viking spheres, we simply focus on the Viking Age as the general period between the later eighth century and the later eleventh century, whilst recognising the importance of and inextricable connection to the periods that proceed and follow it. Therefore, the Viking Age can even be seen as a somewhat longer period of time, with no clear-cut boundaries to the year. In Dutch archaeology or history, there is no official Viking Period, but the European Viking Age overlaps with the Carolingian and Ottonian periods here. To be clear, from the use of the notion of Viking Age instead of Frankish or Ottonian period it should not be inferred that it is a priori argued that between the late eighth and late eleventh centuries there is 'a Viking Age' instead of a Carolingian or Ottonian period in Frisia. What these terms and the discussion of the event-based start of the Viking Age clearly show, is that in general we can nuance periodisation and

particularly periodisation based on single aspects, and so we simply use these terms to make sure we all know which time frame we are discussing.

Although the period of research is this Viking Age, we thus include material and traditions from both before and after. For the pre-Viking Age, we can use the terms Migration Period and early medieval period. In the Netherlands, the early medieval period lasts until around AD 900, so would include the start of our Viking Age. In Scandinavia, on the other hand, the medieval period in general only starts after the Viking Age, which itself is part of the Iron Age. In this PhD thesis, the Migration Period and early medieval period are nonetheless roughly considered and used as the period between the fall of the Roman empire (c. AD 400) and the start of the Viking Age (c. AD 800). The period after the Viking Age is considered a(n) (early) medieval period across Europe. On the Continent, the period into the thirteenth century would be called Central Middle Ages, after which we get the Later Middle Ages. The latter term is here simply used to describe the period following our Viking Age.

The primary research area is the historic area of Frisia. Defining Frisia, as well as Frisians, is particularly important and difficult, as the area has a very complex history, geomorphology, character and archaeology. Historic Frisia can be best defined as a Frisian sphere of influence that both expanded and shrank throughout time, and its demarcation – usually by waterways and other natural phenomena – is not at all times easy to establish. Around AD 800, after the incorporation into the Frankish realm, the *Lex Frisionum* (LF) demarcates the area where the laws of the Frisians are valid as between the rivers Zwin in Belgium and Weser in Germany (LF, see ed. Von Richthofen 1863, 656 (n. 1)). Following this legal text, which Charlemagne ordained to be recorded as one of the *Leges Barbarorum*, we perceive Frisia in the Viking Age as stretching all along the coast of the Netherlands and part of Germany between these two waterways. Moreover, the Viking Age homeland of the Frisians, called Frisia or Fresia in contemporary sources, should not be confused with the modern-day province of Friesland in the Netherlands, not even in combination with the present-day German region Ostfriesland, as they were still only part of it.

As will be outlined in more detail in Chapter 2, this Frisian area can be divided into sub-regions with regional variations. Although this differentiation can be seen at both the micro- and macro-level, the most important distinction that can be made is that between West, Central and East Frisia, divided by the waterways Vlie and Lauwers. This distinction is already present in the *Lex Frisionum*, with some variations in legal tradition across these three areas. Archaeologically, however, the most visible distinction is probably between the rich Westergo area and the rest of Frisia. The northern tidal coastal area is bordered by vast areas of peat to the south, which were only claimed during the tenth century, whilst the former dunes are now located on the Wadden Islands. The western coast still has dunes and is characterised by the intersection of the main rivers. Naturally, we need to take these internal differences into account when studying Frisian history and archaeology.

In order to study the interconnections, we need to study both finds from the Frisian area and references to the people, region and sphere in texts. The finds once belonged to the people, so it makes sense to combine these two. The term 'Frisian' is problematic not only because the Viking Age meaning of the term is different from our modern one, but also because its meaning shifts and is not always clear at a given moment (Bazelmans, 2009; Hines and IJssennagger 2017). Moreover, it is mostly applied by outsiders. If it refers to people from Frisia, then was there one group of people with a common identity living in this area? Did they see themselves as Frisian and did this comprise all people living in this area? Probably not, as it is more likely, also considering the landscape, that the area was inhabited by several local groups who had a history, language and maritime identity of their own, which they shared to a certain extent. Ethnic identity must have been a multi-layered and dynamic phenomenon, and we can expect that people changed identity in their life according to circumstances. This would have created hybrid identities, in which elements are combined and assimilated, so it may be more suitable to speak of cultural identity than ethnic (cf. Downham 2012). We can, in fact, see Frisia as a poly-ethnic transitional region through time, as will also become clear in the historic framework of Chapter 2, and therefore expect manifold identities, even under one and the same term 'Frisian' (cf. Bazelmans, 2009). Unfortunately, written sources do not always distinguish between the local groups, so when we find a reference to a Frisian we most often do not know from which part of Frisia. At the same time this sphere of influence overlaps with the Frankish sphere of influence and both spheres need not be mutually excluding phenomena. Naturally, the same can be said for the term 'Vikings', which is equally shifting in meaning and can include people from different regions, and the 'Viking sphere', which can overlap with the Frisian and Frankish spheres. Being careful with these terms and taking their various meanings into account is thus a necessity. In this PhD thesis, we are therefore delineating our primary research area to a region which is in the Frisian sphere of influence – the Dutch coast – from which we collect material sources and whose inhabitants are referred to as Frisian as we encounter them in written sources. The term Viking, on the other hand, is used as a general term for the spheres, people and objects who originate in or clearly belong to the cultural Viking sphere in Scandinavia and beyond- in the Danelaw, for instance. Clearly, the research is by no means restricted to the Frisian area, as it primarily serves as a starting point from which we follow and trace connections across the North Sea world. In that process, the material and the textual case studies should be seen as two different perspectives or approaches to the same question and same past.

Although I have the entire Frisian sphere in this sense in mind when studying connectivity with the Viking world, and this is a necessity when written sources refer to Frisia, it is not feasible to study the area in its entirety in terms of archaeological traces. The whole research area is not equally covered in publications, databases, object recording and so on, and therefore it is hard or impossible to make a close study of the entire area. By inventorying material from the whole area but by only going really in depth in the case studies with a focus on parts of the Netherlands,

this problem is overcome. What follows from this, and should be clear at all times, is that the aim of this thesis is not to provide an exhaustive overview but to provide insights into the nature and extent of connectivity. As such, this PhD thesis does not present a detailed study of the entire Frisian area, or a comprehensive overview of Viking finds from the Netherlands. What the PhD thesis does present is a selection of deliberately picked object types from specific regions which are presented in detail in the case studies.

In this PhD thesis, the North Sea region is broadly seen as the coastal areas of the Continent (from Northern France up to Denmark), the Scandinavian coastal lands (including the southern Swedish and Norwegian coasts), and the coastal areas of the British Isles (so including the Irish Sea regions), even though some areas may not strictly be part of a North Sea area geographically. The word sphere, which has already been used several times here, is primarily used to denote particular zones of (cultural) influence, which may or may not coincide with geographical and political areas. In addition, there are many different spheres one can refer to, such as geographical spheres, cultural spheres, economical spheres, spheres of power and spheres of exchange, to just name a few. Moreover, spheres can and do overlap. The reason for choosing to use 'sphere' instead of territories, is that it is a term that can capture the fluid relations and contacts in the Viking Age, the shifting of spheres through time and the changing reach of particular people and power without referring to a well-circumscribed or 'official' territory. Moreover, it can also help to discuss particular parts of a sphere of influence one is touched by, such as the transactional sphere. For instance, in general terms, there is a relative difference in the use of currency between the Carolingian and Viking spheres, particularly in the underlying system of value, whilst there was exchange and articulation between and co-existence of the two systems as well. We know that in the Viking Age Frisia was officially part of the Frankish realm politically and territorially, but does that automatically mean that they also conformed to the Frankish sphere of exchange? Or could the Viking sphere of transaction, the metal-weight economy, reach into the Frisian region? The same types of questions can be asked in relation to religious and cultural spheres and can be studied by looking at a combination of sources. Again, it must be stressed that although this PhD thesis is concerned with studying Frisia within the Viking Age North Sea sphere of influence, this should not be interpreted as meaning that this was the only or most important sphere of influence that touched Frisia at this time. It simply means that from the set of overlapping spheres, identities and the pluralistic system of interrelations, it is this context that was chosen to be the subject of investigation.

From both a modern and a historical Continental perspective, Frisia could be considered a peripheral area. Sometimes it is therefore considered liminal in a geographical and political sense, in a negative way as meaning marginalised, and even referred to as 'no-man's land' (Reuter 1991, 69). From a land-based perspective, the northern coastal area is a liminal area on the edge of the Continent, whilst from a North Sea perspective, it is one of the most important and connected zones. As such, liminality is not necessarily a negative concept, but also one that provides



Fig. 1.3 Map of the North Sea area indicating Friesland (red) and historic Frisia (pink).

opportunities, and one that can be explained in a very different way than as meaning marginalised. Although liminality has been conceptualised, primarily within anthropology, in the context of rituals or rites de passage by Arnold Van Gennep (1960) and Victor Turner (1987), it has also been applied to describing stages within other processes or states of being, such as cultural change or identity formations (cf. Turner and Turner, 1987). So in essence, liminality is about transition and about neither belonging fully to the one or the other. In this PhD thesis, the liminality that is referred to is a socio-cultural liminality and not a geographical liminality in the sense of a peripheral area per se. Rather, the liminality is related

to the edges and the overlapping of spheres. However, this socio-cultural liminality may coincide with a geographical periphery, as can be the case in Frisia. Here, liminality is seen as the ability to communicate with a sphere or spheres, whilst never really becoming fully part of it. This state of liminality provides freedom of movement and mobility, as it allows one to move back and forth between different spheres, and between land and water. This can be a source of social power. So although much of the research in north-western Europe is particularly concerned with important heartlands, it is very promising and, in the case of studying cross-cultural contact in fact necessary, to look at those regions where spheres and groups with different identities, social statuses and material cultures meet and are negotiated (Cohen 1985, 70), whether we call these liminal zones or not.<sup>3</sup> It is primarily in these areas that we see the most interesting dynamics in both a physical and mental sense. Where different spheres meet, overlap and interconnect – in our case Frisia – culture contact takes place and, most importantly, receives social meaning. As such, liminality and connectivity are highly interconnected phenomena in the case of Frisia, as will be further explored in the following chapters.

### **1.6 Corpus**

The corpus of data for this PhD thesis consists of a range of written sources of various text types, such as normative, historiographic, fictional and narrative, and a selection of archaeological artefacts, mainly metal detected. The corpus of selected texts is presented and critically discussed in Appendix 1, whilst the archaeological corpus is presented in detail in Appendix 2. As will be explained in more detail there and very briefly in the introductions to Chapters 4 and 5, which contain the analysis of each corpus, some deliberate choices have been made regarding the selection of sources to form the corpus. These choices have been made both from a theoretical and methodological point of view, but also pragmatically and with feasibility in mind. For both the textual and tangible corpus there are clear biases, which are discussed in the methodological section of Chapter 3 and the appendices.

The selected texts show a huge diversity in type, date and origin. Because of the relative scarcity and, above all, scattered nature of the references to the Frisian-Viking interconnections, we have to embrace the sources where we can, without losing sight of their biases. Most importantly, we believe that sources recorded after the Viking Age can still hold relevant information to it, which allows us to take the liberty of including post-Viking texts. In terms of text-type, a distinction based on that criterion is not the leading principle here, so law codes, panegyric, sagas, annals and vitae – or normative, historiographic, fictional and narrative texts – can all be studied next to each other. For each text, the relation to the Viking Age and the text-type is established in the appendix before its content is analysed in the case studies.

The corpus of material objects is made up of portable metal finds, most of which

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<sup>3</sup> See also the 2012 Sachsensymposion theme LIFE ON THE EDGE. Social, Political and Religious Frontiers in Early Medieval Europe which takes its inspiration from exactly these facts.

are metal-detected. These finds have been selected due to their availability and growing numbers, the expectation that they can provide new insights, their well-studied parallels and their clear association with the Viking sphere. In addition, particularly the portable metal finds were among the objects that could and did travel in the Viking Age, making this an ideal category of material when studying exchange and connections as signs of connectivity. The brooches and pins of the first case study have primarily been chosen for their role as personal items that display style and identity (cf. Kershaw 2013, 3-10), whilst the material in the second case study is related to the transactional sphere or sphere of silver. To complement these, the third case includes some other material categories that are strikingly present and are believed to be of interest for future research. That mostly finds from the northern coastal area are studied or at least form the starting point of the cases, is due to the simple fact that the finds in this area are the best known to me and most accessible, and that I have the most contact with metal-detectorists in this area. This is not to say that the corpus is limited to this area, as we will see.

That the corpus is divided in two is based on the acknowledgement that texts and objects, despite both having a relevance to the Viking Age individually and together, differ in their relation to that Viking Age, in their temporality and in their relation to our question of connectivity. Therefore, they can best be presented accordingly. This does not mean that the sources are kept separate, as their strength is in their combination and confrontation with each other, which happens throughout the thesis. This confrontation and combination happens despite the different temporalities and characteristics, which are here thought of as different wavelengths that can nevertheless create one single image, like a radar image, as will be outlined in the methodology.

### **1.7 Structure of the PhD thesis**

Together with Chapter 2, this introductory chapter presents the setting of the scene for the actual analysis of the sources. In Chapter 2 the historical-archaeological framework of primarily Frisia, but also the North Sea sphere in more general terms, is sketched. Besides sketching the framework for the Viking Age, the chapter includes the pre-Viking and post-Viking periods as times of importance for Viking Age events and their recording, as well as times from which source material originates. Again, as the history and archaeology of Frisia and the North Sea world can be complex and diffuse, we cannot sketch everything in detail and sometimes have to stick to general developments and aspects. Nevertheless, the aim of the chapter is to create a more or less coherent picture of the pre-Viking to the post-Viking period in which the methodological chapter and the case studies can be placed.

The theoretical framework and the methodology that guides the analysis of the sources is subsequently set out in Chapter 3. With regards to the multi-disciplinary character of the topic, the multi-temporal nature of the sources and the various types of information from a range of contexts, the choice has been made to present the theoretical framework as a discussion of important concepts, ideas and biases. The methodology that follows from it subsequently examines the possibilities of

the sources, how to approach them, and how to combine them meaningfully despite their restrictions and problems. Here, the idea of reading the image that arises from various sources as a radar image based on different wavelengths, will be introduced.

Chapters 4 and 5 form the heart of the PhD thesis, as this is where the case studies of the material and textual sources relating to connectivity are found. Due to the different nature and temporality of the source types the textual and material cases have each been placed in their own chapter, in accordance with the division of the corpus. Chapter 4 focusses on the analysis of the written evidence by presenting a content analysis of the sources, which among other things will focus on recurring themes, broken down into three case studies. Chapter 5 is concerned with the material culture and contains an exploration of a number of Frisian finds, their context and the distribution pattern of their parallels, which will be plotted on distribution maps. Again, this is done in three case studies. To make sure the chapters focus solely on the content analysis of the sources, the actual presentation and discussion of the corpora that are analysed have been placed in two separate appendices, as mentioned above. Appendix 1 presents the selection of written sources, the criteria for their selection and their relation to the Viking horizon. In Appendix 2 the catalogue of discussed finds is presented, with a discussion of their background, the selection criteria, the main collections the finds stem from and the standard works that are used for their classification.

Finally, in Chapter 6 the conclusion of the PhD thesis is presented and an answer is formulated to the question of to what extent Frisia displays connectivity with the Viking Age North Sea world and how this is reflected in the various selected sources.

