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Central because Liminal

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Chapter 2

Three Formative Periods

**A historical-archaeological framework for Frisia
and the spheres with which it is connected**

In the various sources, and particularly the textual ones, pre-Viking, Viking and later material is intertwined and combined. Together, they form a condensed horizon in time that includes the Viking Age. This is why in the analysis of the sources, the Viking Age cannot be seen separately from the previous and following periods, and why these periods need to be taken into account to study the Viking Age proper. The case studies presented in this thesis should, therefore, be placed in the wider historical and archaeological framework of Frisia and the different spheres of activity, economy and influence to which it is connected throughout time, as it is sketched in this chapter. Again, although bearing in mind the entire Frisian sphere, particular attention is paid to the west-, central- and east-Frisian areas. Sketching the historical framework to place the cases in is not a straightforward task, since the history of Frisia and Frisians prior to and after the Viking Age is as turbulent as the Viking Age itself. It is a history of changing landscape, people, identity, power, alliances and religion. Even less straightforward are the representations of this history in the available sources, and the fluid terms and demarcations that are used within them (Hines and IJssennagger 2017). Yet throughout these periods, the idea of a 'Frisia', that is a Frisian cultural and perhaps political area, and of Frisian people, albeit with varying meanings attached to these terms in each period and sometimes per situation, is persistent in historical sources and therefore in historical and archaeological research.

The historiography of Frisia has traditionally been dominated by descriptions of its institutional history, and it tends to provide us with attempts to establish a seemingly clear image of a territorial development, with a manifest periodisation (cf. Henstra 2012). For the diffuse area and construct that Frisia is over time, and given the few sources available, many of which are not contemporary and most of which are external, it is not easy to provide such a formalised history. Neither is it always helpful, especially not when studying connectivity that crosses the boundaries of spheres of influence and time, as the case studies will elucidate. The danger with an institutional history is a generalisation that does not reflect the situation in Frisia and that leaves little room for nuance, exceptions and the study of particular relations which are less formalised. So in order to understand the connectivity in the Viking Age, I will first attempt to sketch the changing networks, relations and 'spheres' in which Frisia was involved over the course of time, based on both historical and archaeological sources. For this reason, I will speak of spheres – both of influence and power – as conceptualised in the previous chapter, rather than of territories, to capture their fluid and shifting character. These spheres do not necessarily only exist next to each other, but are ; rather constantly interacting with each other, and in many places may even overlap.

Due to its geographical position, Frisia can in the Viking Age be seen as an intermediary zone between the southern Frankish world and the northern North Sea world, and as such had relations to both these worlds at the same time. The history of these relations in time and space are, in a very condensed manner, presented as a framework here, with the particular focus on the Viking Age and the two formative periods that flank it: the Migration Period/ early Middle Ages,

and the twelfth to thirteenth centuries. The section on the Viking Age contains a sketch of the known framework to place the case-study material in, whilst the more detailed discussion of the relations, spheres and connectivity is presented in the case studies themselves and synthesised in the Conclusion in Chapter 6, since it is the aim of this thesis to study the connectivity of Frisia and the North Sea world.

2.1 Early times of transition: From Prehistory to the end of the Roman era

Archaeological sources make it clear that after transient Neolithic people dwelled in Frisia, which in that period had a very different coastline that lay more land inwards, the northern coastal area was settled by people from the hinterland and neighbouring regions about 600 BC.⁴ On the higher ridges in the tidal landscape where they settled, they used sods to build house platforms. Over the centuries, these were heightened and extended, creating terps⁵ or dwelling mounds (Knol and IJssennagger 2017; De Langen 2012; Bazelmans et al. 2012, 116-18). Throughout the centuries, new ones were built as the land extended seawards due to younger sediments accumulating over the centuries. The mounds remained inhabited through the ages, and up to around AD 1000 many were still being extended. With the building of sea dykes around AD 1000, the need for dwelling mounds diminished.

Although there seems to be continuity from pre-historic to Roman times, it is with the first recordings of the name Frisian in that period that we start to speak of 'Frisian culture'. Anything pre-dating these Roman references is referred to as proto-Frisian (De Koning 2012, 9-10). The early recordings of Frisia and Frisians in written sources are descriptions of the people and the area they inhabit by others, from outside of Frisia. It is not until the late eleven hundreds or early twelve hundreds that the Frisians themselves start to 'speak' in vernacular sources, mostly through their vernacular law-texts (Langbroek 2015). In Roman times, when the area inhabited by Frisians appears in writings for the first time as seen through the eyes of classical writers, the coastal area was inhabited by *Frisii* and neighbouring tribes such as the *Chauci*, *Frisiavones* and *Cananefates* (as mentioned by amongst others Tacitus and Pliny; Nieuwhof 2015, 26-8; Galestin 2007/8). Of these tribes, often divided into *minores* and *maiores*, the *Frisii* are usually regarded as what we now would consider Frisians proper, whereas *Frisiavones* were a related people living within the Roman or Romanised society (Galestin 2007/8). The *Frisii minores* lived along the western coast of Frisia (mainly the modern province of North Holland), *Frisii maiores* dwelled along the central northern coast (the modern provinces of Friesland and Groningen), the *Chauci minores* inhabited the coastal area between the rivers Ems and Weser and the *Chauci maiores* from there up to the Elbe (Knol and IJssennagger 2017; Nieuwhof 2015, 26-7; Galestin 2007/8, 692).

⁴ See for a fuller discussion, and the most recent one, Nieuwhof 2015 and references therein, as well as Gerrets 2010, 157. The islands show signs of habitation as well, but appear to have only first been settled in the eighth century.

⁵ These are known as terpen or in English terps in the modern Frisian area, but as wierden in the province of Groningen and Wurten or Warften along the German coast.



Fig. 2.1 The Roman sphere of influence in relation to Frisia.

The whole coastal area between the Rhine and the Weser was an intermediary zone whose dwellers were much in contact with the Romans and the Roman world. Most importantly, the textual references testify to this. In addition, the many Roman objects in the terp region of Frisia could be an indication of this contact, although we must bear in mind that many of them could also stem from a later, Merovingian context. Despite the contact, most parts of Frisia never became fully part of the Roman Empire as it lay north of the Limes. The Limes followed the Rhine, including only the south-western coast of what is later known as Frisia within the Roman Empire. As such, the people who dwelled north of the Rhine were barbarians in the eyes of the classical authors, even though they became allies

for a short while⁶ and there were Roman military outposts in the area which led to temporary Roman control (Nieuwhof 2015, 27-8). However, in most instances where Romans visited the northern coastal area and tried to subdue it, it resulted in tragedy and exclamations on the poor conditions in the region. The much-cited words of Pliny the Elder (AD 23-79) that the coastal dwellers look like ‘sailors in ships when the water covers the surrounding land, but shipwrecked people when the tide has retired’ (Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, book 16:1, ed. and trans. Rackham 1945, 388-9) are a case in point, although the Frisians possibly would not have minded the maritime imagery. As has been pointed out by Egge Knol (Knol and IJssennagger 2017), Pliny would have looked at the Frisians and the rich marsh very differently if he had been an agrarian instead of a Roman officer, as the fertile marsh offered many opportunities.

How far inland the Frisii and Chauci settled, and to what extent their Germanic sphere stretched, is not clear. Textual episodes concerning groups of these people moving to the Rhine banks and crossing the Rhine indicate that they possibly dwelled as far south as across the Rhine, at least at times. This means that although habitation often is concentrated on the terps, it is not at all restricted to the terps and the terp area. It must be recognised that the terp area is only part of what we consider Frisia, but an important part due to the concentration of habitation. The coastal zone between the waters Vlie and Lauwers seems to have been the original heartland of Frisia and was to remain a heartland through time (Knol 2010).

2.2 Shifting spheres in the Migration Period and the early Middle Ages

After the crisis of the Roman Empire in the late third century, people who inhabited the Frisian coastal area started to move, just like many of their Germanic neighbouring tribes. Although the extent to which they did so has been debated for decades, it is agreed that there is a strong decline in population at the end of the Roman Iron Age, both in the Dutch coastal area and in Northern Germany.⁷ During the fourth century AD, there were few people living in the northern coastal region in particular, and this is termed the habitation hiatus (Nieuwhof 2015, 12; Knol 2009; Boeles 1951, esp. 207-26, 241-9). The idea of a hiatus is based on the lack of archaeological traces in the fourth century, as well as a change in material culture in the fifth century, when the area starts to become reinhabited. The change in archaeological remains includes settlement structures and burial rites, and the objects found are usually considered ‘Anglo-Saxon’ in type and style (Nieuwhof 2013, Knol 2011, Knol 2009, Nicolay 2005, Taayke 1996). Stating that ‘Frisian’ material culture was making way for ‘Anglo-Saxon’ material culture, however, would be an oversimplification. Moreover, it raises the question of the relation between ‘ethnic identity’ and material culture, which is recognised as a very complicated and sensitive matter that needs to be looked at with care (cf. Theuvs and Alkemade 2000, 404-11, 443-4, 467-9; Theuvs 2009). The term ‘Anglo-Saxon’ is, next to its historical

⁶ Until the rebellion of 28 AD.

⁷ See for a thorough discussion of the uncertainties and the debate Nieuwhof 2013 and Nicolay 2005 (particularly 67ff).

and its cultural or (pseudo-) ethnic notion, an umbrella term for pottery that was found from Denmark and Northern Germany into Frisia and then beyond in this time (Dijkstra and the Koning 2017; De Koning 2012, 11). In addition, it is clear that the extent to which the population declined in the fourth to fifth century differs throughout the coastal region, with the strongest decline in the north-western coastal area (particularly Oostergo and Westergo), where natural circumstances may have possibly had a greater impact, and the least in the eastern coastal region. For present-day North Holland, there is even strong evidence for continuity of habitation at least locally, despite a decline in population and changes in the archaeology, in the form of archaeological traces and survival of ancient place-names (Dijkstra and De Koning 2017; De Koning 2012, 3, 26). Overall there are many regional differences to start with, as 'Frisia' stretched along such a long and geomorphologically varied coast. For instance, it appears that the region we now call Friesland was more densely populated than western Frisia in the Migration Period and early Middle Ages. Whilst the Anglo-Saxon pottery and changing burial practices did reach East and Central Frisia, as well as present-day South Holland, it is not found in the north-western parts (Dijkstra and De Koning 2017; De Koning 2012, 15). On the basis of historical, paleogeographical and archaeological evidence, Dijkstra and De Koning (2017) argue that the western Dutch coastal area was not colonised by the incoming Anglo-Saxon groups in the fifth century.⁸ In some places in the northern coastal area, there is clear continuity from Roman times into the Migration Period. The introduction of Anglo-Saxon-style pottery may here be the result of contact rather than migration (Nieuwhof 2013, 73-80). Nevertheless, it is still accepted that with a 'migration wave', people who are considered (Anglo-)Saxons came from the east to at least the central and west Frisian areas (Nieuwhof 2015, 31 and all the references in footnote 20) and eventually settled in Britain. They were probably arriving from Northern German and Danish coasts in the Migration Period, as did the Anglo-Saxons in Britain (De Langen 2012, 16; Dijkstra 2011, 365; Nicolay 2005, 73). How many of the changes that are visible in the archaeology are due to migration or acculturation remains debated, and most likely it is a combination of both. For Kennemerland, Wieringen and Texel a continued Frisian habitation substrate is in any case postulated (De Koning 2012, 16). The incoming (Anglo-) Saxon and related people together with the remaining local population are generally referred to as 'new Frisians' in academic discourse. Once they start appearing in the historical sources they are mainly referred to as 'Frisians', although they are, to a great extent, a different people from the pre-Migration Frisians (Bazelmans 2009; Knol and IJssennagger 2017).

The same situation and discussion also largely applies to Britain at this time, as similar changes occurred there after the collapse of the Roman Empire in the fifth century. One of the changes was colonisation of the eastern and southern parts by Germanic peoples who came from across the Channel and North Sea, bringing their culture (Hines 2004, 37-9). Nonetheless, there is a visible decline

⁸ Although a place-name like Sassenheim could possibly suggest differently even if it refers to the personal name Saxo.

in the quantity of material culture in the early fifth century, followed by the arrival of 'Anglo-Saxon' material culture, which is defined as a Germanic material culture with a background on the Continent and in Scandinavia, in the middle of the fifth century (Hines 2004, 38). What remains a matter of debate for Britain too, is how much of the shift to Anglo-Saxon culture between the fifth and seventh centuries was the result of (ongoing) migration from across the North Sea and how much was due to native inhabitants adopting this new, developing culture (Hines 2004, 39). In both cases, migration is not an explanatory framework as such anymore unless the various types of migration and other kinds of mobility, as well as their relation to each other, are studied in more detail. Therefore, it may be better to speak of a high level of mobility and mobility that is directed from east of Frisia towards the west across the North Sea, including but not restricted to migration. For instance, besides migration there also seems to be an increase in acts of piracy at this time around the North Sea (De Koning 2012, 12). If one portrays the Migration Period events in this way, we recognise Frisia as an intermediary zone between east and west, a position that determines its involvement in the connections and direction of the mobility – which comes in many forms, including marriage mobility – and the embedding in a network stretching along the North Sea coasts. Therefore, we could already here start to speak of a connectivity between Frisia and the North Sea world. Although it remains uncertain to what extent, we can determine that Frisians and Frisia were part of and affected by this mobility, leading to the coastal area becoming part of a shared sphere of a 'Germanic' – or rather a coastal – culture that ranged from east of the North Sea to the west of it.

According to Peter Schrijver (1999, 33-4; 2017), based on research of the development of the vowel system, the developments in the North Sea Germanic languages (Old English, Old Frisian and Old Coastal Dutch) show signs of being adapted from Proto-Germanic to a British Celtic or related Celtic dialect somewhere between the fifth to ninth centuries AD. This happened on the Continent, and as Schrijver stresses, much of the spread (over north-western Europe) of the North Sea Germanic languages was in Celtic-speaking areas. As such, the Celtic substratum is something that the British, Flemish, Dutch and Frisian coastal areas have in common. In Britain, it is clear that the incoming Anglo-Saxons from the fifth century onwards encountered British Celtic-speaking people, and something similar may have been the case along the Continental coast (Schrijver 1999, 9-10).

The lacunae in material traces in the Migration Period is accompanied by a hiatus in references to Frisians in the written sources, but in Merovingian times the 'Frisians' reappear. The new inhabitants in Frisia are being called 'Frisian' again in historical sources, even though they must largely have been different people from the Frisians in Roman times. According to Jos Bazelmans (2009), the re-use or re-establishment of the name Frisian for the coastal dwellers in Frisia was instigated by the Franks and must be seen more as a political term than an ethnic one. However, rather than either ethnic or political, it can also be argued that Frisia was used primarily as a geographical term referring to a specific zone, especially by the Franks, and that the related terms for Frisian referred to the coastal people there.

This geographical term could, however, subsequently be used in and for political discourse, and even turned into an ethnically-charged term in the long run. For the neighbouring Franks and Saxons, John Hines (2003, 300) explains that they had emerged as powerful military-political confederacies in Roman times and had eventually ethnicised as groups, something that we could also think of for Frisians (Frisii, Frisiavones, Chauci). Indeed for the Saxons it seems they first came to be seen as one Saxon people by the incorporation into the Frankish empire and by denotation of the Franks, even though historically there were many Saxon sub-groups (Flierman 2015, see particularly 278-85). For Frisia, it also seems to be the eighth-century Frankish incorporation that leads to the recording of the *Lex Frisionum*, which establishes the idea of one defined Frisian people bound to a defined area.

Meanwhile, it remains uncertain how these Frisian people saw their own identity or identities. As has been put forward by Annet Nieuwhof (2013, 79), it must to a large extent have been defined by the social, cultural and political networks the coastal dwellers were involved in. This network, with shared cultural expressions like specific pottery types, we often call Anglo-Saxon, but it is uncertain how it was seen by the various groups themselves (e.g. Anglo-Saxon, Frisian, Germanic, coastal, North Sea, etc.) and how many different sub-identities there were (like with the Germanic Franks consisting of a collection of various Frankish tribes). One way or the other, the inhabitants of the Frisian coastal area were clearly tied up to other North Sea coastal regions and must have related themselves to this network. It may very well be that the name Frisian clung to the Dutch/German coastal area and to the few remaining inhabitants, and subsequently continued to be used for the new coastal dwellers as well. What the people of various backgrounds who now inhabited the Frisian area had in common with the old inhabitants, and with each other, was that they were all coastal dwellers whose identity-formation and culture were related to the maritime world around the North Sea (IJssennagger 2013a; Loveluck and Tys 2006; Nicolay 2005). Simultaneously, the western Frisian area in particular is part of a network extending to the Frankish Rhineland (or vice versa) in the fifth to seventh centuries, as is shown by the large amount of imported pottery (De Koning 2012, 3-4).

The turbulent Migration period, which is characterised by high levels of mobility and the merging of various tribes visible in the shared Germanic sphere around the North Sea (reflected in, for instance, language, shared material culture, a shared pre-Christian Germanic belief system, shared stories, use of runes), must be seen as a formative period for the identity of the affected, Germanic people. Therefore, studies about this period have often focussed on the ethnogenesis⁹ of the *gentes* and on the rise of kingdoms (Goetz 2003, 1-2; Nicolay 2014). What is even more interesting in the light of shifting spheres and relations, is how in the following centuries the affected and involved people still connected to this transformative period. That this was the case can be seen in myths of origin that related to

⁹ The term ethnogenesis is here used in the widest sense, as a general denotation of the development of specific identities, which could even be identities that only exist in written sources.

Scandinavia and in the use of Scandinavian-style brooches (and local copies) and other dress items (Moreland 2004, 147-8; Nicolay 2014, esp. ch. 9). *Beowulf*, which is believed to reflect fourth-century events and connections in a composition from probably the seventh or eighth century (but the tenth at the latest) and in which an early Frisian King Finn occurs in relation to Danes, is an illustrative example of the shared stories (Chickering 1989; cf. Neidorf 2014; Davis 2006). Johan Nicolay (2005; 2014) has shown how the gold bracteates (and later other precious jewellery) that originate in southern Scandinavia and are found in Central Frisia are a case in point concerning material culture. These objects, brooches and other dress accessories, are increasingly viewed as having been precious not only for their use of material (gold) and craftsmanship, but because they came from the area of origins, suggests Moreland (2004, 148). Similarly, they could have been so viewed as they reflected a shared identity or set of identities. As they furthermore display northern mythological motifs, they simultaneously represent a mode of vertical and horizontal authentication – concepts that will be further explored in the next chapter – related to this particular period but with a long-lasting effect.

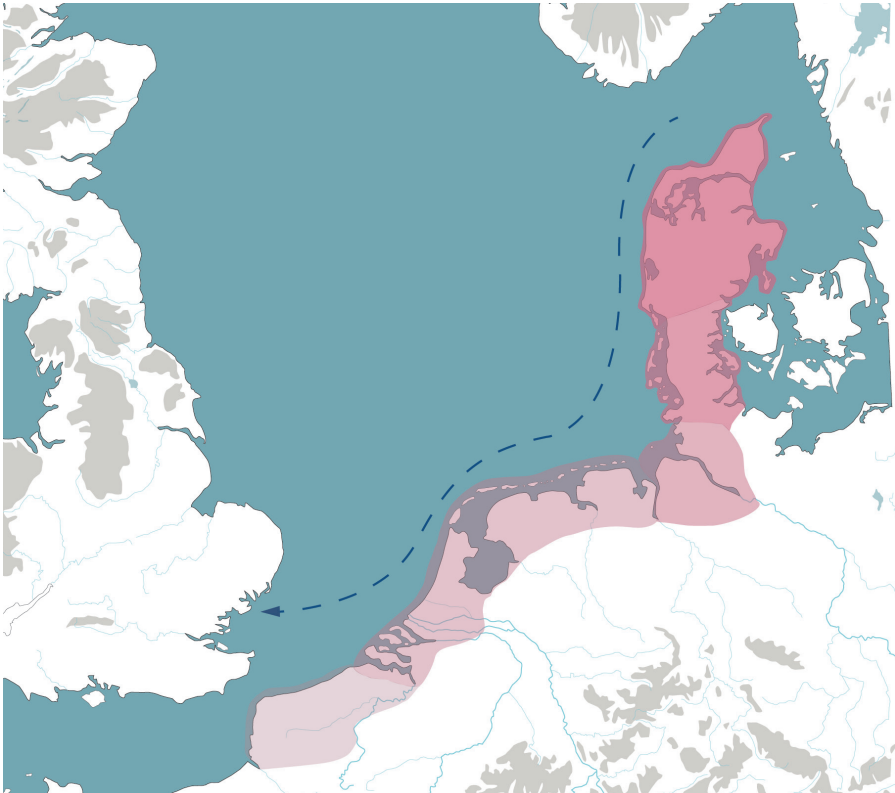


Fig. 2.2 The Migration Period movement and the areas involved.

The large number of high-status and, in particular, gold finds in central and south-western Frisia – but few in the north-eastern part – is seen as indicating the wealth of the region and the interconnection with other areas with similar finds (Nicolay 2014). Because of their typology, the quality of the material, and the parallels in the styles of decoration, the objects in Frisia have in particular been compared to Anglo-Saxon finds, including those from Sutton Hoo and the Staffordshire hoard, Scandinavian finds and to Frankish objects. According to Johan Nicolay (2014), the focus on different spheres throughout the fifth to seventh centuries can be seen in the stylistic developments of gold and silver jewellery and dress accessories found in Central Frisia, ranging from Scandinavian and English to Frankish and Frisian styles. Whilst these stylistic influences may indeed be observed, the question remains whether these were combined in Frisia itself, or whether they reflect a more general North Sea sphere development. What is more debated is the extent to which this indeed reflects ‘kingship’, as Nicolay suggests, a discussion that is valid for the idea of early medieval Frisian kings in general (cf. De Langen 2012, note 27). This largely depends on the definition of ‘kings’ and ‘kingship’ one uses, and one must not lose sight of the fact that we are dealing with a rural and somewhat scattered area. Be that as it may, analysis of the gold content of these objects revealed that the earliest bracteates, coins and some later, elaborate objects had a very high gold content of up to 99.1% (IJssennagger et al. 2016). This means that throughout the period, people in various parts of Frisia had access to high quality gold for the most precious objects, even though the percentage of gold in objects overall declines like in other areas. Analysis of the garnets used in this and other early medieval jewellery from the Netherlands indicated that almandine from India was used in most of the objects, like in most other early medieval jewellery in Europe. This shows that Frisia had access to the same networks in which this was available as other areas throughout the early Middle Ages (IJssennagger et al. 2013).

During this period, the connections that were established through the mobility of the Migration Period persist, even though there are constant variations in the focus of the connections because of the changing political landscape. Whilst in the Roman period the modern-day provinces of North Holland and Friesland were seen as Frisia, from around AD 700 onwards the entire area between the Zwin and Weser (thus comprising the entire coastal area of the Netherlands and Ostfriesland in Germany) was considered to comprise Frisia. As remarked by Wood (1994, 269) the Frisian sphere in the early Merovingian period (so before 700) ‘does not appear in the sources as an independent territory’. Most likely, the Frisian area consisted of a conglomerate of areas inhabited by various groups of people in a political sense, but by 678 we do hear of the Frisian ruler Aldgisl who seems to act independently from Frankish rulers for this area or a part of it. This development may have been connected to the burgeoning Frisian trade on the one hand and the political developments in Francia and other neighbouring regions on the other, and may mark the response to a crisis in the Frisian community which led to an at least temporary period of more centralised rulership. Aldgisl’s successor, and possibly

his son, Radbod or Redbad (†719)¹⁰ seems to have been in a similar position, and even became an important political player in a turbulent period in Merovingian politics.

According to the *Annales Mettenses Priores*, the Austrasian Pippin II (of Herstal; c. 635-714) fought several battles with the Frisians and in 692 is said to have subjected these Frisians, as *maior domus*, to Frankish rule. The Frisians later did not keep to the terms of subjugation, which resulted in still more clashes (Van Egmond 2005, 28). As has been stressed by Broome (2013) the sources seem to particularly emphasise that battles were fought against Frisians as well as other peoples to re-establish the Frankish hegemony over them. In 690, at the battle at Dorestad, Redbad was defeated and he and Pippin came to peace terms, which most likely included the marriage of Redbad's daughter Theudesinda with Pippin's son Grimowald. Through this marriage, Redbad becomes tied to the Christian, Frankish rulers and to Frankish politics.¹¹ It was at least a symbolic act, reconciliation through marriage, and one that was quite common. There was a lot of turmoil in the Frankish world, which became displayed in an opposition between the Austrasian and Neustrian elite. After Pippin's death in 714, Redbad and the Frisians ally with the Neustrians, whereas they earlier they allied with the Asutrasians. (Fischer 2012, 50-60; Wood 1994, 269-70). As such, it is a clear example of the constantly shifting connections and alliances that Frisia was involved in, and which were generated by the political circumstances.

Subduing Frisia and the Frisians was not an easy task. According to Wood (1994, 285) this was primarily because of the landscape with all its waterways. This inaccessibility and the struggle to gain a foothold is also seen during the missionary activity, which must have been influenced by the political developments. This is not to say that the pagan Frisians were firmly opposed to the missionary activities from the start for the sake of their own religion, as is often stated. The linguistic and other close connections, including those between the elites, must have been one of the reasons why Anglo-Saxon missionaries in particular came to try and convert their neighbours to Christianity (Hines 2003). Both Aldgisl and Redbad, whom are believed to have resided in the Utrecht area, received the first missionaries as guests and often let them preach freely in Frisia (Halbertsma 2000, 69-71; Wood 1994, 297). In 678, Wilfrid is received by Aldgisl and whilst he is preaching in the area, according to Wilfrid's *vita*, suddenly the amount of fish caught is higher than usual, resulting in the conversion of a number of Frisians (*Vita Wilfridi* ch. 26, ed. Levison 1913, 220). Similarly, Redbad receives Boniface and Willibrord when they come to see him, even though of Boniface it is said that he returned to England shortly after, when he found the time was not right for missionary work (Van Egmond 2005, 25, 39; Wood 1994, 297). Possibly, Christianity as such was not seen as a threat, and this may be due to the nature of the pre-Christian, Germanic religion. This was a polytheistic religion that could allow for Christ as

¹⁰ I will primarily use Redbad, unless the source I refer to uses Radbod.

¹¹ But as Van Egmond (2005, 29) stresses, this bond ended when Grimowald died, possibly childless, in 714.

yet another god or trinity in its already diverse pantheon without threatening the original gods. As we will see later, there indeed seems to be a very long period of syncretism and hybridisation between these belief systems in Frisia. Nonetheless, Christianity could become a threat when it became connected to political matters. The *Vita Bonifatii* (ch. 4, ed. Levison 1905, 13-8, part. 16-7) claims that during the troubles with Charles, Redbad also expelled and persecuted Christian missionaries, amongst whom Boniface, who were probably Charles's supporters. This seems to be the only source – which may not surprise us – in which Redbad is depicted as a particularly pagan persecutor, even though the other sources also recognise him as standing in the way of conversion of the Frisians (cf. Van Egmond 2005). According to this vita, there were churches in Frisia under Frankish control, but they were all destroyed and paganism was restored. In the *Vita Wulframni* (ch. 9, ed. Levison 1910, 668; see for a translation of the specific episode Meens 2015, 579) it is related how Redbad as king of the Frisians already has one toe down the baptismal font, when he asks if after conversion he can still sit with his forefathers in the afterlife. When the missionary Wulfram informs him that this is not the case, Redbad refuses to be baptised and he later becomes a symbol of the Frisian resistance against Christianity and, most importantly, overlordship (Nijdam and Knottnerus forthcoming). The connection of conversion with Frankish incorporation, and the connection between refusing Christianity whilst refusing external overlordship, is key here.

Although the authenticity of the baptismal scene is much debated (Meens 2015), it may illustrate that the conversion of the Frisians was to some extent a top-down process and that Redbad therefore was an obstacle, even though his daughter married into a Christian family. More importantly, it illustrates how opponents to the Christian Franks were described in written sources, particularly in later sources, namely as rebellious and non-Christian. Even worse, they were people who knew Christianity but still chose not to embrace it. This imagery was not restricted to pre-conversion Frisians, but similarly applied in references to Saxons, another fluid term used as a blanket designation for various groups (see Flierman 2015). It goes without saying that this also was the case for the later incoming Vikings. It could be argued that, from a Frankish perspective, Christianisation was the final step in incorporating Frisians and Saxons into the Christian Frankish empire and the Continental, Christian world. After this incorporation, the division between the Christian world and the heathen North came to lie at the border with Denmark for some two centuries. This is probably why this opposition between heathenism and Christianity is stressed in Frankish writings, particularly in the Viking Age when the coming of heathen Vikings threatens the Christian hegemony. We then clearly see cases of Franks framing Frisians as well as Vikings as enemies.

Whereas the Franks call the Frisian leaders *duces*, the Anglo-Saxon sources call the Frisian leaders kings (cf. Van Egmond 2005, 32). The use of *duces* for leaders on the borders of their empire who are of some importance but not as important as kings or Frankish rulers, is standard across the Frankish world. Moreover, as has been noted by Broome (2013), the historical sources (which are usually Frankish)

mainly portray Redbad as a rebellious duke, whilst hagiographical sources (more often Anglo-Saxon) refer to him as a pagan king. The difference may thus partially be explained by the different scopes and purposes of the sources. The Frankish historians of the eighth and ninth centuries saw and portrayed the Frisians as subordinate to the Franks, and the leader as *dux Frisionum*, as subordinate to the *rex Francorum*. The hagiographers saw the pagan Frisians as a people distinct from the Christian Franks, who still needed conversion, and therefore could call Redbad a pagan *rex*. However, even within the Frankish sources, or sometime within one and the same source, there are variations that could be due to the particular point of view of the author or compiler (Wood 1977, 19-20). Moreover, the terms could also be explained as indicating no more than leaders of the (army of) Frisians, duces, and leaders who ruled, reges. In Frisian history writing, particularly from the later Middle Ages onward, the idea of a great Frisian kingdom and of Frisian kings has been very persistent whilst simultaneously being a matter of different visions of the historic situation (cf. Dijkstra 2011, 362- 63). As indicated by De Koning (2012, 5), it has been most strongly expressed by researchers with a Frisian background, whilst researchers with a more southern or 'Frankish' background have more often dismissed the idea. However, the idea of a great eighth-century Frisian sphere, called *Magna Frisia*, and the mostly later medieval boasting about Frisian kings have led to the search for the Frisian kingdom and Frisians kings, also in archaeological research. Be that as it may, neither the idea of a Frisian king nor that of a duke needs to actually reflect the historical situation, and if they do show an etymological confusion of terms, then it may be safest to refer to Redbad, Aldgisl and similar powerful men as Frisian leaders or chiefs.

What becomes clear from this, and what must be stressed for the entire period, is that the people, including the Frisians, were not stable groups of clear ethnic origins, but groups of constantly changing composition and political alliances, which were indicated in a way that suited those who were observing and reporting (cf. Goetze 2003, 8). Most likely, the networking in politics and the search for allies and partners was happening on more than one front, but in this case we almost exclusively have the one at the Frankish front recorded in the historical sources. From the archaeology, however, we can infer that connections were just as avidly sought and maintained with their North Sea neighbours. This may, however, have been a slightly different matter or type of networking, due to a different political situation and because it also stemmed from ancient ties, shared histories and common origins.

The trading place of Dorestad, already mentioned above, must have been an important location for contact between the various spheres and peoples, a nodal function that could also be found in other places along the coast, but on a different or less centralised scale. Although it is uncertain when exactly Dorestad came into existence as a trading centre, it is generally agreed to be in the late seventh century (Theuvs 2003, 22-3 and note 50). Although many have argued, on the basis of some historical references, that the middle of the seventh century saw an expansion of the Frisian sphere of influence to the south, into the area along the Rhine,

Scheldt and Meuse delta, we cannot be sure what exactly this entailed. In any case, the abovementioned battle between Redbad and Pippin II near Dorestad in 697, which is often cited as the battle for Dorestad, should most likely not be seen as a battle for control over this trading site (Theuvs 2003, 23).

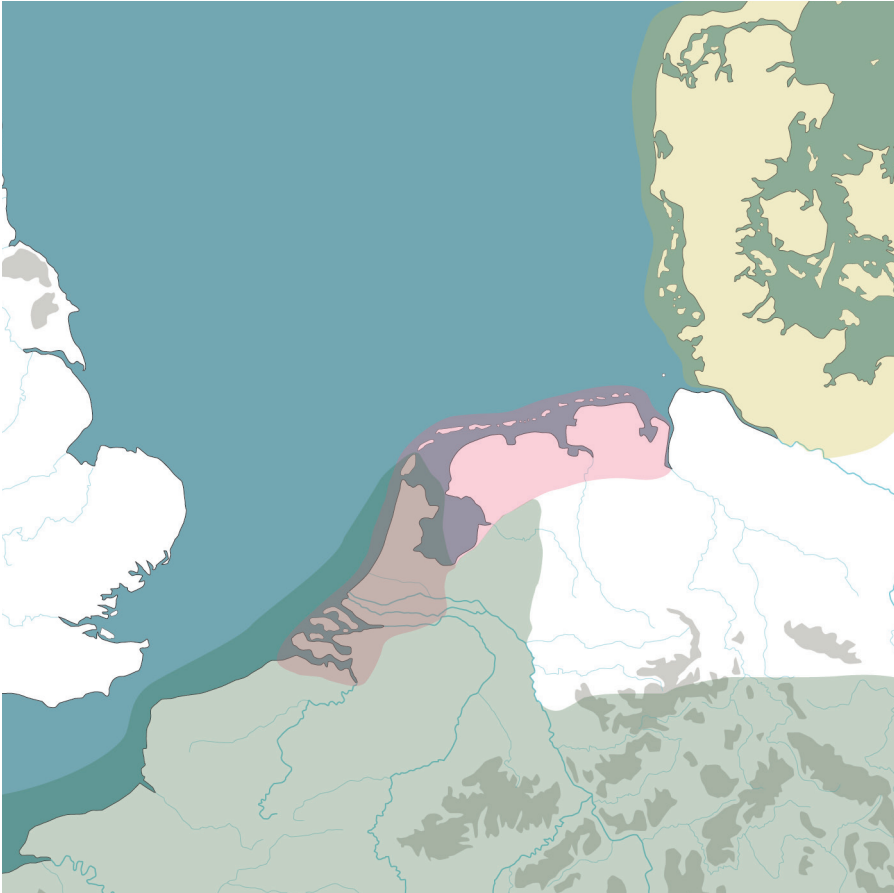


Fig. 2.3 The spheres of influence and power right before AD 734. The Frankish sphere (green) has started to cover Frisia (pink) west of the Vlie and has not yet reached the border of the Danish sphere (yellow).

Not only would continuous struggle for control of the place and alternating Frisian and Frankish power have had extremely negative effects on a developing trading town, particularly one that became one of the most important early medieval Continental trading sites, but the struggles between Redbad and Pippin and his family were also part of a much wider political conflict. Moreover, an important reason for the prosperity of Dorestad as a trading centre, which can be seen from

the archaeological finds (Kosian 2015, 100; Willemsen and Kik eds. 2010; Van Es and Verwers 1980; 1983; 2009; 2015), appears to be precisely the fact that apart from the central geographical location along the busy waterways, it was a more or less 'neutral' trading place, not firmly under one religious authority or system, at the crossroads of spheres of influence and people. As it lay on the edge of the Frankish and Frisian spheres – the latter of which was of paramount importance in the early medieval maritime trade with connections to the north via the Vlie, to the west via the Rhine and the south and east via the Rhine and the Lek – it was an accessible location for many traders and people. As argued by Theuws (2003, 14-6), the reason for Dorestad's importance is the exchange between the Christian Frankish sphere and the non-Christian northern sphere, and thus between two different world views and value systems. As such, it was not only a trading place in the sense of commodity exchange but much more. It is this position, directly at the crossroads of these different spheres, that makes it possible and interesting to have a 'neutral' trading and meeting place there, and the early medieval Frisian trade could have prospered from it. In general, we could classify this position at the crossroads between spheres as **central because liminal**. Not because it is centrally placed within one sphere, but because it is on the frontier between spheres and interacts with more than one. As we will see, this idea of being central because liminal can often be applied to Frisia in general, but it is a specific characteristic of Frisia in the Viking Age. According to Richard Hodges (2004, 143), in a reaction to Theuws (2004), metal-detecting has enabled us to find many new sites that also seem to be prominent exchange sites and so argue against the special status of an intercultural site like Dorestad. These sites, Hodges (2004, 143) suggests, 'belong to the ranked regional exchange networks of emerging kingdoms of the North Sea interaction zone'. Although indeed it may show that intercultural exchange on different scales happened in more places than just a central one, these need not be opposing arguments. On the contrary, the fact that many exchange sites are in the North Sea interaction zone and thus in liminal (and therefore central) spaces, underlines the argument and the need for exchange places at the crossroads of cultural and exchange spheres.

In this period, Frisians were making their name and fame as (long-distance) traders and middlemen (Lebecq 1983; 1990). As trade mostly went over water, whether maritime or riverine, and was directed at points where sailing routes could reach inland systems of transportation, Frisia was in an excellent location in relation to the trading networks (Kosian 2015, 99). This location, in combination with their maritime skills (Lebecq 1983), must have secured Frisians their paramount role in these networks. According to Chris Loveluck and Dries Tys (2006), these traders were more or less peasant traders, who had the opportunity to use their position in a not-so-controlled coastal rim. Besides this uncontrolled 'peasant trade' there must have been an extensive network of trading sites in which the Frisians traded their own wares and the wares of others. Again, Frisia must have functioned as an intermediary in trade because it was also an intermediary culturally, a buffer between the North Sea area and the heartland of the Frankish empire.

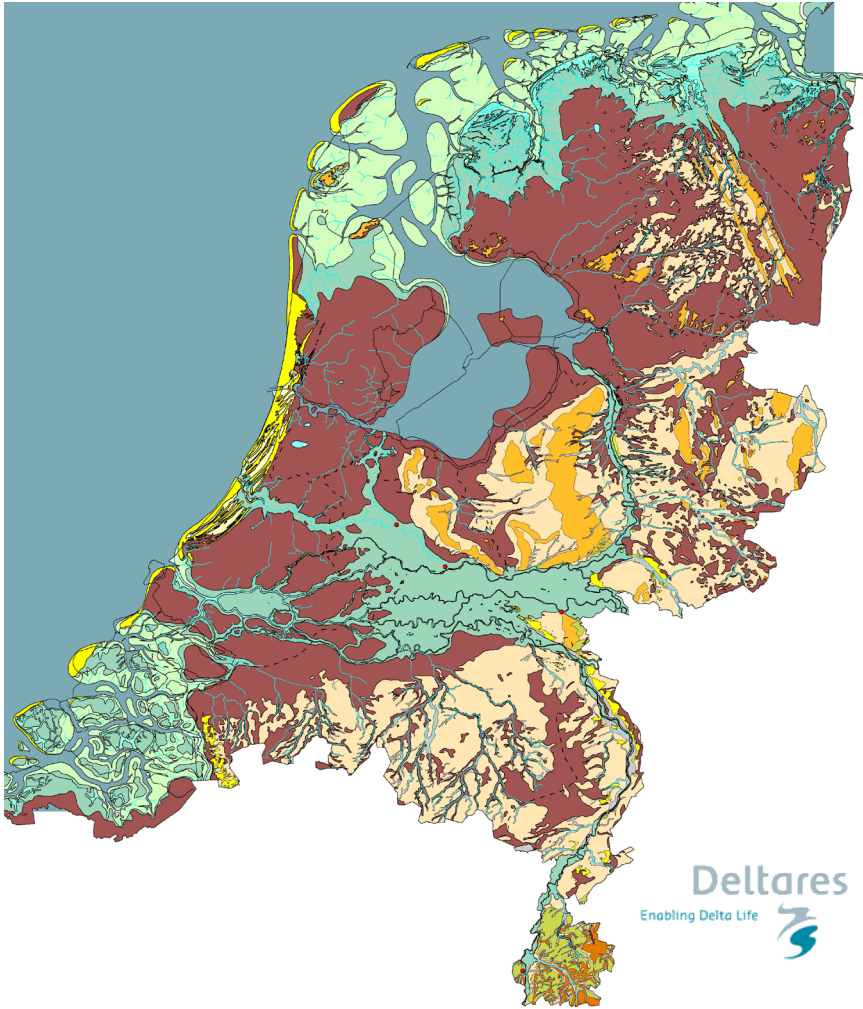


Fig. 2.4 Palaeogeographical map of the Netherlands (P.Vos and S. de Vries 2013). In green are the wet and fertile salt-marshes and their ridges, in yellow the (Pleistocene) sandy soils. In brown are the largely uninhabitable peat stretches and in light green the intertidal areas.

A material reflection of the extensive North Sea trade is the sceatta, the late seventh- and early eighth-century silver penny type that is found in Frisia, England and Denmark. Although some mysteries still surround these coins, such as their iconography and where they were minted, they indicate that trade between the various North Sea regions had gained such importance that a shared silver

currency or validation-system was in place. Perhaps due to the paramount role attributed to early medieval Frisians in trade, it has been argued that the Scandinavian trading places Ribe and Hedeby were founded by Frisians, but this remains a topic of investigation for the future (Sawyer 1977, 152 and note 72; Feveile 2006, 28–31; Skre 2007, 460–2).

On the basis of all this, it has been famously argued by Lebecq (1990) that the term ‘Frisian’ in these contexts became synonymous with trader, something that will be discussed briefly in Chapter 4. Even if this statement can – and in my view should – be nuanced, it does show how Frisians were tied up with or came to be seen in connection to their role in trading. Their originally geographical name may have come to be used as an umbrella term, much like the term Viking. This also raises the question of what we should make of the reference to a *mare Frisicum* or *mare Fresicum*, usually explained as the early medieval name for the North Sea. It is hard to pinpoint the use and origin of this name, as has been shown by Miedema (1976). In his survey of the use of this term, he shows that based on the very few references in early texts, the name has been placed in the context of the North Sea as well as in the sea between Ireland and Scotland, but also around specific estuaries along the eastern British coast (i.e. Humber, Firth of Forth). In a later text, Adam of Bremen names the North Sea the *oceanus Fresonicus*, and it is possible that this, together with the idea of a *Magna Frisia* and the Frisian trade, has strengthened our ideas of the North Sea and all its estuaries as a *mare Frisicum*.

The Frisian trade continued into the ninth century and does not seem to have been greatly hindered by political matters. Not only during, but also after the formal subjugation of the Frisians and Saxons, the political situation remained unstable. The Frisian Redbad and the Saxon Widukind are both characterised as opponents of Charlemagne in the historiography, which in the case of Redbad is historically impossible. Nonetheless, there are similarities in their struggle for independence against the expanding Christian, Frankish realm. Of Widukind, we know that he fled to the ‘Nordmanniae’ in 777 (ARF s.a. 777, ed. Kurze 1895, 48; trans. Scholz 1970, 55) and according to Hines (2003, 306) ‘a crucial point appears that he could act with a refuge in Scandinavia – and thus, presumably with the connivance and support of the Danish king. Widukind was thus fighting to be part of one politico-religious system – non-Christian and north Germanic – rather than another, the Carolingian empire’, or so is, at least, the Carolingian representation. The story in the *Vita Dagoberti III* (ch. 10, ed. Krusch 1888, 517) that during the struggle for conversion, Redbad is driven out of Frisia and into Denmark, may remind us of this and enhances the idea that in the struggle against the expanding Frankish realm, the Frisians, like the Saxons, may have had an ally in the Danes (cf. Halberstma 2000, 90–2; Salomon 2000, 73–74). After the turning of Widukind to the Danes, the Danish King Sigfred sent his ambassador Halfdan with a group of men to the assembly of Charlemagne in 782 (ARF s.a. 782, ed. Kurze 1895, 58, 60; trans. Scholz 1970, 59). As pointed out by Simon Coupland (1998, 78), according to the Poeta Saxo, this Halfdan is the same Halfdan who, together with his retainers, was taken into the Frankish kingdom by Charlemagne in 807.



Fig. 2.5 The Frankish (green) and Danish (yellow) spheres around AD 800, which overlap in the Frisian spheres (indicated by the dotted pink line). The Frankish sphere reaches up to the Danube border, whilst the Danes want to extend their sphere beyond that border as well.

Also in the intervening years, emissaries were sent between Charlemagne and the Danish king, indicating that they as neighbours and opposing politico-religious powers had to deal with each other. Later, the Franks and Danes came into conflict again as it was feared Godfred wanted to attack Saxony, though this attack never happened. Nevertheless, Godfred does claim that both Saxony and Frisia belong to him. This tension between the Danish and Frankish leaders, which is far more

complex than can be set out here, is the context in which the Viking Age starts for Frisia. During the eighth century, the expanding Frankish sphere had spread its wings over the Frisian area and cultural sphere in a political sense and drawn it into the Christian world. Whereas earlier, the Frankish sphere reached up to the Frisian sphere, it now included it, and it reached up to another sphere: the Danish one. By the end of the eighth century, the new border zone between the Frankish, Christian realm and the non-Christian northern world, came to lie at the border with Denmark, north of Frisia and no longer south of it. It is precisely the shift of the bordering zone between these two spheres that seems to have caused a lot of tension between Franks and Danes around the year 800. Like the Frisians, Danish leaders came to be drawn into Frankish politics, and the process that had first been seen at the meeting point with the Frisian zone now was seen at the border with the Scandinavian one.

2.3 The Viking Age: From *mare Frisicum* to Norse Sea

Whereas in the Migration period, when people move from east to west, Frisia functions primarily as a zone between the east and west, in the Viking Age it is an intermediary zone between North and South, between Christian Frankish and non-Christian Viking worlds. As one of the subjugated 'barbaric' peoples, the Frisians' laws were recorded in Latin and are together known as the *Lex Frisionum* – one of the *Leges Barbarorum*. It is believed that the text as it came down to us was a not entirely finished draft which was recorded during the reign of Charlemagne around 800. It is apparent from the text that Frisian law-speaking was undertaken by free Frisians and their law-speakers at the thing – the assembly typical for Germanic societies, and a phenomenon and word that are also known in Old English and Old Norse. Similarly, the incorporated Saxons had their *Lex Saxonum* recorded in the early ninth century (Hines 2003, 301). Through the *Lex Frisionum*, we get an insight into Frisian society, its rules and some pre-Christian practices. From the LF, we also learn how the area then perceived as Frisian is bounded:¹² stretching from the Sincfal in the south-west (about where the present Zwin is on the border with Belgium) to the Weser in the north-east (Henstra 2012, 3-5; 10-22). It thus included the areas that were earlier seen as inhabited by neighbouring tribes such as the Chauci, and regional differences were most likely still present. Within this one Frisian area, there were three sub-regions with some variations in law: West Frisia between the Vlie and the Sincfal (*inter Fli (Flehi) et Sincfalam*), Central Frisia between the Lauwers and the Vlie (*inter Laubachi et Fli (Flehi)*) and East Frisia between the Lauwers and the Weser (*inter Laubachi et Wisaram*) (throughout the LF). North Frisia, the so-called Frisian sites that appeared near the mouth of the Eider and the isles off the Schleswig-Holstein coast during the eighth century, was not listed as it was not a part of the area subdued by the Franks (Henstra 2012, 3).

¹² The question, however, remains by whom. Is this the area that the Franks considered Frisian, or is it the area that the inhabitants saw as Frisian? And is it considered Frisian because of the Frisian law-speaking tradition?

So despite Frisia being subjugated by the Franks and having been incorporated into the Christian, Frankish world, Frisian laws are still in place in the area that is considered to be inhabited by Frisians. What the various Frankish leaders are seeking here is an alliance with and incorporation of the Frisians and the Frisian territory via their leaders. This is also the case with other peoples, such as the Saxons. By including them in their Frankish power sphere and in their network, the Franks get access to the north of the Continent and beyond. If we look at the geographical range of this process, we can see that there are a number of phases in which the Frisian area comes into the Frankish power sphere. First, it is the coastal and riverine area in the south-west up to the Vlie, then the area between the Vlie and the Lauwers, and then between the Lauwers and the Weser. Possibly, this is because they represent different groups or regional variety within what we know as the Frisian sphere, bounded by waterways. Strikingly, these three areas are also the ones mentioned in the *Lex Frisionum* as comprising the Frisian area.

With the famous recorded Viking surprise attack and the raid on the monastery at the Holy Island of Lindisfarne in 793, the Viking Age officially started, but as we have seen, this is a matter of definition. Nevertheless, with the increasing Viking activity and the decreasing role of the Frisians in trade over the next decades, a mare Frisicum would be turning into a Norse Sea, dominated by the Vikings, even though the name 'Frisian sea' persists as an alternative name for the North Sea for a long period. What needs to be borne in mind is that throughout the Viking Age, Frisia was subjugated by the Frankish realm and thus must be considered in a Frankish framework, also in the case of material culture. This is exactly why Frisia, which simultaneously belongs and has belonged to the maritime North Sea world, is such an interesting area for the study of connectivity. The degree of Frankish influence, however, is one that can be debated. Be that as it may, this situation distinguishes Frisia from both the British Isles and Scandinavia in this period of time and creates a particular set of circumstances for Frisia in light of the Viking Age. Being part of the Frankish realm must have meant that Frankish counts (or Frisian counts under the Franks) were installed and that taxes and military service must be paid to the Frankish rulers (Coupland 1998). Nevertheless, Frisia did remain a well-known area inhabited by Frisians who by now were famous for their long-distance trade, and it is uncertain how much life on the far edge of the realm changed in this new situation of Frankish overlordship. The North Sea network that Frisians traditionally took part in still existed and still operated, meaning that Frisians were more or less part of both this North Sea world and the Frankish world. This seems to have become even more the case when Viking activity reached the southern North Sea shore and the Frankish realm.

Although opinions differ on whether it is fitting to speak of a Viking Age in the context of Frisia, which I believe is the case as I have argued elsewhere (IJssennagger 2015a, in particular 138-9), we can, in parallel to Britain, say that the documented Viking Age in Frisia started with the first recorded Viking attack. This was in 810 and besides being the first Viking attack on Frisia, it is in general one of the earliest

known attacks on the Continent.¹³ In this attack, which was recorded by the *Annales Regni Francorum* (ARF s.a. 810, ed. Kurze 1895, 131; trans. Scholz 1970, 91-2), the Frisian islands were sacked, after which the Danes landed in Frisia and fought three battles with the Frisians. The Danes were victorious and had the Frisians pay them a hundred pounds of silver before they sailed back to Denmark). This raid appears to have been connected to struggles between the Frankish and Danish rulers who wished to expand their powers and as such it could be seen as a politically-motivated raid. The Frankish-Danish struggles had been ongoing since the end of the eighth century when the clash of the Christian Frankish and non-Christian northern spheres came to lie at the Elbe, the border with Denmark, and both parties were trying to get the support from Saxons and Slavic Obodrites who dwelled near this border. In 809, Charlemagne had ordered a *civitas* be built at Itzehoe (Esesfelt), just across the Elbe, to defend the area against the Danes, whom he clearly mistrusted (Jongbloed 2008, 22). It is believed that the 810 raid indeed was instigated by the Danish King Godfred and, as we shall see further in Chapter 4, there are indications that Godfred claimed Frisia as an area belonging to his sphere of influence, which may have been one of the triggers for this raid. As scholars have noted, the hundred pounds of silver is relatively modest in comparison with later extractions of tribute, leading to the idea that the amounts paid as tributes started relatively small but grew larger over the course of the Viking Age. This may well be true, but what is uncertain here, with the mentioning of tribute, is whether this is a one-time extraction of a hundred pounds of silver, or whether this is a recurring tribute that was installed (see also IJssennagger 2013a, 76). It is usually seen as a one-time extraction, but the description itself leaves room for both interpretations:

“Imperator vero Aquisgrani adhuc agens et contra Godofridum regem expeditionem meditans nuntium accepit, classem ducentarum navium de Nordmannia Frisiam appulisse totasque Frisiaco litori adiacentes insulas esse vastatas iamque exercitum illum in continenti esse ternaque proelia cum Frisonibus a commisisse Danosque victores tributum victis inposuisse et vectigalis nomine centum libras argenti a Frisonibus iam esse solutas, regem vero Godofridum domi esse.”
(ARF s.a. 810, ed. Kurze 1895, 131)

While the emperor was still at Aachen, considering an expedition against King Godofrid, he received the news that a fleet of two hundred ships from Denmark had landed in Frisia, that all the islands off the coast of Frisia had been ravaged, that the army had already landed and fought three battles against the Frisians, that the victorious Danes had imposed a tribute on the vanquished, that already one hundred pounds of silver had been paid as tribute by the Frisians, and that King Godofrid was at home. (Trans. Scholz 1970, 91-2)

¹³ The first being in the Somme area.

Whether a single extraction or meant to be recurring, it should not be thought of as a formal tax-payment imposed by a Danish realm. However, if it is a recurring tribute of some form nonetheless, this has implications for how the power over Frisia is perceived.

So it appears that Viking incursions on Frisia originated in a political context and related to a clash between two opposing spheres, who both felt that Frisia and Saxony should belong to theirs. This rivalry over Frisia and neighbouring areas between Frisians, Carolingians and Scandinavians characterises the Viking Age into the tenth century (Lund 2006). Be that as it may, one of the outcomes was also the extraction of silver, which is to say material gain. We cannot exclude material gain as a motive for this and particularly later raids either: it was and would continue to be a motive here and for many other areas as well, since the known amount of silver testifies to the wealth present in Frisia and these other areas. Although it seems clear that the later raids in particular were targeted at gaining wealth and power and often were opportunistic in nature, it is not the case, as some have argued, that all Viking raids on Frisia (or elsewhere) were directed at weak targets for material gain (cf. Cooijmans 2015). Not only do the Viking activities seem to have been based a combination of these incentives – which I think are very important – and others, but the activities also changed over time. Therefore, they cannot all be seen as the exact same phenomenon. The Viking raids on Frisia, but certainly also the gaining of Frisian areas in benefice by Danish warlords between 826 and 885, must from a Frisian perspective be seen in a framework of the shifting spheres of influence. This is key to the Viking Age history of Frisia.

The same can be said for the changes in the exchange network that saw the decline of certain major trade centres and the rise of others. Most important is the decline of Dorestad, which in its heyday saw many a Viking attack. Once it was firmly within the Frankish sphere of influence, due to the northward expansion of the Frankish, Christian power sphere, the role of Dorestad declined, a situation that continued when it became part of the Danish benefice within the Frankish sphere (Theuvs 2004, 133–6). As has been stressed by Theuvs (2003; 2004), one of the reasons for this development must have been the fact that the trading towns were no longer at the crossroads of spheres, but within a sphere. Therefore, they were no longer ‘neutral’ and easy to access. It may in that case not be surprising that traders found alternatives on the new frontier of spheres, especially with the Danish sphere increasing in strength and significance. An alternative presented itself, for instance, in the form of Haithabu, which Theuvs (2003, 16; 2014, 137) identifies as the real successor of Dorestad, in contrast to the often-mentioned sites of Deventer, Tiel or Gendt, which all are within the Frankish sphere. According to Theuvs, it was exactly the definitive integration of the trading place in the Christian Frankish world that was the main reason for its decline. Cooijmans (2015) recently argued that the abandonment of Dorestad was part of a Carolingian scheme to not only secure its heartlands in a time of Viking incursions, but also to shift the trade to other places in order to regain control over it. If this indeed was the case, then it only partly succeeded, with the new trading towns within the Frankish realm only

gaining an importance minor to that which Dorestad previously enjoyed, whilst the more northern trading towns just outside the Frankish sphere, like Haithabu, indeed gained in importance. We can in fact suppose a combination of both these developments, where the Frankish efforts to regain control over trade by relocating it to places like Tiel and Deventer, as sketched by Cooijmans, are a reaction to the development of former Dorestad traders finding their way to new trading sites on the junction of spheres, as sketched by Theuws. Considering all this, was the giving of the Dorestad area in fief to Danes, as we will discuss below, some of which did not even have to be baptised and become Christian in order to gain the fief, perhaps a sign of trying to restore the old role and importance of Dorestad as a neutral or multi-religious and multi-ethnic trading place?

One way or the other, it is clear that the attack in 810 is primarily a politically motivated action, and therefore stands out somewhat from other Viking attacks in Frisia that may have been more clearly directed at gaining wealth. As such it also differs in nature from the first Viking attack in England. Some have therefore proposed that it should not be seen as a Viking attack proper, and again we can say that it is a matter of definition. Indeed, the running up to the attack is different than in later instances, but the attack itself is not too different from later ones if one considers them to be directed at gaining power or control over an area, extracting tribute and gaining wealth in all possible forms. Be that as it may, the various (royal) Frankish chronicles, most notably the *Annales Regni Francorum*, *Annales Bertiniani*, *Annales Fuldenses* and *Annales Xantenses*, as well as various *vitae* and letters, record Viking attacks on a number of places in Frisia for the decades that follow. The first recorded raid after that of 810 is in 834, followed by raids in the three subsequent years, which all mention that both Frisia and Dorestad are attacked, and in 834 also Utrecht (AB s.a. 834, 835, 836, 837; s.a. 838, ed. Waitz 1891, 9, 11-13; trans. Nelson 1991, 30, 33, 35, 37; AX s.a. 834, 835, ed. Von Simson 1909, 9-10). Dorestad is quite often victim to the Viking incursions, also in 846, 847, 850 and 863, according to the Frankish annals. In some cases, it is said that everything was laid to waste or burned down. How much of this is true is uncertain, as Dorestad was apparently prosperous enough again within a year to be plundered again. According to Theuws (2003, 15; 2004, 136) the Viking attacks on Dorestad signal that the trading place had lost its importance for the old trading partners of the North. Moreover, one could state that as a symbol of Christian Frankish power taking over areas that previously were neutral or closer to the Northern sphere, like Central Frisia, it was an appealing target for Viking attacks.

Although specific places or areas within Frisia, like Dorestad, Walcheren or Westergo and Oostergo, are sometimes mentioned, there is quite often only a reference to Frisia. In those instances, it is uncertain where in Frisia the raiding took place. As has been noted by, for example, Coupland (2006, 247), when the AX mention a raid in 846 on Oostergo and Westergo and Dorestad, 'as usual' is added, indicating that this had happened several times before (AX s.a. 846, ed. Von Simson 1909, 15). In addition, Frisians in trading quarters outside Frisia, such as in Mainz and in Birten, were also harmed by Viking attacks in some instances, such as in

the 880 attack on Birten (AF s.a. 880, ed. Kurze 1891, 96; trans. Reuter 1992, 89). Together, this may still give us an idea of the extent of the raids. The grande finale of the “Viking” presence and resistance to it was, no doubt, the violent killing of the last Danish benefice-holder Godfred in 885 (Besteman 2004a, 105-6; Coupland 1998, 108-12). When putting the raids on Frisia in chronological order, it is striking that increasingly, Frisians seem to be able to repel Viking warbands (in 873, 876, 884, 885). Perhaps this was partly due to the coastal defences that the Franks had put in place. These defences are mentioned in the written records and traditionally are equated with the handful of ring-fortresses (*ringwalburgen* in Dutch), an interpretation that is increasingly being questioned. The fortresses are found along the West-Frisian coast from Texel in the north to Flanders in the south and five of them are in Zeeland (Van Heeringen 1995, 51-69; Ten Harkel 2013, 224-6). Along the rivers inland, there are ring-fortresses known in Deventer and Zutphen (Bartels and Vermeulen 2009), and it has been argued by Leupen (1996) that Maastricht also becomes fortified in the 830s. Deventer and Zutphen saw Viking activity in the later phase of raiding, and traces of the severe attacks have been found (Grootjedde 2004), whilst Maastricht is mentioned as a place of negotiation at various times. In North Friesland, on the Islands of Föhr and Sylt, similar ring-fortresses are known from the ninth century (Segschneider 2009).

Of the known ring-fortresses, those in Zeeland have particularly been researched (Van Heeringen et al. 1995; Ten Harkel 2013; Tys et al. 2016). They are dated to the later decades of the ninth century, continuing to the early tenth century, and are thus much later than the earliest Viking attacks. As Ten Harkel (2013) has shown, the archaeological evidence dates the reconstruction of four of them firmly after the middle of the ninth century. This means that they would be later than 837, by which date the coastal defences were in place in this area according to the written sources. In the case that the fortresses are (part of) these defences, they must represent a later stage. The identification of ring-fortresses as anti-Viking coastal defence measures has, therefore, been seriously questioned by various scholars (Tys et al. 2016; Deckers 2014, 96-114; Ten Harkel 2011; 2013; Dijkstra and De Ridder 2009; Loveluck and Tys 2006, 158-62). For the fortresses in North Holland, Dijkstra and De Ridder (2009) make it clear that they are not all part of the same defence system, as they belong to different moments in time. According to Ten Harkel (2013, 244), the four fortresses on Walcheren and Schouwen-Duiveland were located within Frisia and belonged to one group, whilst the Oost-Souburg fortress, which is situated to the south, was part of Flanders. Likewise, Tys et al. (2016, 178-9, 186) indicate that seeing all the circular forts as belonging to a single category can be problematic and that they should be viewed on their own terms instead of as one system. Following from this they only link Domburg to the anti-Viking defences. In doubting the fortresses’ role as defences against Vikings and refugee fortresses for the local population, Ten Harkel (2013, 246-54) goes furthest by suggesting they may actually have been built by Vikings, instead of against them. One of the leading arguments for this is their similarity with the Danish fortresses. This similarity has been noticed before, but the Danish examples were

dismissed as a model for the Dutch ring-fortresses as the former are later in date. In addition, they are not entirely similar in layout and the idea of a circular fortress is quite common in many areas and times. Another alternative explanation is that they represent construction by local rulers and communities, which may have seen the involvement of Frisians, Scandinavians or Franks. Be that as it may, the various scholars make a convincing case for connecting the fortresses to Viking occupation or involvement – or perhaps even construction – in one way or another, rather than simply regarding all as a Frankish defence measure. The debate clearly has not been settled, and new archaeological finds may shed more light on it in the future. There is, however, no doubt that the fortresses are connected with and belong to the Viking Age.

Strikingly, no visible coastal defences or ring-fortresses seem to have been established in the Central Frisian area. To continue the debate, the question may be raised whether the presence of ring-fortresses could be connected to the practice of benefices in Danish hands. It is primarily in those areas we know became benefices that they are found, whilst they appear to be lacking in Central Frisia, the area for which there are no indications of a Danish benefice. Perhaps the power situation was different here than in the other Frisian regions. Indeed, the fortress on Föhr in North Frisia has been interpreted as related to the implementation of external power by one of the Danish nobles who was briefly granted territory in this area (Dobat 2009, 67; Ten Harkel 2013, 254). Another possible line of thinking, which would point more in the direction of Frankish coastal defences, is whether Central Frisia as the Frisian core area perhaps had more autonomy and therefore no Frankish fortifications. More likely perhaps is that in these parts, the Frisians themselves formed the resistance when necessary.

One of the repelled Viking attacks was in Oostergo, where the Frisian resistance was led by a Dane who had converted to Christianity and had been living amongst the Frisians for many years, according to the annals (AF s.a. 873, ed. Kurze 1891, 80; trans. Reuter 1992, 72). The example immediately makes clear that the Viking attacks and dealings between Frisians and Vikings were not all black and white. This is equally illustrated by the fact that, because of troubles within the Frankish empire itself between Emperor Louis the Pious and his sons, who rebelled against him, Lothar acted against his relatives by instigating Viking attacks by a Harald and his warband on their parts of the kingdom (Coupland 1998, 90). So Vikings could act on behalf of Franks as well, in this case by being allied to Lothar, and as such become part of the Frankish political turmoil. Eventually, the internal troubles would lead to the Treaty of Verdun in 843, in which the Frankish empire was divided in three between the sons of Louis the Pious. This would later, in 870, be followed up by the Treaty of Meerssen in which the middle Frankish empire (including Frisia) of Lothar was divided between Louis the German and Charles the Bald.

Interestingly, the Frisians are named in relation to anti-Viking measures on two occasions in the annals, and not in a positive sense. During the 837 attack on Walcheren, which was quite devastating despite the newly installed coastal defences,

the Christian dux Hemming, who was Danish but commended to the Franks and who defended the island against incoming Vikings, died. At the assembly afterwards, it is made clear that the Frisians had been disobedient and not resisted the Viking attack (AB s.a. 837, ed. Waitz 1891, 14; trans. Nelson 1991, 37; cf. IJssennagger 2013a). To repress this disobedient behaviour, 'stern abbots and counts' were sent to them. Two years later the same annals (AB s.a. 839, ed. Waitz 1891, 22-3; trans. Nelson 1991, 47) record a complaint about the Frisians on behalf of the Danish King Horic. In 838, possibly in the aftermath of the devastating attack on Walcheren, Horic made a case of showing the Carolingian emperor that he was not in any way involved with the Viking activities, and in fact claimed that on two occasions he had captured and killed those Vikings when they returned to Denmark after plundering the Carolingian and Frisian coasts (AB s.a. 838, ed. Waitz 1891, 16; trans. Nelson 1991, 40). The first occasion was in 834, which must either be related to the attack on Dorestad and Utrecht or an unknown raid elsewhere in Frisia. As compensation for the first case, Horic demanded payment, but for the second he demanded the Frisians and Obodrites. This almost looks like another territorial conflict. Although the request was not granted, Horic and Louis came to terms of peace in 839 nonetheless, and on that occasion, Horic made his complaint about the Frisians and their behaviour, after which stern war leaders were again appointed to deal with them. The nature of the behaviour of the Frisians or the claim, unfortunately, is not recorded, leaving us speculating. As will be discussed in more detail later, there is evidence that Vikings were joined by Frisians on some missions, for instance in England as part of the Great Heathen Army (McLeod 2014; 132-58; IJssennagger 2015a, 137-8; IJssennagger 2013a, 80-4; Woolf 2007, 71-3). DNA and isotope evidence that Viking warbands in England indeed were multi-ethnic, supports the idea of multi-ethnic, or perhaps more accurately termed 'multi-geographically provenanced',¹⁴ Viking warbands including Frisians and others. Perhaps Horic's complaint was directed at Frisians who had joined the Vikings he was fighting, or who were at least not resisting those Vikings.

Another way in which the Frankish rulers tried to deal with the increasing Viking attacks was the granting of Frisian areas in benefice to Danish warlords, something that has already been mentioned several times above. The granting of the benefices could be the result of Danes allying themselves with, or commending themselves to, the Frankish rulers. According to Coupland (1998, 87) the first time this took place in the Frankish empire is in 807, when Halfdan – who likely is the same Halfdan that was sent to the embassy of Charlemagne in 782, as we saw above, and who is named 'Northmannorum dux' – and several others submitted to Charlemagne. Although the annals do not mention that Halfdan was given an area as a benefice, there are still some indications that he might have had some power in Walcheren. At least Hemming, who may have been his son, presumably did until

¹⁴ The word multi-ethnic is slightly misleading, as ethnicity is not a static aspect, but a constantly changing feature. What is often meant by a multi-ethnic warband, is that it includes people of various geographical and cultural backgrounds. Despite the problems with multi-ethnic, I will use it in this thesis to avoid confusion, as it is the most common term used in research.

his death in 837 (Coupland 1998, 87-8). The first recorded endowing of a benefice in Frisia by Franks that the sources record is that of Rüstingen (Ostfriesland) to the Danish King Harald Klakk in 826. This king commended himself to Louis the Pious after being driven out of Denmark by the sons of Godfrid, with whom he had rivalled for the Danish throne in 813. Louis subsequently came to the aid of Harald in his attempts to regain the throne, not least by instigating an invasion of Denmark by Obodrites and Saxons on two occasions, the last of which resulted in Harald becoming co-ruler with two of the four sons of Godfrid (Coupland 1998, 89). This lasted a little while but in 827 Harald had to leave Denmark again and he likely retreated to Rüstingen. The year before he had gone to Mainz where he was baptised, with the Frankish royal family sponsoring him and his family and granting him the Frisian benefice (AX s.a. 826, ed. Von Simson 1909, 6-7; ARF s.a. 826; 827 ed. Kurze 1895, 169-70, 173; trans. Scholz 1970, 119, 122).

Other ways in which a benefice could be endowed was as payment for services or as a means to stop a Viking warband from plundering any further (Coupland 1998; Besteman 2006/07, 5; IJssennagger 2015a, 134) and, as such, it was practiced next to the tactic of paying Vikings tribute, in silver or in goods, to leave the area (Jongbloed 2011, 15). This seems to have been the case for most of the benefices. As a reward for their Viking services to Lothar, another Harald (probably the previous Harald's nephew) and his brother Rorik were also granted a benefice. This concerned Walcheren and related areas, including Dorestad, which may have been in the hands of Hemming before (AB s.a. 841, ed. Waitz 1891, 26; trans. Nelson 1991, 51). Rorik, who most likely by then had already joined Harald in the rule over Dorestad, stands out in the Frankish sources as a fierce Viking, who despite having been granted a benefice remained active as a Viking (Coupland 1998, 93-6). Rorik was later joined by his cousin Godfrid, who was the son of Harald Klakk and had remained in Lothar's retinue since the baptism in Mainz in 826, but fallen out with Lothar in the 840s (Coupland 1998, 93). Since then, he seems to have performed most of his Viking raids from Scandinavia. In the 850s, they raided Frisia several times, whilst Rorik held benefice in Dorestad. Later in the 850s, Godfrid may have joined Rorik in his benefice, or at least he did so after they were forced to leave the area; they tried their luck in Denmark, but came back and reclaimed Dorestad and took control over most of Frisia (Coupland 1998, 95). Rorik promised to resist Viking attacks in the area, which he did. Despite many struggles, a temporary withdrawal to Denmark and at one point being driven out of Frisia by local Frisians, Rorik kept negotiating with the Frankish rulers and became one of the most influential Danes in the Frankish empire (Coupland 1998, 100). According to Coupland (1998, 100), his area of influence stretched from the Rhine to the Vlie.

In general, the benefices concerned Walcheren, the area of Dorestad, Wieringen, Texel and the Kennemerland coast – with the latter three forming one West-Frisian benefice together – and were mostly held by Danes that were part of one family of throne-pretenders. The last of these Danish benefice-holders was another Godfrid, who in 879 came to the Continent after having been part of the Great Heathen

Army in England. He and his warband were primarily active in the southern regions of the Netherlands, including the Nijmegen area where they are said to have made a winter camp. Godfrid – also referred to as the Danish ‘sea king’ – gained the West-Frisian benefice. He became so entangled in Frankish politics that he was married to Gisela, the illegitimate daughter of Lothar II (Coupland 1998, 109), but was killed in a conspiracy by other counts in 885 (Jongbloed 2011, 37-40). With his death, the area came into the hands of non-Danish and mostly Frisian counts, which later led to the establishment of the Counts of Holland (Jongbloed 2011; De Boer and Cordfunke 2010).

Despite preventative measures, Viking attacks continued over two centuries, with varying intensity. This did not stop trade or other relations and exchange, even though the focal points shifted and trading sites and posts may have suffered from the piratical activities of the Scandinavians. Despite the diminishing role or at least notability of ‘Frisians’ and an increasing role of the ‘Vikings’, the Frisians’ continuing involvement in North Sea trade seems to be indicated by finds and references. The finds include general tradesware that is found in many of the linked sites, as well as more specific items. For instance, during the excavations in Kaupang, traces of a house were uncovered that bore many Frankish/Frisian finds of pottery and metalwork. Frankish/Frisian pottery, on the whole, is well represented in Kaupang, making up about 30% of the total, just as it is in York, but even more so in this particular house. The metalwork concerns personal, wearable items that were not meant for trade, such as brooches, and three of these were of the type worn by women. Therefore, the excavators suggest that it was most likely the house of a Frisian trader, or a Scandinavian trader dealing in Frisian wares who, possibly, had a Frisian wife (Skre 2010, 137-41; Skre 2007, 460-2; Skre 2011, 411-2, 426-34; Wamers 2011, 76). Another often-cited indication of Frisians continuing as traders are two runic inscriptions on memorial rune stones (U379 and U391) in Sigtuna, Sweden (Lebecq 1983, 450-2) which date from the eleventh century. The runic texts mention *Frisa kiltar* or *Frisa gildar* translated as ‘members of the Frisian guild’ or ‘The Frisian guild-brothers’. According to Jesch (2001, 65) these and the two other known inscriptions with the term *gildar* are the best evidence for organised trade. Whether Frisian here should be read as meaning traders from Frisia, traders with Frisia or a guild of traders (who are generally called Frisian) remains uncertain, yet it indicates that (organised) trade between Scandinavia and Frisia continued into the eleventh century.

As has been argued by Theuvs (2004), exchange in principle is always connected to the articulation of values in the imaginary world and world view of the people involved. There was a close connection between exchange and the imaginary Christian world in the Frankish realm. For the Frisian sphere, this connection with the Christian imaginary world and values seems less the case, and it appears that exchange was connected to the non-Christian imaginary world. Perhaps it was even able to be connected with both the Christian and the northern non-Christian imaginary worlds, as first the sceattas and later the acceptance of hack-silver and dirhams show. This, again, points to the intermediary position of the Frisian coastal

area and its inhabitants, here in terms of trade. The same can probably be said for the Danish benefices of the ninth century: in this intermediary region that was on the forefront in the Viking attacks, both the Franks and the Danes saw a logical opportunity for the creation of a benefice. For the Franks, this harder to control area, which had come within their sphere but simultaneously remained Frisian, and that was difficult to protect from the many Viking attacks, was a concession to the Danes. Giving it in benefice could even help restore control, by both Franks and Danes, and order. For the Danish Vikings, it was a foot in the Frankish empire, but in a safe area as it was on the rim of control and always accepted the northern world as much as the southern. They had furthermore frequented the area in their Viking raids since it had become part of the Frankish sphere, whilst historically they knew it from old ties, family relations and shared histories.

Towards the later Viking Age, there were many changes that eventually caused the end of Viking activity in Frisia. Naturally, the decline of Viking raids and changes in the Viking world itself, in general, were key to this. Trade connections seem to continue, although in different places and possibly different forms. One form we can think of is the organisation of guilds, which are mentioned in relation to Frisians on two rune stones in Sigtuna in the eleventh century (U 379 and U 391; see for image and description Brate 1918; Jesch 2001, 80, 239-41; Lebecq 1983, 451). Especially around AD 1000 change seems to have kicked in, for uncertain reasons, as we know no cities or towns in Friesland around that time, which distinguishes it greatly from other areas. It appears there was still high mobility, but less centralisation. Meanwhile, the Carolingian dynasty had made way for the Ottonian rulers, and from 925 Frisia had officially become part of the German Kingdom that from 962 onwards would be known as the Holy Roman Empire. By this time, Frisia had, since the incorporation in the Frankish realm, been governed by counts of various descent, many Saxon (Henstra 2012, 80). However, for quite some time Frisia had a good deal of freedom in governing itself. Another important development was the fact that from 900 onwards, the Frisian coastal landscape changed dramatically due to the reclamations (De Langen 2012, 19). Change in landscape and occupation around 1000 must also have been caused by the aforementioned first sea dykes that were raised, diminishing the once vital importance of the terpen. Although the Viking attacks continued into the eleventh century, the frequency of the attacks diminished. Frisia was no longer an area on the front line between the Frankish and Danish Viking spheres that were trying to extend their power, but taken up into the German empire. The characteristic mobility and connectivity of the Frisians in general, and especially with the North Sea World, eventually faded away, but only after the eleventh century it seems. The echo of the Viking Age events and the role of both Vikings and Franks, however, remained present in former Frisia for a long time and transformed from an actual connectivity to a remembered and constructed connectivity.

2.4 Frisian freedom and 'national' histories¹⁵

The reason why the post-Viking period into the thirteenth century is seen as a formative period in the present context is the fact that it is the period in which we have the first Frisian texts, as well as important writings which include the Viking Age from elsewhere. As described by Sigurdsson (2004, 55) it is the period when 'written books take over from human memory as the main repository for essential information'. These written books now contain information on or echo the Viking Age and how the people dealt with it, besides often placing it in a larger historical framework. For Frisia, the texts from this period are the first vernacular sources on the Viking Age,¹⁶ much as they are some of the first vernacular texts with Viking Age material in other areas as well. These centuries saw the compilation of 'national' histories, such as the *Gesta Danorum*,¹⁷ as well as the creation of sagas, some of which contain Viking Age poetry. The recording and placing of historical materials had apparently become important and possible. Where earlier this was a matter of oral tradition in various regions like Frisia, it now was a matter of recording in writing (Bremmer 2014). The nature of the recorded histories and stories and the degree to which they rely on historical, orally transmitted information, is a matter of debate, as is further explored in the next chapter.

In the High Middle Ages, the counts in Frisia gained more and more power, developing small lordships, at least in West Frisia. Whereas in the eleventh century the Central Frisian area was placed under the Brunonen counts, from the tenth to twelfth centuries the West Frisian parts came under the rule of the Counts of Holland and of the bishop of Utrecht. This was not the case in East Frisia between the Lauwers and Weser, where power diminished and small autonomous lands-gemeenten came into being. This situation, that also came to the other Frisian lands, has been termed the 'Frisian freedom'. The concept Frisian freedom or Frisian liberty refers to the fact that Frisia did not have overlords, even though they did recognise the emperor as the formal ruler, and the free Frisians governed themselves (Vries 2007, 14-15; Nijdam 2008, 107-13; cf. Bremmer 2014, 4). This aspect of Frisia, namely its freedom, is constantly stressed by Frisians and others alike in medieval times. Possibly, just as earlier with the Frankish incorporation and the Christian missionary activity, the physical nature of Frisia with its waterways and comparative remoteness made it hard for the counts to exercise power there, resulting in more autonomy (Nijdam 2008, 108). This does not mean that there was no social stratification, as it has been shown that already in the thirteenth

¹⁵ The idea is that from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries especially, a number of histories of certain countries and people were compiled, such as the *Gesta Danorum* and *Gesta Normannorum*, which are often called 'national' histories. The same idea of composing a larger and coherent history for a specific area or group of people, such as the Icelanders or Frisians, can be found in the writing of the sagas and the Frisian legal material. However, these could not be classified strictly as 'national' histories, as they are not officially coherent histories and do not relate to official states or nations. So, what we mean by 'national' histories here, is the attempt to write coherent histories of particular areas and people, as a way of placing historical material in context and in relation to the present.

¹⁶ Equally, they reflect the twelfth century, as can be seen by the recording of measurements against the floodings. The layering of the texts and how the Viking Age figures in it, is explored in Chapters 3 and 4.

¹⁷ Which could take inspiration from earlier works like that of Bede, and the more recent Dudo of St Quentin (Friis-Jensen 2015, xli).

century there was a group of noblemen who must have been important bearers of the Frisian freedom (Noomen 1999). Neither was there any form of anarchy, as the collective laws show there were many rules that collectively had been agreed on. Despite many references to this situation of freedom, both in scholarly literature as well as in the Old Frisian laws themselves, it is still surrounded with a lot of uncertainties and myth, and there is a lot of variation in the tradition around independence (cf. Nijdam 2008, 107-20; Schneidmüller 2002).

Although this situation is thus thought to have come into existence after the Viking Age, the tradition in the Frisian medieval texts often projects it back to the time of Charlemagne and to Charlemagne himself, who freed the Frisians from heathen northerners (see Chapter 4). This way, the Old-Frisian textual tradition connects it to the period of struggle between Franks and Vikings. One could postulate that, given the paramount role of the construction of Frisian freedom in Frisian sources and Frisian history writing ever since the appearance of the first vernacular written sources, Frisians after the Viking Age were fed up with any external dominance, whether Frankish or Danish or the like, and thus clung to their freedom. This, however, is only speculation, simplification and projection and that is all we can do because of the lack of a Frisian voice in most of the sources.

Simultaneously, the area known as Frisia became smaller. Starting in the southern river estuary region, the coastal area west of the Vlie gradually became Holland between c. AD 1100 and 1400 (Henstra 2012, 134-45), leaving the area east of the Vlie as '*tota Frisia*' and often referred to as the Seven Sealands, or the *Opstalsboomverbond* – the alliance of the Opstalsboom near Aurich where the free Frisians gathered to speak law. Because of the dyke building, the sea regressed and new arable land became available, which may have been one of the incentives for the foundation of the many monasteries and churches that were established in the course of the twelfth century.¹⁸ However, it also caused a fall in the level of the land, which resulted in many floods that took the soil with them when they retreated, changing the landscape dramatically and creating the *Zuyderzee* and other waters (Henstra 2012, 135).

The development of a culture of writing is often connected to the establishment of monasteries, as well as with the introduction of Christianity in general, and may explain why in this period in many regions recording in writing began – even though the types of writing and the context of it can differ greatly. From the middle of the twelfth century, monasteries and more churches began to be founded in Frisia on a larger scale. Some early churches had been founded in the eighth or ninth century, but not many and not all survived very long. Before, some land had been granted to larger monasteries elsewhere. It may seem strange that apart from the early monastery at Egmond, which would have lain within Frisia at that time, the bulk of the churches and monasteries were only founded in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and not when Christianity was originally introduced. This has been explained by Schmidt (1987) as the result of two factors. First, as Frisia was

¹⁸ Although in the mid-tenth century there already was a small community of canons in Staveren.

a liminal or more remote area far from Rome, Christianity and the establishment of churches had not fully penetrated into the rural society. Whilst Christian in name, many people still used both Christ and old practices in daily life. Secondly, the disruptions caused by the Vikings, leading perhaps to a relapse into paganism or at least not threatening the use of old ways, seems to have played an important part in the absence of churches and monasteries. The more firm establishment of Christianity and its institutions in twelfth-century Frisia is therefore termed the second Christianisation by Schmidt (1987).

The recording of the Frisian vernacular law codes in this period must be related to this climate of writing, reflection on bygone times and to the thriving freedom, which made it necessary to record the current laws and their historical legitimation across Frisia (Bremmer 2014, 1). Similarly, in other areas where written culture was thriving, historical and mythological information were connected to the present in order to validate and contextualise contemporary situations. In the preface to the *Gesta Danorum* it is stated that Archbishop Absalon commissioned Saxo to write a history of the Danes and their deeds, like the kinds of histories that had been written for the neighbouring people shortly before. Here too, the context of literacy connected to the Church and the political climate (including the affairs with the German Empire) must have been important factors (Friss-Jensen 2015, xliii). On Iceland, where most of the sagas were written, reading and writing arrived with Christianity around 1000. Writing was first only used in the context of the Church, but when the first monastery was founded in the twelfth century, writing had come into use for secular texts. Like in Frisia, the first texts that were composed on Iceland when literacy had been established in the twelfth century were codifications of law, as well as genealogies. Shortly thereafter, the sagas were composed using a pool of oral-historical material and poetry (Sigurdsson 2004, 54). Although the Icelandic sagas and the Frisian laws are very different textual traditions, they both seem to be a combination of indigenous vernacular material and Latin influence (Sigurdsson 2004, 21-5). Just as in the law collections, information was added to the sagas over time, creating diachronic, layered. This shows that these works contained the information most important to society, which is why they are very informative to us. Presumably, the oral and written tradition existed side by side for quite some time. As stressed by Sigurdsson (2004, 53), and this can also be applied to other written works in other regions at this time, the literary and other written works that occurred in medieval Iceland can only be explained 'against a background of a people with a stock of tales to tell about the ancient gods and the heroes of the Viking Age, the kings of northern Europe, and the Icelandic chieftains of earlier centuries.' This shows the great interconnection between the pre-Viking, Viking and High Middle Ages, especially in terms of history 'recording'. There is a constant interchange between this twelfth- to thirteenth-century present – a Christian one – and the Viking Age material and events in the sources, making it necessary to always keep the circumstances of both periods in mind as well.