

**THE PERIOD OF THE ‘NEW-FRISIAN’ PENNY IN OOSTERGO
(c.1350-c.1500)**

13.1 On the money of account in the 1412 synodal statutes of Leeuwarden.

The 1412 synodal statutes of Leeuwarden survive in three documents.¹ The first of these is the Old Frisian 16th-century copy of ms. Unia by Franciscus Junius. The second is the History of Leeuwarden by Gabbema (1701), which may also be a copy of ms. Unia; there is very little difference between these two versions. The third is ms. Furmerius (c.1600).²

In these statutes, the money of account is ‘new money’, and the multiple units mentioned are shillings, minor marks and *scilda*. The minor mark is reckoned at 24 *grata*. Also mentioned is a clerical fee of 1 *fleemsk* *grata* and, in addition, there are amounts quoted in ‘pounds new money’. What was this ‘new money’?

Only two kinds of money seem possible: English money (as found in Westergo and the Ommelanden) or some kind of local money. The answer can be deduced from the following passage:³

Item Nene heiliges deys fyra thy wroghien ors etta from synd ende etta eefter synd als hier tho farra by schriouuen sted [...] tre schillinghen in da mene jerem in da bishops jere een haele schild.

[i.e. Item no indictments about the observation of holy days otherwise than at the first synod and the second synod like here further is mentioned [...] three shillings in the ordinary years in the bishop’s years half a *schild*.]

In the statutes, a difference is made between fines to be paid in the ordinary years (when the dean presides over the synod) and the bishop’s year (when the bishop presides over the synod); in the latter case the fines are substantially higher. If the money in the statutes was English money, the fine in the ordinary year would be 3 English shillings = 36 English pennies. This would far exceed the fine of half a *schild*

¹ Van Steyn, “Het ‘Leeuwarder seendrecht’”, 33-69.

² *Ibidem*, 31-32.

³ *Ibidem*, 37.

in the bishop's year,⁴ even if the *schild* in question was a genuine antiquated French *schild*. Because 1 antique genuine French *schild* æ 4.5g of gold,⁵ and 1 English noble in 1412 æ 7.0g of gold æ 80 English pennies,⁶ it follows that, roughly speaking, a coin of 4.5g of gold would have been valued at about (c.4.5g : c.7.0g) x 80 = c.51.4 English pennies, so at the maximum half a *schild* would be equivalent to $\frac{1}{2} \times c.51.4 = c.25.7$ (rounded up to 26) English pennies if the 1411/1412 devaluation of the English currency is taken into account, and without it it would be even less. If the *schild* in question was not a genuine French *schild* but the multiple unit of 30 old *vleemse groten*, only $22\frac{1}{2}$ English pennies would be the equivalent of half a *schild*.⁷ As either interpretation of the *schild* in terms of English money results in a quantity less than 3 shillings English = 36 English pennies, it follows that the 3 shillings fine in the ordinary years cannot have been English money.

The alternative is local money. In the Mid-Frisian conversion directive, an Oostergo minor shilling of 12 Lyordera (Leeuwarden) pennies is mentioned; a mark of these pennies counts 10 shillings and is equivalent to 24 *grate*.⁸ This completely covers the data found in the statutes of 1412, and so there can be little doubt that the money of account, the 'new money' as it is called, was Oostergo money.

This answer, however, provokes another question: was the 'pound new money' that was mentioned in the statutes a unit of 240 Oostergo pennies? One mention of this pound occurs in the following context:

Jtem jef eenighe mensche syn onjariche kind off drencket iefta ondelwelike off ginghe tre schellingh nyes jeldes om den breke in gunge ende nen hagera ban in de mena jerum, hit ne se that hemmen hyara persona in da schild wrogie, so sint hit six pond nyes jeldes. In da bischops jere twa merck nyes jeldes ner hit ne se dat hem syn persona farra wroghie by syner conscientie so is hit tria littika merck, da merck xxiiij graten.

[i.e. If someone drowns his child under age or lets it die miserably: three shillings new money for committing the breach⁹ and no higher fine in the ordinary years, unless he is indicted by his parish priest, so it is six pounds new money. In the bishop's years two marks new money unless his parish

⁴ I have ignored the possibility that the *schild* might be read as a Holland *schild* because this was mostly called a *clinckert* in Mid-Frisia. Moreover, this interpretation would result in an even lower value of the *schild*.

⁵ Spufford, *Money*, 408.

⁶ *Ibidem*, 409.

⁷ Chapter 9, 'The history of the measure of value'.

⁸ Buma, *Westerlauwersches Recht I*, 424-427 (§§ 6 and 9).

⁹ The translation of this passage was made with the generous help of Dr B.S. Hempenius-Van Dijk, Department of Law History, University of Groningen.

priest indicts him further in his conscience so it is three minor marks, the mark at 24 *graten*.]

From this clause it appears that, if the deed was not accompanied by an accusation by the parish priest, the fine was 3 shillings (= 36 pennies) Oostergo money in the ordinary years and 2 minor marks (= 240 pennies) in the bishop's years. If the deed was accompanied by an accusation by the parish priest the fine was 3 Oostergo minor marks in the bishop's year (= 360 pennies) and 6 pounds new money in the ordinary years. Obviously, these 6 pounds new money should be less than 3 Oostergo minor marks; that is, less than 360 pennies. It follows that the pounds in question cannot have been pounds of 240 Leeuwarden pennies each. If this fine was proportionate to its counterpart in the first case, it would be $36/240 \times 360$ pennies = 54 Leeuwarden pennies, which would imply that 6 pounds new money were equivalent to 54 pennies, or 1 pound new money to 9 pennies. This would clearly be odd, and therefore the pounds in question are much more likely to have been pounds of 7 *groten* apiece, as mentioned in the Mid-Frisian conversion directive.¹⁰ As a *grate* was equivalent to 5 Leeuwarden pennies, it follows that the fine of 6 pounds new money would count $6 \times 7 \times 5 = 210$ Leeuwarden pennies. This conclusion is acceptable but, since the source is not original, the apparent disproportion may have been caused by an error in the copying process.

13.2 On the kinds of marks used in the prices of land in Mid-Frisia 1390-1500.

It is hardly possible to find any trace of Oostergo money in the Mid-Frisian documents because the amounts are quoted in unspecified marks or major marks.¹¹ Did these marks emanate from English money of account, as in Westergo, or were they marks of Oostergo money? In this section I have made an effort to deduce from Mid-Frisian charters that mention prices of land, from 1390-1500, whether English marks or Oostergo marks were intended when the prices were quoted in unspecified marks or major marks. My approach has been to make a survey of prices per surface unit, measured in silver equivalence where the money of account was known. I have assumed that the average silver equivalence of these surface units can be compared with the number of marks of unspecified money of account per surface unit, in order to determine what the unspecified marks actually were.

It goes without saying that this has been a precarious venture. Land may differ in quality. Prices may differ according to market conditions which can obviously vary enormously over more than a century. Moreover, the value (or silver equivalence) of the money used in the documents is uncertain even where the kind of money is known. I must admit that if the actual results had shown extreme differences I would have

¹⁰ Excursus 7.1: 'On the Mid-Frisian conversion directive: a survey'.

¹¹ Chapter 13, 'The history of the measure of value'.

given up the attempt, but in fact this was not the case. Also, the effort had no other pretensions than to derive the magnitude in silver equivalence of the marks. The difference in magnitude between marks emanating from English money and those emanating from Oostergo money is substantial, so it should have been possible to distinguish them on the basis of the figures arrived at in any event. In the period under discussion, English marks of 144 pennies had a legal silver equivalence of c.155g before 1411, c.130g between 1411 and 1464, and 104g after 1464; English marks of 120 pennies had a silver equivalence in the same periods of 130g, 108g and 86g respectively. Oostergo major marks of 144 pennies, according to the reconstruction given in Chapter 13, had a silver equivalence of 43g in the 1380s, declining to c.22g at the end of the 15th century; Oostergo minor marks of 120 pennies had a silver equivalence of 36g declining to 18g over the same period. It is clear, then, that the lowest silver equivalence of the mark in English money of account was substantially higher than the highest silver equivalence of the mark in Oostergo money at the same time. Only marks of 48 pennies in ‘English’ money (*liudmerk*, of 52g, 43g and 35g respectively) and Oostergo major marks are not clearly distinguishable at first sight, but it is doubtful that *liudmerk* were used in pricing of land during the 15th century; they have been found mainly in 13th century law and jurisprudence for compensations and fines, and I would not have considered them at all if they had not been mentioned in the conversion directive.¹² Even there the *liudmerk* may only have been mentioned as antiquated money of account found in the judges’ books, to be converted into actual money of account.

In the following cases the price of land is expressed in known surface units, called *pundameta*¹³ -which I have abbreviated to *pmt* - and *onsas*, which I have reduced to *pundameta*: 1 *onsa* = 1/12 *pmt*. The money amounts are expressed either in unspecified marks or in known other kinds of money. If a price is quoted in ‘known other kinds of money’ its silver equivalence can be calculated. An old *schild* is rated at 30 old *vleemse groten*; this *grote* is calculated at 1.4g of silver before c.1430 and 1.2g of silver after that date.¹⁴ A *clinckert* is rated at 24 *butkens* of 0.9g each between c.1430 and 1464, and at 0.7g each after 1464. A *rinsgulder* is calculated at c.30g silver equivalence.¹⁵

From table G it appears that the average silver equivalence of 1 surface unit would be c.265g. If we exclude the case of 1406, which seems to be extreme for some reason, the average would be 255g. The average, and also the most frequent, price in 3 cases in Oostergo, expressed in unspecified marks which therefore have no computable

¹² Excursus 7.1: ‘On the Mid-Frisian conversion directive: a survey’.

¹³ 1 *pundamete* = 0.36 hectare.

¹⁴ Chapter 13, ‘The history of the measure of value’.

¹⁵ Jesse, *Der wendische Münzverein*, 214-219; 30g is a rough average.

silver equivalence, is 8 marks. So, if the average price of 1 *pmt* was about 8 marks or approximately 255-265g silver equivalence, it follows that 1 mark - very roughly - must have been the size of approximately 32 or 33g of silver. From the foregoing it seems clear that they cannot have been English marks. Even *liudmerk* would have to be ruled out. Oostergo minor marks are therefore the most likely candidates.

Table G Silver equivalencies of prices per unit of surface in late medieval Mid-Frisia
If the location is situated in Westergo it is characterised with a W, if in Sewenwalden with an S ; otherwise it is situated in Oostergo.

year	location	price/ pmt	silver eq. in g/pmt	source
1390	Kooten	11 grate merk	.?.	Chbk1, 250
1397	Noorder Ee	13 grata merka	.?.	OFO1: 6
1406	Buawerstra fen ¹⁶	14½ schilden	570	OFO1: 12
1415	Paesens	18 grate merc	.?.	OFO1: 19
1415	Den Ham	13 grate merc	.?.	do.
1431	Bolsward W	6 merc	.?.	Chbk1, 496
1432	Huisum	6 scilden=180 tunem	270	OFO1: 60
1440	n.Ferwerd	9 aldera scilda	324	OFO1: 81
1441	Stiens ¹⁷	396 grethen	397	Chbk1, 520
1445	Hantum	8 merk	.?.	Chbk1, 528
1446	Veenklooster ¹⁸	13 graete marcke	.?.	OFO1: 96
1447	Akkrum ¹⁹ S	6 klinkerden + 6 flaemske	137	Chbk1: 532
1449	Ferwerd	8 merkum	.?.	Chbk1, 533
1450	Vierhuis n.Lwrđ	8 old schilden	288	Chbk1: 534
1451	Grouw	6 ⅔ klenkerden 144	Chbk1: 542	
1458	Wautnya fin S?	15 klinckerden	324	OFO1: 152
1468	Schiermonnik Ham	10 marck	.?.	Chbk1, 622
1471	Franjum.Nyland W	10½ rynsche gld	307	OFO1: 214
1472	Herbajum ²⁰ W	10 zijlden	168	OFO1: 233

¹⁶ It is not certain whether *schilden* were old *scelda* or *clinckerden* (= Holland *schilden*); because the word 'old' is not used here I have categorised it as a *clinckert*, but in around 1406 this was not yet a silver based multiple unit of account; it was a gold coin, rated at c.40g silver (Sassen, "Gemengde berichten" (1913), 233-236).

¹⁷ 1 pmt = 12 *onsa* æ 12 x 33 = 396 *grethen* (= 396 : 24 = 16.5 Oostergo marks)

¹⁸ This case is not a sale but a mortgage, so the price might have been higher.

¹⁹ It is not clear whether this amount was the price per *pmt* or the total price; per *pmt* seems more likely.

²⁰ It is not certain whether *zijlden* were old *scelda* or *clinckerden* (= Holland *schilden*); because the word 'old' is not used I have categorized these as *clinckerden*.

1475	Giekerk	5.7 merck = 137.6 philippus (stuvers) 193		OFO1: 261
1475	Bozum W	12 postolaet gld = 336 butties	235	OFO1: 262
1476	n.Wommels? W	20 clinckerden	336	OFO4: 47
1476	n.Wommels? ²¹ W	15 schielde	252	OFO4: 48
1477	Claytorp W	13½ klinckerden	227	OFO1: 281
1477	Claytorp W	6½ rinx gounen	195	OFO1: 290
1481	n.Leeuwarden	7.5 rynsgolden = 150 stuuere	225	OFO1: 310
1481	Allaerd W	23 klinckerden	386	OFO4: 56
1482	Ryp W	12 klinckerden	202	OFO4: 62
1482	Paesens	10 mercken = 200 wyte stuuere	240	OFO1: 323
1484	Ryp W	14 klinckerden	235	OFO4: 64
1485	Saerd-Bolsward W	20 klinckerden	336	OFO4: 66
1485	Claytorp W	10 klinckerden	168	OFO1: 345
1486	n.Kimswerd? W	25.7 klinckerden	432	OFO4: 71
1486	Witmarsum W	15 klinckerden	252	OFO4: 72
1487	Tietjerk/Oenkerk	6 auld schielden	216	OFO1: 355
1488	Akkerwoude	8.2 aelderschilden	295	OFO1: 358
1488	Hiaure	10 graete marck	?.	Chbk1, 744
1488	Gaastmeer ²² W	20 schyulden	336	OFO1: 360
1488	Ferwerd ²³	7.2 grate merka	?.	OFO4: 78
1489	Harlingen? W	13.2 klinckerden	222	OFO1: 370
1490	Leksum W	6 enckel g rins g	180	OFO1: 378
1491	Herwey ²⁴	8 golden rynsch g	240	OFO1: 387
1492	Clayterp ²⁵ W	12 schilda	202	OFO1: 391
1492	Schiermonnikham ²⁶	6 graet marck	?.	OFO1: 393
1495	Clayterp W	6.2 enkel goldena	186	OFO1: 420
Subtotal		33 cases known	8,720	average 264g

²¹ Ditto.

²² Ditto.

²³ 1 *koegras* = 1 *pmt*.

²⁴ A location Hearewei is found near Minnertsgea in Westergo, and a location Hearrewei is situated near Anjum in Oostergo. The text of the document not giving further clarification, I have opted for the second location, which sounds closer to Herwey.

²⁵ It is not certain whether *schilda* were old *scelda* or *clinckerden* (= Holland *schilden*); because the word 'old' is not used I have categorized these as *clinckerden*.

²⁶ I have not found a location called Schiermonnikham; it was probably situated either on the island of Schiermonnikoog or on the opposite coast in Oostergo.

Unspecified major marks are also mentioned several times, as the table shows. In English money a major mark was 16 shillings or 192 pennies ('Lübeck style' seldom found in Frisia). As these marks of 192 pennies would have been equivalent to even more silver than English marks of 144 pennies, it will be clear at a glance that the major marks in the table cannot have been English major marks. One English major mark would be equivalent to 207g of silver before 1411, to 173g of silver between 1411 and 1464, and 138g after 1464, according to the official rates. For instance, 11 major marks in 1390 would officially be equivalent to 2,277g of silver, and this is far beyond the average we found in the overall table. The only other major marks to have been found in Mid-Frisia are Oostergo major marks. As there is no further information, we must assume that these major marks were Oostergo major marks, and in the table they are indeed found only in Oostergo.

13.3 On the mark in the 1444 treaty between Groningen and Oostergo²⁷

According to the chronicle of Worp van Thabor, the 1444 treaty between Groningen and Oostergo was initiated by Oostergo to gain the assistance of the town of Groningen in controlling the strife between the *hovetlingen* of Oostergo that had flared up again.

Most of the amounts in the treaty are quoted in old *schilden*, but in one case a wergeld amount of 400 'old marks, the mark reckoned at 29 old *vleemse groten*' is mentioned (where a *hovetling* kills another *hovetling*). This is an unusual rate. Since it is almost equal to the rate found in the Mid-Frisian conversion directive for a major Oostergo mark - which is 29 *grate* less 1 Leeuwarden penny (= $28\frac{4}{5}$ *grate*) - it seems possible that this is the mark in question, but an objection might be that it is specified in this treaty as 'old'. English money was often called 'old' money, but the use of an English mark in a treaty with Groningen at that time seems very unlikely because English money of account was no longer used in either Oostergo or Groningen. Moreover, an English mark of 144 or 120 pennies worth 29 old *vleemse groten* does not make sense.²⁸ It could be argued that the term 'old mark' in this treaty with Groningen had the same meaning as it had in Groningen itself:²⁹ the mark that had been abolished in Groningen in 1394 but was still found in the old statutes and jurisprudence of this town and was hence still referred to in treaties. This too seems unlikely, however, as a 14th-century Groningen mark worth 29 old *vleemse groten* is an expression that has never been found in Groningen and would hardly be conceivable. It is also highly

²⁷ Worp, *Kronijken*, vol.4, 80-85.

²⁸ 29 old *vleemse groten* at best $\approx 29 \times 1.37\text{g} = 39.7\text{g}$ of silver; if an English mark of 120 pennies had been in view, this penny would have a silver equivalence of only $39.7\text{g} : 120 = 0.33\text{g}$; but in 1444 its legal silver equivalence was still 0.90g (Chapter 7, 'The history of the measure of value').

²⁹ Chapter 12, 'The history of the measure of value'.

unlikely that wergeld amounts in disputes between *hovetlingen* in Oostergo would ever have been quoted in a multiple unit of account that was foreign to Oostergo.

The only likely candidate that remains is the mark of 12 shillings (144 pennies) Oostergo money, worth $28\frac{4}{5}$ old *vleemse groten*. This mark was usually called *grata merk*, but it may sometimes have been called ‘old mark’, referring to the habitual 144-penny mark in the system of money of account that was valid before the ‘new money’ of Oostergo was established.³⁰ This possibility is also suggested by the Mid-Frisian conversion directive:³¹

“*Item thio grata merck vr all Astergaland thio is xij scillinghen. Hweer so may an man jeld bi alda jeldem, soe is thio merck xij scillinghen*”

[*i.e.* Item, the major mark all over Oostergo that is 12 shillings. If someone is atoned with the old money,³² so is the mark 12 shillings].

³⁰ See my conjecture in Chapter 13, ‘The history of the measure of value’.

³¹ Buma, *Westerlauwersches Recht I*, 426-427, § 14.

³² Ditto; according to the translation of Buma & Ebel: “Wenn man einen Mann nach altem Gelde büßt...”. However, I would not rule out a possible alternative translation: ‘... atoned by old wergeld’; that is, wergeld valid before the 15th century reform (Excursus 1.1: ‘On the wergeld hypothesis’).