

# Superstition is Deeply Imprinted in the Human Heart

Halbertsma's *Lexicon Frisicum*

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In this chapter I will deal with folklore in the Frisian-Latin *Lexicon Frisicum* (1872), compiled by Joost Hiddes Halbertsma (1789–1869). First, I will give a brief outline of the Frisian language. Then I will introduce Halbertsma and his dictionary. In the next section I will discuss folklore in a broader nineteenth-century context and explain how Halbertsma fits in. In the main part of the article I will deal with Halbertsma's ideas about folklore, or mythology, as he would call it, and illustrate by means of a few dictionary articles how these are expressed in the *Lexicon Frisicum*.

## Frisian

Frisian, the language spoken in the Dutch Province of Friesland, is of West Germanic origin. Its earliest stage, Old Frisian, belongs with Old English and Old Saxon, to the North Sea Germanic group. Traditionally, three stages are recognized – Old, Middle and Modern Frisian. These three stages do not coincide, however, with the periodization of the other West Germanic dialects. Old Frisian is the language found in a number of manuscripts and charters from the eleventh to the sixteenth centuries, originating from an area ranging from the German river Weser in the East to the IJsselmeer in the West. Though the oldest manuscripts are relatively late, they often contain texts that are much older. Linguistically, these early texts reflect features that justify calling this stage Old Frisian. Middle Frisian is the term used for the language of the renaissance poet Gysbert Japicx (1603–1666), and that of the literature of the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. Frisian is the second official language in

the Netherlands. It is considered the closest living language to English. Modern Frisian is the language as it has been written and spoken since 1800.

Frisian is chiefly a spoken language. It was only in the nineteenth century that the production of written Frisian would increase significantly (Duijff 2010: 1472). Duijff rightly connects the rise of written Frisian to the influence of the Romantic Movement. Joost Hiddes Halbertsma (1789–1869), Mennonite minister, language lover, author of the *Lexicon Frisicum* and a true Romantic himself, was one of the people who strove to further (written) Frisian (Breuker 2017b).

### Halbertsma and the *Lexicon Frisicum*<sup>1</sup>

Halbertsma was involved in a large variety of fields in his long life. He was a Mennonite minister by occupation, but his interests went far beyond theology. In many of his works, language and culture are central issues. He was especially interested in Frisian in all its historical and geographical aspects and in older Dutch, and spent much of his working life on the *Lexicon Frisicum*. He chose to use Latin as the dictionary's metalanguage (Dykstra 2010 and Dykstra 2011: 89ff). Halbertsma felt that the language scholars of his time had made inadequate use of the Frisian language in comparative linguistics, and with the *Lexicon Frisicum*, he wanted to demonstrate that Frisian was indispensable for the study the Germanic languages. Therefore he regularly placed the Frisian language in a broader Germanic context in his dictionary. When Halbertsma passed away in 1869, the *Lexicon Frisicum* was not ready. In 1872, his son Tjalling published the material his father had finished in manuscript, the part *A* to *Feer*.

Halbertsma wanted his dictionary to contain all of the present and past varieties of Frisian. For Old and Middle Frisian and also for Frisian varieties spoken in Germany, he had to rely on lexicographic descriptions and text editions. Since there were no Modern Frisian dictionaries or word-lists and hardly any written contemporary sources, he had to collect nineteenth-century Frisian language and cultural material by himself. He took his fieldwork quite seriously and he carefully selected his informants. He was the first to make extensive collections of (Modern) Frisian language

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1 This section is based on Dykstra (2011).

material and also the first to describe such material in a dictionary format, which makes him the founding father of modern Frisian lexicography.

## Folklore in a Nineteenth-Century Context

At the start of Halbertsma's linguistic career – his first publication is from 1822 – Romanticism in Europe was already quite an influential social and political movement. Romanticism came with a great historical interest. Historical consciousness was characteristic of linguistics and other areas of the humanities. The past was an instrument for assessing and explaining the present. Throughout Europe, many scholars pursued the remnants of the idealized Middle Ages that might be found among the rural population. The scholars gathered folk tales, folk songs and fairy tales. In Germany in Halbertsma's time, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm worked at the *Deutsches Wörterbuch* and in the Netherlands from 1864 onward the *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal* by Matthias de Vries was published in instalments.

There was much interest in Romantic linguistics for etymological and historical comparative research, and linguists were drawn to folklore and dialects. A people and its language were considered one and national character and national culture were no longer seen separately from one other. Romanticism was more and more influenced by nationalist ideas. One's own language, one's own history and one's own culture became highly praised. Due to the strong nationalist tendencies of Romanticism, scholars were increasingly focused on the language, history and the folklore of their own country. Halbertsma may be considered a real romanticist. He idealized the freedom-loving Frisians and their old, valuable language and culture, not to mention their superior character.

This was the time the Indo-European paradigm came into vogue. Due to this paradigm, “the vernaculars of Europe became the backbone of an ethnographic division of Europe of differently-thinking, differently-feeling nations each with their separate, specific and ethnically inherited character” (Leerssen 2017b: 60). And this is why, Leerssen suggests, “the study of language shows considerable overlap with the developing study of folklore and oral culture, the writing of national literary histories, and the investigation and edition of written sources in the nation's vernacular” (Leerssen 2017b: 60, see also: Netzer 2017, Shippey 2005a: 1, and Van der Sijts 2017). Mohnike (2017: 145) observes that the Indo-European paradigm was “closely linked to the restructuring of European societies into

civic nation-states in search of a new form of social cohesion based on language and myths”. It was in this intellectual climate that Jacob Grimm published his influential *Deutsche Mythologie* (1835, 3rd. edn. 1854).

Leerssen (1999: 81) considers the activities of the brothers Grimm as trend-setting for everything in romantic Europe that was concerned with the national past. In fact, he claims that there is almost no European cultural nationalism that did not begin with folkloristic fieldwork and publications of folk songs, ballads or fairy tales and narratives. Such inventories had their origins in the new cultural sciences, and they exercised great influence on the emerging national awareness of the country in question, and they inspired poets and activists. It was very important that the collected material originated from the people itself. It was all about national traditions and traditions forming a link between past and present: continuity over time was the most important pillar in the concept of “National identity” (Leerssen 1999: 81). Old ballads, oral literature, traditional festivals and customs, fairy tales and narratives, Leerssen (1999: 80–81) explains, were important sources in which the true spirit of a people could be rediscovered, untouched by alienating cosmopolitan levelling of the “high” culture. Just as historians fall back on ethnic, ethnographic and folkloristic indications for the ancient folk culture of bygone years, Leerssen argues, folklore becomes the demotic antiquarian studies of romanticism par excellence.<sup>2</sup>

Halbertsma (1843 and later) showed himself to be an exponent of romantic general scholarship in his application of both mythology and linguistics in the solution of scholarly problems. He considered it the task of the mythologist *and* the linguist (the text has *taalbeoefenaar* [‘a man of language, a language practitioner’]) to uncover the religious concepts that underlie popular ideas and beliefs about North and South. He apparently saw himself as both a mythologist and a linguist, as for him mythology and linguistics were disciplines that could, or should, be practiced in combination.

### Halbertsma, the *Lexicon Frisicum* and Folklore

Halbertsma had actually “been encouraged by Grimm to write about Frisian manners, customs and folktales” (Breuker 2017c). Jacob Grimm himself

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2 Leerssen explicitly refers to Herder as the origin of this scholarly stance.

sent him a copy of his *Deutsche Mythologie* in the second edition of 1844<sup>3</sup> (Van der Molen 1969: 257). The ten references to the *Deutsche Mythologie* in the dictionary show that Halbertsma used it when compiling the *Lexicon Frisicum*. Yet, the enumeration of Halbertsma's publications and manuscripts in Jongsma (1933) makes clear that his interest was mainly in linguistics (lexicography, etymology, comparative linguistics, dialectology, onomastics) and to a lesser extent in (Frisian) history and literature and folklore. Folklore certainly held his interest, though this does not show in official publications on the subject. The myths and legends that he discovered during his fieldwork have largely been incorporated into his literary work, but we also find folklore material in the *Lexicon Frisicum*. Van der Molen (1969: 260) reminds us that Halbertsma in his manuscripts never used the words *volkskunde* or *folklore*, simply because they only came into existence during his lifetime. He mostly used, as did his contemporaries, the word *mythology*, as in the title of his manuscript hs. 546<sup>4</sup>: *Aanteekeningen over Bijgeloof, tot de kennis der oude Mythologie, bij het volk zelf opgezameld* ['Notes about Superstition, to the knowledge of ancient Mythology, collected from the people itself']. Van der Molen (1969: 263) thinks that Halbertsma knew what he was talking about when it comes to folklore. He was active in many fields, from farmers' houses to folk tales, from superstition to traditional costume, from children's games to ice skating, from the national hymn to the head brooch,<sup>5</sup> from the Southwest

3 Halbertsma and Grimm corresponded. In a letter from 11 June 1836 he wrote to Grimm about his observation that everywhere where farmers in the Dutch Province of Overijssel believe in *wite wiven* (spirits of wise, or witty women, AD), old Germanic sepulchral mounds were found (Van der Molen 1969: 261). Halbertsma wrote Grimm in a letter from 26 July 1855 about *bijgelovigheden* ['superstitions']. Grimm in the second edition of the *Deutsche Mythologie* (1844: 620) referred to Halbertsma's book on Buddhism (Halbertsma 1843, a facsimile of which was published in Ter Haar, Halbertsma and de Jong (2019)).

4 Hs. stands for *handschrift* ['manuscript']. Most of Halbertsma's library, his correspondence and his manuscripts are kept in Tresoar, the Frisian scholarly library in Leeuwarden.

5 In the *Lexicon Frisicum*: "eár-izer, n. diadema fæminarum Frisiæ olim ex ferro, unde (*izer* ferrum) nomen trahit; deinde ex argento, nunc ex auro fabrefactum. [...] - Figurate, cornua vaccæ, quod diadema muliebre antiquitus juxta utramque aurem exiebat in caput vaccæ cornubus instructum, quod amuleti vices præstabat. *Hie di kou sawol ien gouden as ien sulweren eárizer wier hja méar wurdich, vacca plus valeret si concinnis cornubus erat instructa*" (Halbertsma 1872: 114, s.v. 'eár-izer').

[*'eár-izer'* [literally: ear iron], neuter noun, a head ornament for Frisian women, which used to be made of iron, from which (*izer*, iron) its name derives; then [made] of silver, now [made] of gold. [...] - Figuratively: the horns of a cow, because the ear iron used to stick out on both sides besides the ears like the horns on the head of a cow; this was the highest valued ornament. "If the cow had both a gold and a silver ear iron, it would be worth more", the cow would be worth more if she had nice horns.]

region of Friesland to the northern island of Terschelling, from the northern church door<sup>6</sup> to country fairs.

Since Halbertsma had such a broad view of contemporary and former society, and because he put language at the centre of everything, it seems only natural that he also conveyed his interests in his dictionary. And that is what he did prodigiously. *S.v.* ‘berthe-leppel’ [‘birth spoon’],<sup>7</sup> for example, he dwells on the customs and traditions around birth and *s.v.* ‘bigraffenis’ [‘funeral’] he spends more than two columns to inform the reader about a variety of subjects that are related to burial in Friesland. We find information about exorcism *s.v.* ‘düewel-banner’ [‘exorcist’]. *S.v.* ‘brilloft’ [‘wedding’] and ‘breid’ [‘bride’] we find ample details concerning marriage customs.

In many places, the *Lexicon Frisicum* has an almost encyclopedic character, partly caused by Halbertsma’s typical associative way of working.<sup>8</sup> The short article *boale-moánne* [‘bread month’] may serve as an example:

*boale-moánne*, *cg.* *prima mensis matrimonii*, *Ang.* honey-moon. Lit it pear hwat máljeije, it is noch yn ‘e boale-moánne, *Gal.* Laissez le couple folatrer; il se trouve encore dans la lune de miel. *Panis triticeus erat olim ditiorum*, *Hol.* *v.* herenbrood; *siligineus contra populi in*

6 In the *Lexicon Frisicum*: “noarder-doárke, n. janua parva in pariete templi boreali, per quam medio ævo liti et abjectæ sortis homines intrabant templum; per portam australem, quæ et multo major et architectonicem ornatior est, intrabant libri et honestiore loco nati. In foribus, qui hanc portam claudunt, sæpe minor est janua, per quam hodie cujuscumque ordinis homines intrant: integri fores tunc tandem aperiuntur, cum funus viri nobilis, ex stirpe antiqua Frisiorum, in antrum sepulchrale familiæ deducitur. [...]” (Halbertsma 1872:686, *s.v.* ‘noarder-doárke’).

[‘noarder-doárke, neuter (noun), a small door in the northern wall of the church, through which in the Middle Ages unfree people and people of low birth entered the church; through the southern gate, which is both much larger and architecturally speaking more beautiful, came free people and people of high births. The doors, which close this gate, often contain a smaller door through which today people of all ranks and positions enter: finally, the whole (large) doors are only opened when the body of a distinguished man of Frisian lineage is brought to the family vault.]

7 The *Lexicon Frisicum* makes a distinction between lemmata in capital letters and lemmata in lower case letters. The lemmata in upper case letters are ordered alphabetically. The lemmata in small letters following a lemma in upper case, have a morpho-semantic or etymological relationship with the preceding upper case lemma. They are often not in the place we would expect to find them in alphabetically. A substantial part of the *Lexicon Frisicum* is now available online at <<http://lexiconfrisicum.ivdnt.org>>, which of course makes the search considerably easier. All available articles are provided with translations in Frisian. Quite a few of them have also been translated into Dutch. Most of the articles referred to in this chapter are available online. It is the intention that eventually the entire *Lexicon Frisicum*, with translations, will be published online.

8 See for Halbertsma’s associative way of working in the *Lexicon Frisicum* also: Dykstra (2011: 81).

*genere; inde Frisii distinguunt inter brea, panis siligineus, et boale, triticeus; ideo et Hol. primum tempus matrimonii vocant de wittebroodsweken, F. wigge-moàanne, idem. Wiggen sunt panes ex farre triticeo puriore, forma digitorum agglutinatorum; inde Burman. 66, 'T is iette yne wigmoane. Hos panes, qui cunas referunt, Frisii comedunt in festo nati Christi. Ang. v. Christmas-batch.*

(Halbertsma 1872: 442, s.v. 'boale-moàanne')

boale-moàanne, common gender, the first month of marriage, English *honey-moon*. *Lit it pear hwat mâljeije, it is noch yn 'e boale-moàanne* [*Let the couple frolic, they are still in their honeymoon*'], French *Laissez le couple folatrer; il se trouve encore dans la lune de miel* [*Let the couple frolic, they are still in their honeymoon*']. Real wheat bread used to be something for the wealthy, Old Dutch *herenbrood* [*gentlemen's bread*]. White wheat bread was generally something for the people. Frisians make a distinction between *brea*, bread made of white wheat, and *boale*, bread made of real wheat; that is why the Dutch call the first period of the marriage the *wittebroodsweken* [*'honeymoon'*, literally: *'white bread weeks'*], Frisian *wigge-moàanne*, idem. *Wiggen* are loaves of somewhat cleaner wheat cereal in the form of fingers sticking together; hence Burmania 66: *'T is iette yne wigmoane* [*'It is still in the honeymoon*']. These loaves, which are reminiscent of cots, are eaten by the Frisians at Christmas. Older English *Christmas-batch*.

After giving a lexicographical definition, "first month of a marriage", Halbertsma mentions the semantically related concept of English *honeymoon*. He then proceeds with a Frisian illustrative sentence, without giving a source, followed by a French translation, also without a source.<sup>9</sup> Then he adds a folkloric, rather than a lexicographical, explanation; "Wheat bread used to be for the upper class", which apparently reminds him of Dutch *herenbrood* [*'gentlemen's bread'*], white bread made from the purest and finest wheat flour. Here the article takes an encyclopedic twist. The following distinction between *brea* and *boale* might be regarded as lexicographical again. All this prompted him to explain the origin of the Dutch term *wittebroodsweken* [*'honeymoon'*]. After that he provides *wigge-moàanne* as the Frisian equivalent of Dutch *wittebroodsweken*. Before he gives an example with *wigge-moàanne*, in a different spelling, he apparently feels the need to explain what *wiggen* are. Finally, there follows a folkloric addition about the Frisian custom of eating these loaves to

9 It may very well be the other way around. Halbertsma often translated sentences from other sources in his dictionary, while he put the translation first.

celebrate the birth of Christ, which again inspired him to refer to Middle English *Christmas-batch*.

The entry for *boale-moàanne* is typical of how Halbertsma worked. It is not just typical of his dictionary, but also of his other works. An article on a trip to Rome may contain many pages with etymological digressions, and his short story the *Hexershöl* [‘Witches cave’] (1854), is a good example of literary work in which he included a number of superstitions. He collected them in the part of Friesland that he thinks remained the most “national”, i.e. the South-West region. Halbertsma thinks that this region stands out as nowhere else can so much of the old Frisian language and of the noble Frisian character be found, and thus also Frisian national feeling (the manuscript has *nationaliteit* [‘nationality’]) and most of the old national superstitions have been preserved.<sup>10</sup> Van der Molen tentatively argues that to Halbertsma examples of superstition are proof of the Frisianness of a region. He relates the high level of superstitionness in this region to the seafaring people, who kept many superstitions that the people who inhabited the land were no longer aware of (Van der Molen 1969: 258).

There may be no official publications by Halbertsma on mythology, we do have two manuscripts in which he deals with what we will call folklore. In Hs. 547, *De wouden* [‘The Woods’], Halbertsma maintains that the Frisians of all Germanic peoples are the only ones who, as long as history speaks, did not only preserve their name but also their ancient residences. Hence, he claims, in the countryside, where the language and habits of other peoples did not repress all originality,<sup>11</sup> the language still has expressions dating back to fifteen centuries and longer ago. Note that Halbertsma puts language and habits on a par with each other.

The main topic of manuscript Hs. 547 is pregnancy and child birth. Halbertsma claims that the Frisians always called everything by its name, the only exception being things that might offend a chaste audience. He believes that the Frisian language bears the unmistakable traces of an ancestral chastity and restraint in all matters concerning human reproduction. As an example of this he mentions the expression *hja mat nei de wâlden*,<sup>12</sup> literally: ‘she must go to the woods’, meaning: ‘the woman is pregnant’.

10 That is reminiscent of Grimm’s conviction that ‘to every nation a belief in gods was as necessary as language’ (Shippey 2005a: 16).

11 Cf. Leerssen (1999: 80–81) cited above.

12 Halbertsma’s spelling is pretty loose. I cite his Frisian as I found it.



We should be aware, Halbertsma says, that the forests were the first temples of the Germanic people. He thinks that the majestic and solemn Gothic churches are nothing more than a grotesque development of the idea of an ancient and arch-like oak forest. Not only did everything that was holy and mysterious attach itself to the idea of forest, but also the creative power of deity that provided for mankind at birth. If we now consider the deep secrecy with which the Frisians and the English<sup>13</sup> treated all matters concerning love and wedding promises, but especially pregnancy and childbirth, it will not surprise us that they pictured childbirth as a journey to the forests (Halbertsma ca. 1853: 133). Thus, the Frisian children believe that mother is going to the woods, and that she, while heaps of children shouted at her from the branches of trees: “Take me first, take me first”, finally chose the little sister or brother, and came home with her or him. When mother needs to lie down after returning from the journey, that is because she, while grabbing the child, had stepped into a nail. Halbertsma thinks that this and other children’s tales cannot be anything else than old and original, simply because we see the ideas that come forward in them evidenced in the language. And language, other than history, always tells the truth (Halbertsma ca. 1853: 134–135).

Halbertsma must have liked the story about the forests. He refers to it in a literary publication,<sup>14</sup> at least five times in the two manuscripts with material that he collected and later used to compile the *Lexicon Frisicum*, and in the *Lexicon Frisicum* itself, for instance *s.vv.* ‘béam’ [‘tree’] and ‘bûmi’ [North Frisian: ‘to plant trees’], where he also quotes related examples from the Dutch Provinces of Gelderland and Holland:

*BÉAM [...] Bern ut ‘e héage béam helje, liberos arcessere ex alta arbore, liberos parere. Animadvertite inter Frisios late sparsam esse fabellam infantes provenire ex arbore concava (di holle béam) summæ antiquitatis et magnitudinis, quæ latebat in immensa sylva. [...].*

(Halbertsma 1872: *s.v.* ‘béam’)

*BÉAM, [...] Bern ut ‘e héage béam hellje, invite children from the high tree, have children. Bear in mind that there has been a widespread fable among the Frisians that children come from a hollow tree (di*

13 Why the English suddenly appear here is discussed below.

14 “Reinsk ... het ien fiere reis nei de wâlden dien om ien poppe to heljen. Dær sieten honderten fen poppen yn ‘e bjemmen” [‘Reinsk.... has made a long journey to the woods to get a baby. There were hundreds of babies in the trees’] (Halbertsma 1854: 387).

*holle béam* [‘the hollow tree’]) that is very old and large, and that stood in a huge forest.

*bûmi*, vb.a. *F.b. pingere quid arbusculis. [...]. Confer béam (p. 204) et adde eis, quæ monui de superstitione infantili homines nasci ex arbore concava, inde pendere phrasin, It wiif mat nei di wâlden (mulieri eundum est in sylvas) mulier est gravida, parturit. Ipsa mater enim creditur cum obstetrice et nutrice in cymba per lacus navigare in sylvam, ubi infantes avicularum instar assultim ludunt in ramis arboris antiquæ, omnes precibus certatim petentes a matre, ut eo amplectatur. Vide plura in voce wâlden. Gelri arborem hominum genitricem appellant kinderboom, holle boom, Hol. holle boom. Vide Langedijk, IV. 367.*

(Halbertsma 1872: s.v. ‘bûmi’)

*bûmi*, transitive verb, (North Frisian), to decorate something with small trees. [...] Compare: *béam* [‘tree’] (p. 204) and add to that my comment that according to a childhood belief the children come from a hollow tree, hence the saying, *It wiif mat nei di wâlden* (‘The woman must go to the woods’), i.e. the woman is pregnant, is about to give birth. It was believed that the mother and the midwife and the nurse would sail in a boat over the lake to the forest, where unborn children play like flocks of birds in the branches of an old tree, and all beg loudly to be taken by the mother in her arms. Note the plural of the word *wâlden*. In Gelderland they call the tree from which the children come *kinderboom* [‘children tree’], *holle boom* [‘hollow tree’], Dutch *holle boom* [‘hollow tree’]. See Langedijk, IV 367.

Because children are being fetched from the woods, in pure Frisian one does not speak of *bern krye* [‘to get’, i.e. ‘receive children’], formed after Dutch *kinderen krijgen*, but rather of *bern helje* [‘to fetch children’]. We find the same explanation in the *Lexicon Frisicum*:

*bern-helje, parere liberos; proprie petere, apportare liberos, scilicet e sylva, cujus arbores fabula infantilis perhibet in ramis ferre infantes quasi tot mala. [...].*

(Halbertsma 1872: 183, s.v. ‘bern-helje’)

*bern-helje*, give birth to children; actually, fetch children, and take them away from a forest where, according to a children’s story, the trees carry babies on their branches as if they were apples. [...].

In Hs. 543, *De zuidzijde van het kerkhof* [‘The South Side of the Graveyard’], Halbertsma dwells on the notion of superstition. He starts off by saying that superstition is deeply imprinted in the human heart. To him, superstition is related to the longing of the heart for higher aid and the inclination of the human mind to the mysterious. Therefore it is almost inseparable from religious feeling, which is a distinguishing feature of humanity. That is why he agrees wholeheartedly with Goethe, whom he claims to have said that superstition is typical of a human being. You cannot expel it completely, because it will hide in every nook and cranny to come forward as soon as you are gone. He compares superstition to a herb, rather than to a weed. He carries this simile further by comparing the sanctified concepts of religion to good wheat. We will never be able to root out this kind of weed,<sup>15</sup> he says, without eradicating the faith of miracles and revelation. Philosophy and education managed to eradicate all superstition in thousands of people, but their faith in the revelations of God is so weakened, that we seem to have the choice to tolerate either religion with a mixture of superstition, or to eradicate all superstition with damage to the root of religion itself.

As Halbertsma considered superstition to be an essential part of religious faith, or maybe even of life itself, it will come as no surprise that in his dictionary we find many references of it. One example is *s.v.* ‘St. Anna, Anne’:

*ST. ANNA, anne, una ex Sanctis mulieribus, quas colit Ecclesia Romano-Catholica. Phrasis, Dær rint fen Sint Anna under, Hol. Daar loopt van Sint Anne onder, præstigia mixta sunt seriis. Hæc phrasis ortum debet imagini ligneæ Sta Annæ, cujus ramenta vendebat piscator; hic metuens ne citius consumeretur ejus loco pergebat vendere superstitionis ramenta e conto ligneo unci, quo imaginem e fundo aquæ tulerat. Sed longa est fabula, quam retulit Abr. Magyrus, Almanachs Heylingen. 1680. p. 189.*

(Halbertsma 1872: *s.v.* ‘St. Anna, Anne’)

ST. ANNA, anne, one of the female saints venerated by the Roman Catholic Church. Expression, *Dær rint fen Sint Anna under* [‘That runs from under St. Ann’], Dutch: *Daar loopt van Sint Anne onder* [‘That runs from under St. Ann’], delusions are combined with truths. This expression must have originated from a wooden statuette of Saint Anne, scrapings of which were sold by a fisherman; but he was afraid that, in doing so, this statuette would soon be finished, so, instead, he

15 The text has *onkruid*, which in English is ‘weed’, rather than ‘herb’.

went on selling to the superstitious people scrapings from the wooden beam of the hook that he had lifted the statuette from the bottom of the water with. But this is a long story, told by Abr. Magyrus, Almannachs Heylingen. 1680. p. 189.

St. Anne is one of the female saints venerated by the Roman Catholic Church. Halbertsma explains that the expression *Dær rint fen Sint Anna under* [literally ‘there is something of St. Anne underneath’] refers to delusions that are combined with truths. The expression must have originated from a wooden statuette of Saint Anne, he says, scrapings of which were sold by a fisherman. Since the fisherman was afraid that, when he kept doing so, there would very soon be nothing left of the statuette. So, what he did instead, was selling the superstitious people scrapings from the wooden beam of the hook with which he had lifted the statuette from the bottom of the water. For the complete story, he refers to an external source.

The superstitious belief that *thiansters* (also, *thsjoensters*) [‘witches’] make chickens lay eggs without shells because they need eggshells to sail on lakes and seas in is discussed s.v. ‘wyn’-aei’ [‘wind egg’]:

*wyn’-aei, idem quod Ang. windegg, an egg which has a soft skin instead of a shell. Halliwell. Ovum urinum, zephyricum. Male Johnsonus, “an egg not impregnated; an egg that does not contain the principles of life”. – Moike leit him nin wyn-aeyen, avuncula larga suis donis eum ponit in re lauta. – Di thiansters (thsjoensters) meitse dat di hinnen wyn-aeyen lidze, sagæ amant vehi putaminibus ovorum loco cymbæ per lacus et maria, adeoque privant ova putaminibus, cum jam in gallinis formata, at nondum posita sunt. Superstitio quoque est sagas in ovorum putaminibus vehi super aquas; inde post prandium finitum pater familias ancillam jubebat, Di aeyen goed toknetterje, heâr! intende ut rite perfringas ovorum putamina! Beit-skemoi foer yn ien aisdop oer ‘e Wezer, vetula Beitska in ovi putamine navigabat super Wesaram. Eadem plane superstitio regnabat inter Anglos, quibus solennis erat formula, to break the eggshell after the meat is out. Longe autem extra Germaniæ fines sparsa erat superstitio; Plinius enim, “Huc pertinet”, inquit, “ovorum, ut exsorbuerit quisque, calices cochlearumque protinus frangi aut eadem cochlearibus perforari”. Cum his conspirant quæ habet Delrio (Disquisit. Magicæ Lib. VI. c. 2. Sect. 1, quæst. 1) “Et is ova comederint eorum testas, non nisi ter cultro perfossas, in catinum projiciunt; timentes neglectum veneficiis nocendi occasionem præbere”. Confer Brand, popular antiquities, ed. H. Ellis. 1849. III, 19. (col. 71).*

(Halbertsma 1872: s.v. ‘wyn’-aei’)

*wyn'-aei*, this is the same as English *windegg*, “an egg which has a soft skin instead of a shell”. Halliwell[1]. Water egg, wind egg. Johnson says, wrongly: “an egg not impregnated; an egg that does not contain the principles of life”. – *Moike leit him nin wyn-aejen* [literally: ‘his aunt does not lay him windeggs’], thanks to the gifts of his generous aunt, he lives a luxury life. – *Di thiansters (thsjoensters) meitse dat di hinnen wyn-aejen lidze* [‘the witches make the chickens lay windeggs’], witches like to sail lakes and seas with eggshells as boats, and therefore they steal the shells of eggs that are already formed in the chickens, but not yet laid. A superstition is also that witches in eggshells sail over the water; that’s why the father of the family admonished the girl after the meal: *Di aejen goed toknetterje, heár!* make sure you properly squeeze the eggshells! *Beitskemoi foer yn ien aisdop oer’e Weser*, old Beitske sailed in an eggshell across the Weser. This superstition was widespread among the English, among whom to break the eggshell after the meat is out was a saying. The superstition, however, also occurred far beyond the borders of Germania, as Pliny says: “As to eggshells, if you have slurped them empty, and as to snail shells, you should break them immediately or pierce them with the spoons”. This corresponds to what Delrio writes (*Disquisitiones Magicae*, book VI, chapter 2, section 1, question 1): “And when they have eaten the eggs, they throw the eggshells into the dish, never without having stabbed them three times with a knife; for they fear that the omission of this ritual act brings misfortune”. Compare Brand, *Popular Antiquities*, adapted by H. Ellis, 1849, part III, 19.

Halbertsma remarks that the superstition about eggshells is to be found among the English, too. But not only there, we find it all over the Germanic area. It is typical of Halbertsma to be aware of (inter)national folkloric connections (Van der Molen 1969: 262). Yet in his publications and in his manuscripts, he mainly focused on the special relationship between England and Friesland and between English and Frisian. In his dictionary, he actually wanted to prove that Frisian was the origin of English. It is therefore certainly no coincidence that he refers to Brand-Ellis at the end of the article,<sup>16</sup> since he also sees similarities in manners and customs between

16 This is one of 32 references to Brand-Ellis in the *Lexicon Frisicum*. Breuker (2017a) points out other interesting non-linguistic sources in which Halbertsma found evidence for his proposition that Frisian was the origin of English, namely J. Strutt’s *Sports and pastimes of the people of England* (1801) and Cruikshank’s *Comic Almanack* for 1837, “which listed popular pastimes that had, as Halbertsma noted, Frisian analogues. [...] Friesland and England had the most witches (*tjoensters*) and shared a number of cultural traditions and popular customs [...]”. The *Lexicon Frisicum* has four references to Strutt, and only one to Cruikshank, none of them very relevant to the relationship between England and Friesland.

Friesland and England. He acknowledges that there was no communication between the Frisian country people and those of England during the last fourteen centuries. Yet, when we find both the same language and the same customs, excluding those derived from Rome's missionaries, Halbertsma thinks that we can be sure they date back to the times that the English and Coastal Saxons, as he calls them, together with Frisian colonists,<sup>17</sup> conquered Britain (Halbertsma c. 1853: 134).

As far as maternity celebrations are concerned, Halbertsma discovered much more similarity between those of the Frisians and the English than he thought one could reasonably expect of two kindred peoples having been separated for more than fourteen centuries. He noticed, for instance, that in Friesland the women who come to visit the new mother, bring her spice loaf, rusks, candy, tea, coffee, fine cake, etc., while in England visitors brought lots of rusks, waffles, crispbread (spice loaf) and large cakes to the new mother (Halbertsma c. 1853: 142). I have found no mention of this in the *Lexicon Frisicum*.

It is still customary among the Frisians that the person after whom the newborn child is named gives the child a birth spoon. In England, Halbertsma tells us, witnesses of the baptism ceremony used to give spoons of gold-plated silver to the child. They were called Apostle spoons, because the images of the Apostles were engraved or cut at the top of the stems. The rich gave the full dozen, the ordinary citizens gave four spoons and the poorer ones gave only one, the one that worshipped the image of the saint after whom the child was named (Halbertsma ca. 1853: 143). *S.v.* 'berthe-leppel' ['birth spoon'] Halbertsma also refers to the English *Apostle-spoons*, though less extensively than in his manuscript.

*berthe-leppel*, *cg. F.u. geboorte-lepel*, *cg. cochleare argenteum datum infanti recens nato ab eo, cujus nomen ferebat. Manubrii extremitas erat ornata imagine apostoli vel Sancti, cujus nomen ceperat infans. Inter Anglos, quibus hic mos olim sacer habebatur, tale cochleare adeo apostle-spoon dicebatur. (Popular antiquities, Brand, Ellis. II. 83.) [...].*

(Halbertsma 1872: *s.v.* 'berthe-leppel')

*berthe-leppel*, common gender, Town Frisian *geboorte-lepel*, common gender, a silver spoon given to a newborn child by the person he was named after. The end of the spoon was decorated with an image of

17 Note the term 'colonists', which is supposed to underline where the relationship between England and Friesland, their languages, and their customs takes its origin.

the apostle or saint after whom the child was named. Among the English, for whom this was a sacred custom, such a spoon was called an *apostle-spoon*. (*Observations on Popular Antiquities*, Brand & Ellis, II, 83).

Next to superstition, pregnancy and child birth, the *Lexicon Frisicum* shows that there are many other folkloric topics that Halbertsma apparently is interested in. Among them are marriage, death, and witches.

We find a number of common beliefs about death *s.v.* ‘fai’:

*FAI, FAEI, adj. morti proximus specie bonæ valitudinis et salutis. [...] Ex variis ominibus veteres portendebant lethalem exitum vel futuram securitatem hominis. Tutus erat, si adveniebat dum amici de eo confabulabantur; hi eum adhuc salutant verbis Dou bisthe noch net fâi, lupus in fabula; incolumis es. Surdum inopinata mors non manebat; Dy doaf is is nat fâi. Contra campanæ sonus tristis portendit mortem instantem hominis corpore sano; Di klok liedt fâi. Si canis nocte dieque latrat in vicinia domus ægroti, hic morti propinquus habetur. Superstitio eadem regnat inter Anglos. “If dogs houle in the night neer an house, where somebody is sick, ’t is a signe of death”. Brand, Ellis. III. 185. De Scotorum ominibus mortis futuræ consule Brand, popular antiquities, Ellis, III. 228. Fâi teken, omen lethale. Scoti fye-token, idem. Some observing to an old woman, when in the 99th year of her age, that in the course of nature she could not long survive, “Aye!” Said the good old woman with pointed indignation, “What fye-token do you see about me?” Brand, pop. Ant. Ellis, III. 228. Hy is sa fâi as ’n lûs op ’e kaem, in vitæ periculo versatur ut pediculus in pectine. – Omina sæpe signis contrariis homines decipere amabant. Infantem, qui formâ antecellebat omnes, morti invisum olim credebant vetulæ; ideo nutrices sollicitæ antiquitus faciem venustam conspuebant. – Si quis amicus, cui erat mens sana in corpore sano, amicum ex gravi morbo cubantem visitabat, timebant ne, dum hic reconvallescebat, ille moreretur. Inde proverbium tritum. De siecke leijt op het bêd en de faije giet er om oft stiet er foor, Burm. 11. De sike op it bæd ind di fâye er foar, F.o. De kranke ligt to bedde un de fege sit d’r feur, ægrotus cubat in lecto, morti propinquus assidet lecto. Hæc religio alte radices figerat in omnibus Frisiæ cognatis gentibus, præsertim Scandinaviæ, ex. gr. Suethis, Prov. Ofta sitter fege wid them sjukas sæng, sæpe ægrotantis lecto assidet morti proximus, Ihre, feg. I. 459.*

(Halbertsma 1872: *s.v.* ‘fai’)

*FAI, FAEI*, adjective, near death, while apparently healthy and well. [...] From various omens the Frisians of former times used to predict

whether someone would die or stay alive. Someone was safe if he showed up with friends while they were talking about him; they greet him then with the words *Dou bisthe noch net fâi*, we were just talking about you. You're not in danger yet. A deaf man awaited no unforeseen death: *Dy doaf is is nat fâi* ['who is deaf, is not in danger']. On the other hand, gloomily ringing bells predict the sudden death of a healthy person: *di klok liedt fâi* ['the bell tolls sadly']. When a dog barks around a sick person's house day and night, it is considered an announcement of death. The same superstition reigns among the English. "*If dogs houle in the night neer an house, where somebody is sick, 't is a signe of death*". Brand & Ellis III 185. About omens of death with the Scots, see Brand *Popular Antiquities*, [ed.] Ellis, III. 228. *Fâi teken*, omen of death. Scots *fye-token*, idem. *Some observing to an old woman, when in the 99 th year of her age, that in the course of nature she could not long survive, "Aye!", said the good old woman with pointed indignation, "What fye-token do you see about me?"*, Brand, *Popular Antiquities*, [ed.] Ellis, III. 228. *Hy is sa fâi as 'n lûs op 'e kaem*, he's in mortal danger like a louse on the comb – people liked to try to neutralize omens with opposite signs. A child that surpassed everyone in beauty was doomed to death, old women used to believe. That's why, in former times, nannies spit upon a pretty face. – When a friend, healthy in mind and body, visited another friend who was lying seriously ill in bed, people feared that while one recovered, the other would die. Hence the common proverb, *de siecke leijt op het bêd en de faije giet er om oft stiet er foar*, Burmania 11. *De sike op it bæd ind di fâye er foar*, East Frisian *De kranke ligt to bedde un de fege sit d'r feur*, the sick man is in bed and the dead man is sitting next to him. This belief was deeply rooted in all peoples related to the Frisians, especially the Scandinavians, for example the Swedes. Proverb: *Ofta sitter fege wid them sjukas sæng*, often the dead person sits at the sick person's bedside, Ihre, lemma feg. volume I. 459.

The adjective *fai* means 'very close to death, while apparently healthy and well'. From different signs, the Frisians of former times predicted that someone would either die or remain unharmed. You were safe when you arrived while others were talking about you. A deaf person awaits no unforeseen death. A sad ringing of a bell predicts the sudden death of a healthy person. When a dog barks at night and during the day in the vicinity of a sick person's house, it is assumed that he is close to death. Halbertsma found the same superstition among the English: "*If dogs houle in the night neer an house, where somebody is sick, 't is a signe of death*". His source is Brand-Ellis, to whom he also refers for predictions of an approaching death in Scotland. He compares Frisian *fâi teken*



['a deadly omen'], with Scottish *fye-token*. People wished to deceive bad omens with opposite signs. Thus, old women believed that a child that was so much more beautiful than all others was hated by death. That's why the concerned nurses spat on the beautiful face. When a friend, who was sound in mind and body, visited another friend who was seriously ill in bed, people feared that he would die while his ill friend was recovering. Hence, what Halbertsma calls, the worn-out proverb "The ill person is in bed, but the one who is close to death is near the bed". Halbertsma claims that this belief is deeply rooted in all peoples related to the Frisians, especially in Scandinavia.

*S.v.* 'faentsje' ['small flag'] Halbertsma throws his nets even further:

*faentsje, n. vexillum parvum. [...]. Vexillum Frisiæ olim notabant septem foliis nymphæ F. pompe-bledden, quæ repræsentabant septem Zelanden, agros maritimos, in quos Frisiam dispertiebant. Hæc planta quaquaversum in lacubus et aquis pluviatilibus Frisiæ nostræ læte floret. Radices agit in fundo, unde scapus ascendit donec se emergens aquæ supernatat ibique lata folia (pompebledden) et flores splendidos, sive albos, sive flavos [...] expandit. Similis huic nymphæ est lotus Ægyptiaca, imago symbolica incubationis et creationis mundi ex aqua. [...].*

*Ex Aegypto evanuit, crescit vero et luxuriat incomparabili pulchritudine in aquis pluviatilibus Indiæ, ubi Budhistis est imago symbolica dei intaminati. Aquam habebant symbolum seductionis et feminæ, et ut nymphæa lotus supernatat aquam madore intacta, sic deus se commoveri non sinit illecebris et voluptate. Hinc est quod Budhistæ repræsentant deum ut adolescentem sedentem in flore et foliis loti natantis. [...]. Dum Germani ex India migrabant in Europam, hanc religionem secum tulisse videntur; certe ejus vestigia restabant apud veteres Frisios, qui hanc plantam verecunde et non sine quodam timore arcano tangebant. Dum nos pueri per hos flores naviculabamur, nemo nostrum eos decerpere audebat; communis enim superstitio inter nos ferebat, temerarium, qui hunc florem manu tenens caderet, protinus morbo comitiali corripitur vel mori. F. pompe-bledden, folia nymphææ, proprie folia dejicientia, prosternantia.*

(Halbertsma 1872: *s.v.* 'faentsje')

*faentsje*, neuter (noun), small flag. [...]. The flag of Friesland used to be drawn with seven water lily leaves. Frisian *pompe-bledden*, which represented the Seven Sealands (areas by the sea in which Friesland was divided). This plant grows everywhere in the lakes and rain puddles of our Province of Friesland. It strikes root at the bottom, where the stem grows until, rising up, it floats on top of the water surface,

exhibiting broad leaves (*pompebledden*) and beautiful flowers, either white or blond [...]. Similar to this water lily is the Egyptian lotus, a symbol for the hatching and creation of the world from the water. [...].

It has disappeared in Egypt, but it grows and flourishes with incomparable beauty in the rainy waters of India, where for Buddhists it is a symbol of the immaculate nature of God. They hold the water to be a symbol of temptation and women, and just as the *nymphaea lotus* floats on the water with an untouched humidity, so the god does not allow himself to be touched by temptation and lust. That is why the Buddhists present the god as a young man sitting on the flower and leaf of the floating water lily. Frisian: *It wiif is sa falsk as 't wetter jip is*, that woman is as mean as the depth of the water. While the Germanic people from India moved to Europe, they seem to have brought this faith with them. Traces of this have certainly been preserved by the old Frisians, who touched this plant respectfully and not without a certain sacred awe. While we as boys were playing boat with these flowers, none of us dared to pluck them; a common shared superstition said that the reckless one who would fall when holding this plant with his hand would immediately perish or die from falling sickness. Frisian *pompebledden*, leaves of the water lily, actually falling leaves.

The seven water-lily leaves (Frisian *pompebledden*), in the Frisian flag inspired Halbertsma to write a short treatise about the water lily, which is very common in water-rich Friesland. It has broad leaves (the *pompebledden* themselves) and beautiful flowers, which float on the water surface. He compares the water lily with the Egyptian lotus, a symbol for the creation of the world from the water. It disappeared in Egypt, but it grows and thrives in the rainy waters of India, where for Buddhists it is a symbol of God's immaculateness. They hold the water for a symbol of seduction and woman, and just as the *nymphaea lotus* floats on the water with an undisturbed moistness, so the god does not let himself be moved by seductions and lust. That is why the Buddhists present the god as a young man sitting on the flower and the leaf of the floating water lily. As the Germanic people moved from India to Europe, they seem to have brought this faith with them, says Halbertsma. There have certainly remained traces of this in the ancient Frisians, who respectfully and not without a certain sanctified awe touched this plant. This reminds Halbertsma of the times when as a boy he and his friends were sailing their boats between the water lilies. None of them dared to pick them, because of a common superstition that

said that the reckless one who would fall, while holding a water lily in his hand, would immediately die because of an epileptic fit.<sup>18</sup>

## Conclusion

Halbertsma's scholarly production does not immediately reveal a great interest in folklore, but his literary work and dictionary most certainly do. His dictionary, due to its encyclopedic character, is an excellent vehicle for giving folklore the attention it deserves according to the nineteenth-century Romantic scholarly paradigm. In the *Lexicon Frisicum*, Halbertsma shows himself to be a worthy member of the nineteenth-century community of general scholars. Not only did he deal with language, he also recorded a wide variety of folklore and historical and other non-linguistic topics. By recording Frisian folk culture and passing it on, the *Lexicon Frisicum* made an important contribution to Frisian cultural nationalism. Breuker (2017c) writes that “[u]ntil his death, Halbertsma remained convinced of the pagan, ancient-Germanic origins of much of what remained in language and popular life of Frisians and Englishmen”. We have seen that the *Lexicon Frisicum* by no means contradicts Breuker's claim. Van der Molen (1969: 257) regards Halbertsma as a folklorist *avant la lettre*. Even though we do not have many complete studies and in spite of the fact that the material is scattered, Van der Molen thinks that we may and should honour Halbertsma as one of the first, if not the first, Frisian folklorist, who moreover has been important for other Dutch regions as a faithful, diligent and accurate fieldworker (Van der Molen 1969: 263).

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18 This is also described in a footnote in Halbertsma's book on Buddhism (Halbertsma 1843: 10). Ter Haar (2019: 42) characterizes that publication as “mainly a personal pamphlet in which the writer tries to connect Buddhism (the oriental lotus) with his Mennonite background and Frisian culture (the Frisian waterlily leaf)” [translated from Dutch].

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