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# The Frisians as a chosen people: religious-patriotic historiography in fifteenth-century Frisia

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## Abstract

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Five late-medieval historical chronicles from Frisia present a series of legends about the Frisians, concerning their origin and the acquisition of their freedom. Each of these legends opens with a concrete parallel from the history of the Jewish people, to make clear that the Frisians, too, enjoyed God's exceptional protection. This article tries to establish when and why these works were written. The many divergences between the texts demonstrate that many more versions and copies were once in circulation. The chronicles especially intended to reach the inhabitants of Frisia west of the Lauwers. It can be shown that the base versions of the vernacular editions were written between 1464 and 1479. One of the places where editing of these took place was the Cistercian abbey of Klaarkamp. But the author of the Latin base text, the *Historia Frisiae*, does not seem to have been a monk, since his work has a more militant character than the popular versions. All of the texts, however, were intended to reinforce of the patriotic awareness of the Frisians at a time when their political autonomy was threatened by the dukes of Burgundy.

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### *Keywords:*

Historiography

Frisia

Burgundy

Fifteenth century

Patriotism

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

‘As God did great things unto the children of Israel, so too did He in His omnipotence do many wondrous deeds to and for our Frisian people’. This is the central message in five late-medieval historical works from Frisia. Despite sometimes substantial differences, these texts show a significant relationship. The story within is constructed of the same series of fourteen<sup>2</sup> legends about the Frisians. These concern their people's origin, their Christianization, the acquisition of their freedom and the services they bestowed upon Christendom. The series starts with the exodus of the patriarch Friso from India and ends in 1248 with the Frisians' involvement in a crusade, which culminated in the fall of Aix-la-Chapelle and in the affirmation by William II of Holland, King of the Romans, of a privilege granted by Charlemagne. This sequence of legends seems specifically selected to form a patriotic canon in a religious framework. Some of the legends are known from older sources, but assembled together and joined by new texts, the legends acquired additional significance. This is because the late-medieval texts open each legend with a concrete parallel from the history of the Jewish people. This way the reader and listener is made clear that the Frisians, too, were blessed and granted God's exceptional protection.

It is this ‘Hebrew’ parallel which deserves particular attention. In a European context the Frisians can be said to have had an early sentiment of unity. Historical and legal texts from as early as the thirteenth-century, for example, already expressed the idea that the Frisians formed an exceptional nation which, based on their efforts for Church and Christendom, had earned the freedom or right to govern themselves without the intervention of a sovereign lord.<sup>3</sup> In some sources Frisia is even directly or indirectly compared with ancient Israel.<sup>4</sup> However, a persistent use of the biblical narrative to reinforce the Frisians' cultural and political collective consciousness is only found in these strongly mutually related late-medieval texts. Such a use was at that point relatively new in North-western Europe; at least it is not encountered in the historiographies of surrounding regions and countries before the year 1500.<sup>5</sup> This makes one wonder about the purpose the writer(s) had with such a historical tale, the function and meaning of the ‘chosen people’-motif, and the nature of the political context in which these chronicles were written.

The texts are known in historiographical literature as the *Gesta*-group. In fact, two of the texts denote themselves as such in their title: the Frisian-language *Gesta Fresonum*<sup>6</sup> and its

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<sup>1</sup> This article is a reworked version of our paper ‘De Friezen als uitverkoren volk. Religieus-patriottische geschiedschrijving in vijftiende-eeuws Friesland’, published in the *Jaarboek voor Middeleeuwse Geschiedenis* 11 (2008), 165-204. We would like to thank Rolf Bremmer, Henk Meijering, Jaap van Moolenbroek, Han Nijdam and Michael J. Douma for their helpful comments on the first draft of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Some studies talk about thirteen legends; the number depends on what stories are considered to be part of the prologue.

<sup>3</sup> See for instance the so-called *Quedam narracio de Groninghe, de Thrente, de Covordia et de diversis aliis sub diversis episcopis Traiectensibus*, H. van Rij ed. (Hilversum: Verloren, 1989), 82. The author, who apparently was a priest from Friesland west of the Lauwers, qualifies his homeland here as: ... *tota illa magna, dives, nobilis et gloriosa Frisia*.

<sup>4</sup> As in an *exemplum* of the Cistercian novice master Caesarius of Heisterbach, written around 1218/1219: Jaap van Moolenbroek, *Mirakels historisch. De exempels van Caesarius van Heisterbach over Nederland en Nederlanders* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1999), 27. Another one is found in the thirteenth-century *Vita Sibrandi* from the Praemonstratensian abbey of Mariëngaarde: H.Th.M. Lambooy and J.A. Mol, eds., *Vitae Abbatum Orti Sancte Marie. Vijf abtenlevens van het klooster Mariëngaarde in Friesland* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2001), 385.

<sup>5</sup> For Flanders, Brabant, Guelders and Holland, such systematically elaborated parallels are unknown. More research however is needed. Anthony Smith, who worked on the subject, only gives examples of comparisons between the own nation and the people of Israel for Scotland and Wales: Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen peoples* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 123-9.

<sup>6</sup> *The narrative sources from the medieval Low Countries*, ed. J. Deploige (Brussels, since 2009), URL [www.narrative-sources.be](http://www.narrative-sources.be), ID NL0497.

derivative, the Middle Dutch *Gesta Frisiorum*.<sup>7</sup> But the name has been applied further, as the Dutch expert on Frisian historiography Edzo Waterbolk labelled the texts *Gesta Dei per Frisios*, ‘God’s deeds through the Frisians’, based on their contents and character.<sup>8</sup> The *Gesta*-texts mentioned above count as editions of an original Latin-language text, a derivation of which has been available since 1939 in the form of the *Historia Frisiae*.<sup>9</sup> Next to these three, the group also includes the *Olde Freesche Cronike*,<sup>10</sup> a Middle Dutch edition in rhyme, and the *Aldfrysk Kronykje* or *Klein Oudfries Kroniekje*<sup>11</sup> which at face value appears to be an extract of the *Olde Freesche Cronike*.

Since the nineteenth century historians have paid some attention to questions of the *Gesta*-group origins.<sup>12</sup> The most important contribution in this regard was offered in 1948 by Jelle Hoekstra, who identified the general contours of the relationships between the *Historia Frisiae*, the *Gesta Fresonum*, the *Gesta Frisiorum* and the *Olde Freesche Cronike*.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, a systematic historical and philological investigation of the story cycle has so far been lacking. An essay by Jaap van Moolenbroek in 1987 dealt with a narrative element from the *Gesta Fresonum* and *Gesta Frisiorum*.<sup>14</sup> Paul Noomen showed in 1994 that, despite their ideological charge, various *Gesta*-texts refer incidentally to concrete institutional and geographical realities in Frisia West of the Lauwers River.<sup>15</sup> Despite this, the questions about the time and place of composition, the environment in which the authors and editor(s) lived, their motives and meaning and intended audiences all remain unanswered.

Illustrative of this uncertainty is the variation in dating. Some argue for an origin in the final quarter of the fifteenth century<sup>16</sup> while others espouse a late, or even a fourteenth-century composition.<sup>17</sup> Given such a range in chronology, there is of course little that can be said with certainty about the author and his audience. Dating and locating the geographical origins of texts is impeded, furthermore, because both the external and internal possibilities for testing are few in number. Only transcriptions of the originals are extant, and it is unclear how much of the content is true to its original meaning. The stories themselves, too, offer few hard facts to work with because of their legendary character.

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<sup>7</sup> *Narrative sources*, ID NL0498.

<sup>8</sup> E.H. Waterbolk, *Twee eeuwen Friese geschiedschrijving; opkomst, bloei en verval van de Friese historiografie in de zestiende en zeventiende eeuw* (Groningen: Wolters Noordhoff, 1952), 39.

<sup>9</sup> *Narrative sources*, ID NL0499.

<sup>10</sup> *Narrative sources*, ID NL0496.

<sup>11</sup> *Narrative sources*, ID NL0495.

<sup>12</sup> In 1873 J. Bolhuis van Zeeburg uncovered its fantastical, and regarding the representation of facts, unreliable nature: *Kritiek der Friesche geschiedschrijving* (The Hague 1873), 61-8; Jan Romein emphasized these works’ impassioned justification of a doomed Frisian freedom: *Geschiedenis van de Noord-Nederlandsche geschiedschrijving in de middeleeuwen. Bijdrage tot de beschavingsgeschiedenis* (Haarlem: Tjeenk Willink, 1932), 146-8; Heinrich Reimers addressed their provenance in the introduction to his edition of the *Historia Frisiae*: ‘Die Lateinische Vorlage der “Gesta Frisiorum”’, *De Vrije Fries* 35 (1939), 96-151. Waterbolk emphasized the humanist character of the texts, because of their focus on experiencing patriotism: *Twee eeuwen Friesche geschiedschrijving*, 36-41; Finally, Rolf H. Bremmer pointed out that the underlying concept bears the cast of a scholarly construction: *Hir is eskriven. Lezen en schrijven in de Friese landen rond 1300* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2004), 123-6.

<sup>13</sup> J. Hoekstra, *Vier Friese kronieken* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1948).

<sup>14</sup> Jaap van Moolenbroek, ‘Het verhaal van een kruisverschijning in de laatmiddeleeuwse Gesta Fresonum en Gesta Frisiorum’, *De Vrije Fries* 67 (1987), 41-52, 46-51.

<sup>15</sup> P.N. Noomen, ‘Suffridus Petrus en de Friese identiteit’, in: W. Bergsma and others, eds., *Mythe en geschiedschrijving in Nederland en Friesland*, special issue of *It Beaken* 56 (1994), 146-87.

<sup>16</sup> Bolhuis van Zeeburg, *Kritiek*, 61; H. Bruch, *Supplement op de Noord-Nederlandse geschiedschrijving van J. Romein* (Haarlem: Tjeenk Willink, 1956), 56.

<sup>17</sup> Reimers, ‘Vorlage’, 108; Bremmer, *Hir is eskriven*, 106.

Not all of the questions above will be answered in this contribution. We will confine ourselves to the historical context and leave philological issues aside for now, as these require an extensive and independent investigation. Building on insights in the relevant historiography, this study contributes with a comparative analysis of the narrative structure of the various versions of the text. In this regard the most recent legends, concerning the Frisian crusading efforts, turned out to be most useful since they offer some facts and dates to be verified. Some attention will be given to the scholarly environment within the Cistercian abbey of Klaarkamp near Rinsumageest, where, according to a note in the *Gesta Fresonum* and the *Gesta Frisiorum*, the author/editor was a member of the convent. Furthermore, the political relationship between Friesland and Burgundy in the third quarter of the fifteenth century will be taken into consideration.

The 'Freedom' which the Frisians defended can be described as a state of 'sovereignlessness'.<sup>18</sup> The coastal regions between the Vlie and the Weser were freed from sovereign rule when various 'southern' lords who had acquired comital rights to parts of Frisia proved incapable of exercising actual territorial authority there. The consequence of this development was that in each land or district (*terra*), native elites exercised governance and justice themselves under the leadership of elected judges. In this context one can speak of communally-governed rural municipalities. In the regions east of the Lauwers (the 'Ommelanden' and East-Frisia), Frisian independence was curtailed or even cast aside by other powers in the course of the fifteenth century. Notably the emerging city-state of Groningen and the East-Frisian Cirksena clan exercised increasing political influence in East Frisia during the late fifteenth century. Frisia west of the Lauwers, which is central to this essay, was from then on the only Frisian region where municipalities were not governed by outside authorities.

The following section of this essay begins with an overview of the legends and the sources of the legends which the editors used. Next, this essay explores the probable relationships between the variations of the texts, proposing a chronological sequence based on clues in their composition. Continuing on, we will trace how and why the parallels with the people of Israel were used in the Latin and vernacular versions of the legends. Subsequently, we will try as much as possible to locate the tradition in time and space. Finally, we will discuss the historical context in which the *Gesta*-cycle came into being, including the (intended) audiences, purposes and possible functioning of the *Gesta*-cycle in late medieval Frisian society. It will be argued that the conception, editing and popularization of the *Gesta*-texts can roughly be dated to the period of 1450-1477. These texts were written for inhabitants of Frisia west of the Lauwers, who, in this period, faced repeated threats to their political autonomy from the dukes of Burgundy.

## Contents and structure

For a brief summary of the various legends we will keep the order of the Latin *Historia Frisiae*, following Hoekstra in his assumption that at its core this version contains the source text.<sup>19</sup>

The *Historia Frisiae* begins with a prologue, in which the divine guidance of Frisian history is explained by pointing to God's *miseriordia* and his wondrous deeds done for the people of Israel. Several Old Testament heroes are introduced here, such as Abraham, Moses, Joshua, the

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<sup>18</sup> For an introduction, see H. van Lengen, 'Tota Frisia: sieben Seelande und mehr. Die territoriale Gliederung des freien Frieslands im Mittelalter', in: Hajo van Lengen, ed., *Die Friesische Freiheit des Mittelalters – Leben und Legende* (Aurich: Ostfriesische Landschaft, 2003).

<sup>19</sup> Otherwise than Hoekstra however, we treat them as 14 stories instead of 13. To avoid confusion, these are not marked here with a figure but with a character.

Judges Shamgar, Deborah, Gideon and Samson, king David, Judith, Esther and the Maccabees.

The prologue is followed by a description of the origin of the Frisian people – denominated here as element A. This is done by way of a parallel: as the sons of Israel had to leave Ur of the Chaldean and later Egypt, so were three brothers who resided in a province of *Fresia* located in India forced to leave their country. The brothers were led by God to sail to far shores in the North and West. These brothers, named Friso, Saxo and Bruno, happened to be Christian because the Apostle Thomas had already Christianized India by this time.

Story B elucidates extensively how the brothers took possession of the new land, dividing it as the Israelites had divided the Promised Land after their journey through the desert. Bruno and Saxo are featured first; their names should be connected to Brunswick and Saxony. Friso is appointed to rule over the region that will be named Frisia. Each of Friso's seven sons (but not his one daughter) is granted administration over a part of the land. These seven administrative divisions are the Seven Sealands. The story culminates in a geographical description of the Seven Frisian Sealands, stretching from Westfrisia, west of the Vlie, to Dithmarschen far beyond the Weser.

Story C is composed of various elements and concerns the subjugation of Frisia by heathen rulers. First, Radbod (Redbad), King of the Danes, forced the inhabitants to abandon Christianity and bear wooden fetters around their neck as a sign of slavery. But as God sent Moses to the Israelites to deliver them from Pharaoh's captivity, so did He send Saint Willibrord to the Frisians in order to convert them and have them choose the rule of Pippin, King of the Franks. Willibrord was succeeded as missionary by Boniface, who is equated to Joshua. Following Boniface's death, the Frisians were forced by Ludger, duke of Saxony, to revert to heathenry. Boniface's successors Willehad, Liudger, Gregory and many others, however, succeeded like the heroes in the Book of Judges in returning the Frisians to the true belief. Of Liudger and Willehad it is said that they were the founders of Münster and Bremen, which along with Utrecht, were cities of bishops who controlled territories in Frisian lands.

Story D contains the thirteenth-century saga of Charlemagne and Redbad in a somewhat strained comparison. King Charles, the text reads, deserves to be lauded as much as David who killed Goliath, for he managed to save Frisia from the heathen King Redbad. This happened in a peculiar manner. To avoid bloodshed, Charlemagne and Redbad decided to hold a peaceful duel; he who could stand still for longest in one place, would prevail and receive Frisia for good. When Charlemagne cast his glove, Redbad moved from his place to pick it up. Because the latter had moved first, he had to yield and lost the duel.

Story E is a saga about the source of a system of law and justice. As the Lord through Moses granted the Jews the law and the Ten Commandments, so did He give the law to the Frisians after the expulsion of Redbad through Charlemagne. Charlemagne summoned twelve appointed men to choose a system of law, but they refused because by their own admission they were incapable of making a choice. In response, Charlemagne chastised them by casting them adrift at sea without a sail or oars. When in their hardship they prayed to God, a thirteenth man suddenly appeared bearing a golden axe on his shoulder. Using his axe, he steered the boat safely to the shore and cast the axe to the ground, where a fountain appeared on the spot. The Godsend envoy then taught the twelve men which law they were to choose and disappeared as sudden as he had appeared. Charlemagne subsequently affirmed the laws the twelve submitted before him. These were the same laws that according to the story still applied in Frisia.

Compared to the previous stories, F and G are extremely concise, each receiving little more than ten lines. F informs us that Godfrey, King of the Danes and uncle to Redbad, was killed by

Frisians in a tent, after which they hung his son from a withered tree near the Ems. These actions were as much deserving of praise as the deed of Judith that ended the life of Holofernes (Judith 13). In a similar narrative, in story G Ludger, Duke of Saxony, is captured by the Frisians and handed over to Charlemagne. He suffered the same fate as the Old Testament's Haman, who desired to kill Mordechai, but who instead died on the gallows himself. (Esther 7:10).

Story H offers a saga that is known as the Magnus saga. As the Israelites were released from the Babylonian captivity, so were the Frisians delivered from the heathen Redbad. Despite their poor armament, they managed to conquer Rome for Charlemagne under the leadership of their commander Magnus. As a favour in return for their aid, Charlemagne granted them not only their freedom but also a number of privileges, which were affirmed by Pope Leo. The counterfeit charter in which these rights are codified is included *in extenso* at the close of the story, at least as it appears in the *Historia Frisiae*.

The themes of Christianization, re-Christianization, and the finding of justice are abandoned in the stories K, L, M and N. These instead revolve around the service offered by the Frisians in battles against the Saracens and the heathens, both enemies of the Frisians in the then-known world. Through this story the reader or listener is transferred to a later period in time. Story K, for example, describes the Frisians' role in the crusade against the Moors in Portugal. Reference is made to an episode from the Books of the Maccabees about the expulsion of Heliodorus from the temple (Maccabees 2). According to the story, the Frisians managed to conquer Lisbon under the leadership of their hero Poptatus despite significant resistance. In this they were assisted by Saint Maurice, who appeared with an army in the sky. When Poptatus was unexpectedly killed shortly after their victory and buried on the spot, a palm tree grew on his grave, becoming instantly an object of veneration. Miracles occurring on the spot led the bishop of Lisbon to canonize the Frisian hero. In story L, the setting moves to the other end of Europe, to Prussia. The hero this time is Lambertus of Katrijp, who as an old member of the Teutonic Order has been appointed gatekeeper of a (main) castle. The Prussians, longing to revert back to heathenry, try to enter the castle by the hundreds, while hidden in sacks of grain. Lambertus sees through their ruse and stabs them all to death. Thus he is equated with Shamgar and Samson (Judges 3:31 and 15:15), who killed six hundred and a thousand enemies of Israel respectively.

The extensive story M consists of various elements, but revolves at its core around the conquest of the Egyptian port Damietta in 1218. Following a portentous sermon by Oliver of Cologne, the Frisians, took the cross en masse and distinguished themselves in this crusade. As Gideon cunningly defeated the Amalekites (Judges 7), so the Frisians triumphed through a clever wooden castle construct on their ships which enabled them to take the chain tower controlling access to the city. The final story (N), concerning the crusade by King of the Romans William II against Aix-la-Chapelle (in the year 1248), is rather concise by contrast. The city was taken thanks to the efforts of the Frisians, who fought like true Maccabees under the leadership of their standard-bearer Menaldus. As a consequence of their victory, William granted the Frisians a privilege which validated the rights previously granted by Charlemagne. With the integral text of this 'affirmation charter' both this story and the whole cycle of legends in the *Historia Frisiae* is concluded.

## Sources

The texts mention various chronicles from which information was drawn. This includes very generic references to a *Historia de origine Saxonum et gestis Helmerie*, a Saxon chronicle, which is

hard to identify.<sup>20</sup> Then there are two unidentifiable references to a *Cronica Patroli* and a *Cronica de fundacione ecclesie Fuldensis*.<sup>21</sup> Identifiable references, however, are the *Vita S. Liudgeri* and the *Decalogus* [read: *Catalogus*] *episcoporum Traiectensis*.<sup>22</sup> Hessel Bruch, has identified this episcopal catalogue can be identified with the *Chronographia* by the well-known chronicler Johannes de Beke, alias Beka.<sup>23</sup> Bruch, a Beka expert, further notes that the author of the *Historia Frisiae* must have had several Utrecht hagiographies available to him, because he offers more detail than Beka in several places.<sup>24</sup> Also, the *Sachsenspiegel* must have been used, since it is known that the given etymology of the river 'Ouekera' running through Brunswick was recorded almost literally in a gloss in this influential book of law.<sup>25</sup> The *Historia Frisiae* mentions also a *Cronica imperialis*, most probably referring to the thirteenth-century *Kaiserchronik*.<sup>26</sup>

In the crusade stories, references are made to a *cronic[ae] passagii ad Terram Sanctam* and a *Cronica Oliveri*.<sup>27</sup> The first probably refers to a series of Frisian and Rhineland crusader reports including the *Itinerarium* of a Frisian crusader which the Premonstratensian abbot Emo of Huizinge included in his chronicle of Bloemhof.<sup>28</sup> This may have been the source from which information on the Frisian hero Poptatus Ulvinga from Lisbon was drawn. The *Cronica Oliveri* refers to the *Historia Damiatina*, the much-read eyewitness report of the (fifth) crusade, written by preacher and organiser Oliver of Paderborn, *magister scholarum* at Cologne.<sup>29</sup> There are also references to a chronicle *apud Sanctum Salvatore*; this refers to the collegiate church of Oudmunster at Utrecht, but a chronicle from there has not been preserved. In the story about Lambert of Katrijp, finally, the author names a *Cronica fratrum domus Teutonice*, which is likewise unidentifiable.<sup>30</sup>

Apart from chronicles and hagiographies, the authors employed a Roman missal, two charters and a number of tractates and sagas from the Frisian legal tradition. Concerning the first, it has been pointed out that the *Historia Frisiae's* *Incipit* was lifted directly from the *Oratio* of the seventh Sunday after Whitsun.<sup>31</sup> The two charters, which are included within in the *Historia Frisiae*, are the counterfeit *Privilege of Charlemagne*, here dated to 803, and the authentic charter of King of the Romans William II, in which the freedom privilege of Charlemagne is ratified. We will come back to these charters later.

Another inserted text is the tractate of the Seven Sealands, various versions of which were already in circulation in the late fourteenth century, and which was used in the ratification of the freedom privilege by Emperor Sigismund in 1417.<sup>32</sup> Then there are the classic Frisian legends of Charlemagne, notably those concerning Charlemagne and Redbad, concerning the finding of

<sup>20</sup> Reimers, 'Vorlage', 116.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 116, 118.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>23</sup> Bruch, *Supplement*, 57.

<sup>24</sup> For example on p. 117 (Reimers, 'Vorlage'), where it is said that Boniface was ordained ... *in die beate Cecilie*, which it not mentioned by Beka: Bruch, *Supplement*, 58.

<sup>25</sup> H. Halbertsma, 'Über die Sagen der Herkunft der Friesen', *Jahrbuch der Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst und vaterländische Altertümer zu Emden* 1957, 5-32, 21; Reimers, 'Vorlage', 115.

<sup>26</sup> Reimers, 'Vorlage', 131.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 134, 140.

<sup>28</sup> H.P.H. Jansen and A. Janse, eds., *Kroniek van het klooster Bloemhof te Wittewierum* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1991), cap. 29-30, p. 59-82.

<sup>29</sup> Edited in H. Hoogeweg, ed., *Die Schriften des Kölner Domscholasters, späteren Bischof von Paderborn ... Oliverus* (Tübingen 1894), 159-280.

<sup>30</sup> Reimers, 'Vorlage', 136.

<sup>31</sup> M.P. van Buijtenen, *De grondslag van de Friese vrijheid* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1953), 4, note.1: *Deus Omnipotens, qui in Sua dispositione non fallitur => Deus, cuius providentia in sui dispositione non fallitur.*

<sup>32</sup> H.D. Meijering, 'De Zeven Zeelanden, het Traktaat en de traditie', in: *Studia Frisica, in memoriam Prof. Dr. K. Fokkema, 1898-1967, scripta* (Groningen: Wolters Noordhoff, 1969), 100-11.



justice, alias the saga of the thirteen asega's,<sup>33</sup> and the Magnus saga, which relates the glorious victory the Frisians achieved in Rome for Charlemagne.<sup>34</sup> The extant versions date back to at least the early fourteenth, and maybe even the late thirteenth century. That is when they must have been included in the most important collections of legal texts, of which we incidentally only have fifteenth- and sixteenth-century copies available to us. Concerning the saga of Charlemagne and Redbad, as well as that of the thirteen asega's, Paul Noomen recently made the case that they served as a prologue to the so-called *Elder 'Skeltenariocht'*.<sup>35</sup> The Magnus saga can be presumed to have served as an introduction to the common-Frisian *Seventeen Statutes and Twenty-four Land-laws* as well as the *West Lauwers 'Sendriocht'*.<sup>36</sup>

Few conclusions about the dates of the original texts can be drawn from an analysis of the sources listed therein. Most of the identifiable sources already existed in the thirteenth century; the sources used in the text had long been known by 1350, and each had acquired an aura of age, respectability, and trust. Only the use of Beka (post 1345) and the Tractate of the Seven Sealands leads one to presume that the *Historia Frisiae* cannot antecede that date.

### Structure of the texts and their mutual relations

For a thorough analysis of the relationship between the works of the *Gesta*-group so far, we have to rely on the work done by Jelle Hoekstra.<sup>37</sup> Based on a philological analysis of story elements, recurring in varying length and order in the different variants, Hoekstra came to a (provisional) conclusion concerning the mutual relations between the *Historia Frisae*, the *Gesta Fresonum*, the *Gesta Frisiorum* and the *Olde Freesche Cronike*, and their possible predecessor. The *Klein Oudfries Kroniekje* was left aside, for reasons unknown to us. Hoekstra's conclusions can be confirmed, in part, and expanded upon.

According to Hoekstra, the assorted legends were probably first composed in Latin, a conjecture that we can subscribe to. The source text for the legends, was not, however, as Heinrich Reimers supposed, the *Historia Frisiae*. Hoekstra showed that the differences between this text and the Frisian and Dutch variants are too significant to allow for such a conclusion. Furthermore Hoekstra showed that the editions of the *Gesta Fresonum* and the *Gesta Frisiorum* are closely interrelated and that the *Gesta Fresonum* is not a Frisian translation of the Dutch *Gesta Frisiorum*. The relation appears to be the converse: the latter chronicle is demonstrably translated from the Frisian. This is evidenced by the large number of 'Frisianisms' in the *Gesta Frisiorum* and the occurrence of completely Frisian words immediately followed by a translation. Because the *Gesta Frisiorum* in some minor points is more in accordance with the Latin text than the *Gesta Fresonum*, Hoekstra supposed that the translator in writing out his text employed a Latin edition independently.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, Hoekstra expounded that the source text for the Dutch translation

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<sup>33</sup> The asega was an official legal advisor to the court of law; it was his task to interpret the law.

<sup>34</sup> Edition by W.J. Buma and W. Ebel, *Westerlauwerssches Recht. Jus Municipale Frisonum*, 2 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1977).

<sup>35</sup> P.N. Noomen, 'Hachens en Wachens: Feit en fiksje yn midsieusk Fryslân', in: R.H. Bremmer, L.G. Jansma and P. Visser, eds., *Speculum Frisicum. Stúdzjes oanbean oan Philippus H. Breuker* (Leeuwarden: Fryske Akademy, 2001), 3-22, 15.

<sup>36</sup> P.N. Noomen, 'St. Magnus van Hollum en Celdui van Esens. Bijdrage tot de chronologie van de Magnustraditie', *De Vrije Fries* 79 (1989), 7-32, 16.

<sup>37</sup> Hoekstra, *Vier Friese kronieken*. Herewith he developed a thesis from the dissertation of Jelle Brouwer: *Het Authentica Riocht, met inleiding, glossen, commentaar en woordenlijst* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1941) (thesis nr. 6).

<sup>38</sup> Hoekstra, *Vier Friese kronieken*, 11.

was not the extant version of the *Gesta Fresonum* but a predecessor, which in any case had to have a Latin predecessor.

The *Olde Freesche Cronike* is harder to place as the only variant in rhyme, and furthermore lacking the motif of Biblical parallels (more on this later). The differences with the other chronicles may be greater, but Hoekstra did notice that the *Olde Freesche Cronike* stands closer to the *Historia Frisiae* than to either *Gesta*-variants, at least in its content and the structure of its narrative. The pressing question whether the *Historia Frisiae* then represents the oldest extant version (whether or not it was the source text), remained unanswered by Hoekstra because he was only concerned with the relationships between the texts and not with question of which one appeared first. According to him, the *Historia Frisiae* did stand closest to the source text because it has most extensively integrated the Biblical parallels into the historiography. This notion is commonly accepted at present. Exactly how old the *Historia Frisiae* and the other variants are, is nevertheless still up to debate.

Before addressing the issue of dating, we will first take a closer look at the narrative structure in the different versions in order to see to what degree Hoekstra’s reconstruction has merit, what relations can be seen between the variants, and if – to go beyond Hoekstra – it is possible to account for some of the differences between the texts. A table of the story elements outlined above provides an accessible guide for comparing the various editions. Bolded text in the table denotes a Biblical parallel. A plus sign ‘+’ denotes a variant which contains substantial elaborations to the basic story elements.

**Table 1: Narrative structure of the assorted legends of the *Gesta*-group**

<i>HF</i>	<b>Prol</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B+</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>G</b>	<b>H+</b>			<b>I</b>	<b>J</b>	<b>K</b>	<b>L</b>	<b>M+</b>	<b>N+</b>
<i>GFres/Gfris</i>	<b>Prol</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B+</b>	<b>C</b>	J			K	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>H</b>		I		N	M+
<i>Gfres partial</i>		A	B+	C	J			L									
<i>OFC</i>		A	B	C	I			J	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>H</b>		K	M+	L	N
<i>KOK</i>			B	C	I			J	<b>D</b>	(F)	<b>E</b>			K	M	L	N

**bold** = Biblical parallel present; + = expanded or additional narrative element: B+ (including a description of the boundaries of the Seven Sealands); H+ (including a copy of the *Privilege of Charlemagne*); M+ (including a prologue featuring the apparition of a crucifix at the time of Olivier of Cologne’s crusade sermon in Frisia); N+ (including a copy of the privilege of William II, King of the Romans)

A logical pattern is present in the content, organization, and chronology of the texts. As can be seen in the table above, the story elements appear in a common order, albeit with subtle differences between the variants.<sup>39</sup> For example, all versions begin with the acquisition and partition of the Frisian lands, the slavery and heathenry of the Frisians under Danish dominion, their subsequent release by the Frankish king (Pippin), and their conversion to Christianity, including the origin of the bishoprics in the Frisian domain of the Seven Sealands (A, B and C). We could call this group of texts the origin- and Christianization-group. Following that is the description of the bestowment of freedom (the privileges) and the struggle for freedom against external threats, the finding of law and the Magnus saga, all of which occurred in the time of Charlemagne and are presented in a fixed order (D, E and H, in between those the two smaller, separate notices F and G). This second group therefore encompasses the classic legends of Charlemagne. Then there are the crusade sagas (K, L,

<sup>39</sup> Apart from the considerable differences on the word level.

M and N). In the two *Gesta*-texts these are partitioned in two pairs which are presented apart from each other, before and after the D E F G H cluster.

As was noted earlier, the crusade stories follow a chronological sequence. They go from 1147 (K) via 1218 (M) to 1248 (N), with the Lambertus narrative (L) in between either K and M or M and N, in an unspecified crusade context. The culmination in the definitive ratification of the Privilege of Charlemagne is significant. This must have been intentional: the Frisians have, as a quintessentially Christian people, earned their freedom by fighting the enemies of Church and king, not only in a prestigious but ancient past (Rome), but again in later times, incontrovertibly demonstrated by the confirmation on the part of William II, King of the Romans.

Although the legends from the first two groups offer fewer chronological specifics than do the crusade series, these stories, too, seem to maintain a consistent chronological succession, at least in the *Historia Frisiae* and according to our own interpretation of the proper order.<sup>40</sup> The stories are ordered in such a way as to lead to the cluster of legends of Charlemagne. The intricately structured story C concerning Redbad, Willibrord and Boniface, including the relapse into heathenry under Duke Ludger of Saxony, logically precedes the legend of Charlemagne and the Frisians (in D). Stories I (the murder of bishop Frederic) and J (the reconstruction of churches under the bishops Radbod and Baldric) are to be placed after the legends of Charlemagne, simply because the protagonists lived after the reign of Charlemagne.

Simultaneously, the insertion of the legends of Charlemagne in the series of episcopal stories indicates that the latter had been grouped together in a predecessor (possibly) or in the utilized source text (probably). An extra clue that this might have been the case can be found in the *Gesta Fresonum* and the *Gesta Frisiorum*, which conclude their version of story element J, concerning the bishops Radbod and Baldric, with a summary ‘... die Bisscoppen, die Vrieslant eerst bekeerden’ (those bishops who were the first to Christianise Frisia),<sup>41</sup> beginning with Willibrord and ending with bishop Baldric. This explains why these texts include episode J directly after the story of Christianisation in C, differing from the other editions.<sup>42</sup> Important in this respect, too, is the conclusion to story element C. The *Historia Frisiae* ends the history of proselytization and the origin of the bishoprics in Frisia with an overview of the many holy or honourable Frisians who – akin to the Biblical Judges – were exemplars to their people: abbot-missionary Gregory and the bishops Hunger and Ricfried, as well as the saints Lebuinus, Odger, Wiro and Plechelmus (including a reference to their hagiographies).<sup>43</sup> In the *Gesta Fresonum* and *Gesta Frisiorum*, this segment concerning the sainted Frisians has been separated. Gregory and his two successors (Hunger and Ricfried aren’t mentioned by name) and a reference to the ‘episcopographies of Utrecht’ are included at the conclusion to C, as in the *Historia Frisiae*. In contrast, saints Lebuinus, Odger, ‘ende andere heilighe mannen fan dien geselschap’ (and other holy men belonging to their company)<sup>44</sup> were placed in the narrative at the close of the Lambertus episode (L), but immediately

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<sup>40</sup> Hoekstra, *Vier kronieken*, 13, argues that cap. 9 on bishop Radbod must have been shifted. H. Bruch, *Kroniek der Friese kronieken. Antikritiek op Bolhuis’ kritiek* (Leeuwarden: Fryske Akademy, 1952), 14, does not believe this to have been necessary. In his opinion the *Historia Frisiae* has kept the original order in its entirety.

<sup>41</sup> In these and the following citations we follow the edition of the *Gesta Frisiorum*. Here: E. Epkema, ed., *Oude Friese Kronijken*, 2 vols. (Leeuwarden 1853) II, 291.

<sup>42</sup> In the *Olde Freesche Cronike* (likewise the *Klein Oudfriese Kroniekje*) this recapitulation is lacking, although the bishops (including Frederic) are treated after C.

<sup>43</sup> Reimers, ‘Vorlage’, 119-20. This part is not found in the *Olde Freesche Cronike*. The fact that in the *Klein Oudfriese Kroniekje* Gregorius is mentioned, is one of the indications that de *Olde Freesche Cronike* cannot have been a direct source for the *Oudfriese Kroniekje*.

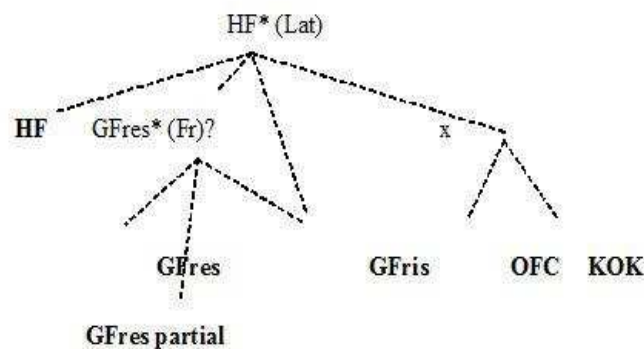
<sup>44</sup> Epkema, *Oude Friese Kronijken* II, 292.

before D nevertheless. The *Historia Frisae*, then, may be the most original, as the *Gesta* appear to diverge indifferent ways from its original structure. At the same time this set-up in the *Gesta* explains why the crusade narratives K and L, in which the Frisian heroes Poptatus and Lambertus are accorded a (quasi-)holy status, are included in between C and D: the author wanted to emphasise here, that they too, by their holiness, were exemplars to the Frisians. Finally, the fact that the episode concerning Bishop Frederic (I) in both texts of the *Gesta* is somewhat singularly placed between the stories concerning Magnus (H) and Aix-la-Chapelle (N) might be explained by presuming that the author hearkened back to the structure in *Historia Frisiae*, where this story also follows H.

The *Historia Frisiae*, then, we believe, represents the most original composition of the *Gesta*-chronicle. The *Olde Freesche Cronike* (or the *Klein Oudfries Kroniekje*)<sup>45</sup> cannot be ascribed that status, because they lack the Biblical parallels, which have to be seen as essential for the cycle. Furthermore, certain story elements have been truncated or extended in the rhymed version, presumably in order to make the story more appealing to the audience.<sup>46</sup> Neither are the *Gesta Fresonum* or the *Gesta Frisiorum* (or their direct predecessor) likely candidates. Their structure is most inconsistent amongst any of variants, although that does not necessarily denote carelessness in their composition. After all, we have seen how, sections missing from other versions reflect authorial choice.

Consequently, Hoekstra's reconstruction is corroborated and reinforced by our analysis. The *Historia Frisiae* can at this point be characterized as the text approximating the Ur-version of the *Gesta*-cycle most. As an unattested predecessor this Latin-language scholarly work has been edited and popularized in diverse variants, in shorter and longer versions, in prose and rhyme, in Frisian and in Dutch. Employing our new understanding of the relationship between the variants, we can construct the following pedigree, or historical tree which charts the development of the texts:

**Figure 1**



We can see, then, that in the time between the composition of the original text and the popularization of a variant text, at least two other edited variant versions were produced.

<sup>45</sup> Table 1 shows that the *Klein Oudfriesse Kroniekje* – the abridged version which was left aside by Hoekstra – comes very close to the *Olde Freesche Cronike* as to the structure of its storyline. Possibly the author of the *Klein Oudfriesse Kroniekje* did use the rhymed chronicle as the base for his concise (and sometimes confused) extract, or a lost (Frisian?) version that had had the *Olde Freesche Cronike* as its example or predecessor. Since both redactions show up many differences on the word level, the latter possibility seems the most probable one.

<sup>46</sup> Hoekstra, *Vier Friese kronieken*, 12.

In addition to the author of the *Historia Frisiae* we can identify separate authors or editors for the *Gesta Fresonum*\* and the *Olde Freesche Cronike*'s predecessor. To gain more insight in the mutual relationships and sequential arrangement of the texts, the variants would have to be subjected to an extensive comparative textual analysis. A complicating factor for such an analysis, however, is that the available editions of the *Olde Freesche Cronike* and the *Gesta Frisiorum* are utterly outdated. A study of this kind would then ideally be combined with a new, integrated publication of the various texts.

It is probable that the pedigree above omits intermediate forms and variant texts that have not been handed down to the present. Numerous greater and lesser variances between the extant texts, which even the casual reader can note, point to that. The cycle must have had an accordingly large circulation and popularity. Preceding the question of its popularity is of course its dating. However before we will address that, we would like to give some attention to the manner in which the Biblical parallelism was shaped in the vernacular versions.

### **Simplification and omission of the Biblical parallels in the vernacular versions**

Beryl Smalley, an expert on the use of the Bible in the Middle Ages, speaks of the Frisian *Gesta*-group as '... an extreme example of the tendency to pour one's material into a traditional mould'.<sup>47</sup> According to her, this tendency is most apparent in the base text, the *Historia Frisiae*\*, for its author offers a consequent parallel for each story. Smalley is of the opinion that the latter and the editor of the *Gesta Fresonum*\* consider themselves strongly bound to the authority of the Holy Writ, even to the extent that they were willing to adapt the historical reality to the Biblical order. Upon more thorough scrutiny, however, it becomes evident that Smalley's statement cannot be upheld. As it happens, the *Historia Frisiae* follows the Biblical sequence in broad strokes only. For example, in the legend of Charlemagne concerning the thirteen law-speakers (E) a return to Moses is made from the story about David in D. In the crusade series we find an even greater leap in time, from the late Maccabean period (K, concerning the capture of Lisbon), to the ancient valour of the Israelites under the Biblical Judges Shamgar, Samson and Gideon (in the narratives L and M). In the *Gesta Fresonum* and the *Gesta Frisiorum* this structure has not changed much, as for example the crusade legends (from K to L) transition from the Maccabees to Shamgar and Samson and (from N to M) from the Maccabees to Gideon. In other words, both the author and the editor(s) were patently willing to alter the Biblical order when their story required a hero whose sort of deeds could only be found in older Biblical books.

All observers have emphasized that the comparison between the people of Israel and the Frisians, outside of the *Historia Frisiae*, can only be found in the *Gesta Fresonum* and the *Gesta Frisiorum*, except for the partial version of the *Gesta Fresonum* which omits the comparisons completely. If one reads the *Gesta Fresonum* and the *Gesta Frisiorum* with an eye towards their Biblical parallels, one will discover that a number of legends contain no Biblical heroes for comparison (c.f. table 1). No less than five of the fourteen stories in both complete *Gesta*-texts omit a Biblical counterpart. In the remaining nine, the Biblical parallel is simplified or limited relative to the parallels offered in the *Historia Frisiae*. The *Gesta Fresonum* and the *Gesta Frisiorum* for example omit, in their legend C, the story of Moses and Aaron leading the Hebrews across the Red Sea. And whereas the *Historia Frisiae* in its legend on the finding of justice (E) makes a functional

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<sup>47</sup> Beryl Smalley, *The study of the bible in the Middle Ages* (3<sup>rd</sup> rev. ed., Oxford: Blackwell, 1983) xi.

comparison to the presentation of the Ten Commandments by Moses, both *Gesta*-works are silent on this theme. The only Biblical reference in their versions concerns the well that springs from the spot where the thirteenth asega cleaves the soil with his axe, because the narrative is reminiscent of the story of Moses when he used his staff to make a spring appear from a rock.

Which biblical parallels are and which are not encountered in the *Gesta Fresonum* and the *Gesta Frisiorum*? A closer look reveals that the Judges and Maccabees are unnamed in the individual sections within the *Gesta*'s? Samson, Gideon, Deborah, Shamgar as well as the Maccabees as a collective term do figure in the prologue, however. This shows that the editor partially incorporated the text of the *Historia Frisae*, but for some reason he didn't consider it necessary to detail the deeds of the aforementioned biblical heroes. That is not to suggest that the *Gesta Fresonum*, the *Gesta Frisiorum*, the partial *Gesta Fresonum* nor the *Olde Freesche Cronike* only hesitantly discuss God's favour for the Frisians. The *Olde Freesche Cronike*, for instance, contains a number of allusions to the Biblical parallels, one of which appears, for example when speaking of the land God gave the Frisians:<sup>48</sup>

'Toe leste God gaf al to hant  
Dat se quemen an een lant  
Mit gesonth' an live ende oec an goede  
Doe was hem bet to mode  
In dat noerden quemen si an  
Van hem sproet menich wyf ende man  
Dat lant, dat woeste was to voren Makeden  
seer goet ende utvercoren'

At last God took care  
that they arrived in a land  
able bodied and with sufficient goods,  
which then pleased Him well  
In the north they came in; many a woman and  
man sprang of from them.  
They made the land, that had been desolate  
before, very rich and 'chosen'

These texts highlight the Frisians' service done for the Church and they attempt to show God's guiding hand in the history of the Frisians.

Bruch and other commentators even judge the *Gesta*-works as having a more religious and pious character than the *Historia*, which places more emphasis on the legitimation of Frisian freedom.<sup>49</sup>

To answer the question of why the parallels were simplified and omitted it behoves taking a brief look at the use of the Hebrew comparison in later times. The earliest consistent arrangements of the 'chosen people'-model in historiography can be found in the late 16th and early 17th centuries in Scotland, England and Republic of the Seven United Netherlands.<sup>50</sup> This concerns three protestant nations whose existence was threatened and had an interest in reinforcing their citizens' group identity to mobilize them for the battle against the Catholic enemy. In numerous historical writings, pamphlets, tracts from preachers, and so on from these pre-modern nations one can find a parallel between the own people and the Jewish people, with the message that the former likewise enjoys God's protection extensively fleshed out. The equation to the Jewish people would certainly resonate with the portion of the populace inclined to Calvinism because they had become intimately acquainted with the vicissitudes of the children of Israel from the Old Testament via sermons, catechisms, school teachings and regular Bible readings. This won't have been the case with the

<sup>48</sup> Epkema, *Oude Friesche Kronijken* II, 212.

<sup>49</sup> Bruch, *Supplement*, 57. He judges the *Historia Frisiae* a more 'Frisian product'.

<sup>50</sup> Smith, *Chosen Peoples*, 45-8; Simon Schama, *The embarrassment of riches: an interpretation of Dutch culture in the Golden Age* (London: Collins, 1987), 98 ff.

Frisians from the fifteenth century. In Frisia in that period, only ecclesiastics were so familiar with the Bible that they could employ its imagery in daily practice. Even then it would concern the regular clergy first and foremost: the monks and nuns of the many monasteries located there. The average layman, never getting to read the Bible, will only have been broadly familiar with the fortunes of the Jewish people from the Old Testament. Creation, the Exodus from Egypt, David defeating Goliath, the Babylonian Captivity was possibly already a part of the religious canon of past Frisians. After all, these key events could be appreciated in pictorial representations in various churches. Which deed was credited to Shamgar, however, or what exactly happened to Heliodore, will have been known to few Frisians at the time. If the editor of the base text wanted to attract more than a few readers and listeners he will have had to omit these miscellany. The goal would have been achieved if the readers and listeners was made clear that God had a purpose for the Frisians, that He protected them and that their freedom indirectly derived from Him and had His approval since times immemorial.

### **Dating the edition and its popularization**

Let us shortly recapitulate the current state of affairs before we get to grips with the dating. A scholarly clergyman collated, edited and elaborated upon a number of stories about pious Frisian heroes and heroic deeds in a relatively consistent chronological manner and bundled these to a religious-patriotic canon, where for each of its constituent segments a similarly consistent parallel to an event from Old Testament is presented. Because he so clearly aims for the Frisians as a nation, we can presume the author/editor intended to reach a lay audience from the start, for example via parish ministers as intermediaries. We only have a *copia copiae* or even a *copia copiae copiae* of the Ur-version in the form of the *Historia Frisiae*. The base text has been edited in a subsequent phase, meaning that another order was applied to the individual stories and that those stories themselves were simplified and made more accessible. In the process of that transformation it has also been translated, both in Frisian and Dutch. Furthermore an edition in rhyme was made and an extract was produced, in order that a large lay audience could be acquainted with it. The editing and translating has to have led to a large number of variants. The differences in detail, identifiable on various levels within the extant texts, show that no schematic of their relation can be made without allowing for supposed ‘predecessors’ and intermediate versions.

In order to assess their time and place the *Olde Freesche Cronike*, the *Klein Oudfries Kroniekje* and the *Gesta Fresonum*\* will be discussed first, because these have the most data available. We already remarked on most editions of the *Gesta*-cycle having come down to us via later, sometimes much later copies. Nevertheless a precise dating is possible in the case of the *Olde Freesche Cronike*, known only from eighteenth-century copies. This is because the copy is concluded with the following comment: ‘Gescreven int jaer ons Heren MCCCC ende LXXIII, op Kersmis dach’ (written in the named year of Our Lord, on Christmas day), in other words in 1474.<sup>51</sup>

Slightly more complex is the dating of the *Klein Oudfries Kroniekje*. Copies have been preserved in a manuscript from the Groningen area (Ommelanden), dated between 1457 and 1479, and in the Old Frisian manuscript *Jus Municipale Frisonum* dated circa 1530. The publishers of *Jus*, Buma and Ebel, dated the Vorlage of this compilatory manuscript before 1464, so that they were

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<sup>51</sup> Epkema, *Oude Friesche Kronijken* II, 249; M. Carasso-Kok, *Repertorium van verhalende bronnen uit de middeleeuwen* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1981), nr. 143.

inclined to presume that year as the *datum ante quem* for the short chronicle.<sup>52</sup> A closer examination shows however that their conclusion concerning the dating of *Jus*' Vorlage was drawn a little too briskly. 1464 is the year given as the provenance of the *Cronica fan Hollandt*, included in *Jus*, where on f. 184r is mentioned: 'ende philippus wert heer van hollandt ende Js tot noch toe als Jnt iaer van lxiij' (and Philip – the Good – became lord of Holland, which he still is by now, in the year of 64). The *Friesche Kroniek*, similarly included in *Jus*, contains under Nr. 96 an account of an episode from the Donia-war, an escalated Frisian feud, from the year 1463 as its final annotation.<sup>53</sup> Whilst one may conclude from these facts that the originals of both chronicles stem from the year 1464, that does not mean that *Jus*' Vorlage contained these originals as part of its compilation. It is similarly possible, if not much more probable, that said Vorlage did contain copies of the *Cronica fan Hollandt* and the *Friesche Kroniek*. That would mean that 1464 should rather be seen as the *datum post quem* than the *datum ante quem*.

The earliest (complete) copies of the *Gesta Fresonum* and *Gesta Frisiorum* date to c. 1500 (*Codex Aysma*) and the first half of the sixteenth century (Leeuwarden, PB 9056 D). That doesn't yield much more than a *terminus ante quem*. More important is the text-internal evidence encountered in an extension to the Damietta-legend, found only in both *Gesta*-texts. It concerns an apparition of the cross in the year 1214 during Oliver of Cologne's crusade sermon. The concluding segment reads:<sup>54</sup>

'Dit is het relaas van de abt van Heisterbach, dat in het Latijn *Vallis* – dat betekent dal – *Sancti Petri* heet, en ook de leesmeester van datzelfde klooster *Vallis Sancti Petri*. Deze beiden waren ook bij de predikatie tegenwoordig en hebben deze twee kruisen zelf duidelijk gezien; dezen hebben dat verhaald toen zij ons klooster te Klaarkamp visiteerden. In de legende der Friezen leest men eveneens dat deze scholaster Olivier velen van het volk tot het geloof in het heilige kruis bracht, met als gevolg dat velen het (teken van) het heilige kruis op hun kleren hebben gedragen. Hieruit zijn de kruisbroeders voortgekomen'.

This is the report of the Abbey of Heisterbach, which in Latin is called *Vallis* – meaning valley- *Sancti Petri*, and also of the reading master of the same monastery *Vallis Sancti Petri*. Both were present at the preaching and have seen the two crosses themselves clearly; they told us about it when they visited us to inspect our monastery at Klaarkamp. In the legend of the Frisians one can also read that this scholaster Oliver brought many of the people to the belief in the holy cross, with as a consequence that a lot of them wore the (sign of) the holy cross on their clothes. From this the crosiers emerged.

This passage is crucial for two reasons. Firstly one can conclude that the author was a member of the convent at Klaarkamp. We will return to that point further on. The second important matter is the mention of crosiers (= kruisbroeders). In his analysis of the story, Jaap van Moolenbroek calls this reference to the crosiers 'not very precise'.<sup>55</sup> He suggests that the author meant to recall the rise of the order of crutched friars, which occurred in Oliver's days. Van Moolenbroek also suggests that 'crosiers' in this context refers to members of military orders who wore the cross on their habits and who were represented in Frisia by the Order of St John and the Teutonic Order. This suggestion seems, however, to be quite improbable, because the Knights Hospitaller and the Teutonic Knights

<sup>52</sup> Buma and Ebel, eds., *Jus municipale Frisonum* I, 8, 330-332.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 582-3. Compare P. Gerbenzon, ed., *Kleine Oudfriese kronieken* (Groningen: Wolters, 1965), 20, who argues that the dating of 1464 bear reference to a 'Vorlage' of the *cronica*, not to that of the *Jus*-compilation in its entirety.

<sup>54</sup> Van Moolenbroek, 'Kruisverschijning', 43.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.



are never referred to in fifteenth-century northern Dutch and Frisian sources as *kruisbroeders*. The references to ‘cruces broeren’ (*Gesta Fresonum*) or ‘crucebroederen’ (*Gesta Frisiorum*) was undoubtedly meant to refer to the members of the small canon’s order of crosiers or crutched friars that arose in the thirteenth century and experienced a spectacular second boom in the fifteenth century thanks to its orientation towards the Modern Devotion. The growth was so significant in fact that the number of aligned crosier monasteries had been tripled around 1470.<sup>56</sup> The author’s reference to crosiers was especially meaningful to the lay audience if we consider that this order appeared in Frisia for the first time in the 1460’s. The crosiers took over a tertiary’s convent in the Frisian town of Sneek in 1464, and in 1466 they founded a new friary in the nearby city of Franeker.<sup>57</sup> Both houses had a favourable start and managed to acquire significant financial and public support in a short time. One of the characteristics of the crosiers is that in the expansion of their new houses in the fifteenth century, they not only derived their material income from the exploitation of their landed properties, but also from mendicancy.<sup>58</sup> The crosiers were permitted by the Church to send out their own *terminarii* next to the four acknowledged mendicant orders to preach and receive alms. Through travel, they quickly became well-known both within and outside of Frisia west of the Lauwers. The popularity of the crosiers is evinced by the many times – whether as the ‘fifth mendicant order’ or not – they appear in the surviving last wills of pious Frisians who donated to the church or commissioned requiem masses to be performed by them.<sup>59</sup> For this reason the reference made by the author of the \**Gesta Fresonum* almost certainly refers to these relatively new brothers with a cross on their habits, brothers who had already made their presence known in the cities and in the country. By referring to them, the author hoped to give more depth and believability to his story of the miraculous apparition of the cross in 1214.

This would mean that the arrival of the crosiers in Sneek in 1464 is the absolute *datum postquem* for the realization of the first version of the *Gesta Fresonum*. Because the lay audience in Frisia became familiar with the activities of the crosiers some years later, it stands to reason that the remark was made in the late sixties or early seventies. This brings the earliest dating of the *Olde Fresche Cronike* (1474), the *Klein Oudfries Kroniekje* (sometime after 1464, but before 1479) and the *Gesta Fresonum\** (late sixties or later) remarkably close to one another.

### **Time of origin of the *Historia Frisiae***

Having established such a date for ‘phase two’, the question arises of how many years earlier the *Ur-Historia Frisiae* could have been written. Given the success of the format, we could at first be inclined to presume a relatively short span of time between the Latin outline and the vernacular version. How short, exactly, is a matter of speculation. It is very well possible that we have to consider a distance of ten years or more between the two, because there is no indication that the scholarly author of the *Historia Frisiae* base text was the same as the one who wrote the primary version of the *Gesta Fresonum*, or the author rhyming in Dutch for the *Olde Fresche Cronike*. The differences between those two texts and the *Historia Frisiae* are so numerous that it has to be

<sup>56</sup> K. Elm, ‘Entstehung und Reform des belgisch-niederländischen Kreuzherrenordens. Ein Literaturbericht’, *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 82 (1971), 292-313.

<sup>57</sup> J.A. Mol, ‘Kruisherren op de Friese zieleheilsmarkt in de vijftiende eeuw. De vestiging van de kloosters te Sneek en Franeker’, *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis* 16 (1990), 327-48, 337.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 342-4.

<sup>59</sup> G. Verhoeven and J.A. Mol, eds., *Friese testamenten tot 1550* (Leeuwarden: Fryske Akademy, 1994), s.v. Franeker (Kruisherren), Sneek (Kruisherren) and ‘biddende orden’ (five).

supposed that the author of the *Historia Frisiae* did not personally guide or correct the editors. This is further evinced by the passage of Oliver of Cologne's cross sermon by the author/editor of the *Gesta Fresonum*\* whereas in the *Ur-Historia Frisae*, the source text which for precisely this passage deserves a correction, is referred to as 'the Frisian legend', which at least suggests some distance, both to the content and to the period of time.<sup>60</sup>

The only extant manuscript of the *Historia Frisiae* offers few clues concerning the dating of the original version. Edzo Waterbolk argued in his dissertation on the historiography of the early modern period in Friesland that it was written at the end of the fifteenth century.<sup>61</sup> His arguments have few supporters these days, however. The humanist qualities he thought he found in the text, amongst others its vainglorious bearing, the use of certain expressions as *patria*, and especially a 'more conscionable' treatment of sources, can barely be quantified.<sup>62</sup>

What is of some importance is the fact that the text is included in a codex from the library of Munich containing a number of humanist pieces from the last quarter of the fifteenth century. From Reimers' preface to the edition of the *Historia Frisiae* it is clear that this codex, and therefore also its only known edition, was copied around 1492 by the German humanist, cartographer and bibliophile Hartmann Schedel in Nuremberg.<sup>63</sup> Schedel supposedly used a source text he received from the 'Frisian' physician Dirk (Theodericus) Ulsen (circa 1460-1508), who resided in Nuremberg, at the invitation of Schedel, in the years 1492-1501. Reimers doesn't say much more about Ulsen. It is certain however, that Ulsen belonged to a circle of early northern humanists who considered the famous Rudolf Agricola their mentor.<sup>64</sup> Although he was originally from Zwolle, Ulsen repeatedly proclaimed himself a Frisian and was also given that epithet by others, possibly to honour the Baflo-born 'Frisian muse's son' Agricola. Whether this demonstrates Ulsen's potential interest in Frisian historical tales cannot be said without further study. Ulsen wrote poems and medical treatises in humanist Latin and was more interested in the *bonae litterae* in general than in historiographies. While it seems unlikely, then, based on his other interests, that Ulsen was responsible for editing the *Historia Frisiae*, we can't rule out the possibility that he supplied his friend Schedel with Frisian text material.

Regardless of whether Hartmann Schedel copied the text of the *Historia Frisiae* from Ulsen, the question remains how old the source text was by 1492. In regards to this issue, Reimers noticed that the codex contains another 'Frisian' segment, namely the *Descriptio Frisiae*, a description of Frisia, which may have been included with the *Historia Frisiae* in the same source manuscript. This *Descriptio*, Reimers notes, ends with a piece of text which serves as an explanation to the receipt of an affirmation by the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire of the privileges and rights granted to the

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<sup>60</sup> 'Aeck lestma in dae Fresena legenda, dat disse scholasticus Olifernus folla folkis brochta thoe dae lauwa des helghen crioeces ...': *Codex Aysma*, W.J. Buma, P. Gerbenzon and M. Tragter-Schubert, eds. (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1993), 546-9.

<sup>61</sup> Waterbolk, *Twee eeuwen Friesche geschiedschrijving*, 40-1, 245-7.

<sup>62</sup> Bruch, *Supplement*, 56-7; cf. Bremmer, *Hir is eskriven*, 123. Compare K. Tilmans, 'De ontwikkeling van een vaderland-begrip in de laatmiddeleeuwse en vroeg-moderne geschiedschrijving van de Nederlanden', in: N.C.F. van Sas, ed., *Vaderland. Een geschiedenis van de vijftiende eeuw tot 1940* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999), s. 7-54, who establishes that the development of the emotional *patria*-notion in Frisia dates back to the thirteenth century. For the use of *patria nostra* to designate Friesland west of the Lauwers at large in 1345, see J.A. Mol, 'Graaf Willem IV, de Hollands-Friese oorlog van 1344/1345 en de Friese kloosters', in: Ph.H. Breuker and A. Janse, eds., *Negen eeuwen Friesland-Holland. Geschiedenis van een haat-liefdeverhouding* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1997), 94-108, 102.

<sup>63</sup> Reimers, 'Vorlage', 96-100.

<sup>64</sup> C.G. Santing, 'Theodericus Ulsenius, alter Agricola?', in: F. Akkerman and A.J. Vanderjagt, eds., *Rodolphus Agricola Phrisius, 1444-1485. Proceedings of the international conference at the University of Groningen* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 170-80, 171 ff.

Frisians in the past. The piece of text concerns the taxation that would be paid per house for the acknowledgment of imperial authority, to be granted on the condition that the Frisians would not have to pay toll for waterways and roads in their country. Because this segment speaks of the privileges granted by Emperor Sigismund (1410-1437), Reimers supposed that this referenced the contact the Frisians had with Emperor Frederick III in the years 1456-1457 as part of negotiations between both parties concerning the official recognition of Frisian freedoms. The segment could have been part of the dossier that was proposed by the Frisian districts Oostergo and Westergo and sent to the emperor's emissary, who, because of a promised tribute levied from the Frisians, proclaimed himself willing to renew his predecessor Sigismund's privilege. The Frisians were certainly interested in a re-affirmation of their imperial privileges but were less inclined to make commitments on paying tribute. It is certain however that this was then an important subject.<sup>65</sup> Because nothing is known of a sequel to the affirmation of Sigismund's privilege by Frederick III in 1457, Reimers presumes that the segment concerning the tribute was only applicable for a short while. Therefore, he estimates the date of the source manuscript of the *Historia Frisiae* to be "mit einiger Sicherheit" around 1460. The source manuscript itself would then also date from this time. One has to take note of the fact that if Reimers' supposition is correct, the author of the source manuscript had access to the dossier that was presented in 1456 to the Imperial emissary Thomas von Gunsteten by the representatives of Oostergo and Westergo. This argument is of course not conclusive. It does, however, open the door to the supposition that the author or copyist of the *Ur-Historia Frisiae* was involved in the formal defence and conservation of the freedom privileges of Frisia West of the Lauwers.

Regrettably it is unknown who was involved in the activities of 1456 and 1457 on behalf of the Frisians. The emissaries remain anonymous, in contrast to the four plenipotentiaries which were elected thirteenth years later, in 1469, to discuss in the Hague the conditions for a possible honouring of Charles the Bold as sovereign. Amongst them was abbot Bernardus (II) of Klaarkamp, the only one who represented Oostergo at that occasion.<sup>66</sup> It is possible that his predecessor and namesake, scholar Bernardus Clinge, had likewise represented Oostergo in 1456 and 1457 in the meetings mentioned. We already saw that the compiler/editor of the Frisian-language *Gesta Fresonum*\* originated from Klaarkamp. Is it possible that the proto-text of the *Historia Frisiae* was written there before it was transposed to vernacular versions?<sup>67</sup>

### **Was the author of the *Historia Frisiae* a monk from Klaarkamp?**

Little is known about textual production at the Cistercian abbey of Klaarkamp in the fifteenth century. Apart from an analysis of its share of charters,<sup>68</sup> only the aforementioned passage from the *Gesta*-texts, which hints that the editor was a member of the monastic community at Klaarkamp, has been the subject of analysis thus far.<sup>69</sup> A study of the sixteenth-century chronicle of

<sup>65</sup> O. Vries, *Het Heilige Roomse Rijk en de Friese Vrijheid* (Leeuwarden: Fryske Akademy, 1986), 74-7.

<sup>66</sup> *Worp van Thabor, Kronijk van Friesland, boek IV*, J.G. Ottema, ed. (Leeuwarden 1850), 114.

<sup>67</sup> This suggestion is submitted by Bolhuis van Zeeburg, *Kritiek der Friesche geschiedschrijving*, 61-3, who, by the way – did not know the *Historia Frisiae*. He qualified the source text as 'der Vriesen legende' (called as such in the *Gesta Frisiorum*) and labelled it subsequently as a *Chronicon Clarecampense* or *Annales Clarecampenses*.

<sup>68</sup> O. Vries, 'Naar ploeg en koestal vluchtte uw taal'. *De verdringing van het Fries als schrijftaal door het Nederlands (tot 1580)* (Leeuwarden: Fryske Akademy, 1993), 38-40.

<sup>69</sup> Bruch, *Supplement*, 58-9. He leaves open the possibility that both versions of the *Gesta* were not written in Klaarkamp but in the windesheim monastery of Thabor near Sneek. However, the fact that the text of the *Gesta*

Bloemkamp, Klaarkamp's oldest daughter abbey, showed that its author, Thomas of Groningen, presumably made use of fifteenth-century material from Klaarkamp in his composition.<sup>70</sup> The latter included at the beginning of his historiography a genealogy of the monastic family of Klaarkamp (a *Genealogia Claraecampi*) and a paean to the abbey (*Encomium Claraecampi*), which must have been copied from existing Klaarkamp texts.

Klaarkamp certainly was a centre of scholarship in the middle part of the fifteenth century. This was because the abbey experienced a flourishing period after 1425, which apart from an ascetic inspiration was characterized by a greater focus on study. Crucial to the abbey's growth was the influence of the reformist inspired abbot Boynigus of Menterne, who, on the authority of the General Chapter of the Cistercian Order, functioned on several occasions as *visitator, corrector et reformator* of the Frisian monasteries in the first decades of the fifteenth century.<sup>71</sup> He ran the abbey of Klaarkamp for a short while in 1425, after which his protégé Boldwinus, who had studied canon law in Cologne in 1417<sup>72</sup> and was enrolled as a professor in Rostock in 1424,<sup>73</sup> was elected to the office of abbot. Under Boldwinus and his successors Dominicus and the Groningen-born mr. Berend Clinge (1443-1465), who had taught theology in Erfurt as a professor, study was heavily valued, as shown in reports from the academic training and activities of the monks of Klaarkamp.<sup>74</sup>

It is possible that the author of the Urtext of the *Historia Frisae* worked elsewhere than in the scriptorium of the renewed Klaarkamp. Indeed, perhaps such a militantly patriotic text such as the *Historia Frisiae* could not have been realized within a monastery. Klaarkamp, at the time, was a redeveloping, devout monastic center where relatively many non-Frisians found a home. For example, influential non-Frisians in this period included Johannes of Alkmaar, Godfridus of Goch and Petrus of Zeeland. Despite a non-Frisian element, a certain Frisian chauvinism in fifteenth-century Klaarkamp has to be taken into account. Although 'immigrants' often prove to be passionate defenders of their new fatherland, it is certain that Frisian interests of autonomy were in good hands with this abbey. We already mentioned how in the negotiations with Charles the Bold in 1469 the abbot of Klaarkamp acted as a representative of Frisia West of the Lauwers. And as for the language: several writings have been handed down from fifteenth-century Klaarkamp that point to a bustling tradition of written Frisian.<sup>75</sup>

That the *Historia Frisiae* was translated into the vernacular, and simplified at Klaarkamp, can be better understood in this changing atmosphere, in which Frisian interests sought to reclaim legitimacy in the shadow of foreign pressures. But was the Urtext composed in Klaarkamp at an earlier date, and was it written by a monk? The author was certainly versed in Biblical knowledge and must have had academic training. His narrative technique and compositional inventions betray at least a measure of rhetorical training. He shows himself to be well-read, given the many quotations and references to written sources. The frequent borrowings from non-Dutch and especially Saxon historiographies suggest that the author studied at a German university for a while. (perhaps it is many authors, or a team of people at work?)

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*Frisiorum* has come down to us in two sixteenth century manuscripts of Thabor, is no compelling indication that they have been composed by a canon of that monastery.

<sup>70</sup> J.A. Mol, 'De stichting fan it Cistersiënzer kleaster Klaarkamp by Rinsumageast', *It Beaken* 58 (1996), 1-13, 2-4.

<sup>71</sup> A. Fruytier, 'Boinghus', in: P.C. Molhuysen and F.K.H. Kossmann, eds., *Nieuw Nederlandsch Biografisch Woordenboek* IV (Leiden: Sijthoff, 1918), 190-193.

<sup>72</sup> H. Keussen, *Die Matrikel der Universität Köln*, 4 vols. (Bonn 1919-31), 195-61.

<sup>73</sup> A. Hofmeister, *Die Matrikel der Universität Rostock*, vol. I (Rostock 1889), 17.

<sup>74</sup> See the information in the database of S. Zijlstra, *Het geleerde Friesland – een mythe? Universiteit en maatschappij in Friesland en Stad en Lande ca. 1380-1650* (Leeuwarden: Fryske Akademy, 1995).

<sup>75</sup> Vries, *Verdringing van het Fries*, 38-40.

We must emphasize that a straightforward answer to the core question of authorship is only possible when the *Historia Frisiae* and the other texts from the *Gesta*-group have been subjected to a thorough philological investigation, particularly with an eye towards their narrative motifs. If we look at the element analysed best so far, that of the representation of the cross appearance at the sermon of Oliver of Cologne in the lengthy passage M (the Damietta narrative), then there is reason to suspect that the author is not from Klaarkamp. Jaap van Moolenbroek in his 1987 essay on the subject showed that the editor/author corrected the *Gesta*-writings and the *Historia Frisae*\* on this very passage.<sup>76</sup> Although the close of *Historia Frisiae*'s passage M contains a source reference to the *Historia Damiatina*, it doesn't appear to follow the latter's presentation of Oliver's cross sermon. According to the *Historia Damiatina*, crosses appeared in the Frisian skies; on one occasion they even bore the Saviour. There is no mention of these crosses within the *Historia Frisiae*, however. Instead, there is talk of a ... *in aere exercitus virorum candidorum*: an army of holy men spurring the Frisians into action. The crosses have therefore been replaced with a bellicose heavenly host. This narrative motif is reminiscent of the story about the battle of Alcaccer in Portugal (of September 1217) which is incorporated in passage K concerning the exploits of the hero Poptatus at the capture of Lisbon (1147). So, the motif was used twice, which required correction. It is no wonder that monks at the Cistercian abbey of Klaarkamp, familiar with Caesarius of Heisterbach descriptions of the cross sermon of Oliver, felt obliged to add some crosses from the original sources to the narrative.

In short, the monks of Klaarkamp were connected to the *Historia Frisiae* but don't seem to have written its Urtext. Neither does the text have a monastic flavour. The text's interest in war is greater than in the *Gesta*-versions, and there is no indication that the monks had so much interest in the bellicose. We can agree with Bruch in this regard: the *Historia Frisiae* is more patriotically Frisian than the *Gesta*-versions; the *Gesta*-versions are more pious and religious. The author, it seems, was a secular scholar, who had access to the documents used in negotiations with the German emperor and/or the duke of Burgundy regarding the political status? of Frisia west of the Lauwers.

### **An audience in Frisia west of the Lauwers**

In all of the writings of the *Gesta*-group, Frisian territory is interpreted broadly. The description of the Seven Sealands locates the Frisians along the entire North Sea coast between Alkmaar and Bremen. Expressions like 'we Frisians', 'our Frisian people', 'our Frisian ancestors', 'our forebears', or in the Latin: *nos Frisones, nostri progenitores, nostri contribuli*, would therefore have referred to all the inhabitants of these areas.<sup>77</sup> The geographical perspective of the text, however, is unmistakably centered on Frisia west of the Lauwers.<sup>78</sup> The text does not appear, for example, to consider the inhabitants of the (Frisian) Ommelanden of Groningen or the East Frisians as potential readers and listeners. Because the *Gesta Frisiorum* is derived from the *Klein Oudfries Kroniekje* the *Gesta Fresonum*, all of which were written in Frisian, there is a strong indication that the popularisers of the *Historia Frisiae* hoped to reach a Frisian-speaking and Frisian-reading audience first and foremost. In practice this meant that one had to restrict themselves to the inhabitants of

<sup>76</sup> Van Moolenbroek, 'Kruisverschijning', 44-8.

<sup>77</sup> These expressions are found in the first three legends, concerning the settlement in the Frisian lands and the Christianization of the Frisians (A, B en C). In the legends of Charlemagne and those on the crusade the text speaks with some distance of 'the Frisians' in general, and of 'them'.

<sup>78</sup> Bremmer, *Hir is eskriven*, 124.

Frisia west of the Lauwers. In the Frisian lands east of that small river (the Ommelanden of Groningen, East Frisia and the Oldenburger part of Frisia), Frisian as a written and spoken language had largely disappeared from the stage by 1400.<sup>79</sup> A secondary argument is that is that the texts of the *Gesta*-group have been handed down in West-Lauwers Frisian collections.<sup>80</sup>

A West-Lauwers Frisian cast is also found in the series of stories which focus on the missionaries and bishops who brought the Utrecht Frisia into the Christian fold. The only attention given to the missionary activities of St. Liudger, the first bishop of Münster, concerns Frisia west of the Lauwers. In both the *Historia Frisiae* and in both *Gesta*-texts Liudger is assigned a prominent role as protector of the church at Dokkum. The text mentions that Liudger managed to convert the eastern part of Frisia, with the explanation that the Münster mission area used to belong to the ‘Utrecht diocese’. The author of the *Olde Fresche Cronike* felt it sufficient in his description of Liudger’s mission to state only that Liudger had journeyed ‘across the Lauwers’; Liudger’s founding of the bishopric of Münster is completely omitted.<sup>81</sup>

We also find this West-Lauwers perspective in the localizable Frisian names in the texts, as well as in the enumeration on the Seven Sealands. There are, however, only a few examples of local names in the texts. In the *Olde Fresche Cronike* and the *Klein Oudfries Kroniekje* Willibrord is said to have travelled from England to Frisia, landing there in Holwerd (Holwyrde, Holwerth), a coastal village lying north of Dokkum. The famous martyrdom of Boniface at Dokkum is found in each of the versions. The *Klein Oudfries Kroniekje* bases the legend on the finding of law (or the thirteen asegas) in Franeker. With regards to the mysterious names of Hachens and Wachens from the saga of Charles and Redbad, Paul Noomen argued that they refer to two farmsteads in the parish of Edens, southeast of Franeker. The *Gesta Fresonum* gives their locale as ‘toe Herlinghen’, still clearly a location in northerly Westergo.

The most noticeable textual demonstration of a West-Lauwers fingerprint is found in the four legends of the heroic deeds of the Frisians in the crusades. Poptatus, captor of Lisbon, is declared to be Wirdum-born<sup>82</sup> in the *Historia Frisiae*, the *Gesta*-texts, and in the *Olde Fresche Cronike*. The *Klein Oudfries Kroniekje* speaks only of a ‘liteka Popka van Fresland’.

In the legend of the Teutonic Order’s castle in Prussia, it is told that the Frisian hero Lambertus was from Katrijp, a hamlet in the moorlands south of Oldeboorn. In the extensive Damietta legend, composed of various narrative elements, the *Historia Frisiae* and the *Olde Fresche Chronike* mention how the Frisians from Dokkum built their construction on cogs so that the chain tower of the sultan could be captured. Coincidentally, we do know the same story from several traditions narrative sources written for Venice and also for Haarlem.<sup>83</sup> As for the standard-bearer Menaldus, who led the Frisians to victory at Aachen, the *Klein Oudfries Kroniekje* mentions that he was born in Westergo.

The only Easterlauwers hero in the texts – and therefore the exception that proves the rule –

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<sup>79</sup> Vries, *Verdringing van het Fries*, 1.

<sup>80</sup> Apart then from the *Historia Frisiae* which has been preserved in the manuscript of Hartmann Schedel.

<sup>81</sup> Epkema, *Oude Friesche Kronijken II*, 218.

<sup>82</sup> We are inclined to identify this place with the village of Wirdum, just below Leeuwarden, in the nowadays province of Fryslân. There is however also a Wirdum in the province of Groningen and one in the German Landschaft Ostfriesland. The chronicler Eggerik Beninga, who was born in the latter village, says that Poptatus came from the Eastfrisian Wirdum, with the apparent intention to extend the gallery of his own forefathers with a Frisian hero: Y. Poortinga, *De palmridder van Lissabon* (Leeuwarden: Fryske Akademy, 1965), 31.

<sup>83</sup> Jaap van Moolenbroek, ‘De ketting van Damietta, een Haarlems zaagschip en Willem I van Holland. Over de wording en standaardisering van een kruistochtmythe’, *Jaarboek voor Middeleeuwse Geschiedenis* 14 (2011), 113-50, 138-9.

is the un-named banner-waving Frisian who, together with a certain Henricus of Liège, led the capture of the chain tower. The same Frisian was already mentioned (again anonymously) in the *Historia Damiatina* of Oliver of Cologne. . In the various texts of the *Gesta*-group his provenance is indicated as ‘de Phiolgonia’ (*Historia Frisiae*), ‘Violgama’ (*Gesta Frisiorum*), ‘Wolvagae’ (*Gesta Fresonum*) and ‘Fyullinghalande’ (*Klein Oudfries Kroniekje*). This has to refer to the region of Fivelgo in the Ommelanden because in the description of the Seven Sealands that district is referred to as Phiolgonia. [the end of this sentence is unclear]

**Political context: the Burgundian threat in the years 1456 and 1468-1476**

‘Doe die heilige vader Bonifacius was doet,  
do quam Vrieslant weder in groete noet,  
want van Burgundien een hertoge groet,  
in Vrieslant toech hi mitter spoet’.

When the holy father Boniface died,  
Frisia was in great need,  
because a mighty duke from Burgundy  
Set forth to Frisia with speed.

In this passage from the *Olde Friesche Chronike*<sup>84</sup> the savage who tried to seduce the Frisians into heathenry after Boniface’s death, the man who is called Ludger of Saxony in other texts, is referred to instead as the duke of Burgundy. This substitution or name change cannot be a coincidence, for the entire world knew that the Burgundians had nothing to do with Frisia at the time of Christianization, and the later authors sought to strengthen the historical veracity of the original legend. Here, a reference is made to the threat posed to Frisia by the Burgundian duke in the fifteenth century. The question of which duke this could refer to, Philip the Good or Charles the Bold is quickly answered. Dating the *Olde Friesche Cronike* to 1474 points in the direction of Charles, who was then at the height of his power. After the subjugation of Guelders in 1473, Charles seemed to be making serious efforts to again take Frisia by force.

This oncoming military threat did not drop out of a clear blue sky.<sup>85</sup> The first clouds had packed in the middle of the fifties, during the reign of Philip the Good. Not only could he style himself count of Holland and Zealand since 1433, but lord of the Holland part of Frisia (Westfriesland) too. In that capacity he maintained a claim to the territories east of the Vlie. These territories, Phillip perceived as rebellious, and he held them not by brokering peace but by prolonging armistices instead. He did this with all the more conviction since he had been given to understand from knightly romances that Frisia had once been ruled by kings. If he wanted to become king at all – which was one of his major ambitions – then the legendary crown of Frisia seemed within reach. To this end, next to coming to an understanding with the head of the Holy Roman Empire, King of the Romans Frederick III, he had to force the Frisians to truly honour him as sovereign. Informal negotiations between Phillip and Frederick III in the years of 1447-1448 had no result because Frederick III did not want to relinquish his rights to the Frisian territories. The subjugation of Frisia came closer in 1456, when Philip had his bastard son David named bishop of Utrecht, paving the way for a further expansion of power to the north. In June that year he demanded to be accepted as sovereign lord of Oostergo and Westergo, prompting both districts to send a legation to Haarlem to discuss their terms. In the meantime he assembled an armed force, which – contrary to what the Frisians feared and believed – was not meant to conquer Frisia but to force the so-called the Northeastern part of the prince-bishopric of Utrecht to acknowledge the newly elected prince-bishop as secular lord. Nevertheless, this action posed so serious a threat to the autonomous Frisian districts, that they made a pact in August to protect the Frisian freedom (‘fry ende freesk’) against ‘alle landsheren’. It never came to a confrontation, for after the campaign against the Oversticht, Philip became diverted by other matters and was forced to withdraw his army. Negotiations with the Westerlauwers Frisian representatives continued but proved fruitless without a military big stick. And so the storm dissipated, yet without the skies entirely clearing.

With the coming to power of Charles the Bold in 1467, new threats appeared on the horizon. In 1468, the young duke had a spy reconnoitre all defensible *stinzen* (defensible motte-and-bailey

<sup>84</sup> Epkema, *Oude Friesche kronijken* II, 217.

<sup>85</sup> A.G. Jongkees, ‘Bourgondië en de Friese vrijheid’, *De Vrije Fries* 41 (1953), 63-78.



constructions of the nobility), cities and monasteries in Frisia and Groningen,<sup>86</sup> and around Easter 1469 he called on the districts of Oostergo and Westergo as well as the city of Groningen to send deputies to The Hague to discuss the terms of paying tribute to his person. As was said, Frisia west of the Lauwers complied with this request by sending four clergymen, including the abbot of Klaarkamp. They pointed out to the duke the Frisians' freedoms affirmed by Charlemagne and William, King of the Romans, but showed themselves open to debate by asking the duke about the nature of his demands. After the return of the Frisian delegates there was much palaver, as a result of which two envoys set sail once again to Holland to seek details of the levying of taxes. After these had returned, before November 25<sup>th</sup>, and had reported what position Duke Charles had taken, the representatives of Oostergo and Westergo decided in a meeting at Bolsward to leave the matters up to a committee to debate and postpone resumption of contact with the men of the duke to after Easter 1470.

In early April, 1470, a new invitation reached the leaders of the West Lauwers districts from Charles, about a resumed conference at Enkhuizen on May 2 with a Holland delegation under the leadership of Louis van Gruuthuse, stadtholder of Holland and Zeeland. From the account by chronicler Worp van Thabor it appears the Frisians did not reject this invitation at once. All prelates and the most respectable nobles, seventy in number, gathered on the last day of April in Stavoren to appoint delegates.<sup>87</sup> The ultimate nomination of the delegates occurred after each and every one of had sworn to the saints that no one would seek personal profit in the political decision-making. This time the abbot of Klaarkamp was absent from the discussion. The men present appear to have held long negotiations, which had at the beginning of July led to results insofar that Charles proved willing to guarantee the Frisians most of their freedoms. So, the Frisian delegates were inclined to accept Charles as their overlord, on the precondition however, that, fully in accordance with the *Privilege of Charlemagne*, they would elect a 'potestas' (Podestà)' who, in the name of the duke, would supervise the judges and collect fines and ducal taxes.

Negotiations broke down, however, because neither party could agree on the amount of tribute to be paid. Only the chieftain and alderman of Dokkum, Offe Riemersma, and a number of like-minded nobles from the north of Oostergo were willing to accept the Burgundian duke as sovereign lord on his terms. All of this led to an exceptionally large civic unrest in Frisia in the summer of 1470. At a communal diet of all the districts the assembly that every district would violently defend itself if Charles dared an invasion. Simultaneously Offe and his supporters, who had remained in Enkhuizen were branded traitors. In late August the district of Westergo sent a punitive expedition to Dokkum to destroy the conspirators' homes and confiscate their possessions. Duke Charles was understandably dismayed when he learned of what had happened. In response, he declared the Frisians open enemies and he prepared for war. This chest-beating, however, didn't much win supporters in the Holland cities. Because of public opposition, it took until November 5 for war to be declared by Charles, which wasn't followed up with any significant military action.

Like count William IV of Holland-Hainault over a hundred years before, Charles the Bold had antagonized the entirety of the Frisians of Westergo and Oostergo.<sup>88</sup> Frisian opposition to Charles mobilized to such an extent in many places internecine feuds were suspended and while Frisians renewed their pledges to defend their independence to the death. Now again, words like *patria* and battle cries such as 'free and Frisian' were everywhere to be heard. In short, the demands

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<sup>86</sup> N. Algra, *Een spionagerapport van omstreeks 1468* (Leeuwarden: Fryske Akademy, 1967).

<sup>87</sup> *Worp van Thabor, Kronijk IV*, 114-117.

<sup>88</sup> Mol, 'Fries-Hollandse oorlog van 1344/1345', 102-4.

and threats of the Burgundian duke had lit the fires of patriotism. And that fire would keep on burning in the years to come, with a particularly intense flare up in 1473.

In 1473 Charles undertook a campaign to subjugate the duchy of Guelders. That he was largely successful in this greatly concerned the Frisians, Groningers and East-Frisians. All Frisian regions on the coast of the North Sea, from Stavoren to Jever, were captivated by the emergent power of the Burgundians. Numerous gatherings were organized where the participants made alliances to defend one another as free Frisians against any ‘southern’ lords. The city of Groningen, for example, formed a compact with the districts of Hunzingo, Fivelgo, Langewold and Humsterland. A week later, Groningen and the Ommelanden entered into a twenty-year alliance with countess Theda of East Frisia to face the Burgundians. The Frisians from Oostergo, Westergo and Zevenwouden came together on August 10 in Leeuwarden to discuss a new public peace.<sup>89</sup> In this respect, they agreed to swear an oath to support each other ‘free and Frisian’ wherever push came to shove. This oath wasn’t to be sworn by prelates and nobles alone, but also by serfs, yeomen and tenants vis-à-vis their local parish priest, whose cooperation was also expected. Presumably the intent was to prevent a second ‘high treason’ like that committed by Offe Riemersma of Dokkum.. The echo of his deed is further evinced by the stipulation that no individual nobleman could circumvent the district and reconcile with the Burgundian duke.

The unrest quickly decreased when Charles moved his troops from Guelders away to the south in September to pursue other war efforts. The pressure was not completely dissipated because the duke expressly kept the conquest of the Frisian lands on the agenda. At an encampment near Neuss on November 29, 1474 he came to a concord with count Gerhard of Oldenburg to share the loot when the Frisians had been defeated in due time. Charles never mobilized forces for such an effort, however, because he fell in battle at Nancy in 1477.

## Conclusions

The Dutch historian Jan Romein was critical of the a-historical and ‘insignificant’ nature of late-mediaeval Frisian historiography and its exaltation of Frisian Freedom. Romein commented that ‘the Frisian Freedom succumbed to its own licentiousness’ and that ‘the struggle for a freedom which had survived itself, was meant to lack all inspiration’.<sup>90</sup> Though it may be true that the communal regime – which persisted above all in Frisia west of the Lauwers – was militarily weak in the mid-fifteenth century, and lacked a centralized organisational structure, its decline and fall were by no means imminent at that time. The districts had been independent for nearly two centuries and had proven their vitality. It cannot be precluded that they could have maintained their autonomy even after 1500, with a development in the direction of a federation along Swiss lines.<sup>91</sup> It is clear that the Frisians, despite all their feuds and mutual disputes, deeply cherished being free to govern themselves. This autonomy was a matter to defend with extreme prejudice.<sup>92</sup> When this

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<sup>89</sup> *Oudfriesche oorkonden* vol. II, P. Sipma, ed. (The Hague, Nijhoff, 1933), nrs. 73-5.

<sup>90</sup> Romein, *Geschiedenis Noord-Nederlandsche geschiedschrijving*, 139-43.

<sup>91</sup> That could have been the case if the expanding towns of Westerlauwers Friesland had succeeded in continuing the supremacy they had established in the period 1482-1486: O. Vries, ‘Staatsvorming in Zwitserland en Friesland in de late middeleeuwen. Een vergelijking’, in: J. Frieswijk, and others, eds., *Fryslân, staat en macht. Bijdragen aan het historisch congres te Leeuwarden van 3 tot 5 juni 1998* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1999) s. 26-42.

<sup>92</sup> Hoekstra, who valued the *Gesta*-stories much more positively than Romein, misses the point however when he concludes that we can read in them ‘... how the Frisians kept dreaming of their freedom, even when there was hardly any freedom at all’: *Vier kronieken*, 6. It was not a matter of dreaming. The Frisians west of the Lauwers by then were still free to govern themselves and they wished to keep it that way.

freedom was threatened by exogenous forces, there arose a great interest and need for legitimizing patriotic texts; texts that placed the sovereignty and defence of Frisian lands in a biblical perspective, that advocated unity and sacrifice and assured the audience of God's protective hand. The rousing chronicles from the *Gesta*-group provided for that need.

Our analysis of the structure of the diverse texts of this group confirms and intensifies the opinion that a predecessor of the extant, Latin-language *Historia Frisiae* (*Historia Frisiae*\*) must have been the base text. The Biblical parallels are most extensively worked out in that text. The *Historia Frisiae*\* is justly qualified as a scholarly product that must have been written by an academically trained author. The Frisian-language *Gesta Fresonum*, the Middle Dutch-language *Gesta Frisiorum* as well as the Dutch-language *Olde Freesche Cronike* and its recapitulation the *Klein Oudfries Kroniekje*, can be considered editions and popularisations of the *Historia Frisiae*. Although in these vernacular texts the idea of God's special protection of the Frisian is maintained, the comparison between the Frisian people and the Jewish people in the individual legends is diminished relative to the narrative of the *Historia Frisiae* or even omitted. This omission points to the intention of the authors/editors to reach a large lay audience which was not yet well-versed in Biblical matters. The many divergences between the named texts demonstrate that many more versions and copies were once in circulation than only those which are now known. This demonstrates further that we are dealing with a highly popular genre of medieval Frisian writing. The geographical clues in the texts and the focus on the Frisian part of the bishopric of Utrecht also indicate that the intended audience was the inhabitants of Frisia west of the Lauwers.

An analysis of the controversial section of the text shows that the base versions of these editions were written between 1464 and 1479, likely between 1468 and 1474. One of the places where editing and popularisation took place was the abbey of Klaarkamp. However, the base text of the *Historia Frisiae* does not seem to have been composed there. Only historical-philological research can bring to light who the author was and when he introduced his work to the world. For now, a secular scholar seems likely, since the Urtext is more militant than the later popular versions. All of the texts, however, were intended to reinforce of the patriotic awareness of the Frisians west of the Lauwers at a time (1456 and 1467-1477) when Frisian freedom was threatened by the Burgundian dukes.