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MIRROR HISTORIES: FRISIANS AND SAXONS FROM THE FIRST TO THE NINTH CENTURY AD

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For the first centuries of their documented existence, neither Frisians nor Saxons are particularly well defined. They appear in Roman writing as two among a host of barbarian groups active at the northern periphery of the empire, sometimes as enemies of the Romans, sometimes as allies or soldiers in the Roman army. Descriptions are short and circumstantial, and tend to conform to deeply ingrained ideas about the uncivilized inhabitants of the North, who were expected to be, by turn, strong, brave, stubborn, tempestuous, cruel and prone to excess. Few educated Romans who picked up Tacitus' *Historiae* would have travelled beyond the northern frontier, but they would have understood a story about the inhabitants of Cologne, who were able to overcome a formidable fighting force made up of Chauci and Frisians by plying these *Germani* with copious amounts of food and drink (*Historiae*, 4.79). Some centuries later, the Gallic bishop Sidonius Apollinaris was still upholding a venerable literary tradition when he treated one of his sea-bound friends to an unsolicited exposé on the religious customs of the Saxon pirates presently threatening the coasts of Gaul: among other unsavoury practices, these Saxons were said to sacrifice every tenth one of their human prisoners (*Epistulae*, 8.6.14).

In so far as Roman observers located them in space, Frisians and Saxons were typically linked to the coastal areas of the North Sea, with both groups being associated with seafaring and piracy. Tacitus' *Germania* (c. AD 98) offers a slightly more precise area of habitation: the Roman historian mentions two Frisian *nationes*, whom he specifies as the minor and the major Frisians and locates in the wetlands between the Rhine and the ocean (ch. 34). Significantly, Tacitus' extensive ethnography of the peoples of Germania failed to mention Saxons. Some fifty years after Tacitus, the Alexandrian cartographer Ptolemy did mention them, assigning the Saxons to the Jutland Peninsula above the Elbe, with the Frisians being once again located on the Dutch coast left of the river Ems. The two groups were separated, in Ptolemy's view, by the Chauci, who inhabited the coastal regions between the Ems and the Elbe (*Geographia*, 2.11.11). The absence of Saxons from Tacitus' *Germania* fits a more general pattern. From a Roman perspective, *Frisii* and *Saxones* belonged to different timeframes: the former are attested in Roman writing from the first to the third centuries AD (Seebold 2001), whereas the latter become a recurring presence only from the fourth century onwards (Flierman 2017). Ptolemy is in fact the only surviving Roman author to mention Frisians and

Saxons in the same work, and the very earliness of his reference to the Saxons has led some modern commentators to designate it a scribal error (Springer 2004; Kahrstedt 1934), though this palaeographical argument collapses under close scrutiny (Seebold 2012).

Looking at Frisians and Saxons through the lens of Roman writing, two questions present themselves. First, what sort of historical entities were behind the labels 'Frisian' and 'Saxon' in such writing? Can we speak about distinct Frisian and Saxon peoples in this period, and if not, at what point *can* we do so? Second, what can be said about the relationship between these two groups, considering that few Roman sources explicitly tie them together? Variations on these two questions remain relevant well into the Middle Ages. They constitute the backbone of this paper, which roughly covers the period AD 1–900.

Frisii and Saxones (AD 1–600)

It is difficult to make far-reaching claims about the self-perception of those labelled *Frisii* and *Saxones* by Roman observers. On the whole, the Frisian case looks slightly more promising. Extensive archaeological research in areas of alleged Frisian habitation, above all the terp region of modern Friesland and Groningen, has left little doubt that the fertile salt marshes along the Dutch coasts were widely inhabited, at least up to the third century AD (e.g. Knol and IJssennagger 2017). 'Frisia' in this period was a patchwork of not-quite-egalitarian communities of farmers, mostly self-sufficient but connected to each other by bonds of trade, social competition and ritual (Nieuwhof 2015). An explicit textual reference to Frisian political organization can be found in Tacitus' *Annales* (13.54), which describes the barbarian antics of two Frisian 'kings' who went to Rome to enter into negotiations with the emperor Nero (d. AD 64). Their names – Verritus and Malorix – would suggest both hailed from a Celtic-speaking community (Schrijver 2017). The case for a distinct Frisian self-awareness may well have its strongest prop in the epigraphical evidence, i.e., the half a dozen or so inscriptions, found in Rome as well as along the German and British *Limes*, that were commissioned by, or for, soldiers who were *natione Frisius* or *natione Frisiaeo* (Galestin 2007/2008). These inscriptions testify to the existence of individuals in the first and second centuries AD who not only claimed to be 'of Frisian origin', but also considered such an affiliation meaningful enough for it to be commemorated, be it in a Roman social context and alongside other identities (e.g., that of a citizen or soldier).

Of course, the big problem with any diachronic study of the Frisians is the question of continuity. The ethnonym *Frisii* disappears from the textual record by the end of the third century, to reappear only in the sixth (Bazelmans 2009). This disappearance has been linked to marked discontinuities in the archaeological record of the northern Netherlands for this period, hinting at a strong decline in habitation during the fourth century, followed by an influx of immigrants from northern Germany in the fifth (Nicolay 2005; Knol 2009; Nieuwhof 2011; 2013). Population decline was not equally extreme everywhere: Friesland is thought to have become virtually deserted, whereas Drenthe and Holland, and to a lesser extent Groningen, seem to have retained some degree of habitation (van Es 1990; Taayke 1996; Dijkstra and de Koning 2017). Nevertheless, it is assumed nowadays that the *Frisii* or *Fresones* that eventually turn up in the Early-medieval sources in relation to the northern Netherlands were the result of a new process of ethnogenesis, in which those labelled Frisians in the Roman period played only a minor role.

The ancient Saxons come with their own set of complications. Certainly, the coastal marshes of the trans-Elbe region were densely populated in the second century AD, when Ptolemy came to designate it Saxon land (Capelle 1998). The same goes for the coasts and Pleistocene hinterland of the Elbe-Weser triangle (Meier 2003), which Ptolemy had associated with the Chauci, but which are thought to have become Saxon territory in the century thereafter (Udolph 1999). This Saxon 'expansion' into the Elbe-Weser triangle has traditionally been inferred from changes in the material culture of the region. Between the third and the fifth centuries AD, its hinterland witnessed the rise of new large-scale cemetery fields with distinctive urn-types (Böhme 2003). The deposition of prestigious gold and silver ornaments, as grave goods (late fourth century) and subsequently also as part of hoards (fifth century), suggests the presence of well-connected elites eager to distinguish themselves (Nicolay 2014, 140–68). Part of their social standing appears to have derived from contact with the Roman world and service in the Roman army, as is attested by a substantial amount of Roman-type weapons, brooches and belts found in fourth-century graves (Böhme 1999). The question is what such burial rites and other material developments have to do with the ethnic background of the inhabitants, with their claiming a specific Saxon identity. Most archaeologists today would say very little (Ludowici 2019). The textual record is not much help either when it comes to locating 'the Saxons' in space. Apart from Ptolemy, few ancient authors explicitly associate the ethnonym *Saxones* with Germania. A rare fourth-century reference to Franks and Saxons being 'the most warlike of the peoples who live beyond the Rhine and on the shores of the western sea' (Julian, *Orations* 1:34D; Zosimos, 3.6.1–2) is as precise as it gets. It is only at the end of the sixth century that Saxons start to be attested near the Weser (Gregory, *Historiae*, 4.16).

There is, at any rate, very little written evidence for a specific Saxon self-awareness in the Roman Period. We have no inscriptions of individuals claiming a Saxon identity, no references to Saxon personal names, no descriptions of Saxon political organization. What we have, starting in the middle of the fourth century, is a series of historiographical and panegyric references to Saxon (naval) attacks on the Roman frontiers. Gaul is the initial target (Eutropius, *Breuiarium*, 9.21) but from c. 380 onwards we also hear about Saxon raids on Britain (Ammianus, *Res Gestae*, 26.4.5; Claudian, *De consulatu Stilichonis*, 2.250–1). Around the middle of the fifth century, Continental commentators start to allude to Saxon settlement on the Isles (*Chronicle of 452*, p. 80; Constantius, *Vita Germani*, ch. 18), culminating in Gildas' tearful lamentations on the invasion of the Saxons, 'hateful to God and man' (*De excidio*, ch. 23). While Roman authors typically refer to Saxons as a *gens* or *ethnos*, the chronological and geographical variety of Saxon activity in this period, coupled with the sheer ubiquity of the term *Saxones* in relation to any sort of barbarian activity around the Channel, would suggest that these were not the doings of a single ethnic group or political unit. Rather, as Matthias Springer has argued, Late-antique usage of the ethnonym *Saxones* was not unlike the ninth-century label *Vikings*: an umbrella term of sorts, used to denote the actions of highly situational *Raubscharen* or raiding parties (Springer 2004, 46). Bluntly put, any barbarian on the Channel in the fifth century could find himself labelled a Saxon, regardless of his actual ethnic background. But this is not to say that the Late-antique Saxons were a Roman literary fiction. Indeed, the continued attestation of the Saxon name in Early-medieval

Britain as well on the coasts of the Loire and Seine suggests that quite a few migrant communities claimed this name for their own: they considered themselves Saxons or eventually came to perceive themselves as such (Flierman 2017, 53–87). The point is rather that such 'Saxonness' did not necessarily originate in bonds of ancestry, be they real or perceived, but could also be the result of shared military activity (pirates, mercenaries) or conscious association (following a 'Saxon' leader or elite).

Considering the complex nature of the categories 'Frisian' and 'Saxon' in Antiquity, what can be said about the relationship between the two in this period? At first glance, this question seems to run into issues of chronology: Saxons become a frequent presence only in the fourth century, when Frisians have vanished from the textual record, and to a large extent, from the material record. On closer consideration, one might well ask whether the disappearance of the Frisian name, followed by the increasingly widespread use of the label *Saxones*, was not on some level related. It is evident that Late-antique conceptualizations of the world beyond the Rhine were patchy and preoccupied with groups that were of immediate interest. The 'Franks' and 'Saxons' threatening the Rhine frontier and coasts of Gaul in the fourth century were of great interest, the dwindling communities of the terp region less so. When we witness the Franks and later the Saxons replace the earlier Frisians and Chauci as typical maritime peoples and coast-dwellers in Late Roman panegyric and historiography (Hiddink 1999, 223–6), we are at least partly witnessing a recalibration of Roman priorities (Wood 1990). The historian Orosius (d. 420) lived in a world where 'Saxon' attacks posed a very real threat, so for him 'the coasts and inaccessible swamps of the Ocean' were inhabited by the Saxons (*Aduersum paganos*, 7.32.10). In reality, the ethnic landscape of the North Sea coasts was probably more diverse. We don't know how those few remaining inhabitants of Drenthe and Groningen in the fourth century identified themselves – they could have continued to think of themselves as Frisians – but they were occluded from the textual record by a Roman preoccupation with Franks and Saxons. Frisian involvement in the raids on the Channel or the migrations to Britain could likewise have been hidden from view by generic references to *Saxones* (Taayke 2000, 20–1), though, admittedly, archaeological and toponymical support for a Frisian participation in the *adventus Saxonum* has proved inconclusive so far (Hines 2001; Bremmer 1981).

We are in fact better served looking for Frisio-Saxon interaction in the northern Netherlands, where starting at the end of the fourth century we see a number of marked changes in the material record. Not only are there increasing signs of renewed habitation in previously abandoned regions, but such habitation is accompanied by the adoption of new pottery styles and ornaments, the introduction of new burial practices, and changes to the lay-out of settlements. These developments and their regional implications have been studied intensely over the past two decades, so I will content myself here with four short observations. First, that most would agree that these changes were at least partly due to the arrival of migrants. Second, that materially speaking, many of the new objects and practices attested in the northern Netherlands show a close connection to the Elbe-Weser region (Schleswig-Holstein, Jutland and Scandinavia being other parallels), indicating that at least some of the migrants hailed from that region. Third, that if we assume the Elbe-Weser region was indeed Saxon territory in Late Antiquity, then at least some of the new inhabitants of what are now the provinces of Friesland and Groningen were Saxons. Finally, that around AD 700 the inhabitants of Friesland and Groningen were nevertheless known as Frisians, not as Saxons (or

Angles, Jutes or Danes, for that matter). What are we to make of this? It is bound to remain undecided whether the Frisian name stayed in continued use from Antiquity onwards or whether it was retrieved from obscurity at some point by the new inhabitants of the Netherlands, possibly with the Franks acting as cultural brokers (Bazelmans 2001; 2009). Yet it can be said that the timing of the reappearance of the Frisian name in the written sources does not appear random. It coincides, at least approximately, with the rise of several regional or even supra-regional power-blocks in the Netherlands c. AD 600, who had not just each other to contend with, but would soon also enter into prolonged competition with their Frankish neighbours (Nicolay 2014, 355–9). There was thus a political elite in this period for whom affirming, or re-affirming, a distinct ethnic affiliation would have been useful and salient, as means to validate their newfound claims to power as well to set themselves apart from an external rival.

Neighbours and allies (AD 600–800)

The histories of the Frisians and Saxons enter a new phase around the end of the seventh century, when the lands across the Rhine become the target of Frankish military expansion. The Frankish conquest of Frisia was enacted for the most part under the Carolingian mayors of the palace Pippin II (d. 714) and Charles Martel (d. 741), though Carolingian control over the lands between the Sincfal and Weser was not fully established until the end of the eighth century (Reuter 1995) and would become contested once more with the ninth-century Viking invasions (IJssennagger 2013). Carolingian subjugation of the Saxon lands between the Rhine and Elbe was equally protracted: Franco-Saxon hostilities continued intermittently for most of the eighth century, until Charlemagne finalized the conquest of his north-eastern neighbours through three decades of violent campaigning (772–804; Rembold 2017, 39–84). In both cases, conquest was accompanied by missionary activity and set in motion a process of Christianization (Wood 2001; Büttner 1965).

The above sketch would make it appear as if by the start of the eighth century Frisia and Saxony had become well-defined territorial entities, inhabited by unified *gentes* who were duly incorporated into the Frankish and Christian world. This is indeed how their Carolingian conquerors liked to picture things, and with the Saxons, at least, the Frankish administrative insistence on Saxon unity made it easier for the region's leading families to see themselves as members of a single *gens Saxonum* (Becher 1996, 26–66; Shuler 2010; Flierman 2017, 119–62). But such unity was the end-result of a long-term process, which in the seventh and eighth centuries was still in full swing. Indeed, the very duration of Frankish military activity in Frisia and Saxony seems to belie the existence of a unified adversary in those regions. These were not centralized *regna* like Bavaria or the Lombard kingdom, which Charlemagne was able to incorporate in one or two years by means of a dynastic take-over.

There is considerable debate about what the political organization of pre-conquest Frisia would in fact have looked like. A significant increase c. AD 600 in the deposition of gold coins, jewellery and other prestigious items has been tied to the emergence of powerful regional elites, with central places developing in northern Westergo, around the Rhine estuary and possibly the central Netherlands (Knol 1993; Dijkstra 2011; Nicolay 2014). Frankish and Anglo-Saxon sources refer to two king-like figures active in the late seventh century, Aldgisl and Radbod, who had enough clout to challenge the

North-Frankish aristocracy for control of the economically crucial Rhine and Meuse deltas (Halbertsma 2000). The question is whether they did so as regional strongmen, whose core territory was situated either around Utrecht (Bazelmans et al. 2004), North-Holland (van Egmond 2005) or Westergo (Nicolay 2015), or whether their rulership would have had a more supra-regional character (Heidinga 1999).

A comparison with the Saxon situation is useful here, not because the situations were necessarily the same, but because it underlines that we are dealing with dynamic societies, whose political and social organization could be subject to rapid change. By the end of the seventh century, the Saxon sphere of influence had extended across the Weser towards the Ems and Rhine. Describing the earliest Anglo-Saxon missionary efforts in this western section of Saxony, Bede (d. 735) famously claimed that the 'Old Saxons' did not have a king, but were governed instead by 'a great many satraps' (*satrapas plurimos*), who each ruled in their own locality but could unite under a war-leader at times of peril (*HE* V, 10). A Bible scholar by heart, Bede adopted the term *satrapa* [*sic*] from the independent Philistine leaders of 1 Samuel, a clever association that could have signalled both the otherness of the Continental Saxons and their status as potential converts (Becher 1999; Wood 2003; 2015). Late eighth-century (Frankish) annals paint a somewhat different picture of Saxon organization, distinguishing three major Saxon groups in the area between the Rhine and Elbe (Westphalians, *Angrarii* and Eastphalians), with a fourth group (*Nordliudi*) being occasionally attested in the trans-Elbe region (ARF, s.a. 775, 779, 780, 784, 798, 799, 810). In all likelihood, these were recent conglomerates that had formed over the course of the eighth century in the face of mounting Franco-Saxon hostilities (Becher 1999, 24–5). The Westphalians, *Angrarii* and Eastphalians were still meaningful enough sub-groups around the turn of the century to appear in a Saxon capitulary issued in 797 (*Capitulare Saxonicum*, praefatio, ch. 9) as well as in the *Lex Saxonum* (chs. 47–8) codified in 802. Significantly, the *Lex Saxonum* mentions only one legal point on which the three groups differentiated: when it came to dowries, the Westphalians followed the East Frankish *Lex Ribvaria* (Faulkner 2016, 76–7); a marked contrast with the recurring territorial differences in *Lex Frisionum*. While the three sub-groups continue to be mentioned on occasion in the succeeding centuries, they play no role in the Saxon hagiographies and family histories that started to circulate around the middle of the ninth century. As said, the main ethnic identification of the post-conquest elite was with the *gens Saxonum* (Flierman 2017, 119–62).

The Frankish annals also mention several Saxon leaders during the Saxon Wars: Hessi for the Eastphalians, Bruno for the *Angrarii*, and Widukind as 'one among the leading men of the Westphalians' (ARF, s.a. 775; Reviser, s.a. 777). Between them, these figures exemplify the various strategies pursued by Saxon leaders in the face of the social disruption brought on by the Saxon Wars. Hessi, for instance, submitted to Charlemagne as early as 775. He subsequently converted to Christianity and was appointed a count in Saxony, before retiring to the monastery of Fulda to 'soldier for the Lord' (*Vita Liutbirgae*, ch. 1; Krüger 1950, 84–9). Widukind, by contrast, chose to resist the Franks and their religion, and this decision in itself may have turned him into a leader of supra-regional standing. Like Radbod, Widukind remains a slippery figure. He was certainly a convenient scapegoat for court-related annalists (Rembold 2018, 66–9), who managed to implicate 'that perfidious Widukind' in two of the Franks' most painful military debacles in Saxony without ever specifying the Westphalian's precise involvement (ARF, s.a. 778, 782; Flierman 2015). But even on a minimalist reading, there are aspects of Widukind's career that point to a man of wide influence. In 777 he stayed with the Danish king Sigifrid in Jutland (Reviser, s.a. 777). In 784, he is said to have moved the Frisian communities right of the Vlie to rebellion by urging them to 'relinquish the Christian faith and sacrifice to the idols according to their former error' (ARF, s.a. 784; Altfrid, *Vita Liudgeri*, ch. 21). While the reference is late and the image typical – several saintly careers were built on Frisians returning to their idols – it is not out of place in the early 780s, when the Saxon Wars were taking on an increasingly grim character and conversion was becoming less and less optional (Becher 2013). In such a context, paganism may well have become a rallying point for resistance against the Franks (Effros 1993; Wood 2013, 7), which Widukind was able to play into with the Frisians. The fact that the Widukinden owned property near Arnhem (DB, no. 181) could have facilitated his move into Frisia. In the end, the 784 rebellion proved of short duration, for a year later Widukind negotiated to be baptized at the royal palace of Attigny, with Charlemagne acting as his baptismal parent (Lorsch Annals, s.a. 785). This was the sort of staged public ritual that was often made to accompany the pacification of the Carolingians' most high-profile opponents, yet another hint at Widukind's elevated status in the 780s. Nevertheless, this status ultimately proved temporary. Widukind's descendants retained positions of prominence in Carolingian Saxony, but did so alongside several other aristocratic families (Althoff 1983; Schmid 1964).

Widukind's appeal to the Frisians in 784 fits within a wider pattern of shared military action, not just against the Franks but also alongside them. In the years following Widukind's baptism, Frisian and Saxon contingents joined two of Charlemagne's campaigns, against the Slavs in 789 and against the Avars in 791 (ARF, s.a. 789, 791). The latter campaign took them along the Danube into modern-day Hungary. The Avars avoided a major confrontation, however, forcing Charlemagne to try again next season. It was not to happen, for the Saxon and Frisian levies never showed up. Instead, news arrived that they had ambushed and killed the Frankish force that had come to collect them. This included the Frankish leader, Count Theoderic, who had earlier led the Frisians and Saxons against the Avars. The incident took place either at the mouth of the Elbe (St Amand Annals, s.a. 792) or, more likely, at Rüstringen, near the mouth of the Weser (Reviser, s.a. 793). Either way, it set off another decade of violent warfare in the Elbe-Weser and trans-Elbian regions. Quite possibly, it is to these years also that we should assign the undated reference to an uprising by the 'East Frisians' spearheaded by their enigmatic *principes* Unno and Eilrat (*Vita Liudgeri*, ch. 22). While the Frankish annals offer no further clues on this rebellion, continued Frisian resistance can be deduced from the events of 797, when Charlemagne is said to have crossed the 'swamps and impenetrable places' of the Elbe-Weser region to get to the ocean (ARF, s.a. 797; Rembold 2017, 42–4). There, according to the contemporary Lorsch Annals, the king was met by Saxons 'from all regions and corners' to receive hostages, 'and [he received] likewise from the Frisians' (Lorsch Annals, s.a. 797).

Looking at such close interaction between Frisians and Saxons in the late eighth century, especially near coasts and major waterways of the north-west of Germany, the question arises what can be said about the borders between these two groups. For the coastal area, the annalistic evidence can be placed alongside *Lex Frisionum*, now dated to c. 787–93, which distinguishes three Frisian regions by their legal customs: a western region between the Sincfal and Vlie, a middle region between the Vlie and

Lauwers, and an eastern region between the Lauwers and Weser (Dijkstra 2011, fig. 8.6). The *Lex* does not specify how far these regions extended southwards, but it should be noted that the densely inhabited salt marshes near the coasts would at this point still have been separated from the Pleistocene hinterlands by peat bogs (Vos and Knol 2015, 164–5, 172–4). It is tempting to see these bogs as a natural border between the Frisian coasts and the Saxon territories inland, at least for the Ems-Weser region. Incidentally, archaeological and linguistic evidence suggests that in c. 800 Frisian habitation did not stop at the Weser, but extended further eastwards towards the Elbe mouth (Kleemann 2002, 350–1; Versloot and Adamczyk 2017). A Frisian presence along the coasts of Schleswig-Holstein and Jutland is similarly attested (Panten 2001). This fits with the Frankish annals which, as we saw above, referred to Frisians sailing up the Elbe against the Slavs (ARF, s.a. 789) and submitting themselves to Charlemagne at the ocean between the Elbe and Weser (Lorsch Annals, s.a. 797). As for the western borders between Frisia and Saxony, the ninth-century *vitae* of the Frisian missionary Liudger (d. 809) suggest the IJssel (*Vita Liudgeri*, ch. 13) and the Ems (*Vita Liudgeri secunda*, ch. 27) functioned as natural boundaries. Paradoxically, these and related hagiographical texts are also among our best evidence for the flexible nature of such borders (Wood 2000). Missionaries like Liudger and Willehad (d. 789) did not limit their evangelizing efforts to either Frisians or Saxons, and much the same could be said for the religious institutions they founded or helped establish. We will take a closer look at some of these institutions in the next section.

Gens commixta (AD 800–900)

While ‘Carolingian Saxony’ has a self-evident ring to it, ‘Carolingian Frisia’ is a more contestable appellation. By the second half of the ninth century, Saxony had taken on many of the organizational features of the Frankish heartland: a comital system relying on local Saxon families (Krüger 1950), eight episcopal seats at least partly held by Saxon bishops (Honselmanns 1984), two heavily patronized royal monasteries alongside a whole string of aristocratic monastic foundations (Ehlers 2007), and a religious landscape rapidly filling up with the imported remains of Roman and Gallic saints (Röckelein 2002). Frisia, too, had its counts and *duces*, but such offices were typically held by Frankish and Saxon outsiders, or by Viking princes with their own autonomous agendas (IJssennagger 2013; Henstra 2012). As for Frisia’s ecclesiastical landscape, there were plenty of missionary churches as well as a fair number of aristocratic donors, but such churches were administered by outside bishoprics and monasteries like Utrecht, Echternach, Werden, Münster, Bremen and Corvey (de Langen and Mol 2017, 7–12).

The contrast is no doubt exacerbated by unequal spread of the evidence. There survives a substantial Saxon textual corpus from the ninth century, made up of charters, letters, vernacular and Latin poetry, and above all hagiographies (Löwe 1986). Such a corpus is missing for ninth-century Frisia. Interestingly, Saxon texts from this period have plenty to say about Frisians. Most importantly, they signal that the divide between Saxony and Frisia was frequently bridged by ties of land-ownership, trade, marriage, ecclesiastical organization and sworn loyalty. Even the Carolingian rulers found the divide problematic on occasion. After the Treaty of Verdun (843), which effectively divided the Carolingian realm into Western, Middle and Eastern Kingdoms, the Emperor Lothar I (d. 855) found himself ruling in Frisia but not in Saxony; still, he could count several Saxon families among his aristocratic supporters. Writing a letter of introduction for one of these supporters in 850, he coined the unique phrase *gens Saxonum et Fresonum commixta* ('a mixed people of Frisans and Saxons') to denote the northernmost inhabitants of his realm (*Translatio Alexandri*, ch. 4). This might have been a shrewd circumlocution on Lothar's part, which allowed him to claim Saxon allegiance without defying Verdun, but it can just as easily be taken for a simple statement of fact: there was a part of Lothar's *regnum*, around the modern border between Drenthe and Westphalia, where Saxons and Frisians, and indeed Franks, were living in close proximity to each other (Kleemann 2002, 351; Wood 2000, 160–2).

It is worthwhile, in this regard, to take a brief look at the Saxon supporter receiving the emperor's letter of recommendation: this was Count Waltbert, who was in fact a grandson of Widukind. Waltbert is first mentioned in a diploma issued in 834 for the church of St Martin in Utrecht (DB, no. 181). We read how Waltbert had ordered his local agents to donate family possessions in Oosterbeek and the Praal (near Arnhem) to St Martin, hoping thereby to obtain salvation for his recently deceased father Wikbert. The diploma, which was drawn up in Oosterbeek, lists both Frankish and Saxon witnesses, as well as an agent named Knut, suggesting a social network that extended into various ethnic groups. In 850, Waltbert's piety led him to Rome, where he acquired the relics of the Roman saint Alexander for a church he had recently founded on his lands in Wildeshausen, to the south-west of Bremen (Röckelein 2002, 241–59). Upon his return, Waltbert approached the Frankish monastery of Fulda to produce a written account of the relics' transfer and the miraculous events that had surrounded it. This *Translatio s. Alexandri* offers a striking overview of the range of people who came to forge a spiritual connection with Wildeshausen's new saint: a crippled boy from the Elbe-Weser region (ch. 7), a deaf-blind man from Deventer (ch. 8), and a Frisian woman named Femburg, who was said to live near Wildeshausen as an 'exile' (ch. 13). On the one hand, Femburg's presence in a Westphalian community seems to confirm the permeability of the Frisio-Saxon border (Wood 2003, 280). On the other hand, the details of her case also underline the limits of this permeability: as a 'stranger' (*peregrina*) without a male guardian, she apparently was at risk of being 'sold'; until the saint's timely intervention, that is.

Another cluster of relevant texts is centred around the extended family of the Frisian missionary Liudger (Schmid 1978; Angenendt 2005). The first *Vita Liudgeri*, written c. 839–49 by the saint's nephew Altfrid, traces the family's history back to Liudger's paternal grandfather Wrssing, a Frisian magnate at the time of Radbod. According to Altfrid, the family held possessions around Loenen and Muiderberg, both in Frisia at the time, but also across the border in Westphalia (*Vita Liudgeri* I, chs. 4, 21, 27, 32; Wood 2000, 159–60). In the early 790s, Liudger came to use these Saxon lands to found monastic communities at Werden and Münster. When he was appointed bishop of Münster soon thereafter, his diocese covered not just Saxon territory but also five Frisian coastal *pagi* between the Ems and Lauwers (*Vita Liudgeri* I, chs. 22, 24; Prinz 1948). It has been pointed out that Altfrid, who was bishop of Münster and *rector* of Werden at the time, was far from disinterested when he styled his saintly uncle a 'bishop of Saxons *and* Frisians' (*Vita Liudgeri* II, ch. 20) with family roots among both peoples (Palmer 2011, 148–9; Rembold 2016, 369). With the Carolingian civil war of AD 840–3 and the subsequent threefold division of the empire, Münster would suddenly have found its diocese split between two Carolingian *regna*: Münster itself belonged to the Eastern

Kingdom of Louis the German, but its Frisian *pagi* were situated in Lothar's Middle Kingdom. Werden faced a similar predicament: it was part of Saxony but held possessions in Frisia, which by the 840s had become quite substantial through a rich stream of aristocratic donations (Bleiber 1965, 142–3, 156–8). In such a context, it was in Altfrid's interests to show that his communities' claims to power and property in Frisia could be traced back deep into the past. There are, to be sure, no explicit signs that Lothar ever encroached on Werden's Frisian possessions. In fact, in November 855 the community received its most lavish donation up to that point, when the Frisian aristocrat Folcer took up the habit and endowed Werden with lands in the Betuwe, Hameland, Veluwe, Kennemerland and Westergo (*Die Urbare*, pp. 9–15). The timing of this acquisition is nevertheless noteworthy – it was arranged two months after Lothar's death. Being part of the Carolingian empire brought Frisia and Saxony closer together, but also put up new political boundaries.

Conclusion

The subject set for this paper was Frisians and Saxons. I have sought to explore this subject by pursuing two closely-related issues. One concerned the long-term development of the Frisians and Saxons as, or into, distinct peoples. The assumption was that, seeing as the Frisian and Saxon trajectories show many similarities as well as some conspicuous differences, it might add to our understanding of each of the two by considering them alongside each other.

With regard to Late Antiquity, it has been postulated that the major issues associated with the Frisians and Saxons in this period – discontinuity for the former, flexible use of the ethnonym *Saxones* for the latter – were on several levels related. On a textual level, Roman observers started to see Franks and Saxons where they had previously seen Frisians and Chauci; a radical reconceptualization of the ethnic landscape beyond the Rhine that was mostly an extrapolation from experiences in Gaul or near the Rhine frontier and could thus well have served to obscure some of the remaining Frisians. On a material level, the fifth century saw North German groups migrating to Britain, the western coasts of Gaul and the northern Netherlands. Contemporary witnesses typically referred to these migrants as *Saxones*, and this name continued to be used by communities in Britain and Gaul. In the northern Netherlands, by contrast, the Frisian ethnonym ultimately prevailed.

With regard to the Early-medieval period, a long-standing issue for both groups is their political organization, which is inevitably tied up also with the question whether there existed coherent Frisian and Saxon peoples at this time. Focusing on the slightly better-documented Saxon case, I have tried to emphasize the changing and flexible nature of such political organization. A good example is the rise of the Westphalian leader Widukind, whose authority among the Saxons in the late 770s and early 780s seems to have derived not from any fixed 'ducal' dignity, but from his careful manoeuvring during a time of great social upheaval. The Franks played the role of facilitators in this picture, first as an external threat, then as conquerors forcibly imposing the ideological and administrative ideal of a single *gens Saxonum*. An important point of discussion is to what extent the Saxon model can be mapped on to the Frisians, who may have been more politically centralized c. AD 700, with several Frisian leaders being considered 'kings' by contemporary observers.

With the development of more coherent Frisian and Saxons *gentes* in the eighth and ninth centuries, the second angle of this paper moved to the forefront: what could be said about the interaction between these two peoples? My approach here was inevitably selective. More might have been said on issues like trade relations (Steuer 2003), pre-Christian beliefs (Glatthaar 2004) and intermarriage (Wenskus 1976). As it stands, this paper has focused first on the close military cooperation between Saxons and Frisians during the 780s and 790s. Such cooperation was built on shared resistance against the Franks and their Church, but facilitated by geographical proximity, easily navigable waterways and cross-border landholding. Close interaction continued into the post-conquest period, as became evident from looking at two well-documented families active on the border between Frisia and Westphalia. These families testify to the various economic, social, religious and political ties between Frisians and Saxons in the ninth century, but also show that these ties did not always easily align. The dynastic divisions of the Carolingians could cut right through the ecclesiastical networks connecting Frisia and Saxony, as well as through the landed possessions sustaining these networks.

Discussion

VERSLOOT I have a linguistic point. There was a linguistic continuum between Saxonia and Frisia at least up to about AD 800. The isoglosses that can be reconstructed – denoting the geographical boundaries of linguistic developments – run through and across Saxonia rather than around it. Before 800, there was very little difference between what was spoken in Frisia and what was spoken in Saxony. Nils Århammar's study of 1990 on 'Friesisch und Sachsisch' is useful here; he argues – rightly in my opinion – that the linguistic boundary between Frisia and Saxony arose mainly as a result of political circumstances brought about by Frankish expansion. Old Saxon came under strong Frankish influence, whereas Frisian remained an archaic and different language.

FLIERMAN That's an important point. It fits the historical evidence of close Frisio-Saxon cooperation in the eighth century and would explain also how someone like Widukind was able to gather support across the Ems or the IJssel. He would have been able to communicate relatively easily with the inhabitants of those regions.

VERSLOOT Yes, there was no sharp linguistic boundary separating those regions at that time; probably only gradual differences in accent. An important piece of evidence, in this regard, is the Straubing fragment of the Old Saxon *Heliand*, which shows such affinity to Old Frisian that it has (incorrectly) been interpreted as Proto-Old Frisian (Klein 1990). Even after 800, there were still many morphological details in which Old Frisian remained closer to Old Saxon than to Old English (its 'default' relative).

IJSSENNAGGER-VAN DER PLUIJM Thinking about the border region and imports, as comes up in a number of our papers, I wonder about imports across the border. Arjen, you mentioned the continuum in linguistic traits, and I would be quite interested in discussing whether the material culture should also be thought of in terms of a continuum rather than importation. As a more general discussion, how do we tell when something forms part of a continuum and when something is imported from a neighbouring area? Perhaps that would help in thinking about some of these issues. It is hard to distinguish, and often is about how the question or perception is framed. These issues about 'Frisian' *versus* 'Saxon' are about how these things are framed in the written sources, but again it may have been different on the ground and in the material culture. I would be really interested in the analogy with linguistics here and a wider discussion about how we can look at this.

FLIERMAN An important issue at stake here is the question of interdisciplinarity: how can we combine and integrate the distinct stories offered by historical, archaeological and linguistic research? What struck me, especially for the Roman Period, is how little overlap there appears to be between material and textual sources. I don't mean that they are contradictory, but that they tend to be concerned with different aspects of life and society. The scope of material culture ranges from habitation patterns and economic circumstances to social and family relations (to name but a few things). Historical references to Frisians and Saxons, by contrast, are nearly always of a military nature: we hear about Frisians or even *the* Frisians rebelling against Roman rule or fighting in Roman armies. How do the Frisians depicted by Tacitus or identified in the epigraphical material measure up to the rather egalitarian first-century coastal settlements excavated by archaeologists? Was ethnicity – 'being a Frisian' – even a relevant form of identification for those labelled 'Frisians' by Roman authors?

IJSSENNAGGER-VAN DER PLUIJM A very interesting observation you made is that Frisians do occur in Saxon sources, if I am not mistaken.

FLIERMAN Yes, in ninth-century Saxon hagiographies, which rank among our earliest surviving Saxon texts, Frisians appear with some frequency and in a variety of contexts: as a neighbouring people, as donors to Saxon monastic houses, and even as members of Saxon communities. Such references are often quite casual; the presence of Frisians in Saxon society was not seen as something completely out of the ordinary.

IJSSENNAGGER-VAN DER PLUIJM You also made the observation that Chauci were eventually replaced by Franks and Saxons in the Roman tradition?

FLIERMAN Indeed, though I would stress that this change in Roman perceptions did not necessarily reflect the actual ethnic landscape at the time, which must have been far more complex. What the Roman sources were documenting was borderland activity: barbarian groups attacking the Roman frontiers or migrating into Roman territory. They projected what they saw happening around their frontiers into the hinterlands: the fourth and fifth centuries witnessed Saxon raids on the Roman frontiers, hence the trans-Rhine area and coastal areas of Germania were generally characterized as Saxon land. This was almost certainly a generalization; we know that small Frisian groups continued to inhabit Drenthe and Groningen.

IJSSENNAGGER-VAN DER PLUIJM It did make me wonder if we need to think more about how long the Roman framework could have remained influential. It has at least made me aware that it played a bigger role than I had realized. So thanks for that.

WOOD I agree there was ethnic fluidity around the Channel region in Late Antiquity. We are dealing with Roman outside observers who determine who is to be identified as Franks and Saxons. Wenskus (1961) is rather good on this. The point I wanted to raise pertains to boundaries. I agree that the boundary between

Frisians and Saxons in the Early Middle Ages was fluid; I found the same looking at the region from a missionary perspective. What struck me then, though, is that you can't really define a boundary in this region until we have diocesan boundaries. The history of post-conquest Saxony quickly turns into a history of bishoprics.

FLIERMAN That's an important point. Under the Carolingians, the regions between the Rhine and Elbe changed radically, turning into a religious landscape dominated by bishoprics, monasteries and the religious foundations of aristocratic families. I also have the feeling, however, that the evidence for seeing ninth-century Saxony as a religious landscape may be somewhat biased. The textual record for this time is dominated by charters and hagiography, both of which emphasize monastic and episcopal agency. The activities of the Saxon counts, for instance, receive comparatively little attention.

WOOD The hagiographical evidence does not simply support a solely episcopal view. The case of Liudger is interesting, in that it shows episcopal and royal boundaries that cut directly across the family's interests.

FLIERMAN I agree, and this was a big issue for the family. In a way, what *Vita Liudgeri* shows us is that boundaries in ninth-century Saxony could be conceptualized variously: we see different parties – Carolingian rulers, bishops, aristocratic families – setting their own boundaries. I would read the text as an attempt by the family and the community of Werden to show that its landed claims in the various Carolingian kingdoms go way back into the past. Their eagerness to defend this claim could further suggest that there were parties out there – Lothar I, for one – who were disputing it.

WOOD *Vita Lebuini antiqua* is also important when it comes to Frisio-Saxon boundaries, and deeply problematic too.

FLIERMAN Yes, we find Saxons showing up as far west as Deventer in this text. In fact, the *Translatio Sancti Alexandri* is all about setting boundaries as well: right from the start, the Saxons are presented as a distinct *gens*, hesitant to intermarry with other peoples. Their territory is sharply demarcated by a list of neighbouring peoples: the Frisians in the west, the Franks in the south, the Slavs in the east and the Northmen in the north. This recurring insistence on boundaries in the hagiographical sources hints at a society in which boundaries were important, contested and in need of constant confirmation.

WOOD And it probably indicates that these boundaries are something new: a landscape definition of community being imposed as opposed to previous tribal or kindred communities.

FLIERMAN Yes, though I would stress that the Carolingians were not the sole agents behind this development; Saxon aristocratic families were actively involved as well.

NIEUWHOF You mentioned a 'Frankish gaze' on the North and the map of *gentes* they created, and how that contrasts with the Late-antique 'Roman gaze'. But there is actually a very interesting parallel with the earlier Roman Period, when the Romans did quite the same. They also created a 'map of *gentes*' in the north, applying ethnic labels to all the different groups they encountered there. I think that is probably something that colonial powers habitually do.

FLIERMAN That's a good point. My impression of the Roman 'ethnic gaze' of the first and second centuries AD is that it was more expansionist: emperors going on naval expeditions beyond the frontier, Ptolemy trying to map the known world. In the Later Roman Period, this outward gaze retreats inwards: what happens *at* the frontier becomes crucially important. The Franks subsequently return to a more expansionist view of external *gentes*, especially under the Carolingians.

NIEUWHOF The use of ethnic labels does not confirm that people thought in similar terms about themselves. These labels may not have been that important to them.

FLIERMAN I agree wholeheartedly. There is no guarantee that those labelled Saxons or Frisians by Roman observers thought of themselves in those terms. For the Saxons, the problem is that before the ninth century, we have no Saxon texts: nothing. With the Frisian name, at least, we have a number of inscriptions from the first and second centuries AD: soldiers in Britain, Gaul and Italy identifying themselves as *natione Frisius*. Such identification occurred in a specific military context, of course, but it does suggest there were people out there who considered the label Frisian a meaningful form of self-identification.

NIEUWHOF Nico Roymans has written about ethnic identity with regard to the Batavians (2004). He thinks that these ethnic labels play a role especially in contacts with the Romans, and that the Batavians and Germans and other groups came to define themselves as such in that context.

FLIERMAN That mechanism applies to the ninth-century Saxons as well. When the Saxons start to write their own histories from the ninth century onwards, they use Frankish and sometimes even Roman sources to do so. On their own terms of course.

MAJCHCZACK I would like to comment on the question of whether the people saw themselves as different ethnic groups. I think when we look at the Lower Saxon areas, there are huge similarities amongst marsh and geest settlements and in the material culture. But it is primarily the coastal landscape that determines how people live and how their settlements are organized. Possibly the label Frisian could be adopted by new settlers in marsh areas actually because it didn't matter that much. I think the culture was surely mixed, and defined by the coastal landscape.

FLIERMAN It is interesting to note that migrants from those same regions also ended up in England and northern France in the fifth century. In this case, however, some did come to think of themselves – or continued to think of themselves – as a distinct ethnic community, e.g. the Saxons of Bayeux mentioned by Gregory of Tours.

MAJCHCZACK I suggest that especially when people live in a diaspora amongst foreigners or in a foreign context, they think of themselves as belonging to a different group. And they might demonstrate their origins by holding on to certain cultural traditions. A good example is the mixed-rite cemeteries at the emporia on the North [Sea] and Baltic Sea coasts, for example at Ribe and Groß Strömkendorf/*Reric*.

FLIERMAN I find that very compelling. It could also help explain why and how the name 'Frisian' eventually became important again in the seventh century. Jos Bazelmans has argued that the name was imposed on the inhabitants of the northern Netherlands by the Franks, but this seems to me only half an explanation. Why did people subsequently accept this identification? What made the label stick? One possible answer, turning back to what you just said, would be increased pressure by, and competition with, outside groups like the Franks and Saxons, which pushed elites of the region to emphasize their distinctiveness: i.e. we are a distinct group called the Frisians.

IJSSENNAGGER-VAN DER PLUIJM The question is also when the label became important again for the Frisians to use, as it does not happen at that very moment, at least we don't actually know that it did. It seems later, so that again we have multiple, different, layers in time.

FLIERMAN Yes: coming up with an exact chronology for the disappearance and reappearance of the Frisian name is tricky. For example: there is a late sixth-century reference to Frisians in the poetry of Venantius Fortunatus, who praises a Merovingian ruler for keeping even 'the furthest Frisians' subdued. Is the use of the ethnonym a literary relic from the Roman Period, as Bazelmans would argue? Or does it mean that, for the Merovingian rulers, the Frisian name was already becoming important again? I lean towards the latter.

IJSSENNAGGER-VAN DER PLUIJM I absolutely agree, but that doesn't mean the Frisians themselves used that term, that is a different angle.

NIJDAM I detect a great deal of influence from the powerful 'ethnogenesis' paradigm. That certainly brings some insights, but we also lose things when we see everything as fluid, and focus so strongly on the written sources and on elite perspectives. So my question is: how do you think these people viewed themselves at lower levels? What infrastructures would have existed that helped them to define ethnicity? I would immediately think of *thing* assemblies and legal boundaries.

FLIERMAN Yes, I was wondering about this myself. How often would, say, a sixth-century woman in Frisia have encountered the law? How and when would it have regulated her life?

NIJDAM I think they would have had to go a *thing* assembly regularly. In the High Middle Ages, this was three times a year.

VERSLOOT We could use the Icelandic situation as a close analogy. Of course it is later and from a different region, but it gives some sort if impression of how these assemblies worked. It was an important event. The annual calendar revolved around it. It was not just a political platform, but involved trade and other social dealings as well.

FLIERMAN That mechanism is feasible. I can easily imagine an annual assembly acting as a vehicle for the creation for a shared sense of identity and social cohesion. The question for me is mainly one of methodology: can we use later material as evidence for earlier practices, especially when the society in question is known fundamentally to have changed in the meantime? Take for instance the tenth-century *Vita Lebuini antiqua*, which offers an elaborate description of a pre-conquest annual Saxon assembly. Combined with earlier Frankish and Anglo-Saxon material, I would be willing to argue from this that assemblies were part of pre-conquest pagan Saxon society. But I am less certain about their form and scale. The suggestion of *Vita Lebuini* that this was an assembly that involved all the Saxons makes sense in a tenth-century context with an Ottonian king ruling over a united Saxony. But we know from earlier sources that pre-conquest Saxony was far less centralized, consisting of various more or less independent Saxon groups.

NIJDAM But I think the accent has been too much on fluidity. What does the anthropological literature say about self-perception?

HINES One of the problems, I would argue, is that anthropological literature is no less influenced by political currents than any other academic subject or aspect of contemporary life; therefore answers are found that tend to conform with what the intellectual world prefers to think at any time. You cannot just go to ethnographic literature and a stock of perfectly observed answers; what is clear is that there is no one answer. I can give an example from the eastern Polish border area where villages are clearly categorized and recognized as 'Polish', 'Belorussian' or 'Ukrainian', on the basis of various cultural markers: for instance, the denomination of the church (Roman Catholic or Orthodox), but also very practical variables such as the orientation of buildings: gable-on or side-on to the street. You can identify what the expectations in terms of visible marking are straightaway; but you can also appreciate how much of a threat non-conformity, or an idiosyncratic choice to be different, could be to the community's sense of itself: its coherence and its identity. People would be likely to feel very threatened even if they might struggle to articulate why they were so upset by such divergency from the norm.

NIJDAM Hence the importance of us *versus* them. This fits with research into human universals, which has been off the agenda after the 1930s but is now returning because of insights within the cognitive sciences: historians are now increasingly amenable to the idea that human beings do something *universally* in a certain way, and then culture comes in. Think of revenge, violence, etc. Such human behaviour is informed by several layers. Returning to John's point about conformity and identity, Patrick Wormald (2003) pointed out the importance of injury tariffs in the barbarian law codes. Every code offered different tariffs, suggesting it was an ethnic marker to have your own list of tariffs.

FLIERMAN I completely agree that ethnic identity was very meaningful in Early-medieval societies. But I would also argue that its meaning and salience derived from context. When paying injury tariffs, yes; during assembly politics, certainly; in military contexts, absolutely. But I don't think we should approach ethnic identity as an essential quality or determinant: someone was a Saxon or Frisian, *ergo* they behaved in such and such fashion. This is the wrong way around. The question, in my opinion, should not be *was* ethnic identity important, but *when* was it important.

NIJDAM So you suggest that from day to day it is unmarked, until you come into the relevant context?

FLIERMAN There are spaces where identity is highly marked and contexts where it is less relevant. I would agree also that there are very refined and often unconscious mechanisms at work when it comes to (ethnic) identification: think of our uncanny ability to identify compatriots on a holiday. But that too constitutes a specific context.

KNOL I was thinking about the Carolingian empire and its impact on the northern Netherlands. It is striking that the cemeteries of the eighth century show a high number of weapon graves and horse-burials, which are almost absent in the sixth and seventh centuries. Moreover, the eighth-century weapon graves are both inhumation and cremation burials. I believe that cremation must mark opposition to the Frankish world, but inhumation could be both Frankish and anti-Frankish.

My second remark is about the border between the Saxon and the Frisian worlds. On one level, it was very simple: Frisians have the sea and the outer ring of tidal flats and salt marshes; then come the uninhabitable peat bogs; then the Saxons on the Pleistocene hinterland. The problem is that, here and there, the Pleistocene hinterland was very close to the sea. More importantly, there were myriad waterways through the peat bogs. Apart from the big rivers, there were many smaller waterways that came into the sea, and these were useful for making connections with the hinterland. The people living in the coastal area needed those connections to get wood, an essential hinterland resource, and also stone. This belies the notion of clear boundaries.

FLIERMAN On your first point, about the eighth-century weapon burials, I agree that these must represent a period of social upheaval. I am wondering, though, who was responsible for these graves? I can imagine two types of groups. One would consist of the people who, as you mentioned, resisted Frankish influence. This fits with the eighth-century Carolingian legislation against deviant burial rites. A second group who could potentially benefit from lavish burial rites would be members of a new post-conquest Frisian elite who were falling in line with the Franks, but who needed to establish and display their authority on the ground.

KNOL We may raise that question but at the time people must have been well aware of who was whom; both parties could use the same form of burial expression. That said, I wouldn't expect a 'new' leader – or an old leader who got in line with Charlemagne's programme – to have practised cremation. A common use of weapon burial is plausible, however.

FLIERMAN I think a late eighth-century Saxon had to make a choice. The Carolingian laws advocated burial in an ecclesiastical context, and we know of some eighth-century Saxon leaders (e.g. Hessi) who were buried in a monastery. But weapon burial would also have been possible; there was no hard regulation against it.

KNOL There was no ecclesiastical legislation against grave goods; the Church doesn't like it but it is permitted; cremation, however, is strictly forbidden.

FLIERMAN Agreed, though Charlemagne's Saxon Capitulary (c. 782–95) is among the first known pieces of Christian legislation explicitly to ban cremation. I think the choice of burial form was more about social strategy than about legal pressure.

KNOL There are examples of Christian grave goods, but they quickly became less and less common. Weaponry, however, expresses power. Archaeology associates weapon burials with founder graves particularly; this seems to have a good parallel in the House of Orange in Delft. The founder – William of Orange – has an exceptional monument; but not his successors. Further markers were not needed.

IJSSENNAGGER-VAN DER PLUIJM To go back to what we were talking about earlier around assemblies, *thing* and law as vehicles for identity, is that territorial or personal law, and does it matter? These would presumably be different as vehicles for identity?

WOOD They are the same. Personal law is determined by where you were born, not who you were born to. So personal law is always geographical, but you carry it with you from your birthplace.

IJSSENNAGGER-VAN DER PLUIJM Yes it is geographical, but then is it the law for Frisia or for Frisians?

WOOD It wouldn't normally make a difference, because most of the people who are subject to these laws aren't moving very far.

IJSSENNAGGER-VAN DER PLUIJM With so much mobility, I think for the Frisians it would actually make a difference.

WOOD Mobility is within the Frisian area. The reason why a person is bound by the law of his birthplace rather than that of his parents is that he knows what he's carrying with him.

IJSSENNAGGER-VAN DER PLUIJM How would this then work between Frisia and Saxony?

FLIERMAN There is a beautiful example from the Werden cartulary that ties in with the question of personal *versus* territorial law and also shows the sensitivity of contemporaries to acting 'within the law'. In 855 a Frisian aristocrat named Folcher donated a substantial amount of property to the monastery. He is said to have held and donated this land according to three laws: the *Lex Ribuaria*, the *Lex Salica* and the *Ewa Frisonum* (the reference to this last law may be a later interpolation). So what does this mean? Did different pieces of the land he donated fall under different laws? Or were multiple legal procedures involved in donating one and the same piece of land?

NIJDAM I didn't know this. I wonder what the procedures were.

FLIERMAN As you said, there is nothing on landholding in Frisian law.

NIJDAM Indeed, it's absent. We would have to take a look at the other *Leges Barbarorum*.

MOL Returning to the question of landscape and the differences between Frisia and Saxony: I concur with Egge's view of a Frisian landscape that's a thin strip between the sea and the peat, with many streams running through. It's also a very densely populated area. The Saxon landscape is very different, in this regard: far more extensive, with vast wastes. The contrast applies also to the political landscape. In the High Middle Ages, Saxony is a land of aristocrats, magnates, powerful bishops. I cannot see how that system was constructed anew around the year 1000; it must have had very old roots. Along the coast, meanwhile, the landscape in terms of land-ownership is much more fragmented, with Folcher being a bit of an outlier in my opinion. Around 1000 Frisia is split into just four dioceses, yet Saxony has many ecclesiastical principalities, with large landed properties. There are, in short, significant differences between the two entities, especially when we are looking for or thinking in terms of continuity.

FLIERMAN What struck me, agreeing with your point about continuity, is that Charlemagne appears to have been very aware of pre-existing Saxon structures and powerful pre-conquest families. He actively tried to exploit those when giving administrative and ecclesiastical shape to post-conquest Saxony. While this approach was largely successful in Saxony, it did not really come off the ground in Frisia. This surprised me at first, because I took pre-conquest Frisia in the eighth century to have been more centralized than pre-conquest Saxony.

MOL Well, that's the big question. We only really know about Aldgisl and Radbod as 'centralized' rulers. I would locate them in North-Holland. Yet the coastal *terp* landscape was very different, possibly with a very different society. The Carolingian conquest of Saxony focused on replacing or winning over the big land-owning families. I don't see that happening in the coastal area of Frisia and Groningen. You were dealing with a smaller landholders there, who you had to win over.

FLIERMAN Landscape is the determinative factor here.

MOL Exactly. Wherever the 'new' inhabitants of Frisia had come from, they had to adapt to the landscape. Pole-jumping over ditches, for instance, was an ancient cultural practice that the newcomers took over to negotiate their surroundings.

KNOL The *terp* area is very densely populated, much more so than the Pleistocene hinterland.

MOL You can't compare it with other areas of the Netherlands.

FLIERMAN I find it feasible to look at landscape as a crucial factor. It would imply that Radbod's kingly authority had to be fundamentally different from Frankish kingship. Would this explain why Frisia was never fully incorporated into the Carolingian framework? The Carolingians did try to impose their usual system of counts, for instance, but these were introduced from outside.

NIJDAM Yes, that's what goes wrong.

FLIERMAN But someone like Folcher did have land. And there must have been others like him. So why didn't the Carolingian system stick? Landscape might be the answer.

DE LANGEN The distribution of land was also different; the estates were scattered. This goes for Folcher's donation as well.

IJSSENNAGGER-VAN DER PLUIJM We need to think about water and waterways as well as land.

HINES To use the Icelandic parallel again to see if it can shed light: there the centralizing *thing*-system serves to counteract or even to overcome a completely dispersed settlement pattern of isolated farmsteads.

That suggests a further but different question of analogy: in this case the remarkable contrast in the trajectories followed in the ninth century between Saxony and Frisia. The failure of an Old Frisian Christian literary tradition to develop in the way it does in every other Germanic language is remarkable. Is that just to be explained in terms of anarchy and breakdown in Frisia, with sheer pragmatic survival strategies taking precedence over everything else, so that there was no need or place to bother with anything sophisticated in the way of religion? Or does something more positive come in its place, which analogies with what happened in adjacent areas cannot identify for us? It is probably much easier to formulate a question like that than to answer it.

FLIERMAN Could it partly be an issue of transmission? All of our Saxon material comes from just a handful of monasteries and bishoprics. It didn't necessarily originate there, but these centres allowed these traditions to be passed on. With Early-medieval Frisia, are we dealing with an actual absence of Christian literary traditions, or with the absence of an ecclesiastical system that documented and transmitted those traditions?

HINES But the Old Saxon does survive and leave footprints: not just surviving fragments; one of the Old Saxon texts (*Genesis*) was first identified hypothetically as the source of an Old English/West Saxon 'translation', and subsequently a fragment of the original was indeed discovered in the Vatican Library (Doane 1991). We also have a couple of ghostly shadows of ancient Old Frisian literature in Old English: for instance in the *Maxims* and above all in the *Finnsburh* fragment. It is a puzzle.

MOL Going back to the differences between Saxony and Frisia: Saxony witnessed the foundation of many large and wealthy monasteries already in the late Carolingian

Period. It continued in the Ottonian Period. This could happen because there were families who could afford large donations. In the coastal area, the first monasteries were founded in the twelfth century; that shows how the social structures were different.

FLIERMAN Are you saying Frisia was generally poorer than Saxony, or more egalitarian?

MOL Not necessarily poor, but the aristocracy was small scale. Local lords had small estates. And even if those estates were considerably more fertile than those in the hinterland, they had to pass them on to the next generation. Of course, most of what we know of Frisian landholding comes from the High Middle Ages or later. The question then is if this system of small-scale landholding is old or new. Using the evidence of twelfth-century foundations, I would suggest that it goes a long way back.

NIJDAM Frisian law confirms this picture. A freeholder is someone with one or two farms, a nobleman has three or four farms. This matches neatly with wergild ratios. It's very consistent.

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