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

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Johannes A. Mol and Justine Smithuis

Abstract

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, making it 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 five texts demonstrate that many more versions and copies were once in circulation. In particular, the chronicles were 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. However, the author of the Latin base text, the *Historia Frisiae*, does not seem to have been a monk given that his work has a more militant character than the popular versions. Nevertheless, all of the texts 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.

Keywords

Frisia
Burgundy
Fifteenth century
Patriotism

Introduction

"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 some substantial differences among the works, this series of texts nevertheless show a strong coherence. The story within each text is constructed with the same set of fourteen[1] legends about the virtues of 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. This involvement was rewarded by William II of Holland, King of the Romans, by the confirmation of a spurious privilege issued by Charlemagne, granting autonomy to the Frisians. Taken together, the legends seem to have been specifically selected to form a patriotic canon in a religious framework. Some of the legends are known from older sources, but for those that were newly composed for the occasion, they have been given a special packaging: each legend begins with a concrete parallel from the history of the Jewish people. In this way, it is made clear to the reader and listener that the Frisians, too, were blessed and granted God's exceptional protection.

It is this "Hebrew" parallel that deserves particular attention. In a European context, the Frisians can be said to have had an early awareness of ethnic kinship and political cohesion. 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 the Church and Christendom, had earned them the freedom or right to govern themselves without the intervention of a sovereign lord (Van Rij 1989, 82). In some sources, Frisia is even directly or indirectly compared with ancient Israel.[2] However, a persistent use of the Biblical narrative to reinforce the Frisians' collective consciousness was unique to these strongly mutually-related late-medieval texts. Using the Biblical narrative in this way was, at that time, relatively new in North-Western Europe; such use is not encountered in the historiographies of surrounding regions and countries before the year 1500 (Smith 2003, 123-129).[3] This leads one to wonder about the intentions and purposes of the writer(s) in employing 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* (Deploige 2009, ID NL0497), and a derived variant in Middle Dutch known as the *Gesta Frisiorum* (Deploige 2009, ID NL0498). Use of the term "Gesta" has also been applied further by the Dutch expert on Frisian historiography, Edzo Waterbolk. He labelled the texts *Gesta Dei per Frisios*, "God's deeds through the Frisians", based on their contents and character. (Waterbolk 1952, 39). These *Gesta*-texts count as editions of an original Latin-language text, a version of which has been available since 1939 under the title *Historia Frisiae* (Deploige 2009, ID NL0499). In addition to these three texts, the *Gesta*-group also includes the *Olde Freesche Cronike* (Deploige 2009, ID NL0496), a Middle Dutch edition in rhyme, and the *Aldfrysk Kronykje* or *Klein Oudfries Kroniekje* (Deploige 2009, ID NL0495), which at face value appears to be an extract of the *Olde Freesche Cronike*.

Historians have paid some attention to the origins of the *Gesta*-group since the nineteenth century. Bolhuis van Zeeburg uncovered its fantastical and, regarding the representation of facts, unreliable nature

[1] Some studies talk about thirteen legends; the number depends on what stories are considered to be part of the prologue.

[2] As in an *exemplum* of the Cistercian novice master Caesarius of Heisterbach, written around 1218/1219: Van Moolenbroek 1999, 27. Another one is found in the thirteenth-century *Vita Sibrandi* from the Praemonstratensian abbey of Mariëngaarde: Lambooij & Mol 2001, 385.

[3] For Flanders, Brabant, Guelders, and Holland, such systematically elaborated parallels are unknown. More research, however, is needed.

(Bolhuis van Zeeburg 1873, 61-68). Jan Romein underlined these works' impassioned justification of a doomed Frisian freedom (Romein, 1932, 146-148). Heinrich Reimers addressed their provenance in the introduction to his edition of the *Historia Frisiae* (Reimers 1939, 96-151). Waterbolk emphasized the humanist character of the texts because of their focus on experiencing patriotism (Waterbolk 1952, 36-41). Finally, Rolf H. Bremmer pointed out that the underlying concept bears the cast of a scholarly construction (Bremer 2004, 123-126). The most important contribution in this regard was offered in 1948 by Jelle Hoekstra, who identified the general framework of the relationships between the *Historia Frisiae*, the *Gesta Fresonum*, the *Gesta Frisiorum,* and the *Olde Freesche Cronike.* 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 one of the main narrative elements from the *Gesta Fresonum* and *Gesta Frisiorum.* Paul Noomen showed in 1994 that, despite their ideological charge, various passages in the *Gesta*-texts refer to concrete institutional and geographical realities in Frisia west of the Lauwers River. However, the main questions regarding the time and place of origin, the environment in which the author(s) and editor(s) lived, their motives, their intentions, and their intended audiences have so far remained unanswered.

Illustrative of this uncertainty is the variation in dating. Some argue for an origin in the final quarter of the fifteenth century (Bolhuis van Zeeburg 1873, 56), while others defend a late thirteenth or even fourteenth-century composition (Reimers 1939, 108; Bremmer 2004, 106). Given such a range in chronology, there is, of course, little that can be said with certainty about the author(s) and his/their 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. The originals have been lost; only copies have survived. It is unclear how much of the copies' content is true to the original meaning. The stories themselves, too, offer few hard facts to work with because of their legendary character.

Not all of the questions above will be answered in this essay. We will confine ourselves to the historical context and leave detailed philological issues aside for now, as these require an investigation in their own right. Building on insights in the relevant historiography, this study contributes a comparative analysis of the narrative structure of the various versions of the text. In this regard, the most recent legends, i.e., those concerning the Frisian crusading efforts, turned out to be most useful since they offer some facts and dates that can 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 the absence of overlordship (Van Lengen 2003; Mol 2017, 37-49). In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the coastal regions between the Vlie and the Weser were gradually freed from sovereign rule when various "southern" lords who had inherited 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 took care of the administration and justice themselves under the leadership of elected judges. In this context, one can speak of communally-governed rural municipalities, which included the towns as well. In the regions east of the Lauwers (the *Ommelanden* and East-Frisia), Frisian independence was curtailed or even cast aside by other powers during the fifteenth century. Notably, the emerging city-state of Groningen and the indigenous Cirksena family, which succeeded in acquiring a comital status on behalf of the Holy Roman Empire, exercised direct authority in the Groninger Ommelanden and East Frisia, respectively. 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 powers.

The first 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. We then trace how and why the parallels with the people of Israel were used in the Latin and vernacular versions of the legends. Subsequently, we attempt to place the tradition in time and space as much as possible. Finally, we discuss the historical context in which the *Gesta*-cycle came into being, including the (intended) audiences, and the purposes and possible functioning of the *Gesta*-cycle in late medieval Frisian society. Building on convincing indications that the creation, editing, and popularization of the *Gesta*-texts can roughly be dated to the period of 1450-1477, it is argued that the texts were written for the inhabitants of Friesland west of the Lauwers in order to make them sensitive to the threat of the subsequent Burgundian dukes, Philip the Good and Charles the Bold, who could conquer Friesland and end its political autonomy.

Contents and structure

For a brief summary of the various legends, we will use the same order of the Latin *Historia Frisiae*, following Hoekstra's assumption that, at its core, this version contains the source text.[4]

The *Historia Frisiae* begins with a prologue, in which the divine guidance of Frisian history is explained by pointing to God's *misericordia* and His wondrous deeds done for the people of Israel. Several Old Testament heroes are introduced here, such as Abraham, Moses, Joshua, the 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 or story 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, with their names 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 their true belief. It is said that Liudger and Willehad were the founders of Münster and Bremen, which along with Utrecht, were cities with 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 because he managed to save Frisia from the heathen King Redbad. This happened in a peculiar manner. To

[4] Other 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.

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 the whole of 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 fount appeared on the spot. The envoy sent by God then taught the twelve men which system of law they were to choose and disappeared as suddenly as he had appeared. Charlemagne subsequently affirmed the laws the twelve submitted before him. According to the story, these were the same laws that still applied in Frisia.

Compared to the previous stories, stories F and G are extremely concise, each receiving little more than ten lines. Story 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 legend that is known as the Magnus Saga. Just as the Israelites were released from Babylonian captivity, so were the Frisians delivered from the heathen Redbad. Despite their poor armament, the Frisians 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 discovering or establishing justice are abandoned in stories K, L, M and N. These stories instead revolve around the service offered by the Frisians in battles against the Saracens and the heathens, both enemies of the Frisians at that time and place. Through these stories, 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. 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, instantly becoming an object of veneration. Miracles occurring on this 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 a 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 up the cross en masse and distinguished themselves in this crusade. Just as Gideon cunningly defeated the Amalekites (Judges 7), so did the Frisians triumph 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 "confirmation 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 difficult to identify (Reimers 1939, 116). Then there are two unidentifiable references to a *Cronica Patroli* and a *Cronica de fundacione ecclesie Fuldensis* (Reimers 1939, 116, 118). Identifiable references, however, are the *Vita S. Liudgeri* and the *Decalogus* [read: *Catalogus*] *episcoporum Traiectensis* (Reimers 1939, 119). Hettel Bruch made it plausible that this bishop's catalogue was the same as the so-called *Chronographia* written by the well-known chronicler Johannes de Beke, alias Beka (Bruch 1956, 57). Bruch, a Beka expert, further noted 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, for example where it is said that Boniface was ordained … *in die beate Cecilie*, which it not mentioned by (Bruch 1956, 58). 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 (Halbertsma 1957, 21). The *Historia Frisiae* also mentions a *Cronica imperialis*, most probably referring to the thirteenth-century *Kaiserchronik* (Reimers 1939, 131).

In the crusade stories, references are made to a *cronic[ae] passagii ad Terram Sanctam* and a *Cronica Oliveri*. 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 (Jansen & Janse 1991, 59-82). 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 (Hoogeweg 1894). There are also references to a chronicle *apud Sanctum Salvatorem*; this refers to the collegiate church of Oudmunster at Utrecht, but a chronicle from there has not been preserved. Finally, in the story about Lambert of Katrijp, the author names a *Cronica fratrum domus Teutonice*, which is likewise unidentifiable (Reimers 1939, 136).

Apart from chronicles and hagiographies, the authors employed a Roman missal, two charters, and a number of treatises 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 (Van Buijtenen 1953, 4). The two charters, which are included within 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 confirmed. We will come back to these charters later.

Another inserted text is the *Tractatus* 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 (Meijering 1969). Then there are the classic Frisian legends of Charlemagne, notably those concerning Charlemagne and Redbad, concerning the discovery of justice, alias the saga of the thirteen *asega*'s,[5] and the Magnus saga, which relates the glorious victory the Frisians achieved in Rome

[5] The *asega* was an official legal advisor to the court of law; it was his task to interpret the law.

for Charlemagne (Buma & Ebel 1977, 130-135). The extant versions date back to at least the early fourteenth century 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 only fifteenth- and sixteenth-century copies have survived. Concerning the saga of Charlemagne and Redbad, as well as that of the thirteen asega's, Paul Noomen made the case that they served as a prologue to the so-called *Elder Skeltenariocht* (Noomen 2001, 15). The Magnus saga can be presumed to have been written as an introduction to the common Frisian *Seventeen Statutes and Twenty-four Land-laws* as well as the *West Lauwers Sendriocht* (Noomen 1989, 16).

From this overview, few conclusions can be drawn about the time of composition of the original texts. Most of the identifiable sources already existed in the thirteenth century; the ones used in the text had long been known by 1350, and each had acquired an aura of age, respectability, and trust. Only the references to Beka (post 1345) and the *Tractatus* of the Seven Sealands lead one to presume that the *Historia Frisiae* cannot date from an earlier period.

Structure of the texts and their mutual relations

For a thorough analysis of the relationship between the works of the *Gesta*-group to date, we have to rely on the work done by Jelle Hoekstra.[6] Based on a philological analysis of story elements, recurring in varying lengths and order in the different versions, 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 to which we can subscribe. 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 Frisiorium* 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 (Hoekstra 1948, 11). Furthermore, Hoekstra expounded that the source text for the Dutch translation 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 given that it is the only variant in rhyme and also lacks the motif of Biblical parallels (more on this later). The differences from the other chronicles may be even more substantial, 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 of whether the *Historia Frisiae* thus represents the oldest extant version (i.e., 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* stands 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 for debate.

Before addressing the issue of dating, we will first take a closer look at the narrative structure in the

[6] Herewith he developed a thesis (nr. 6) from the dissertation of Jelle Brouwer from 1941.

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

HF	**Prol**	**A**	**B+**	**C**	**D**	**E**	**F**	**G**	**H+**					**I**	**J**	**K**	**L**	**M+**	**N+**
GFres/Gfris	**Prol**	**A**	**B+**	**C**	J			K		**D**	**E**	**F**	**H**			I		N	M+
Gfres partial		A	B+	C	J			L											
OFC		A	B	C	I			J		D	E	F	H			K	M+	L	N
KOK			B	C	I			J		D	(F)	E				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, the story elements appear in a common order, albeit with subtle differences between the variants - apart then from the considerable differences on the word level. 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 Seven Sealands (A, B and C). We could call this group of texts the origin- and Christianization-group. Next is the description of the bestowment of freedom (the privileges) and the struggle for freedom against external threats, the discovery or establishment 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). Therefore, this second group encompasses the classic legends on Charlemagne and Frisia. Then there are the crusade sagas (K, L, 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 of these stories in the definitive confirmation of Charlemagne's privilege is significant. This must have been intentional: the Frisians, 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 of the Charlemagne freedom charter 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 succession, at least in the *Historia Frisiae* and according to our own interpretation of the proper order.[7] 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

[7] Hoekstra 1948, 13, argues that cap. 9 on bishop Radbod must have been shifted. Bruch 1952, 14, does not believe this to have been necessary. In his opinion, the *Historia Frisiae* has kept the original order in its entirety.

(the reconstruction of churches under 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 bishops' stories indicates that the latter had been grouped together in a predecessor (possibly) or in the utilized source text (probably). An extra clue suggesting this might have been the case can be found in the *Gesta Fresonum* and the *Gesta Frisiorum,* which conclude their versions of story element J concerning bishops Radbod and Baldric with a summary: … *die Bisscoppen, die Vrieslant eerst bekeerden* (those bishops who were the first to convert Frisia),[8] beginning with Willibrord and ending with bishop Baldric. This explains why these texts include episode J directly after the story of Christianization in C, differing from the other editions.[9] Important in this respect, too, is the conclusion to story element C. The *Historia Frisiae* ends the history of the conversion 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 bishops Hunger and Ricfried, as well as saints Lebuïnus, Odger, Wiro, and Plechelmus (including a reference to their hagiographies) (Reimers 1939, 119-120).[10] In the *Gesta Fresonum* and *Gesta Frisiorum,* this segment has been separated. Gregory and his two successors (Hunger and Ricfried are not mentioned by name) and a reference to the "bishops lives of Utrecht" are included at the conclusion to C, as in the *Historia Frisiae*. In contrast, saints Lebuïnus, Odger, … *ende andere heilighe mannen fan dien geselschap* (and other holy men belonging to their company) were placed in the narrative at the close of the Lambertus episode (L) but, nevertheless, immediately before D. Thus, the *Historia Frisae* may be the most original in so far as the *Gesta* appear to diverge in different 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 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, here, reverted to the structure in *Historia Frisiae*, where this story also follows H.

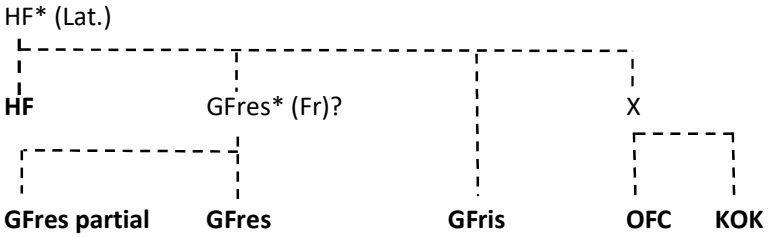
As a result, we believe the *Historia Frisiae* represents the most original composition of the *Gesta*-chronicle. The *Olde Freesche Cronike* (or the *Klein Oudfries Kroniekje*)[11] cannot be ascribed this status because they lack the Biblical parallels, which have to be seen as essential for the cycle. 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 (Hoekstra 1948, 12). The *Gesta Fresonum* and the *Gesta Frisiorum* (or their direct predecessor) are also not likely candidates as the most original either. Their structure is the most inconsistent amongst any of the 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 most approximating the primal or *Ur*-version of the

[8] In these and the following citations we follow the edition of the *Gesta Frisiorum*. Here: Epkema 1853 II, 291.
[9] In the *Olde Freesche Cronike* (likewise the *Klein Oudfriese Kroniekje*) this recapitulation is lacking, although the bishops (including Frederic) are treated after C.
[10] his part is not found in the *Olde Freesche Cronike*. The fact that Gregorius is mentioned in the *Klein Oudfriese Kroniekje* is one of the indications that de *Olde Freesche Cronike* cannot have been a direct source for the *Oudfriese Kroniekje*.
[11] Table 1 shows that the *Klein Oudfriese 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. It is possible that the author of the *Klein Oudfriese Kroniekje* did use the rhymed chronicle as the base for his concise (and sometimes confused) extract, or a lost (Frisian?) version that had the *Olde Freesche Cronike* as its example or predecessor. Since both redactions show many differences on the word level, the latter possibility seems the most probable one.

Gesta-cycle. 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 which charts the development of the texts:

Figure 1



We can see 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.

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 a better understanding of 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 thus ideally be combined with a new, integrated publication of the various texts.

It is probable that the pedigree above omits many 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 this. The cycle must have had an accordingly large circulation and popularity. A strong indication is found in a report by the Groningen priest and city administrator Wilhelmus Frederici (1455-1527) that everywhere in the houses of the Frisian nobles booklets were circulating about the arrival of the Frisians in their present fatherland (Waterbolk 1952, 22). Preceding the question of its popularity is, of course, its dating. However, before we 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" (Smalley 1983, xi). According to her, this tendency is most apparent in the base text, the *Historia Frisiae**, in so far as its author offers a consequent parallel for each story. Smalley is of the opinion that the latter author and the editor of the *Gesta Fresonum** consider themselves strongly bound to the authority of the Holy Writ 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 opinion 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 seen, for example, in 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 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*. For example, the *Gesta Fresonum* and the *Gesta Frisiorum* omit, in their legend C, the story of Moses and Aaron leading the Hebrews across the Red Sea. Moreover, whereas the *Historia Frisiae* in its legend on the discovery of justice (E) makes a functional 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; this narrative is reminiscent of the story of Moses when he used his staff to make a spring appear from a rock.

Thus, we can ask the question: Which Biblical parallels are or 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 these *Gesta*-texts. However, Samson, Gideon, Deborah, Shamgar, as well as the Maccabees as a collective term, do figure in their prologues. This shows that the editor partially incorporated the text of the *Historia Frisae* but, for some reason, he did not consider it necessary to detail the deeds of the aforementioned Biblical heroes. This does not suggest that the *Gesta Fresonum*, the *Gesta Frisiorum*, the partial *Gesta Fresonum,* or 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 when speaking of the land God gave the Frisians (Epkema 1853 II, 212):

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 Frisae*, which places more emphasis on the legitimation of Frisian freedom (Bruch 1956, 57).[12]

To answer the question of why the parallels were simplified and omitted, we must take 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 sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in Scotland, England, and Republic of the Seven United Netherlands (Schama 1987, 98-99; O'Brien 1990, 27; Smith 2003, 45-48;). The arrangements concern these three Protestant nations whose existence was threatened and who had an interest in reinforcing their citizens' group identity to mobilize them for the

[12] Bruch judges the *Historia Frisiae* a more "Frisian product".

battle against the Catholic enemy. In numerous historical writings, pamphlets, treatises from preachers, etc. from these pre-modern nations, one can find a parallel between the people of these nations and the Jewish people, with the message that the former likewise enjoy 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 (Hastings 1997, 17). This would not have been the case with the 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 have only concerned the regular clergy first and foremost: the monks and nuns of the many monasteries located in the region. The average layperson, never getting to read the Bible, would only have been broadly familiar with the fortunes of the Jewish people from the Old Testament. The stories of Creation, the Exodus from Egypt, David defeating Goliath, and the Babylonian Captivity were possibly already part of the religious canon of the pre-Reformation Frisians. These key events could be appreciated in pictorial representations in various churches. The specifics of which deed was credited to Shamgar, or what exactly happened to Heliodore, however, would have been known to only a few people at the time. If the editor of the base text wanted to attract more than just a few readers and listeners, he would have had to omit such miscellanies. Rather, the goals to be achieved would have been to make clear to the readers and listeners 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 time immemorial.

Dating the edition and its popularization

Let us briefly recapitulate the current state of affairs before coming to grips with dating the edition. 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 together into a religious-patriotic canon in which, for each of its constituent segments, a similarly consistent parallel to an event from the 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 primal version of this canon 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 those stories themselves were simplified and made more accessible. In the process of that transformation, the text was also translated, both in Frisian and Dutch. Furthermore, an edition in rhyme was made and an extract was produced so that a large lay audience could become acquainted with it. This editing and translating must 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 that most editions of the *Gesta*-cycle have 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 LXXIIII, op Kersmis dach' (written in the named year of Our Lord, on Christmas day). In other words, the text was written in 1474 (Epkema 1853 II, 249; Carasso-Kok 1981, nr. 143).

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; apparently, they were inclined to presume that year as the *datum ante quem* for the short chronicle (Buma & Ebel 1977 I, 8, 330-332). A closer examination shows, however, that their conclusion concerning the dating of *Jus*' Vorlage was drawn a little too hastily. 1464 is the year given as the provenance of the *Cronica fan Hollandt*, included in *Jus*, where it is mentioned (f. 184r): '*ende philippus wert heer van hollandt ende Js tot noch toe als Jnt iaer van lxiiij*' (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 so-called Donia-war, an escalated Frisian feud, from the year 1463 as its final annotation.[13] While 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 the Vorlage did contain copies of the *Cronica fan Hollandt* and the *Friesche Kroniek*. That would mean 1464 should be seen as the *datum post quem* rather 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, Tresoar, Hs. 9056 D). This does not 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 in the *Gesta Fresonum* reads (Epkema 1853 II, 139):

Disse sint dae wird fan da Abt van Heysterbergh, dat is hieten in Latino Vallis – dat is een dal – Sancti Petri, ende aeck der leesmaester fan denselven cloester Vallis Sancti Petri. Dizze twae wiren aeck in der predicatie, en habbit disse twae cryoes aeck syoen claerliken, disse habbet seyd, dae sie wse cloester toe Clarencamp visiteerde. Aldus hat God Alm. uus Fresen epenbeert, dier foer dat menscelike slacht is stoeren. Aeck lestma in dae Fresena legende, dat disse Scolasticus Olifernus folle folcks vrochte thoe dae lauwa des helghen crioces, alsoe datter fulla habbet dat cr. farra oen hyara claen dreyn. Al hier fan sint dae Crioeces Broren commen.	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.
commen voortgekomen'	

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" (Van Moolenbroek 1987, 44). 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 are never referred to in fifteenth-century northern Dutch and Frisian sources as *kruisbroeders*. The references to "crioes broeren"" (*Gesta Fresonum*) or "crucebroederen" (*Gesta Frisiorum*) was undoubtedly meant to refer to the members

[13] Buma & Ebel 1977 I, 582-583. Compare Gerbenzon 1965, 20, who argues that the dating of 1464 bears reference to a "Vorlage" of the *cronica*, not to that of the *Jus*-compilation in its entirety.

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. In fact, the growth was so significant, the number of aligned crosier convents had been tripled by around 1470 (Elm 1971). 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 1460s. The crosiers took over a tertiaries' convent in the Frisian town of Sneek in 1464, and in 1466 they founded a new friary in the nearby city of Franeker (Mol 1990, 337). 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 income from the exploitation of their landed properties, but also from mendicancy (Mol 1990, 342-344). The crosiers were permitted by the Church to send out their own *terminarii* alongside 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 the crosiers (Verhoeven & Mol 1994). For this reason, the reference made by the author to 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 everywhere, in the towns as well as 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 post quem* 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 1460s or early 1470s. This brings the earliest dating of the *Olde Freesche Cronike* (1474), the *Klein Oudfries Kroniekje* (sometime after 1464, but before 1479) and the *Gesta Fresonum** (late 1460s 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 as to how many years earlier the primal *Historia Frisae* 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 same author rhyming in Dutch for the *Olde Freesche Cronike*. The differences between those two texts and the *Historia Frisiae* are so numerous that it must be supposed that the author of the *Historia Frisiae* did not personally guide or correct the editors. This is further evinced by the passage on 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 with respect to the content and to the period of time.[14]

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 (Waterbolk 1952, 40-41, 245-247). His arguments have few supporters these days, however. The humanist qualities he found in the text, such as its

[14] "Aeck lestma in dae Fresena legenda, dat disse scholasticus Olifernus folla folkis brochta thoe dae lauwa des helghen crioeces …": Buma, Gerbenzon & Tragter-Schubert 1993, 546-549.

vainglorious bearing, the use of certain expressions like *patria*, and especially a "more conscionable" treatment of sources, among others, are simply too vague to be placed exactly in time.[15]

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 (Reimers 1939, 96-100). 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 does not 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 (Santing 1988, 171). 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 cannot 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. Regarding 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 that 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 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 the Frisian freedom statute. 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-confirmation of their imperial privileges but were less inclined to make commitments on paying taxes. It is certain, however, that this was then an important subject (Vries 1986, 74-77). 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. Of course, this argument is 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 who were elected

[15] Bruch 1956, 56-57; cf. Bremmer 2004, 123. Compare Tilmans 1999, 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 Mol 1997, 94-108, 102.

thirteen years later, in 1469, to discuss the conditions for a possible honouring of Charles the Bold as sovereign in the Hague. Amongst them was abbot Bernardus (II) of Klaarkamp, the only one who represented Oostergo at that occasion (Ottema 1850, 114). 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?[16]

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

Little is known about textual production at the Cistercian abbey of Klaarkamp in the fifteenth century. Apart from a philological study of its charters written in Old Frisian (Vries 1993, 38-40), 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.[17] A study of the sixteenth-century chronicle of Bloemkamp, Klaarkamp's oldest daughter abbey, showed that its author, Thomas of Groningen, presumably made use of fifteenth-century material from Klaarkamp (Mol 1996, 2-4). At the beginning of his historiography, he included 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 Klaarkamp texts available at the time.

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, Boyngus 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 (Fruytier 1918). 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 and was enrolled as a professor in Rostock in 1424, 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.[18]

However, this is not to say that the author of the primal text of the *Historia Frisae* could only do his work in the studious environment of this monastery. In fact, such a militantly patriotic writing as the *Historia Frisiae* does not really fit into the intellectual spectrum of pious men who had withdrawn from the world to concentrate on their inner soul lives. Klaarkamp, at the time, was not led by indigenous monks; rather, it attracted many men from outside the region. For example, influential non-Frisians in this period included Johannes of Alkmaar, Godfridus of Goch, and Petrus of Zeeland. Despite this non-Frisian element, a certain Frisian chauvinism in fifteenth-century Klaarkamp may 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 at 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

[16] This suggestion is submitted by Bolhuis van Zeeburg 1873, 61-63, who, by the way, did not know the *Historia Frisiae.* He qualified the source text as "der Vriesen legend" (called as such in the *Gesta Frisiorum*) and labelled it subsequently as a *Chronicon Clarecampense* or *Annales Clarecampenses*.

[17] Bruch 1956, 58-59, 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 Frisiorum* has come down to us in two sixteenth-century collected manuscripts of Thabor is not a compelling indication that they were composed by a canon of that monastery.

[18] See the information in the database of Zijlstra 1995.

Lauwers. As for the language: several writings have been handed down from fifteenth-century Klaarkamp that point to a bustling tradition of written Frisian (Vries 1993, 38-40).

The fact 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 primal text composed in Klaarkamp at an earlier date, and was it written by a monk? The author – assuming he wrote alone and not as part of a team – was certainly versed in Biblical knowledge. 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 also suggest that the author studied at a German university for a while.

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, namely, that of the representation of the cross appearance at the sermon of Oliver of Cologne in the lengthy passage M (the Damietta narrative), there is reason to suspect that the author is not from Klaarkamp. Jaap van Moolenbroek showed that the editor/author corrected the *Gesta*-writings and the *Historia Frisae** on this very passage (Van Moolenbroek 2016, 169-171). Although there is a source reference to the *Historia Damiatina* at the end of *Historia Frisiae*'s passage M, it does not 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 Alcacer in Portugal (in 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 do not seem to have written its primal text. The text also does not 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 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 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

Frisian territory is interpreted broadly in all of the *Gesta*-group writings. 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" (in the Latin: *nos Frisones, nostri progenitores, nostri contribuli*), would therefore have referred to all the inhabitants of these areas.[19] The geographical perspective of the text, however, is unmistakably centred on Frisia west of the Lauwers (Bremmer 2004, 124). The text does not appear, for example, to consider the people of the (Frisian)

[19] 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".

Ommelanden of Groningen or the East Frisians as potential readers and listeners. Because the *Gesta Frisiorum* is derived from the *Klein Oudfries Kroniekje* and 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 they had to restrict themselves to the inhabitants of 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 by 1400 (Vries 1993, 1). A secondary argument is that the texts of the *Gesta*-group have been handed down in West-Lauwers Frisian collections - apart then from the *Historia Frisiae* which has been preserved in the manuscript of Hartmann Schedel.

A West-Lauwers Frisian cast is also found in the series of stories that focus on the missionaries and bishops who brought 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 *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 previously belonged to the "Utrecht diocese". The author of the *Olde Freesche 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 (Epkema 1853 II, 218).

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 Freesche Cronike* and the *Klein Oudfries Kroniekje,* Willibrord is said to have travelled from England to Frisia, landing 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 discovery of law (or the thirteen *asega's*) 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[20] in the *Historia Frisiae,* the *Gesta*-texts, and in the *Olde Freesche 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 peat region south of Oldeboorn. In the extensive Damietta legend, composed of various narrative elements, the *Historia Frisiae* and the *Olde Freesche 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 know the same story from several traditions' narrative sources written for Venice and also for Haarlem (Van Moolenbroek 2016, 125-149). 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 – is the unnamed 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*

[20] We are inclined to identify this place with the village of Wirdum, just below Leeuwarden, in what is today the 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: Poortinga 1965, 31.

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.

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 Freesche Chronike* (Epkema 1853 II, 217), the savage who tried to seduce the Frisians into heathenry after Boniface's death, and 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. 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 Freesche 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 pending military threat did not drop out of a clear blue sky (Jongkees 1953). The first clouds had formed in the middle of the 1450s during the reign of Philip the Good, who had been both count of Holland and Zealand since 1433 and lord of (the Holland part of) Frisia (Westfriesland). In his capacity as lord, he maintained a claim to the territories east of the Vlie. Philip perceived these regions as rebellious, and he tried to gain hold of them by delaying opportunities for peace and prolonging a truce over and again. He did this with all the more conviction because he had been led to understand from knightly romances that Frisia had once been ruled by kings. If he wanted to become king – which was one of his major ambitions – then the legendary crown of Frisia had to be within his reach (Brand 2020). To achieve this end, he had to arrive at an understanding with the head of the Holy Roman Empire, the Roman King Frederick III, and he had to force the Frisians to truly honour him as their sovereign. Informal negotiations between Philip and Frederick III in the years 1447-1448 produced no results because Frederick III did not want to relinquish his rights to the Frisian territories. However, the subjugation of Frisia came closer to occurring 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 of that year, Philip demanded to be accepted as 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 was rather intended to force the Oversticht, i.e, the Northeastern part of the prince-bishopric of Utrecht, to acknowledge the newly elected prince-bishop as secular lord. Nevertheless, this action posed such a serious threat to the autonomous Frisian districts that they made a pact with each other in August to protect Frisian freedom ("fry ende freesk") against "alle landsheren". Things never came to a confrontation because after the campaign against the Oversticht had ended, Philip became diverted by other matters and was forced to withdraw his army. Negotiations with the Frisian representatives continued but proved fruitless without a military big stick. And so, the storm dissipated, though without the skies entirely clearing.

As Charles the Bold came into power in 1467, new threats appeared on the horizon. In 1468, the young duke had a spy reconnoitre all *stinzen* (stonehouses or defensible motte-and-bailey castles of the nobility), cities, and monasteries in Frisia and Groningen (Algra 1967). 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 mentioned earlier, Frisia west of the Lauwers complied with this request by sending four clergymen, including the abbot of Klaarkamp. They reminded the duke of the Frisians' privilege of freedom 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 an intense palaver, which resulted in two envoys setting sail once again to Holland to discuss details of the levying of taxes. After these envoys returned, before November 25th, 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 postponed any resumption of contact with the duke's men until after Easter 1470.

In early April 1470, a new invitation from Charles reached the leaders of the West Lauwers districts to attend a conference at Enkhuizen on May 2 with a Holland delegation under the leadership of Louis van Gruuthuse, stadtholder of Holland and Zealand. From the account by the chronicler Worp van Thabor, it appears the Frisians did not immediately reject this invitation. All prelates and the most respectable nobles, seventy in number, gathered on the last day of April in the port of Staveren to appoint delegates (Ottema 1850, 114-117). The ultimate nomination of the delegates occurred after each and every one 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 in so far as Charles proved willing to guarantee the Frisians most of their privileges. Thus, the Frisian delegates were inclined to accept Charles as their overlord on the precondition that, fully in accordance with the freedom charter *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 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 exceptionally large civic unrest in Frisia in the summer of 1470. At a communal diet, all the districts declared they would defend themselves with arms if Charles dared an invasion. Simultaneously, Offe and his supporters, who had remained in Enkhuizen, were branded as 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. However, he did not win supporters in the Holland cities. Because of public opposition, it took until November 5 for war to be declared by Charles, which was not followed up with any significant military action.

Like Count William IV of Holland-Hainault over a hundred years before, Charles the Bold had thus antagonized all the Frisians of Westergo and Oostergo (Mol 1997, 102-104). Frisian opposition to Charles mobilized to such an extent in many places that internal feuds were suspended and all able-bodied men 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 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. The fact 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 Staveren 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, made an alliance with the districts of Hunzingo, Fivelgo, Langewold, and Humsterland. A week later, Groningen and the Ommelanden entered into a twenty-year pact 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 (Sipma 1933, nrs. 73-75). In this respect, they agreed to swear an oath to support each other as "free and Frisian" whenever push came to shove. This oath was not sworn by prelates and nobles alone, but also by freeholders and leaseholders before their parish priests, whose cooperation was also expected. Presumably, the intent was to prevent another act of "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 away from Guelders in September to pursue other war efforts. However, 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.

Epilogue

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. He commented that "the Frisian freedom succumbed to its own unruliness (*tuchteloosheid*)" and that "the struggle for a freedom which had survived itself, was meant to lack all inspiration" (Romein 1932, 139-143). Though it may be true that the communal governance system – 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 (Mol 2017, 42-46). 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.[21] It is clear that the Frisians, despite all their mutual feuds and disputes, deeply cherished being free to govern themselves. This autonomy was defended with extreme prejudice.[22] When this 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 writing. 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 Frisians 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-

[21] 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: Vries 1999, 26-42.

[22] Hoekstra 1948, 6, 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". 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.

versed in Biblical matters. The many divergences between the named texts demonstrate that many more versions and copies than just those we now know of were once in circulation. This demonstrates further that we are dealing with a highly popular genre of medieval Frisian writing and fits well with the surviving reports on the widespread dissemination of origin legends among the Frisian elite in the decades before and after 1500 (Noomen 1994, 166). 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. Who the author was is not yet known. For now, a secular scholar seems likely since the primal text is more militant than the later popular versions. All of the texts, however, were intended to reinforce the patriotic awareness and sense of unity of the Frisians west of the Lauwers at a time (1456 and 1467-1477) when their political autonomy was threatened by the Burgundian dukes.

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