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A decorated Late Postclassic Mixtec human skull from Teotitlán del Camino, Oaxaca, Mexico, possibly dating to c.1400–1520 CE. The type of adhesive used to affix the mosaic to the skull raised some doubts about the authenticity of the object. Photo P. Erdil. (Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. Coll.No. RV-4007-1.)

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Isolated and backward Westerwolde (Groningen, the Netherlands)?

A confrontation of archaeological and historical data from the Middle Ages in a wider geographical context

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Abstract: *The aim of this paper is to question the supposed isolated and backward position of the region of Westerwolde, in the north-eastern part of the Netherlands. Westerwolde's geographically rather isolated position has traditionally been brought forward to explain its backward image. Progressive peat growth ever since the Bronze Age occupation had transformed Westerwolde into an island. It was abandoned in the Late Iron Age, only to be recolonized in the early Middle Ages. During the 19th century, romantics were still admiring Westerwolde's arcadian scenery and cultural traditions. In contrast, from the mid-19th century until well into the 20th century, protagonists of modern agriculture criticized its backward farming methods and standard of living, as well as its poor infrastructure. The central issues we address here is whether critics were justified in describing it as backward in the 19th century and whether concrete indications for this assumed backwardness are to be found in previous centuries. To jump from early medieval times to the 19th century is too big a leap, but combining archaeological and ecological data with a renewed and more critical study of written sources against the background of huge landscape transformations has brought a nuanced understanding of how Westerwolde evolved. We present new insights for the period starting with the conquest of Frisia and Saxony by the Carolingians and the introduction of Christianity, when missionaries and newly founded monasteries acquired agricultural assets and rights in the conquered region, up to the late Middle Ages. We therefore analyze church foundations, livelihoods or economic conditions of existence in connection with occupation structures, infrastructure and exchange of consumer goods interdisciplinarily. Conservatism appears easily confused with backwardness, and an aversion to innovation, with indifference, as underlying external factors often forced the inhabitants to adopt a wait-and-see attitude. Westerwolde is viewed continuously in connection with the adjacent regions of Drenthe and Lower Saxon Emsland.*

Keywords: Settlement development, rural economy, Westerwolde, Emsland, Drenthe, Middle Ages

1. Introduction¹

Outsiders, residents or experts – it makes a difference who passes judgement over Westerwolde, that remote district in the north-east of the Netherlands. Ever since the 19th century, numerous treatises, travel

accounts, odes and observations designed to take Westerwolde into the modern world have been written, meaning that this region aroused discussion. Visitors esteemed Westerwolde as a refuge of old traditions, of unspoilt rural life in contrast with its surroundings. Protagonists of agronomic development, mostly from

¹ The idea of confronting archaeological and historical data from Westerwolde was born during the farewell symposium of the second author, Groningen 2 Oct. 2015. The authors would like to thank both anonymous reviewers for their constructive and detailed comments on an earlier version of our article.

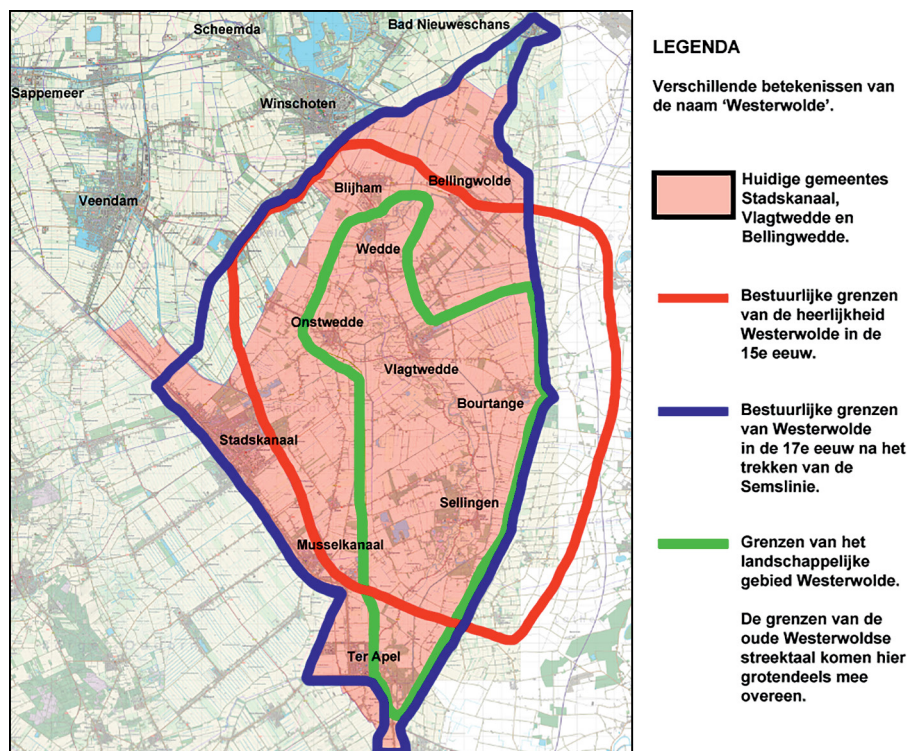


Fig. 1. Map of Westerwolde's boundaries in past centuries (dating from 2013), showing the administrative borders of the seigniorie of Westerwolde in the 15th century (red) and the 17th century (blue), the landscape boundaries (green), and the borders of the municipalities of Stadskanaal, Vlagtwedde and Bellingwolde (pink), now subsumed in the new municipality of Westerwolde, formed in 2018 (source [https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Westerwolde_\(streek\)#/media/Bestand:Westerwolde.png](https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Westerwolde_(streek)#/media/Bestand:Westerwolde.png)).

the neighbouring Oldambt, propagated a reform of the poor water management and infrastructure, calling Westerwolde's farming backward. The backward image stuck for a long time, a perception even resonating in choices made well into our own time. But when and how did this perception of it being 'backward' start? And are we able to uncover its causes?

In the present article, we want to lay bare image and identity, prejudice and facts. To do so, it will prove necessary to determine Westerwolde's boundaries, as sandy Westerwolde differs considerably from its surrounding peat belt and the northern marine clay area. The available data sources vary widely: archaeology reaches basically as far back as the early Middle Ages; tax accounts emerge only from early modern times onwards; and written opinions explicitly dealing with Westerwolde are not at our disposal before the 19th century. Apart from chronological problems, written evidence reaches us strongly biased, especially if juridical procedures were involved, while the voice of the Westerwolde inhabitants is hardly heard. Archaeological evidence may seem to represent real-time events, but it is hard to discern their scale and context; translating field observations into cultural interpretations has always been the debatable point. Dovetailing archaeological and historical interpretations is yet another challenge, but one definitely worth trying out, as historian De Boer propagated in his 2011 keynote lecture for the annual archaeological conference known as the Reuvensdagen, calling archaeology "the indispensable twin brother of history" (De Boer

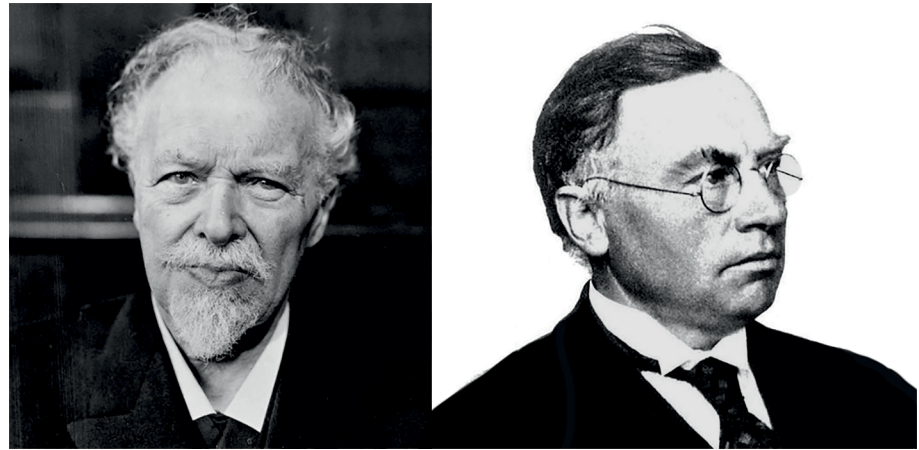
2011: 6). It also explains the long time span we chose to cover here.

1.1 *Westerwolde sensu stricto and sensu lato*

In the minds of historians, jurists, pedologists and archaeologists, there exist different Westerwoldes. Historical Westerwolde is the sandy core area, recolonized in the early Middle Ages, stretching from Wedde in the north to Ter Apel in the south and from Onstwedde/Ter Maarsch in the west to Bourtange in the east (Hofstee 1938: Fig. 1; Muntinga 1945: 2-5). This we call Westerwolde *sensu stricto* or Westerwolde in a strict sense.

Juridical and political Westerwolde was much larger of old, including Hoorn, Morige, Blijham, Vriescheloo and Bellingwolde, of which the northern part was cut off from the Reiderland region by the Dollard floods. The course of history determined the fusing of the southern part with sandy Westerwolde (Fruin 1886; Van der Woude 1952). In a geographical sense, we also reckon Veenhuizen to what we call Westerwolde *sensu lato*, so a larger, more comprehensive Westerwolde. To make it even more complex, the municipality of Westerwolde, newly minted in 2018, covers the former municipalities of Bellingwedde and Vlagtwedde, thus incorporating the northern, former Reiderland part of Blijham, Vriescheloo, Bellingwolde and Den Ham, but with the exclusion of the genuine historical part of the former municipality of Onstwedde, since 1969 integrated into the municipality of Stadskanaal. Political boundaries often lack an argumentative basis (Fig. 1).

Fig. 2. Jurist Robert Fruin Th. Azn (1857-1935) (left) and archaeologist Albert Egges van Giffen (1884-1973) (right) both pursued Westerwolde from their own discipline (source Regionaal Archief Dordrecht (left); Archief GIA (right)).



When analyzing the Westerwolde data, we should continually take note of what area is exactly involved. Furthermore, we should not underestimate the importance of the state border, initiated in the 17th century, when Westerwolde became ‘Generaliteitsland’, and established in 1784 (Van Winter 1965) – the reason why we pay ample attention to the Emsland.

1.2 A historical versus an archaeological approach? A working hypothesis

In this section, we discuss the supposed differences between a historical and an archaeological approach in a specific region, Westerwolde. To call it a paradox is an exaggeration, but analytical methods and synthesizing interpretations differ considerably. Archaeology brings hard evidence but soft interpretation; history still is more based on the written word than on material testimonies. *Pars pro toto*, we present two scholars who, for different reasons, identified themselves with Westerwolde: the jurist Robert Fruin (1857-1935) and the archaeologist Albert Egges van Giffen (1884-1973). Although only partly contemporaries, these two ambitious men considered Westerwolde from their discipline as a *tabula rasa*, although there was no mutual contact.²

Fruin took his doctoral degree in 1886, at Leiden university, on a political treaty, namely, Westerwolde’s legal system amidst distinctive centres of power, from its submission to the Carolingian domination up to its joining the Dutch Republic (Fruin 1886). Surprised as he was about Westerwolde’s petty role in national history, he considered the meagre contemporary interest for the region to not do justice to its eventful past. His political Westerwolde is considerably larger than the ancient sandy core area that the early medieval colonists would have encountered.

Yet it is this Westerwolde core area that constituted the decor of the scientific playground Van Giffen built up, commencing in 1920 with the excavation of a Late Bronze Age urnfield at Wollinguizen (Van Giffen 1920). This was the overture in a series of barrow excavations in Westerwolde that continued until 1943, bringing him international recognition. Van Giffen, an archaeologist with many assets who was strong in systematic approaches, showed less interest in medieval systems, except for the rounded church mound of Vriescheloo, in which he hoped to find a similar centralized ground plan as in the Walburg church in the city of Groningen. When the Vriescheloo church mound proved to contain an ordinary, single-naved ground plan, his interest faded (Van Giffen 1939). The research of medieval religious and civil built heritage in Groningen was left to his temporary assistant Halbertsma, and when the latter found himself better accommodated at the Rijksdienst voor het Oudheidkundig Bodemonderzoek in Amersfoort, this issue received no follow-up in Groningen (Halbertsma 1992: 125-30).

The jurist and high esteemed archivist Fruin was a sharp-minded person with an impressive work ethic, but he apparently showed little flexibility (Ketelaar 1985), thus having character traits in common with Van Giffen. The exertions of these two loners concerning Westerwolde did not result in mutual consultation, even though the historiography of this then still isolated and peripheral region could have greatly benefited from an exchange of views, in particular on the topic of overlapping Frisian and Saxon spheres of influence (Fig. 2).

In the Hesse Fonds series on Westerwolde, published in eight volumes between 1991 and 1998, the historical and the archaeological approach were treated as separate entities, but admittedly at that time the archaeological record of medieval Westerwolde was still patchy.³

2 The name Fruin occurs neither in Van Giffen’s articles on Westerwolde, nor in his extensive correspondence. We thank dr L.B.M. Verhart (Swalmen), who meticulously went through Van Giffen’s correspondence in the GIA archive (pers. comm. 16 April 2020).

3 An incentive is found in Groenendijk & Waterbolk 1998: 95-8.

At the start of this series, the notion prevailed that a history of Westerwolde would primarily be based on literature and archivalia (Gras 1991: 11-4). The Hesse Fonds series did not explicitly work from the presumption of a backward and isolated region, although the editorial preface to Volume 1 hinted at that (Brood, in Delvigne & Koopman 1991: 9-11).⁴

1.3 Notions of 'backward' in the literature and in agronomic statements

1.3.1 The 19th century

A late 18th-century political description of Groningen mentions "*Westwoldingerland ... een afgezonderd landschap, dat in geenerlei opzicht tot den grond der Provincie mag gebracht worden*" (the Westerwolde lands ... a separate region, that in no way must be made part of the Province's territory; De Sitter & Modderman 1793: 3). Although this statement does not contain a value judgement, it evokes the notion that this region stood apart and was considered more or less independent.

Different sons of the Enlightenment devoted journals to Westerwolde. We focus on some passages containing a judgement on Westerwolde's landscape and inhabitants. The earliest source found is theologian and historian De Rhoer, paraphrasing the late medieval Westerwolde *Landrecht* (codified common law) of c. 1470 (De Rhoer 1809). Aiming at scrutinizing local customs, he distinguishes a northern part, dominated by Dollard flood deposits, where "*heerlyke wei- en bouwlanden, alwaar op vette kleigronden 't vee welig tiert, en graanryke akkers gevonden worden*" (glorious meadows and fields, where cattle flourish on rich clay soils and where fields with abundant grain are found) and the actual Westerwolde, where soil conditions are less favourable: "*Hoogerop, 't eigenlyke Westwoldingen, is schraaler*" (up higher, the actual Westerwolde [the soil] is more barren). But the scanty heathland permits sheep farming, honey crops, peat cutting and broom binding, thus offering a steady profit: "*De Heiboer zoekt uit veertig bronnen, 't gene de ander slegts uit eene schept*" (the heath crofter seeks from forty sources that which others create from only one; De Rhoer 1809: 242, 244). In spite of his humanity, De Rhoer views this spreading of the risk from an elitist complacency. With him, no inclination to elevate the region from its loneliness, rather the opposite: rural life agrees with him. At the same time, he accuses the more prosperous people from Bellingwolde and Blijham – whom he counts geographically to Westerwolde but in terms of mores to the Oldambt – of haughtiness (De Rhoer 1809: 247). Obviously, De Rhoer felt more sympathy for the Westerwolde crofter than for the Oldambt homesteader, which makes him a romantic.

School teacher Kremer is more familiar with the local situation and writes a short treatise on the Westerwolde parishes and their topography (Kremer 1818 (1839): 226-49). He stresses the difference between Blijham and Bellingwolde, on the one hand, and actual Westerwolde, on the other: "*De ingezetenen dezer twee kerspels willen ook onder de Woldingen niet gerekend worden: zij verschillen ook van dezelve in kleeding en in levenswijze*" (the inhabitants of these two parishes do not want to be considered part of the Westerwolde lands: they also differ from them in clothing and way of life) and condones this negative connotation as originating in the separate court seats (Kremer 1818 (1839): 226).

And there is that witty sketch of two intellectuals who travel through Westerwolde in 1864, giving insight into the mentality of the local population. This is considered wait-and-see, but not reluctant, simple, patriarchal or hospitable – patriarchal in the sense of guarding the continuity of the family property (Anonymus 1864: 2). This aspect of heredity will be touched upon further below, as landed property in Westerwolde should, according to the *Landrecht*, be kept undivided. Noteworthy, too, is the observation of the presence of much gold and silver among Westerwolde's yeomen, indicating the absence of poverty in this population segment, for "*het gaat hem euvels goed in dezen tijd*" (he is doing extremely well these days). The Westerwolde yeoman emerges from this report as self-confident and conservative, but not poor.

The 19th-century romantics, travelling and glorifying pastoral Westerwolde, remained unaware of the fact that they were not encountering a pristine scenery, but a human-made landscape that had developed as a function of the geographical stratification ever since the 12th-13th centuries. But they at least provide us with some information on the Westerwolde character.

The agronomists, on the other hand, denounced Westerwolde's poor land reclamation. The first professor in *landbouwhuishoudkunde* (rural domestic economy) at Groningen university, Uilkens, dedicated his inaugural address to the improvement of agricultural techniques, especially meant for his home base, the Groningen Westerkwartier (Uilkens 1815). We see him make straightforward propaganda for the enlightened and civilized farmer of his own district, which to a great extent contributed to the image-building of 'the Groningen farmer' (Botke 2002: 528). Others find in Westerwolde a backward region which could greatly benefit from a better opening up to start with. Uilkens' academy successor, Van Hall, identifies the problem of bad drainage, and his circumscription of Westerwolde's agricultural methods testifies to little progressiveness (Van Hall 1839: 125-6).

4 A final conclusion as to the credibility of the backward notion failed to appear.

Winschoten's Mayor Venema, with a keen interest in botany, dedicates 15 pages to Westerwolde's landscape, vegetation and agricultural use. Venema has open eyes for the picturesque scenery, but is most of all surprised by the indifference the inhabitants display in their crop management and even in their home gardens, showing a remarkable dullness and monotony. He criticizes the absence of forestry on the poor, heather-grown sands, where the Westerwolde farmer prefers rough grazing; he furthermore criticizes the permanent rye cultivation on the open fields without fallow and hardly any weed control, "*het gevolg van gebrek aan vertrouwen in het wel gelukken op eigen akker van wat elders goed wordt bevonden*" (the result of a lack of confidence in succeeding on one's own field in what elsewhere counts as a success). On the other hand, Venema is very confident about the buckwheat culture on the peat surfaces, for these are "*de mijnen die hem goud en zilver opleveren*" (the mines that bring him gold and silver; Venema 1857: 204, 210). Venema, born in the prosperous and innovative Veenkoloniën, feels pity for the ignorant and persistent Westerwolde farmer, a situation he judges as a missed opportunity.

Politician and Oldambt *hereboer* (gentleman farmer) Geertsema makes a more crass allegation stating: "*de achterlijke toestand van Westerwolde ligt niet alleen aan de mindere ontwikkeling en weinige beschaving, die er veelal heerscht, maar ten deele ook aan de weinige hulp, die dit afgelegene deel van de provincie heeft genoten*" (the backward condition of Westerwolde is a result not only of the lesser development and low degree of refinement that is largely prevalent, but partially also of the little aid this remote part of the province has received; Geertsema 1868: 104). He criticizes the bad roads and waterways, which prevent people from outside from visiting the region (Geertsema 1868: 158). Geertsema's disapproval is obvious – the more so as the region possesses an ample variety of favourable soil types, as expressed by a mean high land price – and he blames Westerwolde's underdevelopment on remoteness, ignorance, indifference, mutual disagreement and lack of entrepreneurial spirit (Geertsema 1868: 97–100). Geertsema's missionary drive has a point, as his discourse is amply supported by production figures. Objective though his observations may appear, Geertsema nevertheless seems biased by his contemporaries. Botke demonstrated how the image of the Groningen farmer as a civilized and progressive inhabitant of the northern clay zone was gradually but consciously established by individuals and organizations, via literature and picture books, since the end of the 18th century. More than once, this glorified farmer type was identified with the Oldambt peasantry (Botke 2002: 525–49). Top, in his standard work on the history of the Veenkoloniën, is less rejective and finds his scapegoat in the power-hungry city of Groningen, instead of picking on the Westerwolde farmer, although it must be

said that nowhere does he make Westerwolde into an example, either positive or negative (Top 1893).

Halfway the 19th century, Westerwolde's backward agriculture was signalled in official circles. It became an issue on the 14th Nederlands Landhuishoudkundig Congres, held in Winschoten in 1859. There, the complacency of Westerwolde's farming was mocked, the cause being sought in the region's special political circumstances and its long-standing isolation (Addens 1963: 4). Authoritative politicians laid the fundamentals for an institutionalized agricultural thriving, the improvement of agricultural techniques and a better opening up. The Oldambt having the lead in this, any comparison between Oldambt and Westerwolde would be to the detriment of the Westerwolde farmer. This naming and shaming culminated in the 1850s and 1860s, but the Westerwolde farmer apparently did not raise his voice. We can imagine that he, in return, became even more persistent in his retiring nature, to which a history of centuries of repression and leaving him to his lot would have contributed, leaving him with a feeling of immunity. Inward-looking perhaps, but independent by all means. In general, the Westerwolde farmer, in contrast with farmers in the Oldambt, cherished the relationship with his labourers, averse as he was to domination and proud as he was of their well-understood interdependence.

1.3.2 The 20th century

A hundred years later, farmers leader Addens still blames the physical environment for the inevitable triad of wild land–arable land–meadowland, so characteristic for Westerwolde's traditional business units and leading to "*een vrijwel gesloten, zelfgenoegzaam geheel, dat weinig in het ruilverkeer was opgenomen*" (an almost subsistence farming, self-satisfied and with hardly any exchange trading; Addens 1963: 2). Is Addens implicitly touching on a Westerwolde mindset, or should we understand '*zelfgenoegzaam*' (self-satisfied) as introverted, left on their own? Actually, it was an Oldambt farmer who initiated the canalization, and the Westerwolde beneficiary party was reproached as being indifferent to this matter (Volders 2016: 108). In retrospect, Addens, the progressive leader, sees only an improvement of Westerwolde's bad economic situation, together with the drainage programme of the 1910s–1920s and the accelerated modernization of farming after World War II.

The end of the 19th century sees a more practical approach to a now overtly recognized problem, i.e. the bad drainage, in particular in the border region near Germany. A growing call for reclamation of the vast heathlands accelerates the establishment of the Vereeniging tot Bevordering van de Kanalisatie van Westerwolde (society for the promotion of the canalization of Westerwolde), in 1891. This society seized

any opportunity to propagate the digging of canals, in accordance with the landsurface slope from south to north through the lowland of the Bourtangerveen (Volders 2016). As far as canalization is concerned, the Groningen and Drenthe Veenkoloniën undoubtedly served as a role model, and even when in 1909 the fundraising proved successful, a lot of advertisement had gone before, as the popular issue *Westerwolde in Woord en Beeld* from 1897 demonstrates. The editors, advocates of canalization but also afflicted with romantic feelings about unspoilt scenery, sighed “*ons arm, schoon, verwaarloosd Westerwolde*” (poor, beautiful and neglected Westerwolde; Lubberts & Tiemersma 1897: 104). At the turn of the century, the idea of progress posed no threat whatsoever for Westerwolde’s natural scenery; being cut off from waterways and connection roads was worse, and it was synonymous with poor, backward.

In reaction to a visitor’s remark on the beautiful scenery, a Westerwolde inhabitant answers that, yes, it is a good place to keep pigs (Koning 1897: 56). Apart from uttering this often paraphrased stereotypical Groningen understatement, did the Westerwolde peasant resign himself to his situation, did he strive for agricultural improvement at all? We still do not hear his voice, whether he wanted to be released from isolation.

In 1945, agricultural engineer Muntinga pays attention to the mentality of Westerwolde’s residents in former times, summing up negative qualities, such as persistency (the farmers’ own judgement in disputed matters) and conservatism (in particular in matters of *marke* separation, canalization, road planning, the relocation of town halls, cultural organizations and cooperatives). But then he tones down this verdict by underlining the reverse of these qualities, turning them into positive traits, that is, austerity and industriousness: “*Zoo had een vermeerderde welvaart geen of weinig invloed op de leefwijze*” (Thus [they stayed] unaffected by the steadily increasing level of prosperity; Muntinga 1945: 40). Oldambt-bred Muntinga was concerned about the loss of identity but again yearned for a new era, in line with the spirit of progress after World War II. He tries to objectify old and new against the background of agricultural development, but without really taking a position⁵ (Fig. 3). Revealing is a contemporary treatise on Drenthe, a ‘manual’ aiming to scrutinize the Drenthe character in a time of major changes, by Poortman (1951). Poortman wants to know how the regional character was judged around 1850 by contemporary writers, just before the ‘great breakthrough’ (of new reclamations, that is). Typifying the inhabitants of the old villages in sandy Drenthe, we find such qualities as



Fig. 3. J.E. Muntinga at the entrance of the Groningen railway station, 1955 (courtesy G. Muntinga, Paterswolde).

matigheid (moderation), *zedigheid* (modest behaviour), *eerlijkheid* (honesty) and *spaarzaamheid* (thriftiness), but at the same time *verkleefdheid aan oude instellingen* (attachment to old habits) and *zucht naar vrijheid* (desire for freedom; Poortman 1951: 142-4). Does that really differ from the qualifications Westerwolde is criticized for? Rather, it seems a cliché for those societies that lived in landscape-induced isolation and under long-term foreign rule.

Back to the Oldambt perspective. Social geographer and Oldambt son Hofstee was a late representative of influential scholars to underestimate Westerwolde in contrast with the diligent Oldambt, saying, “*Westerwolde mist bijna alles, wat men meestal voor Groningen als kenmerkend beschouwt*” (Westerwolde lacks practically everything that one considers typical for Groningen. In the perception of a Groningen resident it hardly forms part of it) and “*Toonaangevend zijn ze allerminst*” (They are far from trendsetting), for which he blamed the long dominance of the *marke* organization and the miserable road connections (Hofstee 1938: 19-20).⁶ As for the failing infrastructure and drainage, the criticism was not

⁵ Kind information of G. Muntinga, Paterswolde (pers. comm. 20 May 2020).

⁶ Still, Hofstee, too, criticizes the character traits of the Oldambt population, especially in his paragraph on ‘inclinations’ (Hofstee 1938: 68-70).

quite fair, because downstream Oldambt would directly benefit from a quicker run-off in upland Westerwolde, whereas the increased flow rate of Westerwolde's main watercourses was largely to blame to the advanced peat bog reclamation in the Drenthe part of the Bourtange moor. Oldambt leaders may have acted out of a true idealistic paternalism, but economic motives lay dormant.

On the local level, we came across an interesting observation in Buringh's historical description of Blijham, one of the medieval peat reclamation settlements fringing the Pleistocene spurs of northern Westerwolde (Buringh 1954). The experienced farmers leader wonders why so many agricultural parcels in Blijham belong to Westerwolde farmers and seeks the reason in the lack of fertile soil in their home region, Blijham being the nearest place in which to find rich clayey soils. Buringh states that most of the parcels involved were purchased in times of economic recession, when buyers' response in Blijham itself was low and the thrifty Westerwolde farmer seized the opportunity to buy at a bargain (Buringh 1954: 18). As a leader of the Blijham peasantry, Buringh displays a tinge of disdain towards the Westerwolde farmer. Muntinga provides more pragmatic information on the same issue. These transactions took place around 1822, during a period of agricultural crisis, when some Blijham peasants short of money, obtained a loan from the wealthier Westerwolde farmers. As the latter lacked the equipment to cultivate the heavy, clayey soil, they left the tillage to the Blijham peasants, who received part of the yield in return (Muntinga 1945: 111). This emergency alliance will certainly not have contributed to bridge the Westerwolde–Oldambt gap.

After World War II, Westerwolde farmers developed more self-confidence, but not by just copying Oldambt farmers. They attended the agricultural university at Wageningen, or let their daughters marry farmers from the clay district, e.g. the Hoogeland, as a Westerwolde spokesman told us.⁷ A differentiation between northern and southern Westerwolde in dialect and orientation emerges. Especially in the evolving welfare state of the 1960s, this openness to the outer world got them a foothold in economic development. In contrast, cherishing nature and conducting a rural farming life became the occupation of a new group of immigrants, from the western Netherlands this time, representatives of a young counterculture escaping urbanization.

For Westerwolde, we have no counterpart to Hofstee's sociographic study of the Oldambt; it is only through occasional observations that we catch a glimpse of the Westerwolde mentality. Such observations were recorded in the 19th and 20th century, which gives

them only limited explanatory power for the preceding centuries. Character sketches run the risk of ending in anecdotal compilations; nevertheless, we would like to know what identity Westerwolde's primarily agrarian society saw for itself. If the image from the outside was anything but positive, can we say more about cause and effect throughout Westerwolde's history? We want to scrutinize this particular region from the historical and archaeological angle, hoping that this combined approach sheds some light on the character of Westerwolde's society and its external contacts.

2. General contextual observations: Saxony in the early and high medieval period

In order to be able to delve into the heart of the Middle Ages and to answer the question of Westerwolde's contacts with the outside world, and thus also the question of whether or not this landscape and society were, in fact, isolated, we first ask two fundamental questions from a historical point of view. In principle, an answer to these questions should make it possible to incorporate findings from archaeology. The first question is: What is the general context of the period in a considerably broader geographical perspective? Without this knowledge, the position of Westerwolde cannot be determined in nuance. The second question – which became increasingly urgent during our investigations – is: What is the dating and reliability of the historical sources available for Westerwolde? It is only on this basis of knowing the answer to this question that the position of Westerwolde as an agricultural society in confrontation with the outside world can be better gauged.

2.1 Carolingian conquest of northern regions and the process of Christianization in Frisia and Saxonia

Over the past 20 years, the perception of the Carolingian conquest of the Saxon territories, their integration into the Carolingian power sphere, and the process of Christianization has changed quite fundamentally. In view of our goal, we do not need to elaborate on this subject; it will suffice to take a look at the current state of art in historiography, insofar as it is relevant for a good understanding of Westerwolde's context. The introduction of Christianity in an area that was still 'pagan' did not happen in isolation. Christianization in itself is a lengthy process, which did not always go well (Schmidt & Schubert 1997; Schubert 1997; Groenendijk & Van Schaik 2008: 101-9 and Van Schaik 2008a:

7 Kind information B.J. Harding (Sneek), son of a Westerwolde yeoman (pers. comm. 10 June 2020). An article written by his father W.G. Harding breathes this 'new' Westerwolde attitude towards agricultural improvement (Harding 1970).

126-8). Christianization by missionaries was only possible thanks to the northward and eastward expansion of the Franks, especially among the rising mayors (in the sense of *maiores domini*), who, as Carolingians, finally exercised actual power in the 8th century. From the time of the reign of Pippin III, son of Charles Martel, in 751, they were formally recognized as Frankish kings. These missionaries were initially of Anglo-Saxon origin, such as Willibrord, Winfrith-Boniface or Willehad, but subsequently also of Frankish or Frisian origin, among whom Liudger was the most prominent in the North. Carolingian power and Church needed each other for their own legitimacy and for their own power aspirations. Christianization is not an independent process.

It was made clear 20 years ago that, after the conquest of Saxony by Charlemagne (768-814) and the forced conversion and baptism of Widukind (whether feigned or not) in 785, the interest of the Carolingians in Saxony was weakened because their attention was claimed elsewhere in the empire (Carroll 1999: 222). In 2007, a comprehensive study convincingly explained how Saxony was integrated into the Carolingian power sphere and, above all, how laborious the integration was (Ehlers 2007). The fact that these authors had no knowledge that a number of the charters they relied on were, as would later be established, considered to be forged, especially those of Louis the Pious (814-840), can hardly be blamed on them. We will discuss this later. Nevertheless, some of the conclusions of these studies are still valid and are, indeed, only reinforced by new diplomatic findings. In fact, a direct relationship with these Carolingians was created on a large scale afterwards, by beneficiary institutions hoping to obtain rights by claiming the oldest possible and therefore respectable age. This means that a number of early 'foundations' or donations from the late 8th and first half of the 9th century must be regarded with suspicion. It was only under Louis the German (843-876) that a cautious attempt could be made to achieve a firmer grip on Saxony as well. After the Treaty of Verdun, in 843, a first division of the Empire (or, better, the totality of royal properties and rights) had been achieved and an East Franconian Kingdom, later the German Empire, was created.

As a result, we have to be careful not to attribute all kinds of blueprints for administrative subdivisions of the conquered territory to Charlemagne and his successor Louis the Pious, as happened too easily in older, and even in rather recent, studies. There was no master plan. This applies to a division into *pagi* or districts

(*Gauen*), which Rösener (2017: 11) traces back to the Lippspringe assembly in 782, with fixed boundaries, whether they were existing territories of indigenous aristocrats or newly formed with authorities from elsewhere in Saxony.⁸ As if such a division would be possible in such a vast, newly conquered area! After all, that supposes that someone like Charlemagne would have had loyal people at his disposal who could serve him as an organized bureaucracy. Being a count depended as much on personal prestige and personal relationships as did the kingship itself at the time. A count's authority determined the vastness of his *pagus*, or county. A count did not reign over 'country and people', but over 'people' and only through them over 'country'. Exactly the same was true for bishops and their dioceses (Kölzer 2015: 21-2). Territorialization of the exercise of power required stable relationships and institutions. In essence, this is something that was only laboriously established from the 11th/12th century onwards. For the 9th and possibly 10th century, we must therefore be cautious about mapping out administrative boundaries. Maps provide a static image; genesis and dynamics are lost in them.

If we zoom in on the assumed division into *pagi* around 800-1000 in the region relevant to us, we see the following. Many German authors – and in their footsteps also Dutch authors – assume that the region of Westerwolde had been part of the Emsgau since Carolingian times. In many cases, this goes back to the study by Prinz (1934: 29). However, he saw a Saxon Emsgau with Aschendorf and Rhede, of which he did not dare to indicate the exact size, and speculated about a separate Frisian Emsgau, of which Westerwolde would be a part (Steinwascher 2002: 236). We see this on a map that Bockhorst (2006: 46) included in his article on Meppen and Corvey, in which he depicted the Emsgau from c. 800 to c. 1000 (Fig. 4).⁹ There, however, Aschendorf and Rhede are marked out into the Agradingau, which he considers to be a Saxon residential area, while Westerwolde is apparently considered part of the Frisian residential area. It remains uncertain whether Westerwolde belongs to that Emsgau. This northern part of the Agradingau, as well as Westerwolde, did not belong to the original area of the Meppen mission cell, as it was donated by Louis the Pious to the abbey of Corvey in 834. It was not until the second half of the 9th century that this northern part was donated to Corvey by Louis the German (Bockhorst 1992: 11, 2006: 47). More about the dating of this

8 According to McKitterick 2008: 253, at the assembly of Lippspringe, 'counts were appointed (apparently from among the Saxons), to administer the newly conquered territory'; see about that assembly also 229.

9 This is without any justification, but borrowed from Nauhaus 1984: Karte 7. Despite the best intentions of the author/designer, a justification for what is marked as Frisian and what is marked as Saxon is not given. Nauhaus also has Karte 1 (c. 250-750: Herkunft und Wanderung der Sachsen), on which the entire area of Westerwolde is marked as Frisian. That seems very hypothetical.

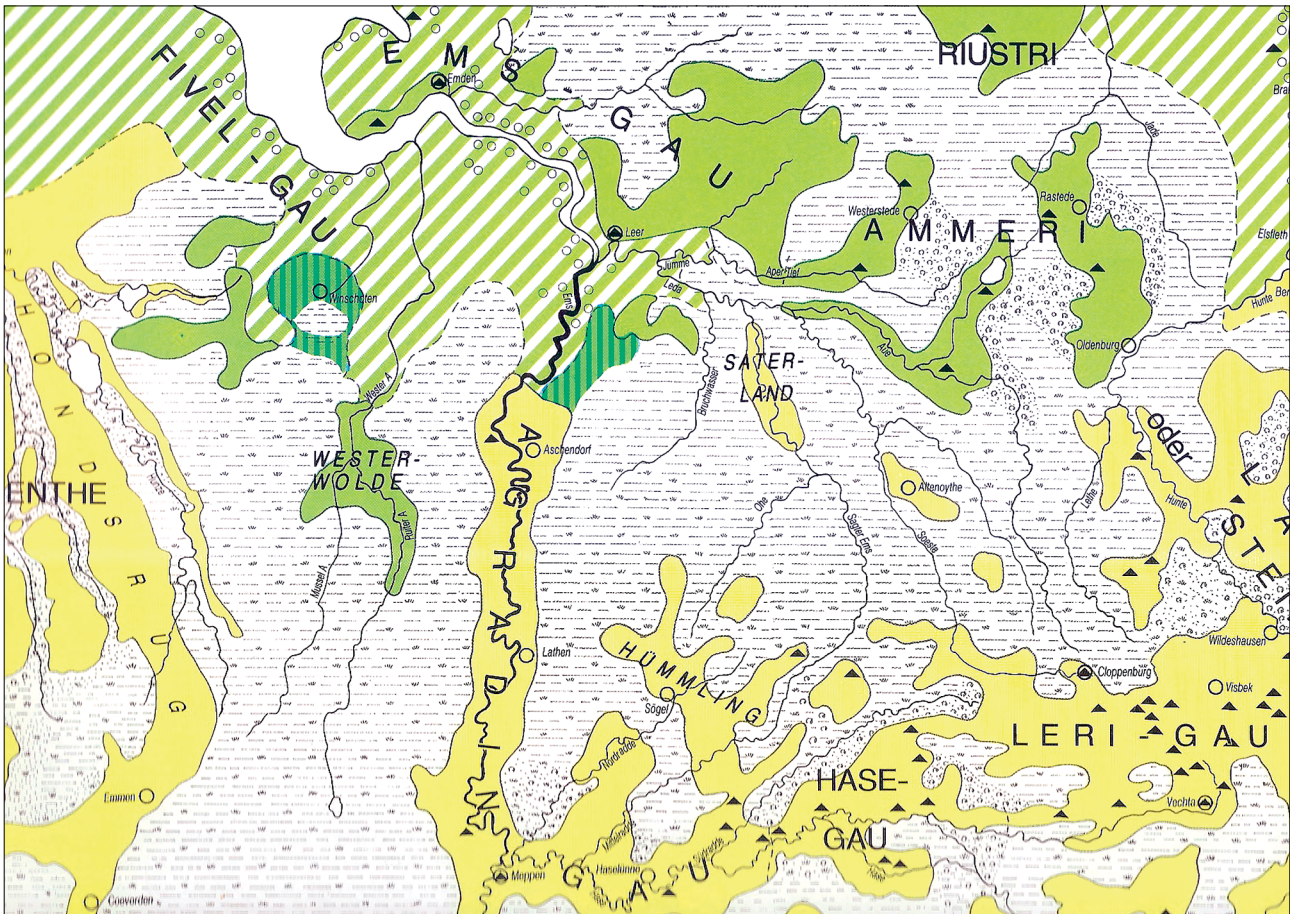


Fig. 4. Map of the Carolingian districts in the north-west of Saxony (c. 800-1000), showing the residential areas that were supposed to be Saxon (yellow) and Frisian (green), the colonized areas (dark green), and the salt marshes (light green). Especially the colouring of Westerwolde on this map of Nauhaus is debatable in our view. Bogs are in between (source Nauhaus 1984: Karte 7; courtesy Emsländische Landschaft e.V., Sögel).

donation and our doubts about it follow below (cf. 3.2.1). It is generally accepted that Aschendorf, *Ascanthorp* in the mid-9th century *Vita Liudgeri*, was a Saxon settlement despite the suffix *-thorp* (Old Frisian for village), which was unusual in that region.¹⁰

The answer to the question whether Westerwolde originally belonged to the Agradingau or the Emsgau is therefore not a definite matter. The next question is whether Westerwolde, if it belonged to any Emsgau, was also included in the count's rights that later, in the 12th century, ended up with the counts of Cavelage, who, from 1140, called themselves counts of Ravensberg (Schubert 1997: 374). This raises the question whether the Emsgau from the very beginning consisted, as a district, of a Frisian and a Saxon part, each of which led their own life. In any case, the Frisian part includes the Reiderland, directly north of Westerwolde, which is relevant to us, but it is clear that names for such an autonomous region (*terra*, *Landesgemeinde*) only appear later, in late 13th-early 14th century.

The name *Emsga* appears for the first time as one of the areas that Charlemagne assigned to Liudger in 787 as part of the missionary territory. As such, it is mentioned in Liudger's *vita* by Altfrid (Van Lengen 1973: 13-4). This *vita* does not say anything about its size. Since Liudger's mission area had become part of the diocese of Münster, and since this is the Frisian part of what is later known as Emsgau, it is imaginable that this Emsgau extended to the *pagus* we know in Carolingian times as Agradingau. We should then see it as the Saxon part of the Emsgau (the present Emsland). That part would belong to the diocese of Osnabrück. Van Lengen (1976: Karte 1) saw the boundary between the Frisian and the Saxon part as running parallel to the boundary between the two dioceses and suggests that everything south of the line Heiligerlee-Bellingwolde-Dünebroek-Stapelmoor belonged to Osnabrück, and that it was Saxon and therefore not Frisian. Could it be that this map created a too-sharp boundary between Frisian and Saxon? Then the question remains whether what we consider to be

¹⁰ The settlement name is interpreted as the manor of a certain Asic, Asico or Asuco and thus a centre of a Saxon demesne (Bockhorst 1992: 10).

Old-Westerwolde, the area of the later five parishes, should be included in the Saxon part of the Emsgau and thus be declared Saxon. There is no doubt that at some point it became part of the diocese of Osnabrück. However, this incorporation is related to the process of Christianization and the development of parishes, not to whether or not the area of Westerwolde belonged to an administrative district from the Carolingian era. It is not related to the ethnic composition of the population.

Count's rights in the Frisian countries were first mentioned in 826, when Louis the Pious enfeoffed the Dane Harald with it. This refers to '*magnam partem Fresonum*', the '*comitatus Hriustri*' (Schmidt & Schubert 1997: 911, 920). However, this Rüstringen is situated considerably more to the north than the Emsgau. This granting of rights is not of importance for 'our' region. Steinwascher (2002: 237) emphasizes the importance of the Emsgau as a connection between both areas, although there must have been some sort of boundary between Frisian and Saxon or Westphalian occupation areas, and in the north-west the bogs could have formed some sort of boundary. Because medieval chroniclers, of whom the 13th-century Abbot Emo of Wittewierum is the oldest, always apply the name Emsgau to what we call the Frisian part, Steinwascher assumes that this boundary should be sought in a broad band in the Hümmling and the bogs to the north and west. He emphasizes that in fen woods, borders remained undefined for centuries. He also states that diocese borders are inconclusive, since Osnabrück stretched into the south of East Frisia and west of the Ems into the area around Westerwolde and Bellingwolde. In Steinwascher's opinion (2002: 238), it is also remarkable that the church of Aschendorf is one of the oldest parish churches in the area and that for a long time it existed separately from the assumed mission cell of Meppen, which is said to date from before 793 (Bockhorst 2012: 1053).¹¹ He thinks that it is not excluded that Aschendorf therefore initially belonged to Liudger's missionary territory. This also seems very likely to us, but at the same time indicates that Westerwolde occupied a special place, because it did not become part of Liudger's missionary legacy when dioceses were formed.

2.2 First incitements to institutionalize an ecclesiastical infrastructure

All too easily, it has been assumed that already under Charlemagne and Louis the Pious an ecclesiastical structure in the form of dioceses was created. It was supposed, first, that the Carolingian conquest was uncontested and paved the way to a top-down sanctioned continuing introduction of Christianity and, second, that it was

a primary interest of the Carolingians to institutionalize Christianity in the newly conquered territories. As far as this second point is concerned, it is striking that Charlemagne and Louis the Pious, the latter in spite of his ascribed epithet, were considerably less concerned with actual Christianization than is often assumed. Consolidation of their newly conquered territory was a first priority, thus favouring aristocratic families or clans, mainly but not exclusively indigenous, on the one hand, and recently founded monasteries or equivalent ecclesiastical institutions, on the other. Their aim was to create support in a region that was in principle still hostile. How else can it be explained that the missionary activities of Willehad did not result directly in a diocese of Bremen and those of Liudger in 805, in a diocese of Münster? It is also true that Charlemagne, and certainly Louis the Pious, could not deal with Saxony all the time. Their attention was regularly drawn to threats elsewhere in the basically over-expanded empire. Quite apart from succession law and family competition, the division treaties of Verdun (843), Meerssen (870) and Ribemont (880) successively ensured more manageable territories.

Carroll concluded that Saxony in its first century as part of the Carolingian Empire had 'an inherently weak provincial church' (Carroll 1999: 245). He had several arguments for this. Only in four charters was property granted to eight episcopal sees: Paderborn in 862-887, by Count Sirag; Hildesheim in 871-887, by King Louis the German and his successor; Verden in 876, by King Louis the Younger; and Münster in 889, by King Arnulf. Privileges in connection with properties, however, were not granted to the dioceses of Osnabrück, Minden or Münster. Insofar as dioceses had land properties other than the private property of the residing bishops, their size was not comparable with more southerly dioceses or with such abbeys as Corvey, Werden or Fulda. They received hardly any gifts from the Saxon nobility, never mind from the Carolingian monarchs. The Saxon aristocracy, once 'converted', turned out to be more interested in monastic foundations than in episcopal ones. Abbeys were seen as a kind of family monastery, for which it was unnecessary to alienate family domains (Carroll 1999: 222-5). Moreover, much of the land of Saxon nobles had already been confiscated as royal demesne (*Reichsgut*). From this, mission cells and early imperial abbeys were endowed (cf. also Rösener 2017: 15, 21-5). The Christianization of southern Germany had occurred much earlier, and that region had known a more intense and long-lasting Frankish influence. Christianity had already gained a foothold there before a structured episcopal hierarchy was established. In

11 In Section 2.2, we will indicate that Kölzer (2019: 9-10) has expressed serious suspicions about a division of Saxony into mission areas from 780, decreed by Charlemagne, to which Bockhorst is apparently referring.

Saxony, however, unlike elsewhere, the first bishops came either from outside Saxony or from mission cells staffed by monks from elsewhere. In short, Saxony was in a sense rather isolated politically, and bishops hardly played a role in Carolingian politics during the first hundred years either; their *Königsnähe* (proximity to the king) was minimal (Carroll 1999: 244). Of the Saxon nobility, only the Liudolfings stood out. In fact, Ehlers (2007) has documented and cartographically supported the difficult integration of Saxony up to the 11th century. In addition to the successive Carolingian kings, the construction of an ecclesiastical infrastructure and the role of the aristocratic genera received explicit attention in his book.

Be this as it may, the idea that a division into dioceses had been established at an early stage, which included early mission cells and their range, is better relegated to the realm of fiction. We will see later on how much the bishop of Osnabrück fought with Corvey Abbey over rights and possessions that had originally been granted to the Meppen mission cell from royal demesne. Boundaries between dioceses were not established until the high Middle Ages. The northern border of the diocese of Osnabrück, and thus the border with the diocese of Münster, was even disputed until the late Middle Ages, as this was an area of fen woods. Recent studies by Kölzer (2012, 2015, 2019), Vogtherr (2012) and Rösener (2015, 2017) have shown that many assumptions about the early Saxon mission and the early beginnings of ecclesiastical organization can be discarded. The idea of mission cells, such as those of Meppen and Visbek, as future dioceses, has also been fully abandoned. Mission cells were Christianization centres that were good locations in terms of traffic geography and catchment area, the range of which was determined essentially by a day trip of up to 20 to 30 km (Kölzer 2015: 26). A charter of Louis the Pious from 819 for Visbek has been unmasked as a forgery. Thus, early church foundations attributed to Visbek could also be declared invalid (Vogtherr 2012: 127–30). Later on, we will see that early church foundations in connection with Corvey's property in Aschendorf and Westerwolde are also very doubtful. It is therefore questionable whether a Meppen mission cell already was responsible for a series of church foundations before the transfer to Corvey in 834. And even in 834, Meppen is referred to by the diminutive *cellula*, which casts serious doubts on its importance (Kölzer 2019: 4). In charters of Conrad III from 1147 and 1147/51 and Frederick I Barbarossa from 1152, the mission cells of Visbek, Eresburg and Meppen are traced back to Louis the Pious as Corvey property, while in 12th-century

historiographical notes from Corvey, Louis the German went through life as a mild benefactor (Vogtherr 2012: 129). This does indicate that Corvey treated the past of its possessions rather dubiously. That the struggle for competence with the bishop of Osnabrück, to which we will return in more detail later (cf. 3.3.1), is the background to this is beyond dispute.

Kölzer's diplomatic research and Vogtherr's historical analysis make clear that there was no question of bishopric foundations in Saxony under Charlemagne and Louis the Pious, apart from Paderborn in 822 and perhaps Münster c. 805 (but no record of the latter has been preserved). All 'foundations' appear to be based on forged or highly dubious charters (table in Kölzer 2015: 20). For these kings, foundations of bishoprics were not a common instrument of power in Saxony. It was only under Louis the German, first for Bremen 847/848, then Osnabrück 848, Verden 849 and 874, Paderborn 859 and Hildesheim 871, that something seems to have been created for Saxony as a whole, namely, bishopric recognition as an instrument for 'incorporation' into the kingdom. Halberstadt completed the series, in 902. It was not until the second half of the 9th century that dioceses gained legal status in the East Franconian Kingdom. The establishment of an ecclesiastical infrastructure was a process of several decades. It was also only under Louis the German that loyal Saxon aristocrats were placed on a bishop's seat (Vogtherr 2012: 140–5; Kölzer 2015: 24), and for the first time in 868 (Synod of Worms), Saxon bishops are named after their seats (Kölzer 2019: 12–13). Boundaries only began to play a role when the Investiture Controversy had fully erupted: it provoked juridification (Fig. 5).¹² Bishops worked for a long time within a mission area assigned to them before an institutionalized diocese with crystallized rights and borders could be established.

In connection with this, the phenomenon of forgeries affects not only the privileges of dioceses and abbeys granted by Carolingian kings, but also those granted by popes. The recent edition of papal charters in Lower Saxony and Bremen makes it clear that, until the middle of the 11th century, there was no papal chancellery at all and that charters were often pre-formulated by the receiving party. In Rome, only the opening and closing formulas were added, and the charter was sealed. Most of these charters have not been preserved in their original form, but are only known from copies. Of the 163 charters from the period 832–1198, 32 are forged and 4 doubtful, but from the period up to 1051 alone, of the 35, 23 are forged and 3 suspect. From 1051 onwards, the number of charters rises very sharply, but the number

12 Nauhaus 1984: *Karte 12* incorrectly assumes that Westerwolde, together with the Hümmling and the entire Agradingau, belonged to the area of the Meppen mission cell.

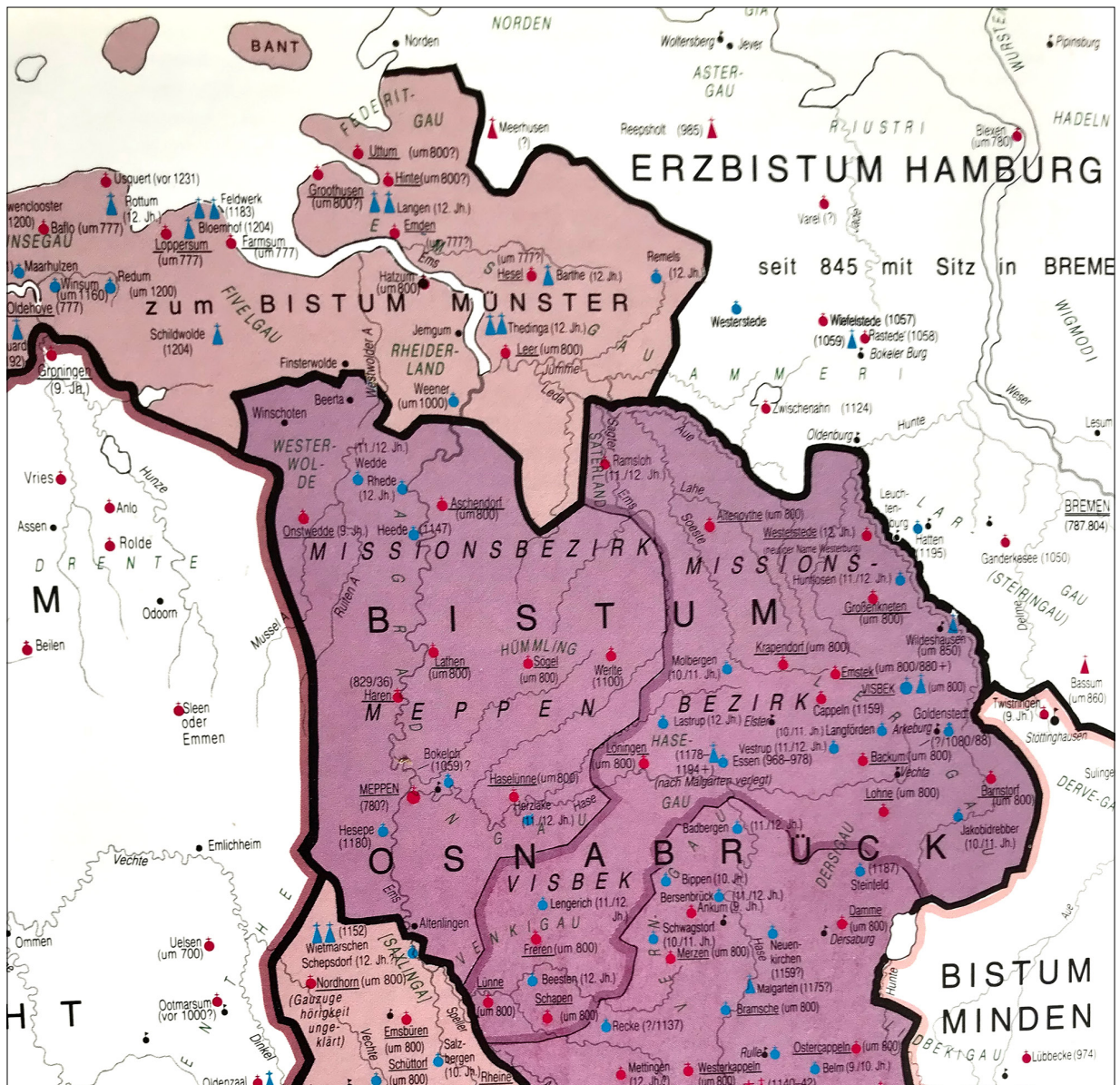


Fig. 5. Map of the bishoprics of Osnabrück and Münster around 1200. The churches shown in red are supposed to be mission or baptismal churches, whereas those shown in light blue are propriety churches, in function of mission churches. The colouring of those of Onstwedde, Wedde and Lathen on this map of Nauhaus is debatable in our view, as are the precise boundaries of the three mission areas within the diocese of Osnabrück, because they no longer existed in the 11th-12th centuries (source Nauhaus 1984; Karte 12; courtesy Emsländische Landschaft e.V., Sögel).

of forgeries gradually decreases (Dolle 2019: 13). In this sense, it is not surprising that until the 11th-12th century, falsification took place on a large scale.

Something similar, but in terms of territoriality, can also be seen in the formation of parishes. The parish as a limited territorial unit was only defined by canon law by 800. For a long time, it was in fact a group of persons entrusted to the care of a priest, first and foremost a community. For the diocese of Münster, it was concluded that around 1300 there were still no fixed parish boundaries (Petke 2013: 50), even though without boundaries set out in a document it can be assumed that somewhere between the 9th and 12th centuries, parishes increasingly acquired a territorial character.

Undoubtedly, parishes in the sense of ecclesiastical communities organized themselves before an episcopal authority had been able to establish itself, so around the middle of the 9th century, archdeacons were introduced as a link between bishop and parishes, and around 900, deans. In the East Franconian Kingdom, however, such institutions were only introduced in the 11th century (Petke 2013: 22, 23, 29-32). In the Carolingian period, most of the churches, even episcopal churches, were founded as propriety churches (*Eigenkirchen*) within the framework of the domain of the founder (Wood 2006). It was not until the 11th century that an attempt was made to put a stop to this, also in the context of the Investiture Controversy. In this way, the system of

proprietary churches was called into question (Petke 2013: 34-40), even though it was difficult to side-track lay people and prevent them from continuing to claim a disproportionate amount of income, as a result of which priests could insufficiently provide for themselves. In short: the foundation of churches depended on important people, on men who could exercise power and who thought they could benefit from a church foundation, so that it could contribute to the status of the founder. Various authors warned against seeing parish formation as something organized from above.¹³ To what extent this was different in the Frisian countries within the area of the dioceses of Utrecht and Münster, as recently argued by De Langen & Mol (2017), and what that has to do with, requires further investigation. From Lower Saxony and Westphalia, we have no indications of this.

2.3 The role of early Carolingian abbeys, local elites and acquisition of land properties and rights over local inhabitants

As will be clear from the foregoing, in Saxony, we are dealing with a Frankish conquest strategy aimed at the sustainable integration of Saxony into the expanding empire. Whereas the Carolingians, actually like their predecessors, the Merovingians, used Church and Christianity as much as possible for their own purposes in order to legitimize their ambitions, it is not surprising that this was essentially a top-down approach. Clergymen were pre-eminently people who were literate and educated and who were able to support the new regime, which still consisted mainly of fighters, in the laborious construction of power structures. On the other hand, missionaries who came with the Franks had all the advantage of being supported by the new rulers in what were foreign territories for them. For both, it was important to connect with autochthonous local and regional aristocratic families in order to gain a foothold and to start building institutions. For the Franks, winning loyalty was a requirement for breaking resistance, and by issuing confiscated lands from those who had actually offered resistance, they often succeeded in establishing the basis of the so-called *Reichsgut*, or royal demesne (Metz 1960). Of course, there were collaborating and non-collaborating Saxon nobles.

We already saw that the first monasteries were initially populated by people from outside Saxony. Establishment or foundation and, above all, perspectives for a continued existence and expansion of monasteries and ecclesiastical institutions required material equipment in the form of buildings and maintenance of

personnel. Religious zeal alone was obviously not sufficient in an environment that remained hostile for a long time. In a typically agrarian society, this economic basis consisted of land tenure. Part of this tenure was created through donations by the Carolingians from their royal demesne. Such endowments played a role in the construction of the Saxon abbey of Corvey, which was founded from the Picardy abbey of Corbie (Metz 1959). Another part of it was created through donations by local and regional lords, who certainly did not do this only for the salvation of their own souls, but above all for the ultimate benefit of themselves. Showing commitment to Christianity as the label of the new ruling power by donating estates implied actually participating in power and at the same time having influence. Here the *do ut des* principle, used with notions from anthropology and sociology in historical science, applies, which was analysed in detail by such researchers as Bijsterveld, in several publications about the Carolingian core region of Lorraine and Brabant during the early and high Middle Ages (Bijsterveld 2007).¹⁴ *Mutatis mutandis*, the situation was not much different elsewhere, like here, in the area of the Saxons or the Frisians.

If we consider these influences from the core area of Frankish power and also of imports of church and monastic personnel, it is not surprising that economic forms of organization, too, came to Saxony and were introduced there, whether or not in a modified form. Similarities and differences were specifically highlighted by Rösener (1985). In the core area of the Frankish empire, in which a rather self-sufficient agricultural economy was generally dominant well into the 11th century, as was the case in Saxony, in contrast to the Frisian coastal area, large landholdings were often organized in a bipartite manorial system. We call this the 'classic manor', but acknowledge immediately that every system – particularly in the distant past – is a historical construct. This includes, simplified, one or a few manors or demesnes with central functions, consisting of the *curtis dominica* (or *Fronhof* in German); the house with the barns and other outbuildings; and the manorial lands, or *terra salica*, managed by the owner or an administrator or steward (*villicus*) as representative of the landlord, abbey or other ecclesiastical institution. Within a radius of roughly 30 to 35 km, a number of farmsteads (*mansi*) were connected to or dependents of each of those manor(s). These villein holdings had to remit at least obligatory annual deliveries, mainly in kind. The manor is often called a *curia* or a *curtis* (Rösener 1980: 115). The functioning of this manorial system (*Villikationssystem* in German) has been studied

13 Also, Isenberg (2016: 56-7) points out that parish formation in Westphalia was not organized from above, but was a bottom-up process.

14 This is a volume of previously published studies, of which one from 1996 and another from 2001 are the most important.

extensively for Saxony (summarized by Hauptmeyer 1997: 1069-7).

The legal status of these villeins could differ. Whereas in the manor, peasants had a very strong dependency relationship and thus a high degree of lack of freedom, especially in the first generations, because they were supposed to provide all kinds of mandatory services on the spot by order of the steward, in the remote farmsteads – certainly in areas that were less easily accessible – the degree of freedom could be greater. It should also be noted that, as a result of the struggles between the Franks and the Saxons and their outcome, the position of the common people had deteriorated and that, even before that, traditional Saxon noble families had extensive land ownership and rule over non-free population groups (Rösener 1985: 176-8). This form of organization of large-scale land ownership can also be seen in Saxony among the early abbeys that received land possession there. If the abbey itself was closer, it was possible to maintain this agricultural system. However, as the distance increased, it became increasingly difficult to maintain it for years. Already in the course of the 11th, but especially the 12th century, we see that land properties that were (too) far away were either disposed of, as they turned out not to be profitable to exploit, or disappeared from sight because local administrators took advantage of them.

More concretely, we will see how this worked out with land owned by the abbeys of Werden and Corvey, which both had properties as far away as Westerwolde and the Frisian territories. Rösener (1980: 119-20) thought that this classical manorial system was only easily recognized in the Frankish core region itself, between the Loire and the Rhine. The abbey of Prüm, in the Eiffel, for example, corresponds to this opinion. There, the serfs at the manor had to fulfil strict obligations. But farther away (also for Prüm), such a system can prove to be much weakened or even absent. So there is no uniform manorial system. A fairly common phenomenon is that large landowners, for their scattered and distant possessions (*Streubesitz*), to a large extent relied on landed remittances and tributes, and did not require any labour services from the peasants. This means that peasants in general were able to carry out their business fairly independently (Rösener 1985: 178). From the Frisian coastal area, we know of a situation in which a fully functioning

manor is missing or has become a purely administrative centre, where the required remittances were collected. This situation is for instance assumed for the manors of Werden, the bishop and the Dom Chapter of Utrecht in the settlement of Groningen. These possessions also went back to royal demesne. Nevertheless, even in a village such as Groningen, for instance, serfdom was not entirely absent and could even be identified until the 15th century, although it was largely in decline from the 13th century as a result of urban development (Noomen 1990: 111).¹⁵

3. Westerwolde in the historical sources until the 14th century

After these general observations, it is time to focus on the two abbeys that had possessions in Westerwolde. We do this by successively checking the available historical sources and their reliability. We start with the period of the earliest toponyms. These originate from the oldest lists of properties of the abbeys of Werden and Corvey.¹⁶

3.1 *The earliest mentions of Westerwolde in the sources of the abbeys of Werden and Corvey*

With regard to Werden's property in Westerwolde, there are still the fewest problems. Considerably more complicated is the case of the Benedictine monastery of Corvey (*Nova Corbeia*), which was founded in 822 near Höxter, on the Weser, from the Picardie abbey of Corbie, after a failed attempt elsewhere in 815. That is why the explanation of Corvey's sources will be by far the lengthiest.

But first let us discuss the abbey of Werden, on the Ruhr, founded by Liudger shortly before 800. Apart from an as yet unreliable older mention, about which more is to be found below, the oldest mention of the name Westerwolde dates from the 10th century: "*Uuestaruualde in Unesuuido*" (Künzel 1988: 395). The source for this is the oldest inventory of properties of Werden, the so-called *Urbar A* of Werden, which is an autograph (Kötzschke 1906: 51). According to its editor, Kötzschke, the *Urbar* is composed of various parts, which originate from the period from about 850 to 950, and which he therefore classified as 10th century.¹⁷ For the time being, it is only hypothetical that the toponym Westerwolde refers to an immigration from the Ems

15 Fully and partially functioning manorial exploitation was discovered elsewhere in the Northern Netherlands too, for instance in the modern-day regions of Utrecht and Holland and in the central Dutch rivers area, even after the large-scale land reclamation period of the 12th and 13th centuries (Huizing 2020: 230-4).

16 See Metz (1958), specifically for the German area in the early Middle Ages.

17 Rösener applies a dating of about 900 in all his publications. We believe it would be safer to date it in the first half of the 10th century.



Fig. 6. Westwerk of Corvey Abbey, near Höxter (Germany), dating from the mid-12th century (photo Remi van Schaik, 2020).

basin in order to distinguish it from the *wolden* (fen woods) north of the Hümmling, east of the Ems. The *Werden Urbar* not only provides the oldest mention of Westerwolde, but also that of the toponym Onstwedde, which etymologically refers to *uuido* or *wede* = wood, brushwood, linked to the personal name Une (Künzel 1988: 271). The indication *uuido* for a settlement in Westerwolde seems understandable from a perspective of a wooded area amidst almost treeless bogs. In the relevant passage it refers to one Miginuard, who is recorded with “*unam virgam unum solidum et unam mansionem*” (Kötzschke 1906: 51).¹⁸ This *Urbar A* provides the best insight into the possessions of Werden at the beginning of the 10th century. The main centres of possession appear to be located in the Frisian coast area and the region of present-day Emsland, in addition to

Westphalia. Noomen thinks that the property of Werden in Westerwolde should be localized in Smeerling south-east of the village centre of Onstwedde and probably concerns the Lottering estate. He refers to a deed of the 14th of January 1483 in which the manor at Brahe (south of Weener) is given in fief to Uko Cirksema and in which there is a “*domus Smerlike*” mentioned. That ‘Smerlike’ should, in his opinion, be understood as Smeerling.¹⁹

After this earliest mention of Werden’s property in Westerwolde we find mentions in the earliest sources of Corvey Abbey (Fig. 6). From the very beginning, this abbey was under the protection of the Carolingian kings. The most recent publications on Corvey and Christianization in western Saxony are those of Rösener (2015, 2017) and Kölzer (2019), but do not cover all historical sources. There was a lot of controversy about the Corvey sources from the first centuries of its existence, all the more so because there are few documents preserved in original form and we often have to deal with later copies. Moreover, it is known that some of the documents that were considered to be original documents have now been identified by specialists either as falsified and back-dated to an earlier date, or are at least as very suspect. That is the reason why a thorough investigation into text transmission and reliability was required in order to at least put the Westerwolde mentions in the correct perspective, since the local historiography of Westerwolde contains a lot of misunderstandings. It may be illustrative – although still not justified – that the *Lexicon van nederlandse toponiemen* (Künzel 1988) does not contain any reference to the Corvey sources for Westerwolde. Presumably, the reason was that the mentions came from copies after 1200. Be that as it may, we have to test presumed mentions of Westerwolde and even of churches in that region from the late 9th century for their reliability, in accordance with the rules of the art of historical criticism. Only at a later stage will we discuss the possible location of the Corvey possessions, which, in fact, are never specified in any of the sources until the 15th century (cf. 3.3.2).

That the abbey, with its extensive imperial property, would have acquired possessions in Westerwolde and Aschendorf (e.g. Leesch 1966: 45) as early as 834, due to the donation of the mission cell of Meppen by Louis the Pious, as many authors believe, is, in our opinion, highly questionable. There is another option that must be explored, namely, that Westerwolde and Aschendorf do not necessarily belong to Corvey’s early possessions and may only have been acquired at a later date (see

¹⁸ Künzel (1988: 271) spells it as *Meginuard*.

¹⁹ P.N. Noomen, pers. comm. 3 June 2020; this information is documented in his contribution to the *Landschapsbiografie van Westerwolde*, to be published in 2021.

Hömberg 1943/52: 69-70).²⁰ A crucial factor is the reliability of the historical sources and their consequences for the reconstruction of historical developments in the period of the early Christianization. It concerns possessions within the area of the original mission cell of Meppen, which, until very recently, was believed to have been established around 780, and which presumably also had the right to raise tithes in order to support parish priests (Rösener 2017: 13-14, 21-2). Meppen would be one of the missionary churches that already existed around 800, before a Saxon church organization was built up. However, it is Kölzer (2019) who questioned these assumptions about late 8th-century foundations of missionary cells and their great significance for early ecclesiastical organization, with rather strong arguments. Meppen's mission area also included the parishes of Sögel and Haselünne, but it is highly doubtful that Aschendorf and Lathen belonged to this area already from the time of its transfer to Corvey in 834. At that time Meppen, was called a *cellula*, as we have already stated, which casts doubt on its real importance (Kölzer 2019: 4, incidentally, following Schubert's observation 1997: 52-3). At a later stage, however, Corvey acquired the right to appoint parish priests of its own choosing in the village churches.

After the Carolingian conquest, the Meppen mission cell belonged to the Saxon Agradingau. The introduction of *pagi* as administrative districts is also a consequence of the Carolingian advance, and this administrative division does not go back to any older, Saxon administrative structure. Westerwolde is said to have been Christianized from Meppen and to have belonged to the diocese of Osnabrück until the middle of the 16th century as a consequence of this monastic property. There is no doubt about this last bit, but there is doubt about when this Christianization would have happened and when Westerwolde would have been reached from Meppen after it was acquired by Corvey. Significant is the fact that already in the 9th century, the bishop of Osnabrück complained to the pope that the Corvey proprietary churches in Emsland, so privileged by undoubtedly regionally powerful people, were an obstacle to the construction of a church hierarchy. Episcopal and parish building was, in fact, lagging behind donations of property rights to abbeys. There was a first bishop in Osnabrück by 803, but some continuity was lacking in the 9th century, at least until Bishop Egilmar (885-918).

The organization of the diocese of Osnabrück from a mission area was characterized by improvisation, and Corvey seems to have benefited from this (Schubert 1997: 57-60, 66-7).²¹ It is therefore indicative, too, that, for example, Visbek and Meppen both have a *St Vitus patrociniū*, typical of Corvey, whereas the Osnabrück *patrociniū par excellence* was St John the Baptist (Schubert 1997: 53-4).

3.2 A critical analysis of the Corvey sources and their reliability

3.2.1 The *Traditiones Corbeienses*

The *Traditiones Corbeienses* are, in fact, a registration of donations or transfers that establish a claim to keep remembrance in prayer within a religious community, even if this does not need to be explicitly stipulated. They belong to the genre of the *memoria*. This is especially true if the text of the charter is not included in its full text (Johanek 1989: 125). This is reflected in many notes of the *Traditiones Corbeienses* and also plays a role in the donation notes in which Westerwolde is mentioned. This registration of transfers of properties and rights to Corvey Abbey is a copy, written in 1479 by the crosier (crutched friar) Johann von Falkenhagen, of lost 11th-century lists of donations from 822-876 (older series) and 962-1022 and 1037 (younger series). It has to be noted that this copy contains quite a few reading errors and that Von Falkenhagen probably used at least two different roles as *Vorlage* (German standard term for an older document, used as the basis for a copy), one of which ends incomplete.

In 1970 Eckhardt, acting on his own initiative and therefore not by order of a scholarly institute, brought together sources and also studies on Corvey in a two-volume book.²² Immediately after its publication, this edition attracted many critical comments from colleagues (Honselmann 1982: 70 n. 30). Whereas previously an older and a younger register of transfers or donations were known, with a gap between the years 876 and 962, Eckhardt 'stuck' a 'middle register' between them, so to speak, based on a source, reconstructed on later copies, the *Registrum Sarachonis* (S). This 'middle register', however, was incomplete and covered the period 872-900. That *Registrum Sarachonis*, though, was edited by Johann Friedrich Falke (1699-1756) in 1752 and was based on a forgery by Christian Franz Paullini (1643-1712), as

20 Hömberg had rightly noted that the accessibility of the Westerwolde area, which was surrounded by bogs and was only sparsely occupied, would be considerably later. The primary church was probably that of Onstwedde. He also suspected already that the mention of Westerwolde and Aschendorf with its churches as a gift from Louis the German in the *Catalogus donatorum* was forged.

21 In fact, Schubert's observation from 1997 is only confirmed by the diplomatic studies of Kölzer, most recently in 2019.

22 See Krause (1979) about his qualities as an editor.

demonstrated by the critics (Honselmann 1982: 81-7).²³ Already in the 19th century, this edition had aroused suspicion. Eckhardt, who knew that it was a relatively late tradition, trusted it nevertheless, postulating that it was a copy of a register of transfers made at the time of Abbot Saracho of Corvey (1056-1071) from lost sources dating from the 9th, 10th and 11th centuries (Eckhardt 1970: 127). Eckhardt was not even able to determine whether the *Registrum Sarachonis* originated from one of those *Vorlagen* or vice versa. In any case, this *Registrum Sarachonis* provided most of the place names. He therefore concluded that it was reliable (Eckhardt 1970: 127-9).

Why is this issue so important to us? It is because Aschendorf and Westerwolde are to be found in this section, which Eckhardt considered to be reliable, but which was contested by others. A lot depends on whether it is reliable. Westerwolde appears twice as 'Uesderauualde' in the part of the *Traditiones Corbeienses* that he considered to be the 'middle register'. We have to be aware that no value may be attributed to the *pagus* mentions placed between square brackets by Eckhardt.²⁴ At the first mention of Westerwolde [in pago Thrente] in § 639, Eckhardt did not add any explanation, but in § 645, where [in pago Isloi] is added, like in the preceding Aschendorpe [in pago Isloi], he noted that Westerwolde and Aschendorp were gifts dating from about 875/876 (Eckhardt 1970: 309-10). Although Eckhardt already knew that these *pagus* mentions are wrong, he apparently did not realize that the first mention of Westerwolde is identical with the second. We will discuss the details of the content of these passages in 3.2.3.

Eckhardt argued that the dating of c. 875/76, which he put in the margin at the mentions of Aschendorf and Westerwolde, was justified by reference to the *Catalogus donatorum Corbeiensium*, which would prove the origin of these remittances and confirm the reliability of the passages in the *Registrum Sarachonis*. In doing so, he ignored serious doubts that had already been explicitly expressed in the 19th century in relation to Westerwolde and Aschendorf. In this way, he linked two suspect sources, because the entries in the *Catalogus donatorum* are of much later date too, as we will reveal in 3.2.2. Anticipating this, we note the two suspicious passages on which Eckhardt based his c. 875/76:

— § 644 "*Idem (tradidit) Asschendorp cum ecclesiis sibi subiectis*" and

— § 645 "*tradidit hereditatem in Westerwolt cum ecclesiis inibi existentibus in proprietatem huius ecclesiae Corbeiensis*".

He linked these two paragraphs to the preceding § 643, where it is written that "*Ludovicus secundus [tradidit] abbatium in Visbeke cum singulis basilicis ad ipsam spectatibus ac decimis*". This Louis II would have been Louis the German († 28 Aug. 876), who, on 20 March 855, had issued a charter concerning the 'abbatia' of Visbek (east of Cloppenburg). The reliability of those entries in the *Catalogus donatorum* and also that charter of 855 will be discussed in more detail below, but this argumentation does contain the crux of the problem created by Eckhardt. There is a threat of circular reasoning here, if only because these passages have absolutely nothing to say about deliveries by farmers to Corvey.

Unfortunately, this idiosyncratic Eckhardtian reconstruction of the *Traditiones Corbeienses* has been incorporated into the historiography of Westerwolde, despite the fact that the critical edition of the *Traditiones Corbeienses* by Honselmann, which was already expected prior to 1970, finally appeared in 1982. Honselmann had already dealt with the *Traditiones* and their transmission (Honselmann 1939: 32-44). Eckhardt should have been aware that Honselmann was working on that edition by order of the Historische Kommission für Westfalen. Honselmann made clear that there is only an older list from 822-876, with a cut around 826, and a younger one from c. 965-1025, with a supplement from 1037 (Honselmann 1982: 83-131, resp. 131-66). The donations of Westerwolde and Aschendorf are *not* mentioned there. For the donations attributed to Louis the German, we have to rely on the annexed 12th-century list of benefactors published by him, which is included in the *Liber Vitae* (Honselmann 1982: 167-79). This is the *Catalogus donatorum*, to which Eckhardt had already made reference, but which he assumed to date back to the time of Abbot Saracho, nearly a century earlier. It contains donation notes that could be from the period 876-962, but it is doubtful whether these notes are a reliable source. Honselmann (1982: 68-71) rightly denounces the misunderstandings to which Eckhardt's 1970 publication gave rise.

3.2.2 The *Liber Vitae* and the *Catalogus donatorum*

The *Catalogus donatorum* is included in a large volume together with other memorials, the so-called *Liber Vitae*

23 Falke had already made notes in 1739 based on documents from Paullini's collection. Some of Falke's handwritten notes were discovered in the legacy of Christian Ulrich Grupen in Celle in the 1970s. Honselmann explains in detail what has gone wrong in this edition of Falke.

24 Eckhardt (1970: 125-6) did realize that there were no names of pagi in the assumed 'middle register', but that they were interpolated in 1698 by someone who apparently had little knowledge of things, probably Paullini.

of Corvey. Honselmann had discovered that this list of benefactors was written by more than one hand and that the section in which Westerwolde and Aschendorf and their churches are listed as donations by Louis – as well as the donations of the church of Eresburg in Sauerland and the church in Meppen with their daughter churches, and the abbey of Visbek with its respective basilicas and tithes – were written by another, later hand. The donations of Eresburg (826) and Visbek (855) were already, in his opinion, based on forged charters. They seem to fit a pattern. For example, there is a falsified charter of 873 in which Louis the German declares that the immunity granted to Corvey by Louis the Pious implied that the tithes of the manors had to be delivered not to the bishop, but to the monastery (see about these tithes 3.3.1). He also mentioned other forgeries from the beginning of the 12th century in this list of benefactors where alleged gifts by Louis are concerned (Honselmann 1982: 168). With nos. 29 and 30 (Westerwolde and Aschendorf, respectively), he explicitly noted that no charters of these donations have been preserved. Both place names, Aschendorf and Westerwolde, only appear in connection with Corvey, as will be discussed below in relation to the reliable *Heberol* from the 11th century (cf. 3.2.3), but the passages in it are not completely identical with what Eckhardt had found in the register of Saracho. The overall attribution of the gift of properties in Westerwolde to Louis the German around 875/876 is consequently in bad odour and can be better qualified as unreliable, both in terms of the fact itself and in terms of the date. The same can be said of Aschendorf. In both cases, but also in other entries in this list, the term “*cum ecclesiis inibi existentibus*” or “*cum ecclesiis sibi subiectis*” is almost standard. This looks like a diplomatic standard formula, and it is doubtful that it indicates a real plural of churches. In addition, it is questionable whether this phrase refers back to a reliable source. This implies that, in any case, possessions in Westerwolde and Aschendorf did *not* belong to the mission area of the Meppen cell and only later – possibly sometime later in the 10th century – became the property of Corvey Abbey.²⁵

Honselmann (1982: 177–9), in the annex to his *Traditiones*-edition, under nos. 27–37, already mentioned the following: no. 27: Eresburch (forgery 826) and Meppen

(834) by Louis the Pious; no. 28: Visbek (forgery 855) by Louis the German; no. 29: Westerwolde without year (which he notes is not preserved) by the same Louis the German; no. 30: Aschendorf without year (which he also notes is not preserved) by Louis the German. Then, as no. 31, follows a large enumeration of place names where tithes were acquired, and nos. 32–33 concern the donation of the property of Merthen in Frisia and – strangely expressed – “*in eodem loco*” the church of Lingwerd. In the latter case, the donations were supposedly made by a Gerulf, a person loyal to Louis the Pious, who, after 839, contributed these possessions when he entered Corvey. Merthen would be the name of a castle in the later new town of Leeuwarden and ‘Lingwerd’ would be Leeuwarden. The church in question is of course the Oldehove, or St Vitus, church.

Even after Honselmann’s edition, research did not stand still, but it should be noted that in German local and regional historiography, the new insights were not adopted everywhere.²⁶ The form and content of Corvey’s *Liber Vitae* have been discussed by numerous authors in a collection of studies as a complement to the previously published facsimile edition (Schmidt & Wollasch 1983, 1989). The series of entries numbered 27–33 in the *Catalogus donatorum* was, in the view of Krüger (1989: 18), recorded by hand C2, which still dates from the second half of the 12th century (and those numbered 34–37 by hand C3, which dates from the 16th century). According to Krüger (1972: 851, 862), hand C2 repeated a piece from the *Catalogus abbatum*. This refers to Eresburg, Meppen and Visbek, but hand C2 added Westerwolde and Aschendorf to the list, plus the churches donated in these places. The listing of tithes under no. 31 is based on papal charters of Eugene III (1145–1153), Hadrian IV (1154–1159) and Lucius III (1181–1185), which would indicate late 12th-century additions. In relation to the entries numbered 32 and 33, concerning Merthen and the church of Leeuwarden, which Louis the Pious would have restituted to his confidant Gerulf in 839, Metz (1989: 281) states that there are justifiable doubts about the identity of this Gerulf.²⁷

The *Catalogus donatorum* is, as mentioned above, part of the *Liber Vitae*, a book with memorial intentions for regular use, although it contains also precious

25 Frerker (1975: 37) incorrectly assumes that the church of Aschendorf had already been given to Corvey in 834.

26 Bockhorst (1992: 11) noted that the dating of this donation is uncertain, but nevertheless suggested for both Westerwolde and Aschendorf, and their churches, a donation by Louis the German, although he knew of Honselmann’s work (1982: 177), as he no doubt did later as well (Bockhorst 2006: 47, 2012: 1054). Reinbold (2012: 1467) still trusted the partially falsified charter of 855 for Visbek. Schubert (1997: 36) did take good notice of Honselmann’s findings. It is striking that even Rösener (2017: 19, 21–2) still did not show any doubt about a mission church on the Eresburg, which was said to have been donated to Corvey by Louis the Pious in 826. The reliability of the donation of Visbek 855 is for him also beyond doubt (2017: 24), although he, too, knew of the study of Honselmann (1982).

27 Noomen (2000: 53) devoted attention to this donation, but, like Leesch (1966: 45), regrettably wrongly included Westerwolde in Meppen’s donation to Corvey by Louis the Pious in 834 by not making reference to Honselmann 1982 and/or Metz 1989.

illuminations. It could have been Corvey's aim to create a real memorial book, but that was not quite realized, and the manuscript took on more the character of a fraternity book. It does not record the obligations towards donators, nor does it contain liturgical instructions (Johanek 1989: 125-9, 132). The codex includes 1) a list of monks who entered between 822 and 1146 and a confraternity list from c. 1116 to c. 1210; 2) the proper *Liber Vitae* (about a quarter of the volume); and 3) the *Pontificale antiquum* (almost three quarters of the volume). From a codicological point of view, it is a composite volume, on which dozens of hands have worked. In view of the content of the Pontifical, this codex will have been created on the initiative of Abbot Wibald of Stavelot and Corvey, who in 1154-1155 had been elevated to the rank of bishop by the pope and had acquired the right to wear episcopal insignia during the liturgy. This implies that the codex was made in the latter days of Wibald's life and even extended beyond his death in 1158 (Jakobi 1979: 35). In the 12th century, this codex was not used much, but in the 13th and 14th centuries, many additions were made (no more were made in the 15th century). The codex was to be found on the altar or in the sacristy.

The *Liber Vitae* is therefore not an archival record, although its creation does fit in with a reorganization of the administrative management and the abbey archives, as well as the restoration of monastic discipline, started by Abbot Wibald. Attention: we are a century later than the regime of Abbot Saracho, to whom Eckhardt still ascribed the *Registrum Sarachonis*, from which he drew the donation entries for his reconstruction of a 'middle register' of the *Traditiones*. There is, however, a certain relationship between the *Traditiones* and the *Liber Vitae*. The *Catalogus donatorum* only reveals the most prominent donators, so one might suspect that there was already another list of donators. In this context, one could think of the 11th-century *Heberol*, which was possibly created on the basis of a donation register that existed at that time but is lost today (Johanek 1989: 130-1). But even in the *Traditiones Corbeienses*, it seems that we are dealing with excerpts from an old, lost cartulary. The high uniformity in formulation suggests an editorial action that has erased form characteristics from charters.

Anyway, in the late 12th century, it turned out to be no longer possible to pursue claims that had not been documented, such as those of tithe rights immediately following the passages about Aschendorf and Westerwolde and that were written in the same hand. These claims are related to Wibald's policy of economic recovery of lost rights and properties (Jakobi 1979: 34; Rück 1989: 135-49), which we will discuss in more detail in Section 3.3.1. What is going on here is a tendency that can also be observed elsewhere in old imperial abbeys in the 12th century, such as in Fulda and in Lorsch: Legal and property rights were archived on a large scale and

used to restore some order. The fact was that monastic ministerials were looking for liberation from dependence on and duties to the abbeys, guardians were intent on taking possessions of the abbeys and behaved like regional lords, but, at the instigation of either king or pope (remember the Investiture Controversy), mobilized abbots such as Wibald for their purposes. For Corvey and Stavelot, there are no compilation codices comparable to the *Codex Eberhardi* for Fulda or the *Codex Laureshamensis* for Lorsch, but it cannot be denied that something similar has been tried for Corvey and Stavelot. Corvey's *Catalogus donatorum* seems to point to this in a certain sense (Jakobi 1979: 193-5). It can be added that in a comparable way, the list of parish churches for which Corvey believed itself to possess the patronage rights (including those of churches in Westerwolde) was still included in that *Liber Vitae* around 1300 (Jakobi 1979: 31). More about this later (4.1).

Then we come to the question of whether or not alleged donations of Visbek and other places, which appear to have penetrated into the *Catalogus donatorum*. What is true about that? Kölzer, as the editor of the hundreds of charters and other documents of Louis the Pious, has shed some light on that matter. From this corpus, he unmasked about one third as forged or manipulated. For Westerwolde, this is of the utmost importance. In 2012, he had already dealt with a gift charter from the Visbek mission cell by Louis the Pious from 819 to the still very young Corvey Abbey (Kölzer 2012: 111-4). He declared this charter, which, fortunately, is still in existence, to be a "*Ganzfälschung*" (total forgery). He described it as a pseudo-original, made in Corvey at the end of the 10th century, and in parts even a product of clumsy tinkering. It contained entire passages taken from a confirmation charter of Charles the Bald from 845 for the diocese of Châlons-en-Champagne, going back to a lost charter of Louis the Pious. After Kölzer, in 2015, upon his farewell to the University of Bonn, had summarized his findings with all their consequences, he explained things once more very clearly in 2016 in front of a shocked audience in Visbek, where people thought they had something to celebrate. The link Châlons-Corvey could have been Bishop Bovo of Châlons (917-947), who had made his profession at Corvey (Kölzer 2016: 27-8). Many churches in the Lerigau, but also in the Hase- and Venkigau, as well as tithes rights, would have been connected to this Visbek mission cell. By declaring the assumed charter of 819 to be a forgery, Kölzer created a domino effect. The charter of 814 for Halberstadt also appeared to be a forgery, but this time from the late 12th century. This also goes back to the same *Vorlage* from Châlons (Kölzer 2012: 104-10, 2016: 33). Even more impressive acts were attributed to Louis the Pious, such as an unprovable foundation of an archdiocese of Hamburg in 834, while charters for a diocese of Osnabrück during the time of Charlemagne and Louis the Pious turned out

to be forgeries from the second half of the 11th century (Kölzer 2016: 34).

After this *ball démasqué*, a charter of 855 remained for Visbek, which would have been issued by Louis the German, but also appeared very troublesome. Honselmann (1982: 177) had declared this charter for the *abbatia* of Visbek to be forged. Unfortunately, Kölzer did not discuss this in detail, although he expressed some objections (2012: 114).²⁸ We assume that Honselmann's conclusion is too short-sighted. However, this cannot be concluded for as long as the original has not been viewed. The mission cell of Visbek seems to have been part of royal demesne, just as that of Meppen was assumed to be.²⁹ The donation to Corvey was made in a pertinence formula that in this case was very extensive, but stereotypical, with all the ins and outs and in accordance with the wording of Meppen's donation charter of 834. Nevertheless, this charter of 855 raises many questions, especially since the one of 819 has been declared a forgery. But for our purpose it does not make sense to delve into it more deeply.³⁰ Kölzer (2012) firmly points out that we should not take this wording literally and *verbatim*. By the way, the passage about subordinate churches had already been recognized as an interpolation of a 10th-century forger, like the one about tithes. In a very shortened form, "*cum singulis basilicis ad eam spectantibus et decimis*", we find part of that formulation for Visbek under no. 28 in the late insertion in the *Catalogus donatorum*. For the donation of property (*'hereditatem'*) in Westerwolde listed under no. 29 (no charter has been preserved) we see a similar formulation: "*cum ecclesiis inibi existentibus*". The donation of Aschendorf under no. 30, for which a charter is also lacking, also contains "*cum ecclesiis sibi subiectis*". In other words, it is highly suspicious that so early, in the 9th century, there would already have been churches belonging to it. Mission 'bishops' and missionaries were mobile for quite some time, travelling around and working from centres that were situated at favourable locations in terms of traffic geography and catchment area. Missioning progressed, but laboriously.

So, what can be said about the reliability of that *Registrum Sarachonis*, which was mistaken by Eckhardt for

a lost middle register of the *Traditiones Corbeienses*? Is there no justification at all for the assumption that possessions in Westerwolde would have been donated by Louis the German as early as the 9th century to Corvey? Should we consider the mention of seven named inhabitants of Westerwolde to be fake? It is a fact that in the reliable *Heberol* from the beginning of the 11th century – albeit without mention of those seven names – remittances in fish and cloth from seven inhabitants to Corvey's manor in Lathen are recorded, in addition to the remittance of 10 pikes and 2 cloths by a certain Adaldac to the manor in Meppen. If the seven names from the *Registrum Sarachonis* – which, although it is a forgery by Paullini/Falke, perhaps goes back to an unknown, in any case not surviving 12th-century record (but definitely not an 11th-century one) – refer to the seven unnamed Westerwolde inhabitants from the 11th-century *Heberol*, then this registration of the seven would go back to an older *Vorlage*, which is closer to the *Heberol* (Müller 1976) but which cannot be connected with any supposed donation by Louis the German.

3.2.3 The 11th-century *Heberol*

The previously mentioned *Heberol* (also called the *Rotulus*) was edited critically for the first time by Kaminsky (1972). A fragment of it has been preserved in its original form (A), but an almost complete version can be found in a copy of Johannes von Falkenhagen from 1479 (B). Schily (1921: 9–11) had already determined that A could not have been the direct *Vorlage* of B, but that B must have had at least two *Vorlagen*. However, A and B do not yet form the complete *Heberol*, because after fol. 6 in B one sheet is missing, on which, according to Kaminsky (1972: 32–3), at least the tithes of Lotten and the manors of Aschendorf, Lönigen and Bunnan should have been written. That is not fully correct. Following Last (1983: 386–7), there are no manors known in Aschendorf and Bunnan.³¹ But what is left of the *Heberol* is also lacking in other ways, so it may be assumed that Von Falkenhagen could not have had a complete roll in front of him. Important to note: Westerwolde can be found in both A and B.

28 For example, the *passus* in the pertinence formula about tithes would be an interpolation of a 10th-century Corvey forger (Kaminsky 1972: 22, who, however, assumes that Visbek would have got them in 855). Unfortunately, Kölzer does not go into this matter again in 2019.

29 Kölzer (2019) strongly questions this (contra Rösener 2017) and postulates that this is a scholarly construction based on a forgery from the late 10th century. In our opinion he is going rather or even too far in this.

30 Vogtherr (2012: 128–9) pointed out that there is a remarkable warning in the *dispositio* of that charter, in which the Visbek missionary station was handed over to Corvey at the request of Abbot Warin (831–56), from which it could be deduced that there were fears that this *abbatia* would collapse. In addition, there is a clause on erasure, which states that the cell might not be given as a *beneficium*, but the erased passage left space for an additional 60 to 80 characters. This seems to indicate an interpolation in the interest of the recipient, Corvey.

31 For an inventory of all 21 Corvey property registers up to the 14th century and literature, see Last 1983: 444–6.

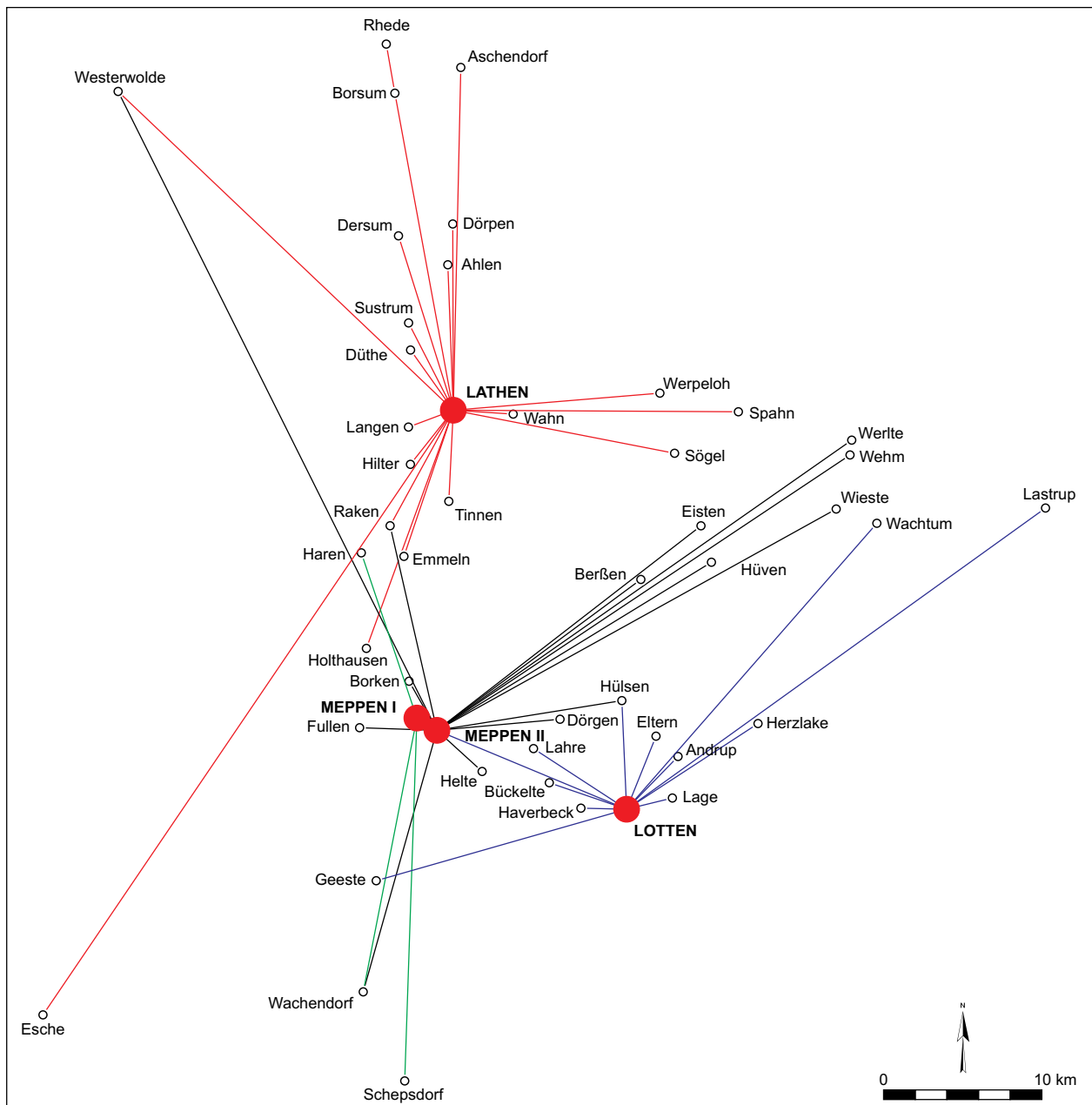


Fig. 7. Map of the villages with farmsteads that, according to the 11th-century Heberol, had to provide remittances to the manors of Meppen I (green), Meppen II (black), Lathen (red) and Lotten (blue), all in Emsland, Germany (design Remi van Schaik; drawing E. Bolhuis, GIA).

This *Heberol* from the beginning of the 11th century was already an important source for the still relevant studies by Martiny (1895) and Schily (1921), and has remained so more recently for the studies by Last (1983) and Rösener (1980, 1985, 2015). In that *Heberol*, 27 manors, the manorial lands and the villeins' obligations (with name and place of residence) are listed. People appointed by the abbot travelled from manor to manor to receive the required remittances (Kaminsky 1972: 32). The structure of the *Heberol* reflects that of West Franconian polyptychs, and it is written in Latin. There were four manorial centres in the wider area in this part of north-western Saxony. Meppen had two (I and II),

and the other two were Lathen and Lotten (see map Fig. 7). Bockhorst (1992: 12) assumed that there was another manor in Aschendorf as well, because it is known that one Franco had donated 60 *iugera* (*iugerum* = about 0.25 ha, or 0.623 acres), two pairs of oxen and one serf (*mancipium*) to the abbey in memory of his brother Immed in Aschendorf around 1000 (Honselmann 1982: 164). As mentioned above, one leaf from the copy of the *Heberol* is missing. An area of 60 *iugera* suggests in any case a size comparable to the manor of Meppen I and half of Meppen II, but would be twice as large as that of Lathen. In itself this is not a crazy idea, but most interesting for a neighbouring region such as Westerwolde, following

Kaminsky's suggestion. Last (1983) did not find a single one in Aschendorf among the 40 manors in all 20 subsequent registers up to the 14th century. There were farmsteads, but they delivered to the manor in Lathen, even up to the mid-16th century (Frerker 1975: 13).

The overall impression that emerges from this *Heberol* is the high degree of direct exploitation, estimated at around 20%. In the so-called Nordland, the area between Ems and Hunte, the ratio manorial land to farmstead land was 1:4. In the totality of the Corvey possessions, this ratio was slightly different: 1:5. The number of farmsteads connected to the manor could vary considerably, from 1 to even 16, with an average of 4 to 5 farmsteads (Rösener 2015: 11-2). In our Tables 1, 2 and 3, we can see that the situation at the manors of Meppen, Lathen and Lotten is quite different. In the *Heberol*, Meppen, Lathen, Lotten, Bramhof (near Schapen), Freren, Andrup and Werlte are recorded as manors with the related farmsteads. Looking at the yields – at least to the extent that their remittances can be regarded as an indication – rye farming and sheep farming are the most important. Although the natural conditions in the Meppen area did not provide good conditions for intensive cereal cultivation because of the poor sandy and loamy soils, agricultural centres with a developed exploitation of the demesne could still be established here (Rösener 2015: 18-9).

One farm in Westerwolde, together with a whole series of other farmsteads (25 in number), belonged to the manor of Meppen II. There was no question that Corvey had tithes in its possession there. Lathen is a different manor: there are also farms in Westerwolde connected to it, and likewise there are no revenues provided from tithes. Considering the lack of tithe income from Westerwolde, already noticed by Schily (1921: 54), the previously expressed assumption that Westerwolde could not have been part of the Meppen mission cell and therefore would only have been acquired later by Corvey, acquires more strength of argument. The question of the tithes in Westerwolde will be discussed in more detail in 3.3.1.

According to the Corvey *Heberol*, which, leaving aside the lost leaf, reflects the situation at the beginning of the 11th century, the manors of Meppen II and Lathen were the ones to which contributions are made from Westerwolde. To the manor of Meppen II, with its 120 *iugera* manorial land, belonged 26 farmhouses in a range of places, including Westerwolde. Meppen I included 110 *iugera* manorial land and 423 *iugera* farmland distributed over 30 farmsteads.³² There were 63 farmsteads attached to Lathen, 7 of which were in Westerwolde, but unfortunately their surface area is not recorded. The manor of Lathen was thoroughly investigated by

Frerker (1975) up to the 16th century, although, unfortunately, he neglected everything that could have to do with Westerwolde. No remittances from Westerwolde were stipulated to the manor of Lotten, to which 28 farmsteads belonged (Tables 1, 2 & 3).

Between Ems and Hunte, widespread heathland was a favourable condition for intensive sheep farming, but there was hardly any pig farming due to the absence of forests for acorns and beech nuts. Between Meppen and Aschendorf, there were only slightly higher soils to be found between the bogs, suitable for arable farming. Nevertheless, in that very part of the Nordland, almost half of all Corvey's properties were located in that region. There were 114 farmsteads and 336 *iugera* of manorial land located in this area, all concentrated in Haren, Haselünne, Lotten, Andrup and Meppen, but Meppen came out on top. In almost every village, Corvey had something. Despite the soil conditions, this area in itself would not have been unfavourable for occupation, nor would it have been exceptionally sparsely populated (Martiny 1895: 277-8).

In Westerwolde, remittances consisted almost solely of fish, a product that did not have to be delivered to any of the four manors from elsewhere. This probably indicates fishing in the Westerwoldse and Ruiten Aa, and therefore freshwater fish. The number of cloths to be delivered was minimal in all four manors, and no remittances of sheep or grain were recorded, whereas elsewhere a large number of sheep; relatively large amounts of rye; and, to a considerably lesser extent, oats were found to have been stipulated. Wheat does not occur at all in the Ems area and in Westerwolde; the soil was not fertile enough for that. We do know, however, that barley-like grain (*Hordeum*) was found in Selligen after the beginning of the 11th century (*cf.* 6.3). The cattle hides, which were only delivered from Meppen itself and from two villages near Lingen, in our opinion indicate tanning at that manor. Cattle themselves do not appear in the deliveries, although there were several cattle markets along the river Ems. In this region, oxen will have been used only for traction in arable farming, and undoubtedly also for manure, as this is indispensable in an agricultural system. Nevertheless, in Westerwolde, we have found numerous toponyms indicating the keeping of oxen (*cf.* 5.3). Poultry, which will undoubtedly have been there, were not included in the recorded remittances.

An Adaldac (at Eckhardt: Landuck) in Westerwolde had a farm with 3 *iugera* land and paid 2 pieces of cloth and 10 pikes annually to the manor of Meppen II. Delivery of cloth indicates sheep farming, although in this case it seems to have been at a modest scale. Those pikes are special in themselves. What may these fish

32 Our detailed calculations for Meppen I and II in Table 1 differ from those of Bockhorst 2006: 54-5 and also from Rösener 2017: 23.

Table 1. The manors of Meppen I and II, Germany, and the villages with farmsteads liable for delivering yearly remittances, according the 11th-century Heberol of Corvey (Kaminsky 1972: 201-4 = § VII-VIII). The localization of Schwagstorf by Kaminsky (1972: 202) must be corrected to Schepsdorf. 1 iugerum = c. 0.25 ha, 1 modius = 52-63 litres, 1 sextarius = c. 0.58 litre.

| manor | demesne lands <i>iugera</i> | villages | location | farmsteads | farm-land <i>iugera</i> | annual payment of taxes | | | | |
|-----------|--------------------------------|--------------------|----------|------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-------|-------|------|
| | | | | | | rye <i>modii</i> | oats <i>modii</i> | sheep | cloth | pigs |
| MEPPEN I | 60 | Meppen | Meppen | 4 | 66 | 44 | 10 | 7 | 4* | |
| | | Wachendorf | Lingen | 24 | 317 | 133 | 45 | 29,5 | 20 | |
| | | Schepsdorf | Lingen | 2 | 40 | 20 | 10 | 2 | | |
| | 30 | Haren | Meppen | -- | -- | | | | | |
| | 20 | Meppen trans Hasam | Meppen | -- | -- | | | | | |
| total | 110 | | | 30 | 423 | 197 | 65 | 38,5 | 24 | |
| MEPPEN II | 120* | Meppen | Meppen | 3 | 50 | 30 | 20 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| | | Fullen | Meppen | 1 | 10 | 20 | 10 | 2 | | 1 |
| | | Raken | Meppen | 1 | 12 | 20 | 10 | 2 | | 1 |
| | | Borken | Meppen | 2 | 16 | 24 | 16 | 2 | | |
| | | Meppen trans Hasam | Meppen | 3 | 45 | 60 | 30 | 6 | | |
| | | Dörgen | Meppen | 1 | 12 | 12 | 8 | 1 | | |
| | | Hülsen | Meppen | 1 | 12 | 20 | 10 | 1 | | |
| | | Berßen | Hümmling | 4 | 42 | 76 | 32 | 6 | | 3 |
| | | Hüven | Hümmling | 2 | 20 | 18 | 12 | 3 | | 1 |
| | | Eisten | Hümmling | 1 | 15 | 30 | 6 | 2 | | 1 |
| | | Werlte | Hümmling | 1 | 20 | 30 | 6 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| | | Wehm | Hümmling | 2 | 25 | 34 | 20 | 3 | | 2 |
| | | Wieste | Hümmling | 1 | 15 | 30 | 6 | 2 | | 1 |
| | | Helte | Meppen | 1 | 6 | 8 | 6 | 1 | | |
| | | Wachendorf | Lingen | 1 | 20 | 20 | 18 | 1 | | |
| | | Westerwolde | | 1 | 3 | | | | 2 | |
| total | 120 | | | 26 | 323 | 432 | 210 | 36 | 6 | 12 |

Table 1 continued

| manor | villages | farm- steads | farm- land <i>iugera</i> | annual payment of taxes | | | | |
|-----------|--------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| | | | | cow- hides | honey <i>sextarii</i> | <i>denarii</i> | other products | comments |
| MEPPEN I | Meppen | 4 | 66 | 17-18 | 1 | | | *of inferior quality |
| | Wachendorf | 24 | 317 | 28 | 5 | | 5 woman's clothes | |
| | Schepsdorf | 2 | 40 | 12 | | | 24 cartloads wood | |
| | Haren | -- | -- | | | | | |
| | Meppen trans Hasam | -- | -- | | | | | |
| total | | 30 | 423 | 57-58 | 6 | | | |
| MEPPEN II | Meppen | 3 | 50 | | 1 | 8 | | *2 huobe of 60 each |
| | Fullen | 1 | 10 | | | 8 | | |
| | Raken | 1 | 12 | | | 8 | | |
| | Borken | 2 | 16 | | | | | |
| | Meppen trans Hasam | 3 | 45 | | | | | |
| | Dörgen | 1 | 12 | | | | | |
| | Hülsen | 1 | 12 | | | | | |
| | Berßen | 4 | 42 | | | 8 | | |
| | Hüven | 2 | 20 | | | | | |
| | Eisten | 1 | 15 | | | | | |
| | Werlte | 1 | 20 | | 1 | | | |
| | Wehm | 2 | 25 | | | | | |
| | Wieste | 1 | 15 | | | | | |
| | Helte | 1 | 6 | | | | | |
| | Wachendorf | 1 | 20 | | | | | |
| total | | 26 | 323 | | 2 | 32 | 10 pikes | |

Table 2. The manor of Lathen, Germany, and the villages with farmsteads liable for delivering yearly remittances, according the 11th-century Heberol of Corvey (Kaminsky 1972: 204-6 = § IX). 1 iugerum = c. 0.25 ha, 1 modius = 52-63 litres, 1 sextarius = c. 0.58 litre.

| manor | demesne lands <i>iugera</i> | villages | location | farm- steads | farm- land <i>iugera</i> | annual payment of taxes | | | | |
|--------|-----------------------------------|-------------|------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-------|-------|------|
| | | | | | | rye <i>modii</i> | oats <i>modii</i> | sheep | cloth | pigs |
| LATHEN | -- | Lathen | Aschendorf | 3 | -- | | 30 | | | |
| | | Esche | Bentheim | 4 | -- | 60 | 24 | 4 | | |
| | | Haren | Meppen | 2 | -- | 24 | | 2 | 3 | |
| | | Holthausen | Meppen | 2 | -- | 10* | 10* | 2 | | |
| | | Emmeln | Aschendorf | 3 | -- | 48 | | 6 | 3 | |
| | | Hilter | Aschendorf | 1 | -- | | | 2 | 2 | |
| | | Langen | Aschendorf | 9 | -- | 162 | | 18 | 10 | |
| | | Sustrum | Aschendorf | 2 | -- | 30 | | 4 | 2 | |
| | | Dersum | Aschendorf | 7 | -- | 109 | | 14 | 7 | |
| | | Borsum | Aschendorf | 1 | -- | 12 | | | 1 | |
| | | Rhede | Aschendorf | 2 | -- | 28 | | 4 | 2 | |
| | | Aschendorf | Aschendorf | 2 | -- | 23 | | 3 | 2 | |
| | | Dörpen | Aschendorf | 1 | -- | 20 | | 2 | 1 | |
| | | Ahlen | Aschendorf | 2 | -- | 40 | | 4 | 2 | |
| | | Düthe | Aschendorf | 2 | -- | 16 | | 2 | 2 | |
| | | Spahn | Hümmling | 1 | -- | 13 | | 1 | | |
| | | Werpeloh | Hümmling | 3 | -- | 36 | | 4 | 2 | |
| | | Sögel | Hümmling | 3 | -- | 40 | | 6 | | |
| | | Raken | Meppen | 2 | -- | 20 | 16 | 2 | | |
| | | Tinnen | Aschendorf | 3 | -- | 44 | | 4 | 3 | |
| | | Wahn | Hümmling | 1 | -- | 15 | | 2 | 1 | |
| | | Westerwolde | | 6* | -- | | | | 12 | |
| | | Westerwolde | | 1 | -- | | | | | |
| total | -- | | | 63 | -- | 740 | 70 | 86 | 55 | |

Table 2 continued

| manor | villages | farm- steads | farm- land <i>iugera</i> | annual payment of taxes | | | | |
|--------|-------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| | | | | cow- hides | honey <i>sectarii</i> | <i>denarii</i> | other products | comments |
| LATHEN | Lathen | 3 | -- | | | | | |
| | Esche | 4 | -- | | | | | |
| | Haren | 2 | -- | | | | | |
| | Holthausen | 2 | -- | | | | | *rye/oats 20 altogether |
| | Emmeln | 3 | -- | | | | | |
| | Hilter | 1 | -- | | | | | |
| | Langen | 9 | -- | | | | | |
| | Sustrum | 2 | -- | | | | | |
| | Dersum | 7 | -- | | | | | |
| | Borsum | 1 | -- | | | | | |
| | Rhede | 2 | -- | | | | | |
| | Aschendorf | 2 | -- | | | | | |
| | Dörpen | 1 | -- | | | | | |
| | Ahlen | 2 | -- | | | | | |
| | Düthe | 2 | -- | | | | | |
| | Spahn | 1 | -- | | | | 1 woman's cloth | |
| | Werpeloh | 3 | -- | | | | 1 woman's cloth | |
| | Sögel | 3 | -- | | | | 3 woman's clothes | |
| | Raken | 2 | -- | | | | | |
| | Tinnen | 3 | -- | | | | | |
| | Wahn | 1 | -- | | | | | |
| | Westerwolde | 6* | -- | | | | 12 <i>sicli</i> fish | *each of them 2 × a year |
| | Westerwolde | 1 | -- | | | | 2 <i>sicli</i> fish | |
| total | | 63 | -- | | | | | |

Table 3. The manor of Lotten, Germany, and the villages with farmsteads liable for delivering yearly remittances, according the 11th-century Heberol of Corvey (Kaminsky 1972: 206-7 = § X). 1 iugerum = c. 0.25 ha, 1 modius = 52-63 litres, 1 sextarius = c. 0.58 litre.

| manor | demesne lands iugera | villages | location | farm- steads | farm- land iugera | annual payment of taxes | | | | |
|--------|-------------------------|------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|-------|-------|------|
| | | | | | | rye modii | oats modii | sheep | cloth | pigs |
| LOTTEN | 30 | Lotten | Haselünne | | | | | | | |
| | | Haverbeck* | Haselünne | | 5 | | | | | |
| | | Lage | Haselünne | 1 | -- | | | | | |
| | | Andrup | Haselünne | 6 | -- | 98 | 37 | 5* | 2 | 3 |
| | | Lotten | Haselünne | 6 | -- | 123 | 6 | 5 | 5 | |
| | | Bückelte | Haselünne | 1 | -- | 20 | 3 | | | |
| | | Geeste | Meppen | 1 | -- | 15 | 3 | 2 | 1 | |
| | | Meppen | Meppen | 1 | -- | 10 | | | | |
| | | Lahre | Haselünne | 3 | -- | 50 | 6 | 2 | | |
| | | Hülsen | Haselünne | 1 | -- | 20 | 3 | 1 | | |
| | | Eltern | Haselünne | 1 | -- | 20 | 3 | | 1 | |
| | | Lastrup | Cloppenburg | 2 | -- | 24 | 6 | 3 | | |
| | | Wachtum | Löningen | 4 | -- | 79 | 9 | 7 | 1 | |
| | | Herzlake* | Haselünne | 1 | -- | 20 | | | | |
| total | 30 | | | 28 | -- | 479 | 76 | 25 | 10 | 3 |

Table 3 continued

| manor | villages | farm- steads | farm- land <i>iugera</i> | annual payment of taxes | | | | |
|--------|------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| | | | | cow- hides | honey <i>sectarii</i> | <i>denarii</i> | other products | comments |
| LOTTEN | Lotten | | | | | | | |
| | Haverbeck* | | 5 | | | | | *abbot's cowherd 5 iug. |
| | Lage | 1 | -- | | 7.5* | | | *jars (<i>eminae</i>) |
| | Andrup | 6 | -- | | | 24 | | *2 of those rams |
| | Lotten | 6 | -- | | | | | |
| | Bückelte | 1 | -- | | | | | |
| | Geeste | 1 | -- | | | | | |
| | Meppen | 1 | -- | | | | | |
| | Lahre | 3 | -- | | | | 2 woman's clothes | |
| | Hülsen | 1 | -- | | | | | |
| | Eltern | 1 | -- | | | | | |
| | Lastrup | 2 | -- | | | | 2 woman's clothes | |
| | Wachtum | 4 | -- | | | | 3 woman's clothes | |
| | Herzlake* | 1 | -- | | | | | *next page missing |
| total | | 28 | -- | | 7.5 | 24 | | |

have been intended for? From the late Middle Ages, we have the impression that pike is a very representative consumer good (Schubert 2010: 128). It was often served in gelatine, in jelly or in a bound sauce with spices, by order of city governments or noblemen, when distinguished guests visited town or court. We may imagine that they were delivered at a particular moment, probably in dried form, when the abbot or his direct representative visited the manor on his annual tour or visit. Since pikes spawn early in spring, it is not plausible that the remittance took place during Lent, as Bockhorst (2006: 55) assumed. In the Honselmann edition, seven unnamed Westerwolde inhabitants are mentioned as belonging to the Lathen manor; in contrast, in the Eckhardt edition, seven named individuals, UUastbert,

Omar, Odulf, Ritger, Geruerc, Dedo and Beio, are mentioned. Each year, they had to deliver a quantity of fish amounting to 14 sekels, a measure of volume the size of which is unknown. Six of them had to contribute a cloth each on St Martin (11 November) and on Pentecost, for a total of 12 cloths. It was assumed by Martiny (1895: 324) that the specification of those two dates in the year could be related to the fact that these individuals would have taken their deliveries from the remote Westerwolde to Meppen and Lathen, with their larger church and their storage facilities, only on religious holidays. In our opinion, it is doubtful whether this was a decisive reason. If we add up the deliveries of cloth to Meppen and Lathen, we see that Westerwolde is responsible for no less than 28.6% of the deliveries to these two manors and that

wool production appears to have been quite large. The percentage of the four manors together would be 16.9%, but even then Westerwolde's proportion is significant. Sheep farming is plausible, considering the high scores of *Ericaceae* (heather) in the Wedderbergen pollen diagram, suggesting an equilibrium between grazing pressure and sod cutting for the deep-litter stables (cf. 6.3).

An important restriction has to be made: the previous observations are just based on a snapshot in time. For Westerwolde, we have not studied any property registers from later centuries up to now. In 12th-century registers, from elsewhere cheeses, butter, fowl, geese, various types of fish, linen and also pottery are mentioned. Fowl had to be paid as tax by all Westerwolde parishes from 1316 onwards, when the protection of the bishop of Münster was invoked (cf. 3.3.2). These dairy products in particular indicate that more cattle were kept than can be deduced from the 11th-century *Heberol*. It should also be noted that, whereas in the 11th and 12th centuries, payment in money is still rare, in the 14th century, almost all manors and farmsteads were paying in cash (Martiny 1895: 280-1). This is the well-known phenomenon of the transition from a natural to a money economy.

Leaving aside the issue that the manorial districts of Meppen and Lathen were apparently not well demarcated and sometimes overlapped (which is due to their origin as *Streubesitz*, of course), with all the administrative complications in practice, it cannot be determined from which part of Westerwolde remittances had to be paid to the manor of Meppen, and from which part to that of Lathen. The *Heberol* does not reveal any additional location information on the farmsteads in Westerwolde that had villein obligations. We only find indications for the location of Corvey possessions, for the first time, in a deed of granting in fief to Eyge Addinga, a chieftain (*hoofdeling*) in Westerwolde, issued by Abbot Herman on 31 July 1474. This document concerns Onstwedde with Smeerling, but with the exception of three properties, among which was Lottering, identified by Noomen as an early Werden property (cf. 3.1). This document also concerns Vlagtwedde, with all of Wollinghuizen, four properties in Weende, and four

in Wedde and Sellingen with all that belongs to them (with one exception). Addinga and his ancestors, as stated in a document of the same day, had been enjoying this ancient possession of Corvey in Westerwolderland and Winschoten as liegemen of the abbey for more than one hundred years.³³ The question is still unanswered how that Corvey property was enlarged after the 11th-century *Heberol*. It would be going too far to speculate on that here though. It can hardly be otherwise than that a considerable number of the farmsteads belonged to the manor of Lathen since time immemorial.

It may be worth noting that, whatever the connections between Westerwolde and Lathen may have been (cf. 5.1), the distances are quite considerable: from Sellingen, it is about 20 km to Lathen (based on modern footpaths), from Vlagtwedde about 30 km, and from Onstwedde and Wedde about 35 km. The distances from Westerwolde to Meppen, on the other hand, ranged from about 40 km (from Sellingen) to more than 50 km (from Wedde). These distances between the manorial centre and the farmstead would have exceeded the limits for adequate property management. Usually, the majority of the farmsteads were at a distance of 15 km from a manor, and the remainder were often not more than 30 km away (Last 1983: 392). This observation in itself makes it clear that the supervision of the tributary farmsteads in Westerwolde, not to mention the difficult travel connections, must have been a thorny business.³⁴ According to the *Heberol*, the manor at Lathen is identifiable shortly after 1000 and must have been located on former imperial property, of which, however, Meppen was the centre (Hillebrand 1962: 173). The Lathen *curia* is mentioned for the first time in a charter of 1147, and its *villicus* only around 1200 (Frerker 1975: 83). Everything indicates that nowhere in this part of the Corvey possessions do we find completely unfree people, only so-called *laten*, or serfs. We prefer to avoid the confusing term 'half-free', used by Hauptmeyer (1997: 1071).³⁵

In concluding this section, and in connection to what we noted earlier about the importance of Lathen, we would like to add this: After this early 11th-century *Heberol*, there are later surveys of properties for the manors of Lathen and Meppen (listed by Last 1983:

33 RHC Groninger Archieven, Toegang 547: Familiearchief Lewe inv. no. 609 (reg. no. 37) resp. inv. no. 616 (reg. no. 38 and 57). In the first document, an original deed, the abbot declares that Eyge Addinga and his ancestors have owned Corvey properties and rights in Westerwolde and Winschoten for more than one hundred years. The second document is the specified deed of granting Westerwolderland with appurtenances and the guardianship in Winschoten in fief, but in the form of a *vidimus* written by Johan Lewe around 1605 and dated as '1502'. This *vidimus* is questionable because it is forged, but there is a copy from the mid-16th century as well (The Hague, Nationaal Archief, Toegang 3.01.02: Ambtenaren Centraal Bestuur Noordelijke Nederlanden inv. no. 925, fol. 27v-28r). The authenticity of these two documents does not need to be doubted, in view of the fact that there are already 16th-century *vidimus* deeds, unlike is the case for several other deeds from the Lewe archive regarding Westerwolde (cf. Alma 2020: 39). We owe this information to R.H. Alma, Warffum (pers. comm. 23 June 2020).

34 This distance problem in general was already pointed out by Schily 1921: 54.

35 Modern medievalists no longer work with such archaic legal categories. The social reality was considerably more plural.

386). Concerning Meppen, there is the register of Abbot Erkenbert from 1106/1128, which contains only the abbot's possessions; no reference is made to properties in Westerwolde (Kaminsky 1972: 138-44, 223-39). For Meppen and Lathen, there is an intriguing register of Abbot Widukind from 1185/1205 (cf. 3.3.1). For Meppen, there is still a register from prior to 1250, but this only contains the chapter's property, which did not include properties in Westerwolde.

3.3 Growth and decline of Corvey's dominance in the region

3.3.1 Corvey in the clinch with the bishopric of Osnabrück during the 11th and 12th centuries

The *Heberol* from the beginning of the 11th century still records revenues from tithes in Emsland, which undoubtedly originated in large part from the former mission cell of Meppen. But the abbey lost most of these revenues to Bishop Benno of Osnabrück (1068-1088) in 1077. In the years 1077-1079, this direct adviser of the German King Henry IV organized a whole series of forgeries to the detriment of the abbeys of Corvey and Herford. We have to see this in the context of the Investiture Controversy, which erupted in 1075, and which was not only a struggle between pope and king, but also between supporters and opponents of one of the two parties (Schubert 1997: 304-16; about Benno's role, see 308-12). This controversy was also fought with forged documents. Corvey, which had managed quite well until then, was now engaged in a power struggle with the bishop of Osnabrück, who, as we know, had great difficulty in establishing his diocese with parishes after the first mission cells, such as Meppen and Visbek, had been founded. It was here that the start-up problems of building up an ecclesiastical (hierarchical) organization, in which the interests of abbots and bishops came into conflict, were avenged (cf. 2.2). These start-up problems had particularly affected the diocese of Osnabrück in the 9th and even 10th century. This diocese had already a rather obscure beginning, as had the diocese of Bremen (Patz 1977: 675, 681).

The whole dispute about tithes between Corvey and Osnabrück, which was based on a series of forged royal charters from the 9th and even 10th century, will not be discussed here; numerous authors have already had their say in this matter (e.g. Kaminsky 1972: 83-94; Spicker-Wendt 1980: 67-79, 147-51). However, we do have to look at how this controversy played out in Emsland and Westerwolde. In principle, tithe rights, originally the right to one tenth of the harvest yield

and intended for the support of the parish clergy, were linked to churches over which the right of patronage was also exercised (Schubert 1997: 54). Whereas in 1077, the German King Henry IV generally assigned the tithes to the bishop of Osnabrück and Corvey suffered a defeat, it is not impossible that in some cases compromises were made at local level, such as in the village of Lathen, where, according to a notice from the beginning of the 12th century, unlike in Rhede and Dörpen, Corvey retained the entire tithe. Everywhere else in the area of the Lathen manor, the tithes went to the bishop of Osnabrück (Frerker 1975: 33). Abbot Wibald († 1158), whom we met before in connection with the *Liber Vitae*, tried in vain at the end of his life to get back the tithes in Aschendorf by appealing to the fact that this church was one of the important baptismal churches in the Nordland, i.e. the area between Ems and Hunte (Robben 2016: 154). However, it remains uncertain how and when Corvey would have obtained the tithes in Aschendorf, since Aschendorf was not included in the donation of the Meppen mission cell in 834. In Section 3.2.2, we saw that the claim that the church had already been donated to Corvey by Louis the German came from a late 12th-century addition to the *Catalogus donatorum*, so it is not unimaginable that Wibald was the instigator of this addition.

Even more unclear is the situation regarding Westerwolde. The Corvey sources up to the end of the 12th century do not mention tithes. Just as in Aschendorf, the idea that Corvey had the patronage rights over the five churches in Westerwolde (cf. 4.1) would raise the expectation that it also currently had, or had in the past, tithes rights there. This is not the case: there, too, at this time the tithes appear to be, or had come to be, in the hands of the bishop of Osnabrück. We do not know how it was in earlier times. Bear in mind that the 11th-century *Heberol* did not mention any tithes from Westerwolde. In any case, according to 14th-century Osnabrück registrations of fees, from about 1360 onwards and also later during the 15th century, tithes in Sellingen were granted in fee. From later times, there is also mention of tithes in Onstwedde, but because of the late moment in time at which they are registered, it is uncertain whether they were also in episcopal possession.³⁶

But there was more at issue than just the disputed right to tithes. The abbey, as a big landowner, had to deal with the problems of land management already mentioned in Section 2.3, because properties were sometimes scattered at great distance from the abbey itself and could not be managed together even with the best will in the world. Appointed administrators,

36 No further study of the tithes in Westerwolde, their origins and fortunes has been carried out by us, but such study certainly seems to be a desideratum in view of the tithes conflict between Corvey and Osnabrück. We owe this information to B.J. Harding, Sneek (pers. comm. 20 Oct. 2019 and 14 Nov. 2020).

who were not clergymen, increasingly tended to act independently to dispose of the abbey properties belonging to the respective manors. Often, they were either *ministeriales*, loyal but legally unfree agents of the abbot or the guardian as his secular representative, or regional aristocrats, legally free, who had pursued such functions in the expectation that they could expand their power through them. The administration also soon came into the hereditary possession of such people. Consequently, it was not unusual to dispose of property and obtain income at the local or the regional level. Complaints from the abbey about such actions by administrators are known from as early as the beginning of the 12th century, by which time this was already happening in the Nordland. Corvey's guardian, or rather its regional under-guardian, there was Count Otto van Zutphen and later his son Henry, who had been granted the use of the central manors of Haselünne and Huntlosen (Bockhorst 2006: 56-7). These counts of Zutphen also exercised comital rights over the Emsgau, and to them was given in fee the custody of the Corvey possessions in the Osnabrücker Nordland by the Duke of Saxony (Hillebrand 1962: 41). After an initial assignment to Bishop Adalbert of Bremen in 1063, these rights were transferred to the counts of Zutphen and then, at the beginning of the 12th century, to the counts of Cavelage-Ravensberg (Schmidt & Schubert 1997: 922). The Cavelage-Ravensberg dynasty came to prominence when, after 1063, the (direct) royal power disappeared from the area of Westphalia and Lower Saxony and forms of early seigniorial and territorial authority (*Landesherrlichkeit*) arose in – at least a part of – the former Carolingian *pagi*.

The Meppen manors also were disposed of in the 12th century, in the sense that the administrators or stewards, the *villici*, in fact exploited those *curiae* in hereditary leasehold, as a result of which the abbey no longer had full disposal over the income (Hauptmeyer 1997: 1073; Bockhorst 2006: 56-8). Whereas in the 10th and early 11th centuries the abbey still had reasonable control over the entire abbey property, in the 12th century, it slipped completely out of its hands. On the other hand, bishops – in this case those of Osnabrück, but the same applies to those of Münster and Utrecht – increasingly emerged as territorial lords and, apart from their gradually crystallizing ecclesiastical territory, also established a secular territory.

As the Investiture Controversy came to a denouement, strictly formally with the Concordat of Worms of 1122, bishops escaped the grip of the king and entered into alliances with the regional nobility more frequently. See how an abbey such as Corvey was pushed to the defensive by regional nobles and bishops seeking to strengthen their power positions. All this is to explain not only why in the 12th century the abbey's overall property management was subject to erosion, but also

why documents were forged by the various interested parties to claim rights and possessions. By the middle of the 12th century, Corvey realized that something had to be done regarding the management of properties, and a start was made with reorganizing the administration. The aforementioned Abbot Wibald, who came over from Stavelot and was abbot of both abbeys from 1146 to 1158, made a start with this reorganization. In the previous section, we have already mentioned how difficult it was to bring some order in the archives in an attempt to obtain evidence for what the abbey traditionally believed it was entitled to. In that context, for example, the alleged donation of Westerwolde and all its churches entered the complex codex, the *Liber Vitae*. Wibald had the support of King Conrad III of Hohenstaufen, but he did not sit well with Pope Eugene III, and his having a function at two locations meant that not everything went smoothly. Because of his sudden death, the reorganization process was interrupted, and it was only at the end of the 12th century that the work was resumed.

From that time, there is again, after a long interruption, some administration about the manors of Meppen and Lathen, namely, a register of Abbot Widukind (1185-1205). What was not recorded in the early 11th-century *Heberol* is now in this register. For the manor at Lathen, remarks were made about so-called *mainmortes*, obligatory remittances in case of the death of a serf, by which both the abbot and the *villicus* could claim the right to the best part of the estate. There were also rules in case a wife of a *litus*, a *laat* (the German and Dutch term for what we usually call a serf in English) died without leaving an unmarried daughter. In that case, the inheritance expired to the abbot. Payment also had to be made when a serf's farm was taken over by the son when his father had died or when a serf's daughter got married. All these cases are noted in great detail for Lathen (Frerker 1975: 17-20). This enumeration of villeins' obligations is almost a classic example of what was regulated in manorial rights for properties of comparable large landowners, such as the abbeys of Abdinkhof, Prüm and Werden (cf. Slicher van Bath 1964 for the manors in the area of the Veluwe, the Netherlands). Such rights of the abbey, and thus obligatory recognitions to emphasize the servile status of the farmers on their farms, also applied elsewhere in the Nordland (Bockhorst 2006: 58-61). This also shows how essential the position of the *villicus* in the management of such a manor was, and how much depended on his loyalty to the abbey.

It is not clear from these records whether these servile obligations also applied to Westerwolde at that time. These stipulations look like a generic arrangement, so that even the Westerwolde peasants on Corvey properties could still be subject to them around 1200. As such, the continuation of serfdom would be in line with the situation elsewhere, especially (but not just here) on the sandy soils of the eastern Netherlands, Westphalia and

the southern part of Lower Saxony, well into the 13th and 14th centuries or even far beyond.³⁷ For the manor at Lathen, releases from serfdom by means of letters of manumittance have been documented from the 15th and 16th centuries. At the end of the 16th century, the last serfs were still at the Lathen manor (Frerker 1975: 65-75). However, it should be noted that Corvey was the only big landowner in the Westerwolde region and that certainly not all farmsteads could be counted as its property. We therefore have to be careful not to let the overall picture be distorted by one large landowner, who also kept and left records, and who also tried to keep his manorial organization standing for a very long time, as best he could – unlike, for instance, was the case at Werden.

All kinds of other provisions relate mostly to general management. Significant is that in a charter from shortly after 1203, a knight and his two brothers were entrusted with the office of *villicus* of the manor of Lotten, but had to take over a debt from the abbot. The same charter also stipulated that they should not prevent the abbot from appealing to the serfs for help with the construction of a fortress (in German *Burg*) in Landegge, north of Haren, along the river Ems. Apparently, this fortification had to protect the Corvey possessions in Emsland, but since documents from 1224 give the impression that the bishop of Münster, too, was involved in this construction, it seems that the sovereign power of the bishop of Münster was spreading to the north and that this part of the Osnabrücker Nordland became part of the Münster protection area. The bishop of Osnabrück, of whom Corvey no longer had a high opinion after the loss of the dispute about the tithes, was thus bypassed (Bockhorst 2006: 58-61).

3.3.2 Power expansion of the bishopric of Münster to the north in the 13th century

With the first manifestation of the bishop of Münster, still in the first half of the 13th century, we enter the phase of the ongoing expansion of his temporal power farther north and the formation of the so-called *Niederstift* (Bockhorst 1985). As we have just indicated, this meant that an important part of the ecclesiastical territory of the bishop of Osnabrück became secular territory of his immediate neighbour, whose ecclesiastical territory extended as far as the Frisian countries to the east of the Lauwers since the early Christianization (Fig. 5).

It has already been mentioned that the comital rights of the Emsgau had been transferred to the counts of Cavelage-Ravensberg in the beginning of the 12th century. About a century later, in 1226, the county of Ravensberg included the Nordheim inheritance of Ravensberg and the joint Cavelage possessions, i.e. the area of Vlotho, Vechta and Vreesenburg, together with properties and counties belonging to it (Hanisch 1962: 7-94). In 1226, however, a division of assets was established between Count Otto and his brother Count Louis, whereby Otto would keep the offices of Vlotho, Meppen and Vechta with possessions more to the north (not specified, but probably the Frisian part of the Emsgau). After the death of Count Otto (1244), the geographical focus clearly shifted to Vechta. Countess Sophia inherited from Otto Vechta, Haselünne, Vreesenburg and imperial fiefdoms in Frisia. Vreesenburg is the seigniorial fortress of Fresenburg, north of Lathen. In the chronicle of Abbot Emo van Wittewierum, it was, perhaps disdainfully, called a *castellulum*.³⁸ Some years later, in 1252, Jutta, daughter of Sophia and wife of Walram of Montjoie (Monschau), sold her Ravensberg rights in the Vechta seigniory to Bishop Otto II of Münster for 40 000 marks (Van Lengen 1973: 25-6; Schmidt & Schubert 1997: 922). A more detailed look at this charter of 1252 reveals that nothing is specified and that the charter refers in a general sense to allodial goods in Vechta, Emsland and Frisia. In 1253, the German King William II granted the bishop the comital rights of Vechta and all possessions in and outside Frisia in fief, which the last count, Otto of Ravensberg, had held in fee. From that moment on, the bishop of Münster was able to expand his secular territory to the Emsgau, and so 1252-1253 constitutes a definite *caesura* in the development of this area (Hucker 1993).

It is not irrelevant to note that none of the surviving documents from the mid-13th century indicate that villages in Westerwolde can be considered part of the Emsgau and hence part of the territory of the earlier counts. In essence, this is also apparent from the fact that there is no mention at all of Westerwolde in the deed of sale of 1252 to the bishop of Münster. The request for protection from the “*consules ac incole universi terre Westerwalde commemorantes in quinque parrochiis*” (counsellors and inhabitants of the five Westerwolde parishes) to the bishop in 1316 is proof that the *Niederstift* was only at that time expanding to the north-west (Renaud & Van Dijk 1959: 51; Bockhorst 1985: 46). At least as important is the fact that this confirms that

37 For Guelders, see Becker (2001: 291-3). For Twente, where serfdom survived the longest, Slicher van Bath (1957: 673-728) still remains important. For Lower Saxony in summary, see Hauptmeyer (1997: 1070-87). The occurrence of serfdom until at least the 13th century has also been observed in the peat reclamation areas in the border zone between Utrecht and Holland (Huiting 2020: 234).

38 See Jansen & Janse (1991: 250-3) for the battle between the inhabitants of Reiderland and those of Aschendorf and their allies in 1230-1234.



Fig. 8. Seal of the Universitas terrae of Westerwolde, attached to the charter in which consules and common inhabitants of the terra Westerwolde voluntarily join in the protection of the bishop of Münster, 18 January 1316 (source Landesarchiv Nordrhein-Westfalen - Abteilung Westfalen - B 101u/Domkapitel Münster/Urkunden III W Nr. 11; photo Landesarchiv Nordrhein-Westfalen, Münster).

Westerwolde presented itself as an independent *terra* and *universitas terrae* (in German a *Landesgemeinde*), to some extent comparable with the independent *universitates terrae* in the Frisian countries (Van Lengen 2003a), but above all – and this was often overlooked – with *universitates*, which are recognizable in the neighbouring Saxon-Westphalian area (Drenthe, Saterland, northern Emsland and the Hümmling), albeit with a different origin and a somewhat different character (Köller 2015: 407–31, 2017: 122–4). The parishes acknowledged the sovereign power of the bishop and committed themselves to the annual payment of a fowl tax from each hearth on the feast of St Michael (29 September).³⁹ At the beginning of the 14th century, the *universitas* used its own seal, provided with a sheaf of corn with ears protruding on either side, a logo that, being a sign of fertility, can be called remarkable for a relatively poor arable region (Fig. 8).⁴⁰ Exactly the same had been done by the *universitas* consisting of the parishes of Aschendorf, Heede and Rhede in 1296, when, under the condition of maintaining their peasant autonomy, they invoked the protection of the Münster bishop against local nobles (Köller 1–130 :2017). Since that time, Aschendorf formed

the northern border of the Münster territory and had an earthen boundary dike (*Landwehr* in German).⁴¹ Be that as it may, Westerwolde did not share the fate of the Emsgau in 1252, neither in the Saxon nor in the Frisian part. Apparently, it never belonged to the Emsgau.

What moved the Westerwolde inhabitants to take this step is far from clear. The fact that Westerwolde belonged to the diocese of Osnabrück, and that Corvey owned patronage rights over the parish churches there may have played a role, but that seems very debatable to us, as does the assumption that Westerwolde would have strived for closer ties with Emsland (Bockhorst 1985: 46). One provision in the 1316 agreement may well give an indication, although it would take us too far to go into detail. The inhabitants of Westerwolde indeed promised not to build, nor permit the construction of, “*aliquod castrum vel munimen*” (any fortress or other kind of fortification, wording that is perhaps to be read as a moated tower house, German *Steinhaus*, Dutch *steenhuis*) (Blok 1895: I, no. 251). This could mean that the bishop wished to prevent such tower houses from being built in Westerwolde, if they were not already there. If the native inhabitants were not themselves the actors, they may have been concerned about Frisian immigrants, as in the Frisian coastal area such tower houses had started to appear as early as the 13th century, for example in Houwingaham. In the 14th century, building a tower house would create a *furor*, with Winschoten as a nearby example, where, at a short distance from each other, three tower houses were situated (Groenendijk & Bärenfänger 2008: 30–2, 70–8). Around Aschendorf, such farmhouses of lower nobles with a tower – a mark of standing, wealth and power – were common too (Köller 2017: 127). Given that the reclamations in Vriescheloo are assumed to have been undertaken by colonists from neighbouring Frisian areas, it is not surprising that there would eventually be a growing build-up of power by chieftains (*hoofdelingen*) in Westerwolde too, as became a fact after c. 1360 with the arrival of the Addinga family from Reiderland. Egge Addinga was in 1391 still considered to be one of the Reiderland chieftains, although he had had the opportunity to build a *steenhuis* in Wedde on land belonging to Corvey and also signed as Egge Addinga in Westerwolde (Schrage 1993: 35–7). Because of repeated Dollard floods, especially the Marcellus Flood of 1361, the Addinga family would have sought and acquired compensating land ownership more to the south, but would have continued to retain properties in Reiderland (Renaud & Van Dijk

39 The significance of this fowl tax, which was administrated in detail only since 1568, for the historical demography of this region until the beginning of the 19th century, will be subject of a follow-up study.

40 The earliest known specimen dates from 1316, attached to the charter kept in the Landesarchiv in Münster. The logo is very different from what we see anywhere else in the coastal region on such seals (see Van Lengen 2003b; Van Schaik 2012: 9–11).

41 This wall is documented in a charter of 1471 (Bockhorst 1992: 29).

1959: 51-2). They will undoubtedly not have been the only ones. However, the founder of the nearby Vriescheloo tower house, probably built in the late 14th century, has not been identified so far (Groenendijk 1989).

In this context, attention may still be drawn to the customary rights in the *terra* Westerwolde. Although these were not codified in the Lower Saxon language until 1470, they were already mentioned in 1395 (Blok 1899: II, no. 897: “*als dair een lantrecht is*” (as it was defined in the customary law of the region) and must certainly have their origin in customary law that was transmitted orally.⁴² It is not necessarily the case that there was originally an Old Frisian text, as was established 20 years ago for the Oldambt customary law recorded in 1471, but dating from 1327. In that version of 1471, this law was applicable to both the Oldambt and the Reiderland, and the law remained in force until 1809 in Bellingwolde and Blijham. This Oldambt customary law was an originally 13th-century Old Frisian text that has not been preserved in 13th- or 14th-century copies, but was translated word by word into Lower German in the 14th or 15th centuries and, around 1530, long after the region had already switched to Lower German, was recorded by a *redger* (judge) from Appingedam (Alma 2000). We cannot say anything about this, but it would be advisable that experts in legal history, by comparison with Old Frisian customary laws would investigate whether there are any specific Frisian elements in it that could indicate Frisian influence and thus a possibly mixed population composition in at least the northern part of Westerwolde *sensu stricto*.

For a good understanding of the relationship between Corvey and this pushy bishop as sovereign, let us note just this: Already at an earlier stage, in 1238, the bishop of Münster proved himself to be an overpowerful patron of Corvey and his properties in the Nordland, and Corvey allowed itself to be ruled so until the middle of the 14th century, because it was only in 1348 that the abbot announced that the pastor in Meppen could dispose of his own serfs, his wastelands and his abandoned farms without the intervention of episcopal officials. However, this claim appeared to be in vain. The bishop refused to honour such rights of the abbey. Nevertheless, it was not long afterwards that Corvey for the first time created a register of fiefs. In this book, 275 fiefs were registered, of which only 10 were from the *Niederstift*, and even these were, in fact, claims. In the next register of fiefs, there were only three from the *Niederstift*, and in 1366, none (Bockhorst 1985: 101-5). Earlier, it had been noted by Martini (1895: 306-19) that the income from this part of the Corvey property had decreased to a minimum in the 14th century, because many of the original Corvey farmsteads had ended up in the hands of

the lower nobility. This clearly indicates that Corvey's position in the *Niederstift*, to which Westerwolde had belonged since 1316, was extremely weak. It is very questionable whether Westerwolde was still on Corvey's radar at all. That the tide would turn, possibly under the influence of Corvey's 'alliance' with the Addinga family starting in the second half of the 14th century, is another story. That both parties benefited from that alliance is undeniable, because the Addinga family has shown a great deal of arrogance, and the inhabitants of Westerwolde have had a lot to do with them. The role of the bishop of Münster in all this is rather obscure. What may have been his objective with the sale of his rights in the territory of Westerwolde to Hayge and Bole Addinga in 1400 is for now unclear, and from what occurred in the course of the 15th century, which is not a subject of discussion here, it seems that he more or less withdrew his hands from this part of his secular territory and let the Addinga clan go its own way (Köller 2015: 428-9).

4. Parishes and churches in Westerwolde

With regard to the age of medieval settlements and the entry of Christianity into the region, we will have to check to what extent historical sources provide reliable indications for this and, subsequently, to verify whether archaeological and architectural-historical findings are consistent with them. We also want to know what involvement Corvey had with the churches in Westerwolde.

4.1 Church mentions in written sources, and their reliability

Part of the problem of the age of the churches in Westerwolde has been clarified by Leesch (1966: 43-4, 69-72), but he did not refer to the *Traditiones Corbeienses* and to the possibility, assumed by some authors, but dismissed by us as based on forged records, that there would already have been churches in Westerwolde in c. 875/876. He argued that a list in Corvey's *Liber Vitae* of parish churches of which Corvey held the rights of patronage does not date from c. 1150, but from the 14th century (after 1290 and before 1424) and is a later insertion. However, a list in a later copy but going back to a 13th-century *Vorlage* does not include the five churches. In any case, the mention of the Westerwolde churches appears to come from this presumably 14th-century list. Therefore Buursma (1995: 18) rightly expressed doubts about the possibility that churches existed in Westerwolde before 1000. As a matter of fact, this parish list – in addition to the already mentioned Westerwolde request from 1316 to the bishop of Münster for protection – is the earliest source to mention the five

42 The most recent edition is that of De Roehr (1809).

settlements together, constituting what we call the core area of Westerwolde, and to mention the place names Sellingen, Vlagtwedde, Wedde and Vriescheloo or Loo at all.

If we link this question of Corvey's rights of patronage to what was explained above about the loss of Corvey's grip on its distant possessions since the late 11th century and the unsuccessful attempts by successive abbots, such as Erkenbert and Wibald, in the 12th century to turn that tide, this can only lead to one conclusion: Corvey had, in fact, already lost its possessions in the distant and eccentric Westerwolde, the possessions and obligatory deliveries had slipped out of its hands and fallen into the hands of notable people, noble or otherwise. What remained were the rights to appoint parish priests, but these, too, would ultimately end up with the Addinga family. The granting of fiefs from the 15th century to them is a clear indication of the wafer-thin role that Corvey had left to play.

There is still an issue that raises doubts about Corvey's strong and early grip on churches in Westerwolde. The patron saints of these churches seem to point to this. Corvey had acquired rights of patronage over existing or newly founded churches in a number of places elsewhere, but with a few exceptions these were closer to one of their manors. The Vitus patrociniū was transplanted to those churches at an early stage, even though it has been pointed out that the oldest Vitus churches in Saxony do not go back to Corvey, but to St Denis and Fulda (Röckelein 2002: 87). We think we know this about Meppen from 834 on, but also about, for example, Twiste, Goddelsheim, Lönningen, Barnstorf an der Hunte and Billerbeck.⁴³ Whether this also applies to the proprietary church of Bokeloh, dating from 919, which was transferred by a local aristocrat, Reginbert, to Corvey in 1037 (Schubert 1997: 53-4) is not clear (Röckelein 2002: 88).⁴⁴ In any case, there is no evidence at all of such an influence in Westerwolde. This seems all the more reason to assume that Corvey could not have been the driving force behind the foundation of churches or the formation of parishes, and to assume that village communities had already built their own churches. For this we refer to the website corpusroemeling.nl, put online by the Fryske Akademy in 2019. The church of Onstwedde appears to have been dedicated to St James the Great in 1391. That of Vriescheloo appears to have been dedicated to St Nicholas; although this patrociniū is only mentioned in 1523/24, another patrociniū is assumed prior to this. The church of Vlagtwedde probably also has

Nicholas as its titular in 1402. The patrociniū of Wedde and Sellingen are unknown.

So, there was no Vitus patrociniū in Westerwolde – only elsewhere in the Frisian coastal area. We have seen one already, the Oldehove in Leeuwarden, for which a clear relationship with Corvey can be demonstrated at a very early stage (cf. 3.2.2). Winschoten – which, like the five parishes of Westerwolde and those of Blijham, Bellingwolde, Beerta and Ulsda, belonged to the diocese of Osnabrück – has a Vitus church too. The present-day church of St Vitus dates from c. 1275, a date which is surprisingly consistent with the earliest mention of the village in the *Vita Sibrandi* from c. 1267-1275. There had been an older church, however, which was demolished in 1543. There is no archaeological evidence for the location of this church, which may have been built in the early Romanesque period. The location St Vitusholt is uncertain, as is Corvey's involvement with a church in Winschoten. Winschoten does not appear in the above-mentioned 14th-century list of churches, and Winschoten is never mentioned either in older Corvey sources. Roemeling therefore assumed that Corvey did not have a hand in the founding of Winschoten's oldest church (corpusroemeling.nl/Winschoten). The fact that on 31 July 1474 the abbot of Corvey declared that the Addinga family had had custody rights over the church for more than a hundred years and (re)granted them those rights raises questions that cannot be answered in this context. We refer to what we noted above about the fief deed of Corvey properties in various Westerwolde villages (cf. 3.2.3).

4.2 Archaeological and architectural-historical findings

In the Westerwolde area and its periphery, only a few churches have been investigated archaeologically, and none of them have been the subject of programmatic research. In the eastern Dollard bay area, research took place in Vriescheloo, in 1939/1940 (Van Giffen 1939), and in Houwingaham, farther downstream the Westerwoldsche Aa, in 1993 (Groenendijk & Bärenfänger 2008). These were single-naved brick parish churches, so familiar in the Groningen and Ostfrisian coastal zone and their peaty hinterland. As for the ground plan of Vriescheloo's oldest church, there has been some confusion about the date of construction. No tuff was found there. Van Giffen (1939) called it a 15th-century foundation altogether; Molema dated the oldest phase in the second half of the 12th century,

43 Patze (1977: 690) wrongly assumes that the Meppen church had the Vitus patrociniū from the very beginning. This is impossible, since Corvey obtained relics of St Vitus only in 836; before that time, the abbey was dedicated to Stephen; see Königs (1939: 17, 39). Only after that date could Corvey become the disseminator of the Vitus patrociniū.

44 From where Röckelein obtained a founding date of 783 is unknown to us.

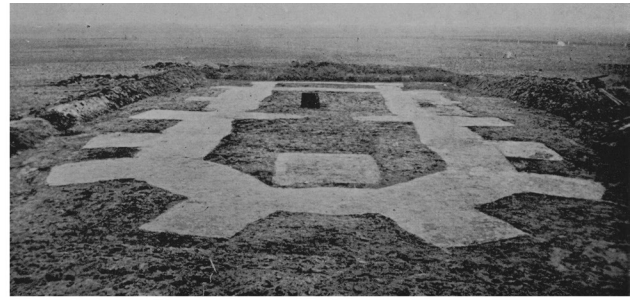
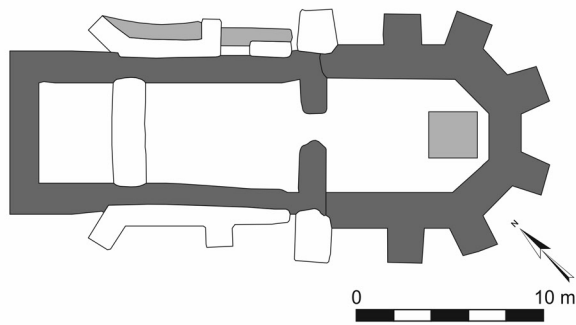


Fig. 9. Ground plan of the single-naved church of Vriescheloo, the Netherlands, displaying two building phases, the earliest dating from the 13th century (left), and a view of the excavation of the Vriescheloo church, seen from the east (right) (source Van Giffen 1939; excavation plan redrawn by E. Bolhuis, GIA).

due to the constriction between nave and choir (Molema 1990: 257); and Van der Ploeg confirms Molema's view and dates the church in the 12th/13th centuries.⁴⁵ Halbertsma, too, considers the possibility of a – at the earliest – 13th-century construction (Halbertsma, 1973: 99) that we agree with, given the latest insights on the first occurrence of brick in the second quarter of the 13th century (Fig. 9). Houwingaham's church is only generally dated as 13th century, as we know its contours only through a detailed soil scan.

Furthermore, in sandy Westerwolde, the interior of the medieval church of Sellingen was investigated in 1972/1973 ahead of a restoration. This single-naved, brick church, in its present appearance dating from c.1300 (Ozinga 1940: 201), was preceded by an older and shorter one, also built in brick, as was concluded from foundation trenches that do not correspond with the present church, their filling larded with brick fragments. Wood and tuff were absent, dating this first brick church only slightly older than the present one, as Halbertsma (1973) concluded. The reason behind the replacement remains unclear, but the reason is not an isolated one, as Molema demonstrated for the two consecutive 13th-century brick parish churches of Scheemda, apparently prompted by a risky foundation technique used for the previous church (Molema 1990: 257–8). More important than the issue of the succession of Sellingen's brick churches is the presence of a graveyard with older human interments, cut by the church foundations and with an orientation that deviates from the current nave axis. This apparently Christian graveyard suggests a still-older church beyond the present location (Fig. 10).

Ozinga and Halbertsma, both experts in the built structure, obviously struggled with the question of where to seek the five mid-12th-century Westerwolde churches as they pop up in the illustrious Corvey

church list. In the case of Sellingen, this led Halbertsma to search in vain for a wooden predecessor. He contemplates that in this region the tuff phase was probably skipped, the brick phase directly succeeding the wood phase, such as he assumes for Vriescheloo and some Drenthe churches (Rolde, Sleen, Peize, Zuidlaren and Noordlaren; Halbertsma 1973: 99, 1977: 34). Halbertsma was left to conclude that the search for wooden predecessors must proceed (Halbertsma 1973: 99–100). Today, we understand these considerations in the light of current knowledge, concluding that the supposed mid-12th-century Corvey church list must be a later product (cf. 4.1). Be that as it may, Sellingen's present-day church stems from the early 14th century, not earlier.

This wood-tuff-brick discussion keeps re-emerging. Van Schaik describes the state of the art for Groningen in 2008, and the picture appears diverse (Van Schaik 2008a: 153–6; 2008b: 220–2). Brick architecture in Friesland and Groningen is now postulated to have begun not before c. 1225 (Emmens 2008). Meanwhile, Isenberg (2017: 17–8) warns researchers to not just assume a wooden predecessor if tuff is lacking; we are reminded that in the first Christianization phase missionaries made use of 'movable' churches. Moving wooden structures was quite common in the Middle Ages, even before 1000, as Zimmermann pointed out, and not merely for economic reasons, but out of tactical considerations as well (Zimmermann 2007, esp. 67–8). Furthermore, founding a church required not only the donation of land, but also the provision of a means for the priest's livelihood (Isenberg 2017: 17–8).

Vlagtwedde's church foundation, tentatively dated by Ozinga in the second half of the 13th century (Ozinga 1940: 215–6), is said by Halbertsma, Roemeling and Haiduck (Halbertsma 1973: 99; corpusroemeling.nl/Vlagtwedde; Haiduck 1992: 64) to have contained a tuff core, but in a later report Halbertsma does not return to

⁴⁵ Information kindly provided by dr C.P.J. van der Ploeg, Department of History of Architecture and Urbanism, University of Groningen (pers. comm. May and June 2019).

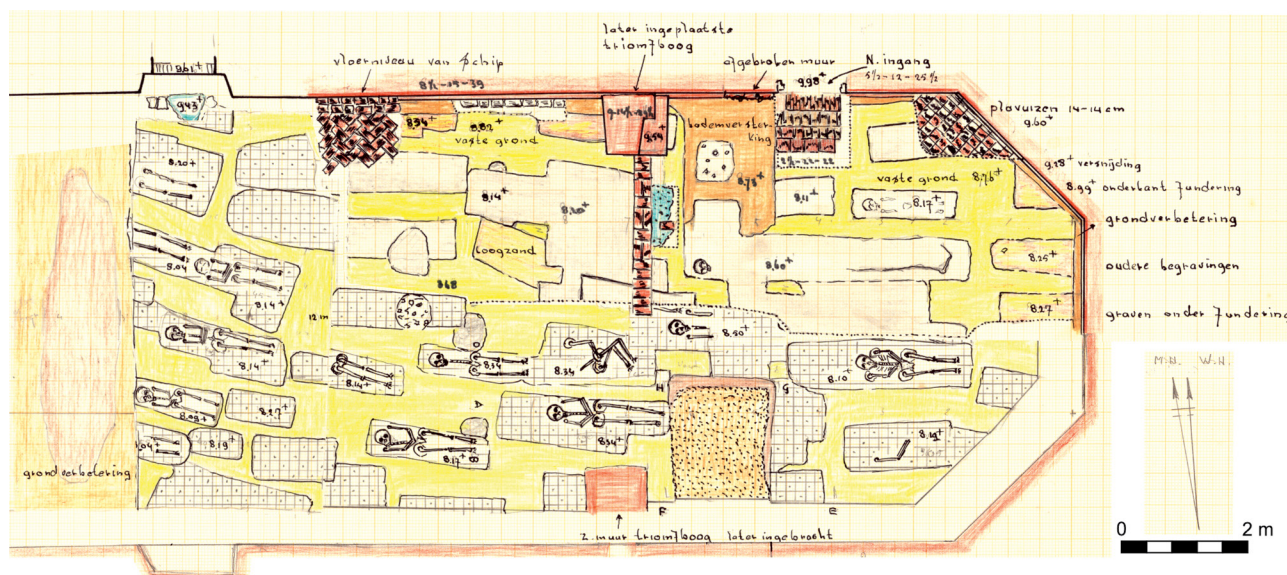


Fig. 10. Nave and choir of the late 13th-century parish church of Sellingen, the Netherlands, as excavated in 1972–1973. The picture combines three separate excavation surfaces of about the same level. Patches of foundation strips with brick debris perpendicular to the nave ('grondverbetering', in brown) suggest a slightly older and shorter church in the same location. The different orientation of the interments in the nave and the continuation of the graveyard under the nave and choir wall of both brick churches suggest a nearby, even older church (original drawing A. van Pernis, Rijksdienst voor het Oudheidkundig Bodemonderzoek, Amersfoort, adapted by E. Bolhuis, GIA).

this issue (Halbertsma 1977: 33). Thus Vlagtwedde's nave is only generally dated. And because tuff as a construction material was gradually replaced by brick in the 13th century, this date fits in, if tuff were to be shown to appear in Vlagtwedde after all.

Wedde's brick church was built in the second quarter of the 13th century, based on observations in the nave. Here again a wooden predecessor was suggested because of the lack of tuff, but not proven (Halbertsma 1977: 34; corpusroemeling.nl/Wedde). Ozinga in his time suggested that the oldest section dates from the 13th century (Ozinga 1940: 218–9).

Onstwedde's brick church in its present appearance dates no further back than the 14th century (Ozinga 1940: 107; corpusroemeling.nl/Onstwedde). Archaeological research as to its real age is wanting, and there would be enough reason to undertake such research in view of the fact that 'Onstwedde' in the earliest written sources coincides with 'Westerwolde' (Fig. 11; cf. 3.1).

The foregoing considerations mean that in Westerwolde we do not encounter churches older than 13th century, in spite of its recolonization since Merovingian times. Actually, we have no serious indications that Westerwolde's five primordial parishes – Onstwedde, Vlagtwedde, Sellingen, Wedde and Loo – already possessed a church around the middle of the 12th century and that sand-Westerwolde preceded peat-Westerwolde in church foundation. Neither do we have any indication of wooden predecessors so far.

4.3 Comparison with neighbouring Emsland and Drenthe

What do the neighbouring regions of south-eastern Drenthe and Emsland tell us in this respect? In Drenthe, the church of Roswinkel, which is the one closest to Westerwolde, is known to have been established before 1395, but no further detail is available (corpusroemeling.nl/Roswinkel). The colonization of Roswinkel will have taken place in the late 13th or early 14th century (cf. 6.1.3).

The earliest church of Emmen, excavated in 1964 and recently reinterpreted, was a mid-9th century wooden, single-naved church of modest size. It was twice replaced in wood, to be superseded by a brick structure in the early 13th century (Fig. 12). The oldest graves in the church interior and outside the church date from the first half of the 9th century, indicating, together with their position and grave gifts, that this necropolis is to be considered early Christian (Den Hengst 2013: 120–8, 137). Christianity in Drenthe, introduced shortly before AD 800, possesses an early and well-documented representative in the Emmen soil archive. Scattered over Drenthe, we find further wooden churches from the early Christian period (e.g. Te Kieffe 2013).

Halbertsma already points to a missing tuff phase in the sandy districts of Ostfriesland and Ammerland, in sharp contrast with the more prosperous *terp* village churches in the coastal clay zone, and relates this to the absence of proper transport routes (Halbertsma 1977:



Fig. 11. The late-gothic parish church of Onstwedde, the Netherlands, nowadays a Reformed church. Most of the building dates from c. 1500, but the tower is c. 150 years older (photo Remi van Schaik, 2020).



Fig. 12. Plan of the first wooden church (red) reconstructed on the basis of features found in the church interior of the Grote Kerk Emmen, the Netherlands (source Den Hengst 2013: Fig. 3).

34). In our opinion, this transport argument is a debatable viewpoint. In Emsland, the earliest churches relevant for Westerwolde were established in Aschendorf and Meppen, both situated on the river Ems, but tuff is absent. Aschendorf's St Amandus church would have started as a wooden structure in the second half of the 9th century and counted five wooden stages altogether.⁴⁶ In the second half of the 13th century, it was replaced by a brick structure, with tuff lacking completely (Fig. 13; Robben 2016: 107-8). The early establishment as a baptismal church places Aschendorf between the regional

centres of power since the end of the early Middle Ages. Even older must be Meppen's St Vitus, also a baptismal church, in 834 mentioned as *basilica* and dedicated to St Vitus after 836, when Corvey was donated the mission cell of Meppen (cf. 3.1).⁴⁷ The church was remodelled into a Romanesque church in the first quarter of the 13th century, built from sandstone cuboids, but whether this church replaced a wooden one was insufficiently researched (Karrenbrock 2002: 293).

Concluding, we perceive that those parts of Drenthe and Emsland situated closest to Westerwolde embody

⁴⁶ The origin of the patronage of St Amandus is an interesting issue, because it is a widely common patronage in medieval Flanders (more than 100 churches), but rarely found in Germany. This saint from the Merovingian period founded an abbey between Cambrai and Tournai around 640 (Robben 2016: 155-7). It is wholly unknown if it was transferred by missionaries from that region to Saxony and if it could be a dating indication for the church at Aschendorf.

⁴⁷ It is debatable whether the first church was originally dedicated to St Margaret and if there was any relation to mission activities from Utrecht (Bockhorst 2012: 1054; Robben 2016: 156).

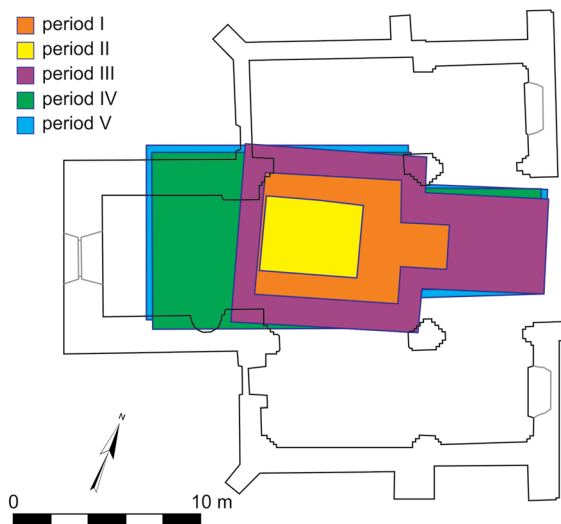


Fig. 13. Contours of St Amandus church in Aschendorf, Germany, and its five identified preceding wood phases. Criteria to define a phase may differ, which may explain why period II appears to cover a smaller area (source Robben 2016: Abb. 27).

the presence of a local elite embracing Christianity to establish their power. This was argued for Emmen (Den Hengst 2013: 132, 140-5) and for Aschendorf (Robben 2016: 158-9), but has not yet been demonstrated for Westerwolde, although Onstwedde would be a good candidate.

Isenberg stresses the foundation of proprietary churches well into the 12th century, displaying almost identical, single-naved ground plans, a construction schedule that was to be abandoned around 1200 (Isenberg 2016: 57-8). So far, the lack of tuff in these regions is remarkable in comparison with the coastal zone. Haiduck mapped a concentration of tuff churches in the Dutch and German coastal zone (Haiduck 1992: 53-66, distribution map 3). However, in the northern Netherlands, the use of tuff is not restricted to the coastal zone, but also comprises the Pleistocene hinterland (De Olde 2002, 2003). Suggested obstacles, such as difficult transport routes (Halbertsma 1977), were of a minor importance. Haiduck stresses that building in tuff followed regional fashions that were of short duration, in Germany lasting from circa 1150-1200. In the lower course of the river Ems, the presence of suitable raw material stimulated brick production, starting soon after 1200 (Haiduck 1992: 47-53, 2009: 49). Van der Ploeg points at the cost aspect of building in tuff, which left many churches in 13th-century Frisia still consisting of wood, whereas brick making already started making headway (Van der Ploeg 2012: 157).

5. Infrastructure and transport

Navigable waterways and road systems were essential for an exchange of people, goods and ideas. Accessibility from the outside was as important as the transportation of surplus products, if any, to external markets. The oldest archaeological information on medieval road systems in Westerwolde goes back to the high Middle Ages, but we do not know their extent. In Westerwolde's winding and shallow waterways, flat-bottomed vessels will have been in use, but none have come to light, despite the intensive digging activities for environmental development in its stream valleys since the 1990s and their archaeological supervision.⁴⁸ Much cross-moor traffic will have taken place by foot or on horse-back.

5.1 Significance of the river Ems commerce between Frisia and Westfalen

The main traffic flow was via navigable rivers, of which the Ems was the waterway by far to connect Westfalen (Osnabrück) with the Frisian coast. At Meppen, the river Hase, coming from the east, joined the Ems. Between Ems and Weser, also the Hunte river was of importance. Along these waterways, we may expect the first tolls and markets. At Haren/Ems, the Tecklenburg toll is documented in 1236. At Meppen, Corvey Abbey established a toll as early as 945 (Otto I) and one year later it extended its activities with market and coinage rights. The Haselünne toll on the Hase existed already in the late 12th century and Landegge, on the Ems, is supposed to have had a toll and market in the 13th century (Holbach 2001: 229). So many tolls close to each other suggests many shipping movements, although it remains unknown who participated the most (Lübbing 1927: 140-1). Meanwhile, the subsequent storm surges that raged between 1362 and 1509, leading to huge land losses in Reiderland and the formation of the Dollard estuary as far inland as the Bourtange moor, must have had far-reaching consequences for shipping traffic on the downstream Ems and for the tolls and markets involved. The storms must also have had an impact on the land route between Groningen and the Ems region (Holbach 2001: 231).

In the grain transport between Westfalia and the coastal zone, with important markets in Meppen and Emden, Westerwolde seems to have played a minimal role. It is mentioned in 1492, possibly as a grain supplier, when a shipload of rye waits for permission to sail out from Westerwolde. This must apply to Wedde, for the only regional waterway of importance, the Westerwoldsche

⁴⁸ However, we should bear in mind that small inland vessels did not perish but were simply pulled ashore and demolished once discarded, and the wooden parts were reused, or served as fuel (pers. comm. prof. dr T.J. Maarleveld, University of Southern Denmark, 19 Jan. 2021).

Aa, was navigable inland as far as Wedde (Van den Broek 2007: 431-2).⁴⁹ Unlike Westerwolde, Drenthe seems to have produced a rye surplus, even in years of scarcity (Benders 2011: 88-91).

Let us turn to a land route, the long-distance road Groningen–Münsterland, which crossed northern Westerwolde. It had to pass a toll bridge at Wedde, spanning the Westerwoldsche Aa. On its way from the Drenthe raised bog as the Runde/Ruiten Aa, this river picked up the Mussel Aa and several small rivulets, reaching a considerable flow once it arrived in Wedde. Here, natural elevations flanking its course suddenly opened into a broad river valley, the Weddermeden or Hoorndermeden. This valley plain formed a natural barrier for road transport because it was repeatedly flooded during the formation of the eastern Dollard bay. Westbound and eastbound traffic was forced to take the high riverbank and cross the Westerwoldsche Aa at its embouchement into the Weddermeden. This made installing a toll bridge here lucrative, a position well understood by the Addingas when they decided to settle down in Wedde in the course of the 14th century. The road, once established as a land route, continued its path through Westerwolde south-eastward via the Bourtange (*tange* = elongated sand ridge) to cross the Bourtange moor and join the ‘Frisian road’, a major long-distance land route flanking the river Ems and connecting Münster with Emden (Fig. 14). The Wedde trajectory of the route Groningen–Münster was, in fact, a short-cut for the southbound traffic, and it is in this light that we view the joint intention of Egge Addinga and the city council of Groningen in 1443 to have a road constructed connecting the Groninger Stadsweg (running from Groningen to Oterdum, on the Ems) and the ‘Frisian road’ flanking the river Ems in Emsland. But this intention did not come to fruition, and two next endeavours in 1457 and 1483 to dig a canal from the Ems via Heede towards the Westerwoldsche Aa at Wedde failed too (more comprehensively: Van den Broek 2007: 71, 411-3, 431-2). The *Landrecht* of 1470 had established the width of different types of roads, *heerwegen* (military roads) included, but it is uncertain whether the *heerweg* Groningen–Münsterland already features in this *Landrecht* (Delvigne & Koopman 1991: 87, 90). During the Eighty Years’ War (1568-1648), this *heerweg* obviously was of strategic importance, judging from the construction of the fortress Bourtange in its trajectory in 1580. Martial as its name may sound, this *heerweg* served hardly any military ends, and its civil utility should not

be overestimated either. Crossing the Bourtange moor between Bourtange and the Ems west bank was not all that easy in the wet season, since peaty areas could only be crossed by artificial road surfaces, the wooden trackways. Overdiep, advocate of Bourtange’s revival as a tourist attraction in the 1960s, called this moor passage ‘difficult’. An indication of its limited width is seen in the fact that the stronghold was projected in 1580 on the spot where the *tange* was at its broadest and where two charts could pass each other (Fig. 15; Overdiep 1993: 13).

Now, there is a problem with the appearance and permanence of medieval and early modern bog trackways. They do occur in the historical record, but remained undocumented in the soil archive, as the corresponding medieval peat horizon has disappeared through decomposition, burning, peat extraction and land cultivation before the historical importance of bog trackways was recognized (Hayen 1982; Schlicht 1982; Casparie 1987). The land route to Münsterland via the Bourtange towards Heede is only approximately mapped, and we have no knowledge of its appearance (it concerns the trackway known as Bou LIV; Hayen 1982: 180). We only know of a historically documented trackway from 1665, when the Münster bishop Bernard van Galen tried to overrun the Bourtange fortress by making a provisional bypass to Jipsinghuizen, consisting of construction wood claimed in the Emsland (Bou XXII; Hayen 1982: 180; Casparie 1987: 53-4). But this is an exception, and the trackway was dismantled after the failed military operation.

Whether the early medieval trackway Bou XXVI/Bou XXVII between Sellingen and the Hasseberg continued another 7-8 km eastward towards the Ems west bank has to remain unsolved, but if it did, it did not amount to much more than a footpath.⁵⁰ Too often bog trackways have been interpreted as part of a traffic system, an interpretation which must be doubted (Casparie 1987: 63-4). Even the interregional late medieval/early modern land route Groningen–Münsterland probably was locally only slightly more than a footpath, especially in its Bourtange moor trajectory. A second problem is continuity. Partly this relates to continuity as a formal concept: Were travellers constantly aware of its existence? Was it accessible? And partly this relates to continuity as a physical concept: What was its practical usability, since maintenance demanded the cooperation of parties from both sides of the bog?⁵¹ Moreover, crossing the treacherous moor was not bound to one track; we must remember that such an undertaking, no matter

49 ‘Navigable’ must be read as accessible for riverboats; small barges with little draught would have reached places farther inland.

50 Hayen (1982: 180) mistakenly maps this temporary early modern trackway Bou XXII as identical with Bou XXVI and Bou XXVII; the latter have been confirmed as footpaths of Carolingian age through excavations (Casparie 1987: 53; Groenendijk & Casparie 1995).

51 The twin concepts of ‘formele continuïteit’ and ‘materiële continuïteit’ are based on a treatise by Heslinga (1952: 173), and have been slightly adapted for the current purpose.

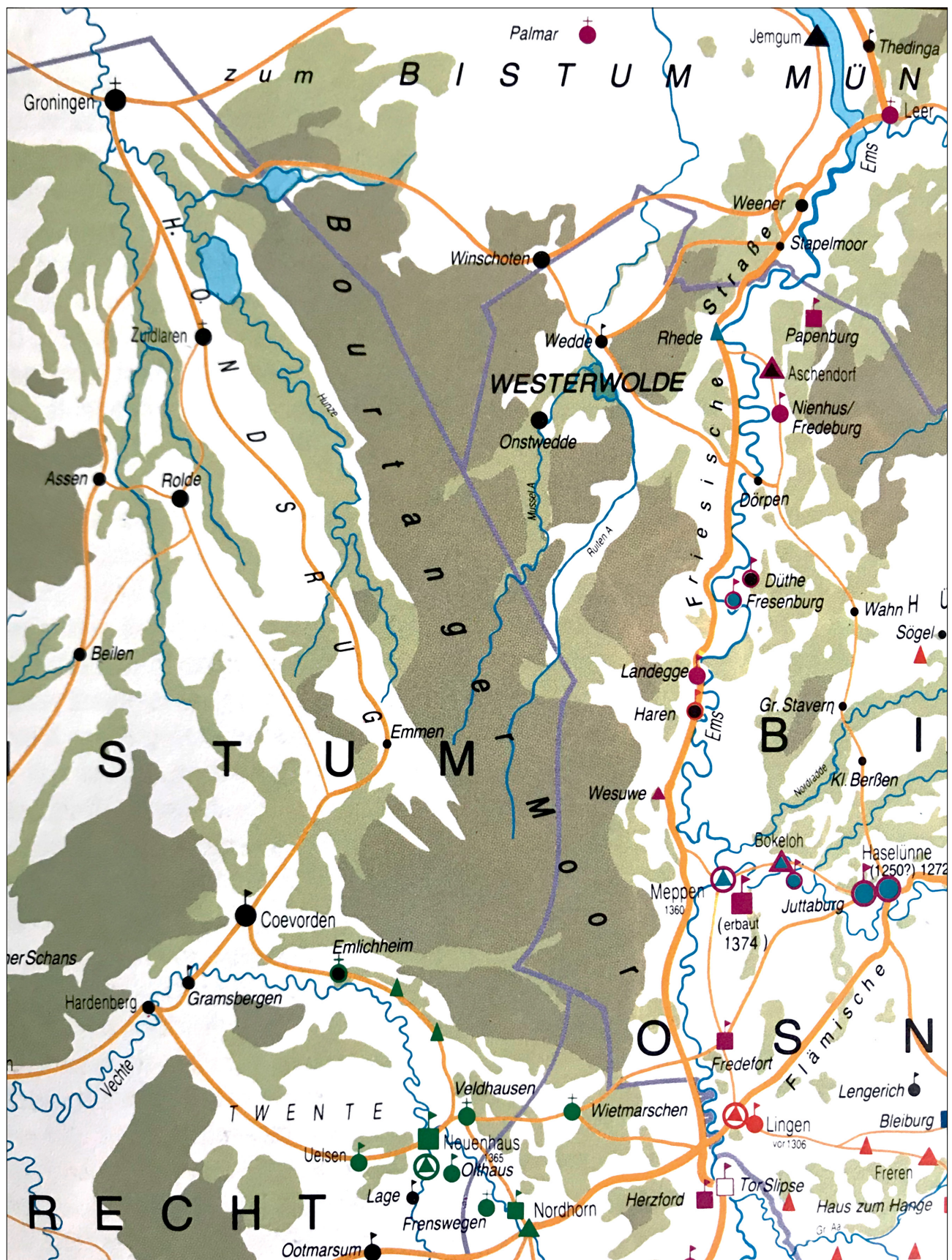


Fig. 14. Waterways and transport routes in the Ems area in the 12th, 13th and 14th centuries. ▲ = markets (source Nauhaus 1984: Karte 15; courtesy Emsländische Landschaft e.V., Sögel).

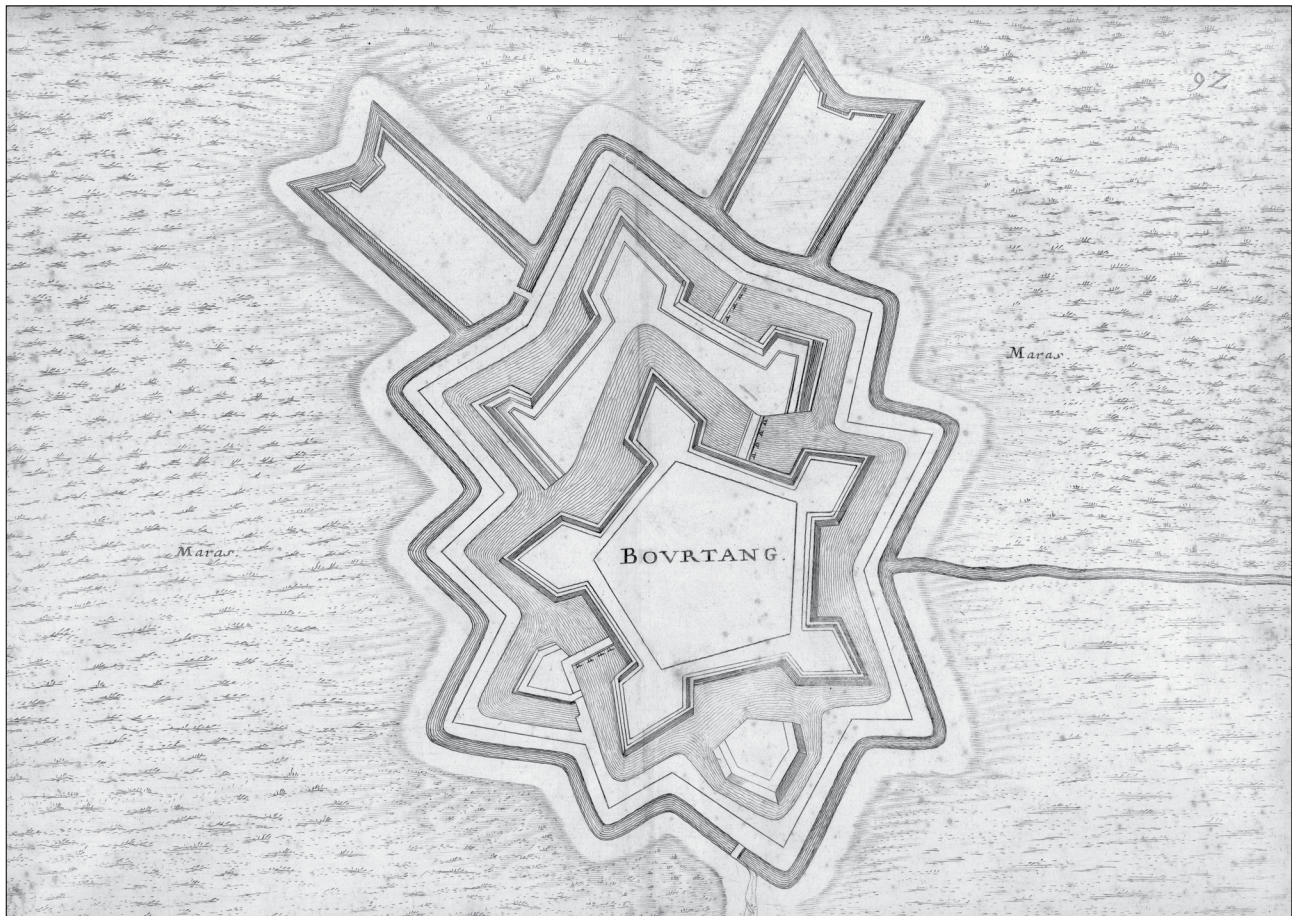


Fig. 15. The fortress of Bourttang, the Netherlands, was designed on a sand ridge (tange) surrounded by a peat bog. North = left (copper engraving G. Gualdo Priorato, *Schauplatz desz. Niederlands*, Vienna, 1673).

the reason, was preferably done in the dry season and often will have been an individual undertaking. The hazardous aspect of crossing a bog may be illustrated by the numerous hoard finds in the moor zone where Hondsrug and Ems riverbank approach each other, with Westerwolde as a steppingstone in between. In the first millennium AD alone we count 19 hoards, most of them discovered during peat cutting, meaning that they had been buried in a hole cut into the bog (Fig. 16; Groenendijk 1997: 240-1). These finds are not primarily associated with bog trackways; a number of them have been deposited near brook passages and other 'black spots' in the bog. The ideology behind this habit may have changed over the centuries, but the act of hoarding itself seems the expression of a coded behaviour related to travelling.

Several chroniclers have assumed the existence of an ancient land route through Westerwolde along the Ruiten Aa, the Ruitengeweg, as Smith (1894: 110-8) called it. Van Giffen, too, attached value to this claim when he researched the urnfield of Wollinghuizen and found an old cart track crossing the necropolis (Van Giffen 1920: 45-6, 57-8; 1928: 8). However, this cart track seems to have been a medieval phenomenon. It was uncovered again during the construction of a bicycle

path and re-interpreted by means of its track width (Groenendijk & Renken 2002). Undoubtedly, local paths or tracks existed between the settlements along the Ruiten Aa, but tracking them down in the soil archive is like playing the lottery. That makes the find of an abutment of a wooden bridge near Ellersinghuizen, dendrochronologically dated around AD 1125 (Molema 2012), all the more important. This bridge must have been of more than local importance, for the easiest way to cross Westerwolde's shallow rivulets was by means of fords; a wooden bridge still required a certain organization and maintenance. Whether this bridge served more than local traffic, and whether it can be considered a forerunner of the land route Groningen-Münsterland via the Bourttang, remains unsolved for the time being.

5.2 The impact of Dollard floods on Westerwolde settlements and their contacts with Reiderland

The formation of the Dollard sea, especially its eastern bay, had a great impact on the habitants of the northern eutrophic peat area fringing the Pleistocene coastal curve of north-eastern Groningen and Ostfriesland. This former Reiderland had been successfully reclaimed from the 11th/12th century onwards and this effort left

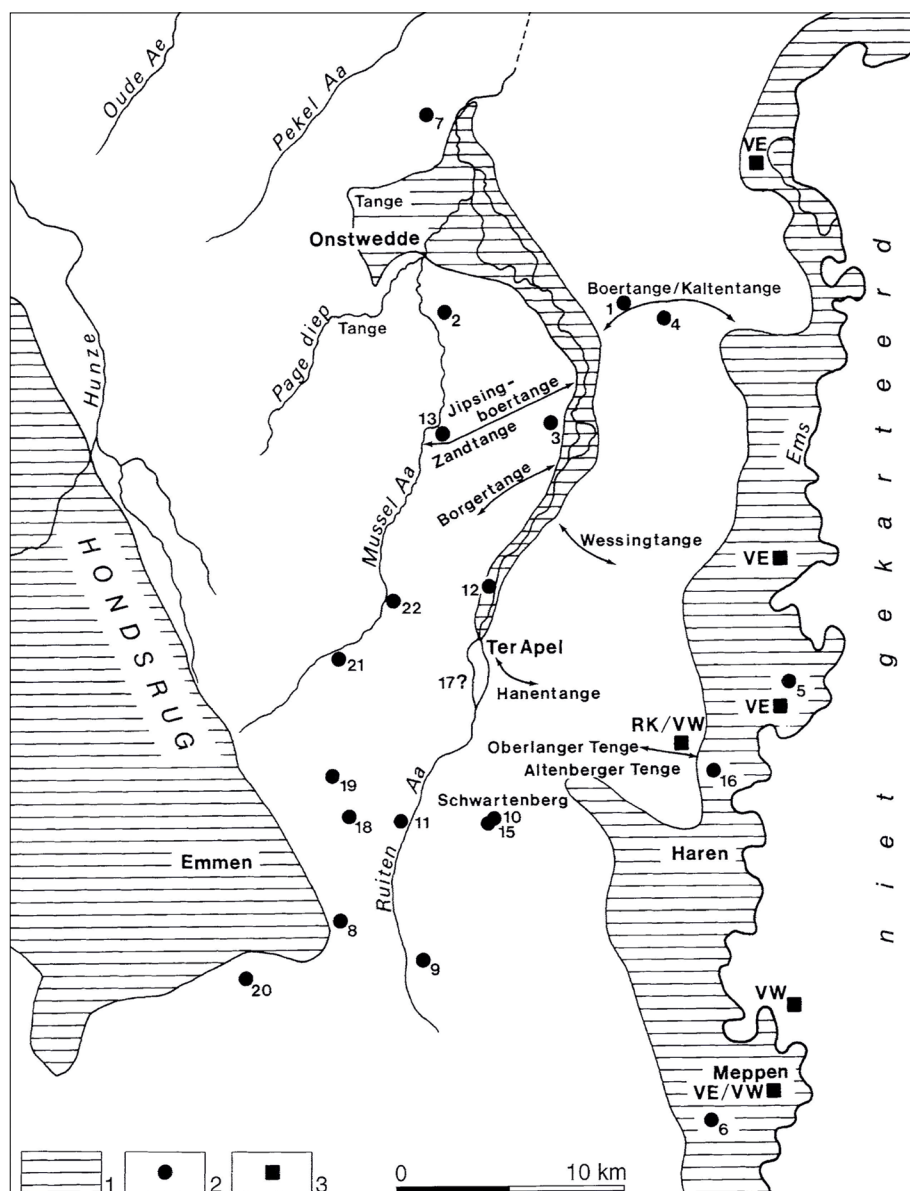


Fig. 16. Hoard finds (●) occurring in the Bourtanger Moor in the first millennium AD (excepted Nos 1-3). They cluster where the Hondsrug and the Ems bank (shaded) converge each other. ■ : contemporary settlements (source Groenendijk 1997: Fig. 131).

hardly any corner unexploited. Peat subsidence and difficulties with gravity drainage already had triggered the relocation of settlements and a disturbance of the agricultural zones, before seawater ruined the land altogether. North of Westerwolde *sensu stricto*, the soil deterioration had become tangible in the 14th century (Wassermann 1985; Groenendijk & Schwarz 1991). For Westerwolde *sensu lato*, this had the effect of being cut off from the Westerwoldsche Aa, a waterway still covering a distance of around 30 kms from Wedde until the confluence with the river Ems in its pre-Dollard course. This considerable distance to the Ems was

further complicated by the periodic Dollard floods and subsequent silt depositions. Thus, the peat farmers of Houwingaham, Bellingwolde, Vriescheloo and Blijham (from north to south) were faced with land loss, having to move their economic zones and being deprived of access to northern markets such as Emden. The closer to the tidal inlet, the more land loss occurred, till there was no other solution than abandoning the settlement catchment area entirely.⁵² Another issue resulting from these coincidences was the immigration pressure on the southern peat belt fringing Pleistocene Westerwolde (cf. 6.1.3; Fig. 17).

⁵² The different reaction to peat subsidence and Dollard expansion of the nearby peat settlements of Vriescheloo and Houwingaham, both the subject of excavations, is significant and partly due to different geographical conditions (Groenendijk 1989; Groenendijk & Bärenfänger 2008).

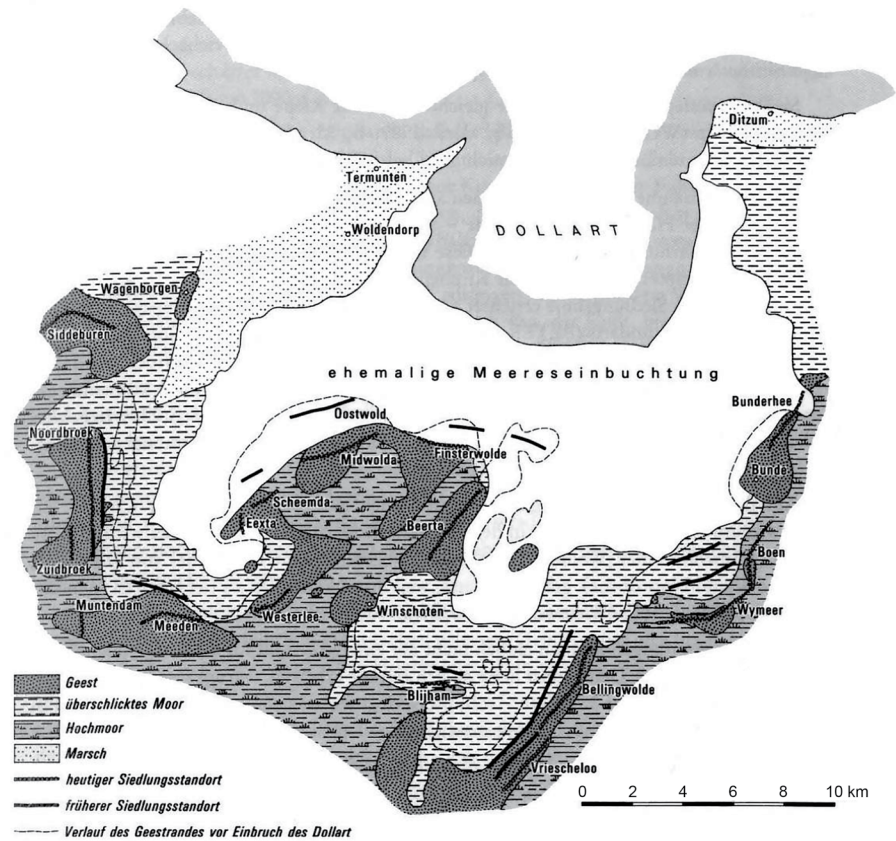


Fig. 17. The Dollard estuary in its maximum expansion c. 1500, subdivided into a western and eastern bay, and the consecutive ribbon villages at its edges (source Wassermann 1985: Fig. 10).

5.3 Fairs and the exchange of consumer goods in Westerwolde and the neighbouring Emsland

In Westerwolde, the market of Wedde (the Weddermarkt) was held twice a year, with the late August market, first mentioned in 1567, functioning as a structuring element in daily life. It is not possible to uncover its origins, as this market was never officially privileged (Muntinga 1945: 143; Luth 1996).⁵³ The Weddermarkt was essentially a cattle market and a fair.

Outside Westerwolde, the first Emsland markets to be privileged were situated on road and waterway junctions, such as Meppen (AD 946), Haselünne (12th century), Lingen (13th century) and probably Landegge (13th century). Emsbüren (14th century) was never privileged but fulfilled an important role in the trade along the 'Frisian road', whereas the regional economic role of Aschendorf, in the Saxon-Frisian transition area and nearest to Westerwolde, remains vague (Steinwascher 2002: 241-2; Veltmann 2002: 268-9). Nevertheless, Aschendorf may have been of importance for the Westerwolde farmer, as there had been a cattle market that the Münster bishop wanted to re-establish in 1482; the duration of the period of interruption is unknown (Bockhorst 1992: 30). Besides, merchants from Appingedam maintained contact with those from

Aschendorf, Meppen and Haren. Appingedam is viewed as one of the major markets in the lower Ems region, first mentioned in 1308 but probably existing as early as c. 1200, with possibly even three annual fairs in 1327 (Holbach 2001: 251). Haren, along the 'Frisian road,' is mentioned at the end of the 15th century, possibly at the beginning of the 14th century (annual fair calendar in Benders 2011: 429-30). For Westerwolde's inhabitants, as regards accessibility, there seems to have been ample opportunity to attend yearly fairs beyond their own region.

Whether there was any coordination of market terms remains unclear, except for an occasional observation, and it is not before 1497 that something like a systematic approach among the markets of Emden, Meppen, Haselünne, Friesoythe and Haren existed. These terms were based on livestock markets, especially for cattle. Actually, annual fairs in this region were less meaningful, due to a lesser traffic intensity and a lack of agglomerations. The market system was fragmented. In the 13th century, the Ems embankment only counted villages or market settlements, whereas cities with purchasing power were lacking (Lübbing 1927: 167-8; Holbach 2001: 260-3); moreover, cities as such are not required as market centres. Meppen, for example, received its

⁵³ See also the comment of Groninganus, 'De Weddermarkt tot vreugd'en ergernis van dominees'; <https://groninganus.wordpress.com/2013/09/11/15230>.

town charter as late as 1360 and until the 15th century ranked among the *Minderstädte*, counting a modest 700–900 inhabitants around 1435 (Igel 2006: 84).

Wine, salt, fish, cattle and corn were the main products transported. Of these, the Frisians will have brought fish, cattle and animal products upstream. In Menco van Wittewierum's chronicle, we read that the bishop of Münster prohibited the annual markets along the Ems in 1272/1273 “out of hatred against the people of Emsgo and Reiderland”, with the result that the Frisians could sell neither cattle, horses, butter nor cheese (Holbach 2001: 231). A trade agreement from 1276 between Meppen and the Frisians mentions herring as a duty-free good, but oxen, horses and sheep incurred tolls as usual.

Westerwolde, with its many brook dales, must have been a good place for fattening cattle, particularly oxen (*os* in Dutch). We do find indications for this in field names all over Westerwolde, such as *Ossemarkt* (Wedde), *Osheerskamp* (Veele), *Osseveld* (Weende), *Osseheersmolenkamp* (Weende), *Ossemaarke* (Ter Borg) and *Osse mark* (Ter Haar), recorded in the 17th and 18th centuries but no doubt of older origin (Van der Woude 1944; Wieringa, n.d.). The signal from the pollen diagram of Sellingen-Panta Rhei is relevant here too, giving a clue to extensive cattle grazing in the brook bog (cf. 6.3). Another signal comes from a document of 1395, containing a legal arrangement among the bishop of Utrecht, the joint six regions of Drenthe and the *terra* Westerwolde (cf. 3.3.2). This most probably applies to Roswinkel, and we tend to believe that it concerned grazing rights. Furthermore, the fattening of oxen did not always mean their breeding at the same location; a transit of herds to urban areas, such as those in Holland, became common from the 15th century onwards. This transit seems the case in a judgement of the *Etstoel*, i.e. the court of Drenthe, from 1454 to purchase Westerwolde oxen instead of oxen from Emsland, from where they were usually obtained (Spek 2004: 552–6). Whether and to what extent Westerwolde contributed to the lively trade in horses and oxen between Groningen and Aurich, the latter an important cattle market since the 13th century, cannot be said (Benders 2011: 304–6).

6. Notions of ‘backward’ in the archaeological record

In the introduction, we touched upon the pitfalls of overestimating the archaeological record. Time depth and scale of observation are hard to balance, and at the same time, discerning patterns is just one of the driving forces of the archaeological *métier*. One of the notions that seemingly distinguishes sandy Westerwolde from its surrounding peat belt in the late Middle Ages is that

the latter had to absorb new agricultural techniques. We think that the cultivation of a wetland required a prompter adaptation to changing physical conditions. Inevitably peat subsidence triggered soil degradation, problems with the soil-bearing capacity on top of the peat, and periodic flooding caused by increasing drainage problems (Casparie & Molema 1990). Drainage problems were explicitly present in Westerwolde's northern peat belt, where surface water accumulated in the Westerwoldsche Aa valley. Waterlogging prompted the need for water management and forced shifting of the economic zones towards higher ground, which again required a mental flexibility. These self-reinforcing dynamics were already playing out well before the Dollard estuary came into being. But is there any proof of that economic and mental pressure factor? To find answers to that question, below we treat the issues of settlement structure, farming techniques and crops in Westerwolde *sensu lato*.

6.1 Settlement structure and artefacts

Systematic archaeological settlement research in Drenthe has been a key project at the University of Groningen (for a summary, see Waterbolk 1990, 2009). Settlement research in Westerwolde cannot compete with that in Drenthe; this goes for both prehistoric and medieval settlement history. Even though house types have a much more supra-regional spread than one might expect for remote, isolated but geographically similar regions, regional varieties may blur the generic features (Waterbolk 2009: 4–5). In comparison with Drenthe, the information available for medieval Westerwolde is scarce and only based on random field observations, aerial and satellite photographs and amateur collections. However, on the level of the settlement structure, some comparison is feasible. We should bear in mind that Westerwolde's territorial structure, in contrast to Drenthe's, was interrupted after the Late Iron Age, only to resume with a recolonization in the Merovingian Era (Groenendijk 1997: 247–51). In matters of links to centres of power, namely its links with the monasteries of Werden and Corvey, Westerwolde appears to have pronounced eastern ties until the late Middle Ages. But at the end of the high Middle Ages, an influx from the north emerges: it concerns the peat bog reclamation at the northern fringe of Westerwolde's Pleistocene spurs. First, we want to put forward an observation on the scale of the *marke* layout (settlement territory) which, as an organization, was generally established and outlined in the 13th century, as a consequence of population growth and an increase in local conflicts about the right of use (Slicher van Bath 1957: 22–4).⁵⁴ Thus the *marke* layout of a region cannot but mirror a snapshot in

54 For the most recent overview, see Hoppenbrouwers 2002.

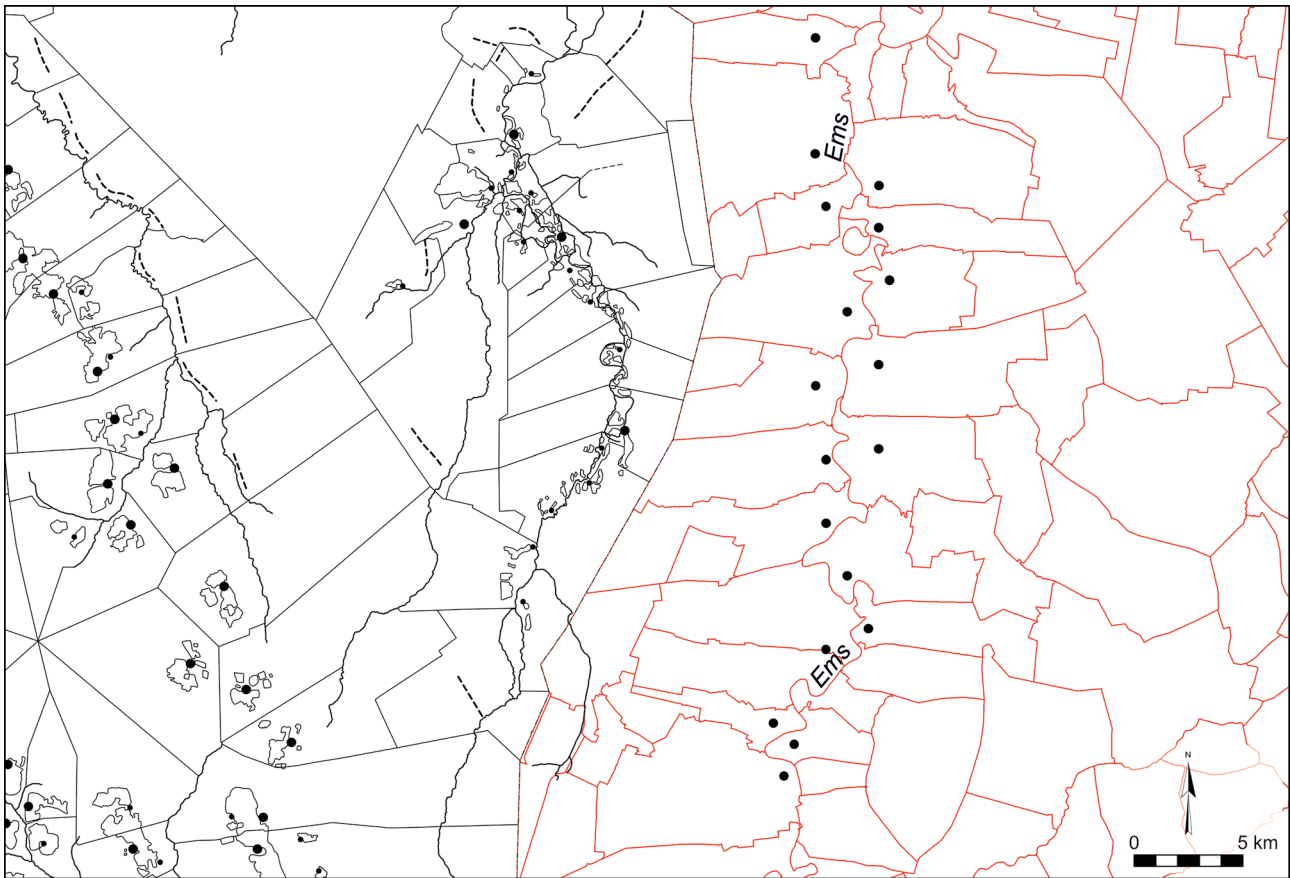


Fig. 18. Marke contours in eastern Drenthe, in Westerwolde and adjacent Emsland (the latter in red). • : villages and hamlets, surrounded by their fields. In Emsland, only the villages along the river Ems are depicted (drawing GIA, complemented by <https://www.geobasisdaten.niedersachsen.de/shop/index.php?do=opendata>; editing E. Bolhuis, GIA).

time. The comprehensive list of *marke* rights per village, edited by Wegman and Wegman between 1991 and 2006, records the situation in the 17th and 18th centuries, when the *marke* system had fully crystallized. Here we limit ourselves to some general observations.

The size of the *marke* depended on the precarious balance between the amount of arable land and the availability of pasture. Compared with Drenthe and Emsland, the average *marke* area in Westerwolde was significantly smaller. At the same time, the layout of the Westerwolde *marken* resembles that of the Hondsrug settlements in Drenthe and that of the *Gemarkungen* in adjacent Emsland, the latter in particular regarding the trajectory opposite central and southern Westerwolde on both sides of the river Ems. They lay perpendicular to the flow of the successive rivers Hunze, Ruiten Aa and Ems (Fig. 18). More precisely, the shape and dimensions of the *marke* in these three regions is connected with the length of the occupied riverbank. If we compare the length of riverbank occupied by Westerwolde (measured along the Ruiten Aa); the primordial Hondsrug villages in Drenthe that are oriented on the Hunze valley

(measured along the Hondsrug toe); and the villages in Emsland (measured along the Ems bank), we see that the mean is 2000 m for Westerwolde, 3600 m for Drenthe, 3800 m for the Ems west bank, and 4600 m for its east bank.⁵⁵ It still remains to be seen if the morphological similarity but significantly smaller dimensions in Westerwolde have solely a geographical origin, or whether they are the result of later effects, such as a subdivision of the primary settlement areas.

In Emsland, the *marke* organization was established from the 11th century onwards (Veltmann 2002: 266). It is questionable if the Emsland organization model influenced Westerwolde, as regional varieties usually have complex origins. Aschendorf, with its local elite, in the form of fully inherited farmers (*eigenerfde* in Dutch), seems to have had the decision-making power within the *marke*, considering a land sale in 1471 (Bockhorst 1992: 29-30). In contrast, Westerwolde had to cope with its loss of independency as a *terra* or *Landesgemeinde* due to the penetration of the Addinga family of *capitane*s in the late 14th century. Although serfdom still existed around Aschendorf and in the Hümmling, in

55 This calculation was made earlier for the Hondsrug and Westerwolde (Groenendijk & Waterbolk 1998: 83-4).

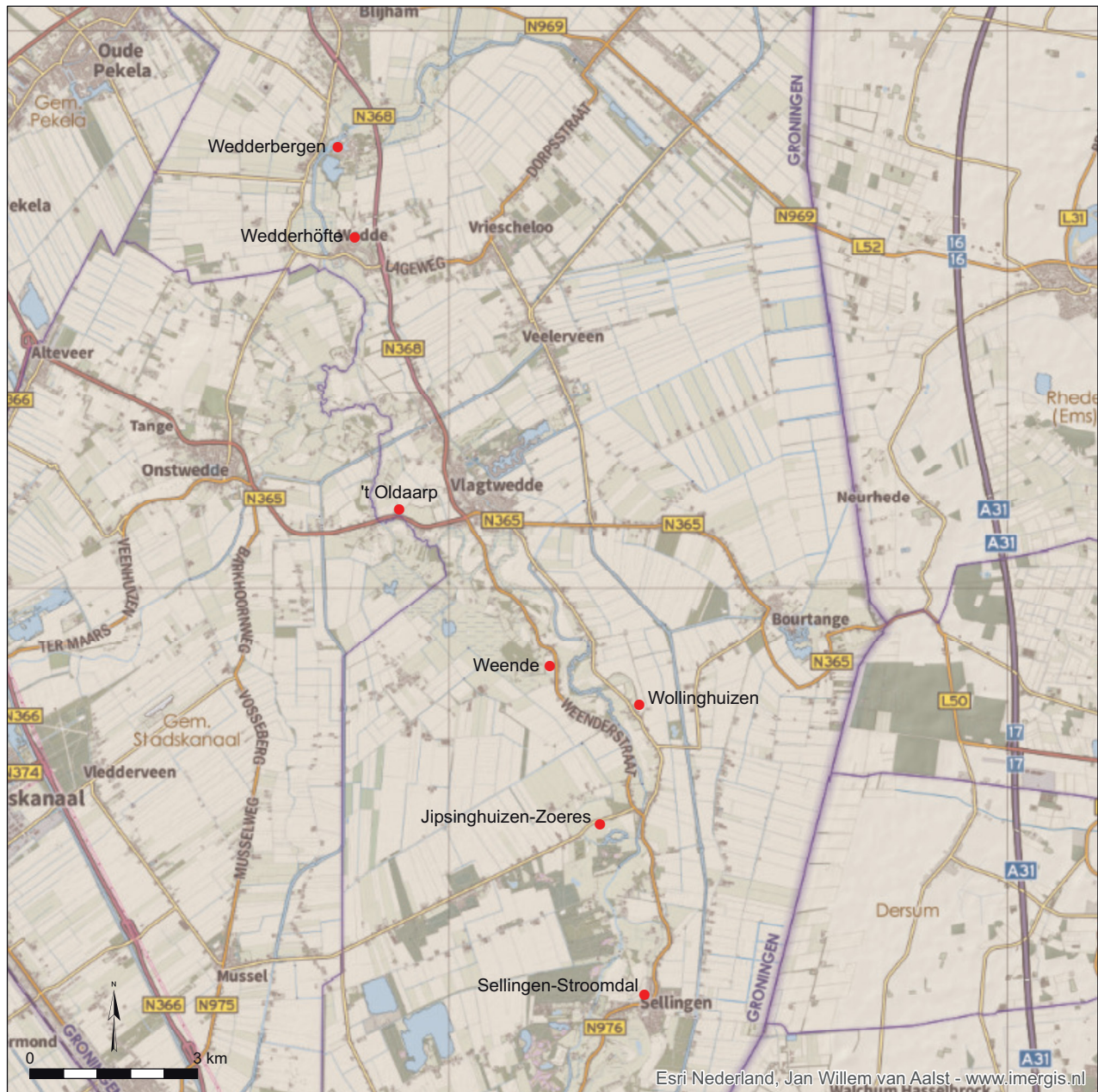


Fig. 19. Location of the deserted late-medieval settlements in Westerwolde discussed in the text (map adapted by E. Bolhuis, GIA).

1394, protests by the peasant population in that region were directed against external threats to their peasant freedom. So the free peasants, although sustained by the minority of serfs, showed themselves as a self-confident *Landesgemeinde*, asking the bishop of Münster for protection (Köller 2017), just like those of Westerwolde did in 1316 (cf. 3.3.2). We must visualize the considerable geographical barrier that existed until early modern times: the habitation of the Ems west bank and the settlements along the Ruiten Aa were separated by the vast Bourtange moor, with its undefined *marke* boundaries. This may have favoured an autonomous development of the territorial balance in Westerwolde, once the *marke* boundaries crystallized.

The minor distances between the settlements alongside the Ruiten Aa are rather conclusive proof of the smaller dimensions of settlement patterning in Westerwolde; only the primordial settlements of Onstwedde and Vlagtwedde display bigger territories (note, however, that the size of the settlement is not proportional to the size of the farms). They, together with Wedde and Sellingen, grew out to normal-sized villages, in contrast with the remaining settlements in Westerwolde *sensu stricto*, which persisted as hamlets.

6.1.1 The arrangement of farmsteads

On the level of the arrangement of farmsteads within the late medieval settlement, we observed that the

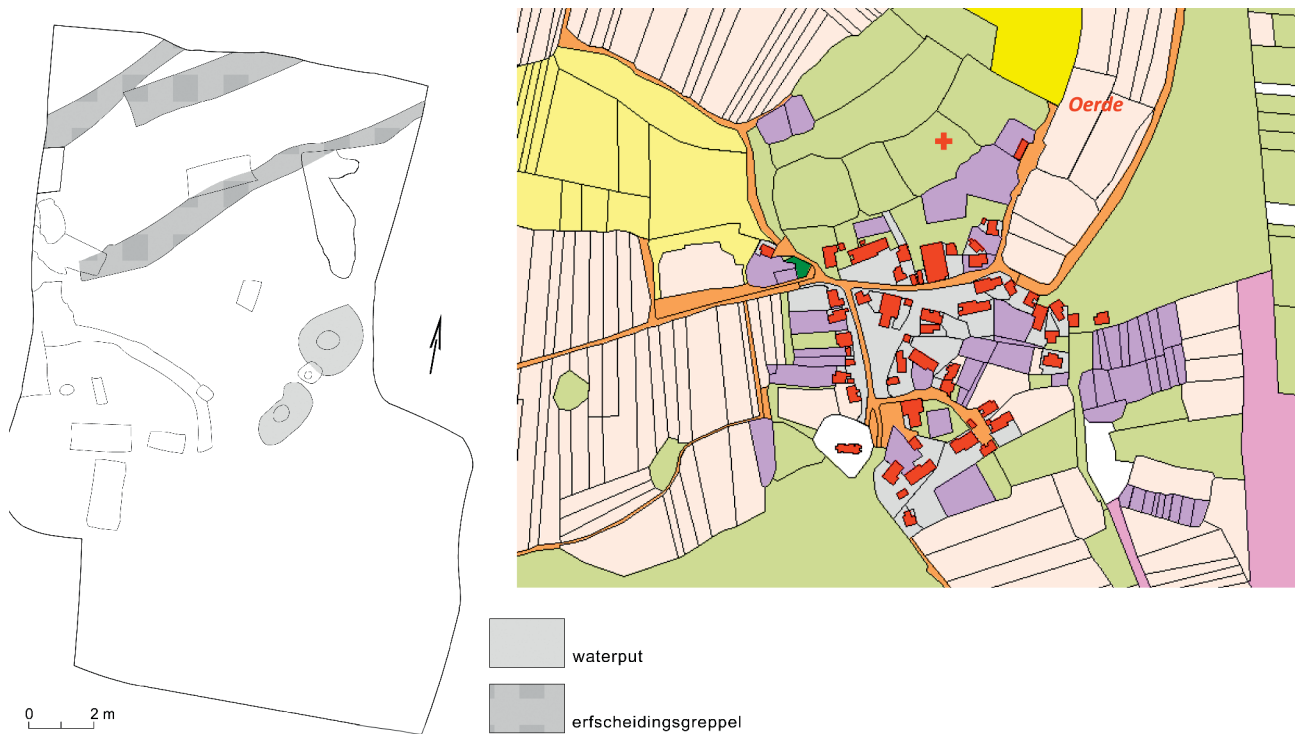


Fig. 20. The site of Sellingen-Stroomdal, the Netherlands. Traces of a late-medieval farmyard (left) and its location on the 1832 cadastral map (right) (source Harding 2003 (left); map hisgis.nl (right)).

village contour may deviate from that depicted on the oldest cadastral mapping of the Netherlands (*kadastrale minuut*), of 1829-1832. The late medieval farmsteads whose boundary trenches were documented archaeologically or by satellite photos (Sellingen, Weende, Wollinghuizen and Wedderhölte) lay outside the settlement scatter as surveyed on the *kadastrale minuut*, even though this map is considered the most accurate basis for a reconstruction of the pre-industrial Dutch countryside. Using it is feasible, as long as the *kadastrale minuut* is just considered as a time slice. In Westerwolde *sensu stricto* it appears that between the late Middle Ages and the time of the first exact surveying programmes (late 18th and early 19th century) farmsteads made a centripetal shift towards the more compact *esdorp* (nucleated village within the open field system). Below, these observations will be described in more detail (Fig. 19).

Sellingen-Stroomdal

In 2002, a construction pit on the right bank of the Ruiten Aa brook was archaeologically surveyed (Harding 2003). Several boundary trenches and wells were documented, containing pottery sherds dating between the 10th/11th and the 14th/15th century.⁵⁶ This

high Middle Ages farmyard was located due north of the nucleated village as it appears on the *kadastrale minuut*, next to the Oerde/Oordkamp, on an elongated river dune, Sellingen's oldest ploughland before the emergence of the open field system. At the same time, Sellingen's early 14th-century church lies at the southernmost edge of the same river dune, partly surrounded by a Ruiten Aa meander. This leads to the conclusion that late medieval Sellingen must have extended farther north. The Oerde, in the north, was not built over until the 20th century (Fig. 20).

Weende

Weende appears on the *kadastrale minuut* as two scatters of farmsteads lying some 500 m apart. However, aerial and satellite photos show a number of soil marks (boundary trenches and pits presumably) in the intermediate zone. There, in 1994 a well was exposed by accident, containing a dump of a dismantled hearth or kiln and a mass of ceramic sherds (*cf.* 6.4). The fill was dated by a piece of charcoal to around 1200 AD and refers to the moment of disuse of the well.⁵⁷ The whole feature should perhaps be taken as a sign of an abandoned farmstead. This location, together with both of the farmstead scatters on the *kadastrale minuut*, is to

⁵⁶ In addition to the 2002 observation, in 2018, a building excavation again yielded comparable trenches, but these were not documented (B.J. Harding, Sneek, pers. comm. 12 April 2018).

⁵⁷ GrA-64289 = 850±30 BP = 1052-1080/1152-1260 calAD; Groenendijk & Waterbolk 1998: 101-5.



Fig. 21. The site of Weende, the Netherlands. Crop marks indicating late-medieval farmyards with the settlement dump (+) on an aerial view, viewed toward the east (left), and the cadastral situation 1832 with the dump site indicated (right) (photo: Henny Groenendijk, 1996 (left); map hisgis.nl (right)).

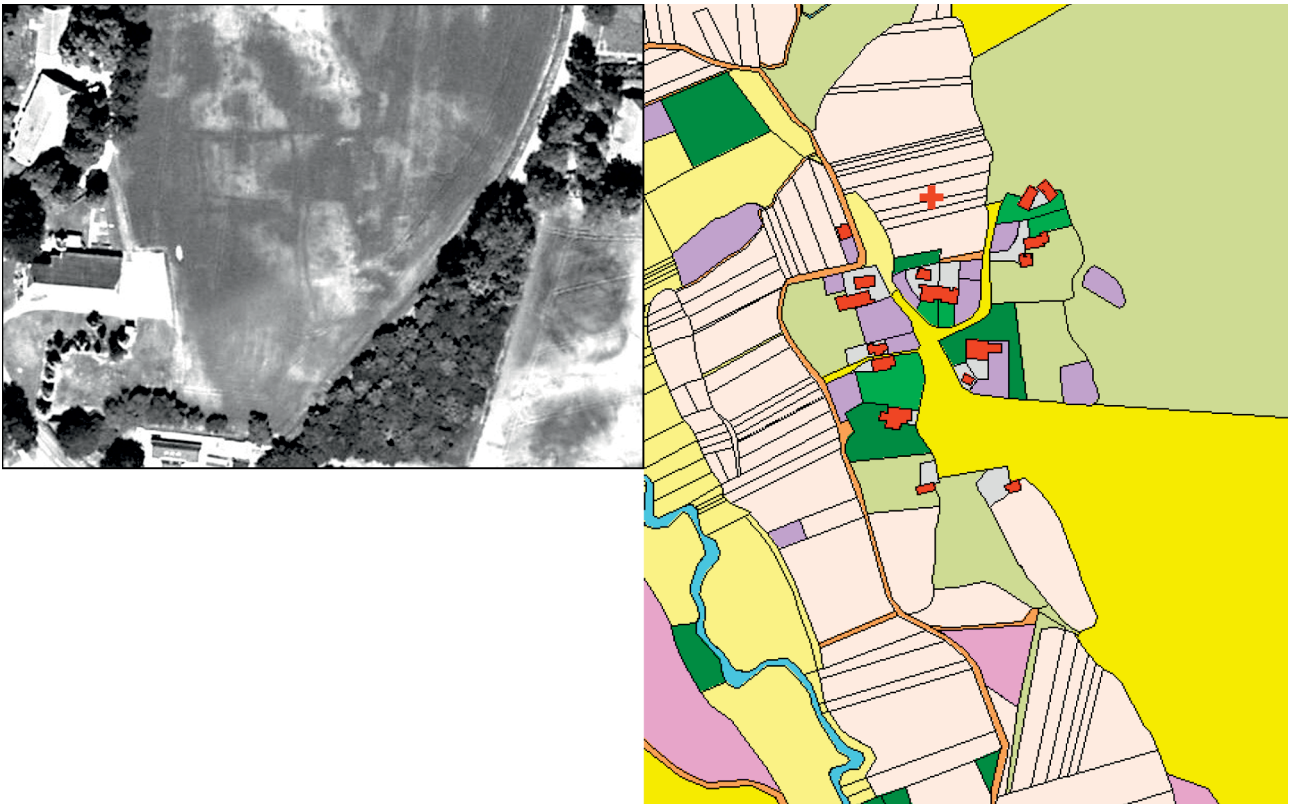


Fig. 22. Aerial view of supposed late-medieval crop marks near Wollinguhuizen, the Netherlands (left), and their location on the 1832 cadastral map (right) (source 2007 NAVTEQ (left); map hisgis.nl (right)).

be understood as belonging to the single settlement of Weende, a name that can be traced back to the horizon of Germanic toponyms with the suffix *-ithi* (Win-ithi).⁵⁸ In addition, we note that the corresponding arable land on the bordering river dune, covering the entire scatter

of the above-mentioned farmsteads, bears the generic name of Oosteresch. Here, an elongated settlement area covering more than 700 m has, by 1829, shrunk to two separate farmstead scatters lying at its extremities (Fig. 21).

⁵⁸ Information kindly provided by prof. dr J. Udolph, Universität Göttingen (pers. comm. 26 Dec. 1997). See also Udolph 1994: 285.

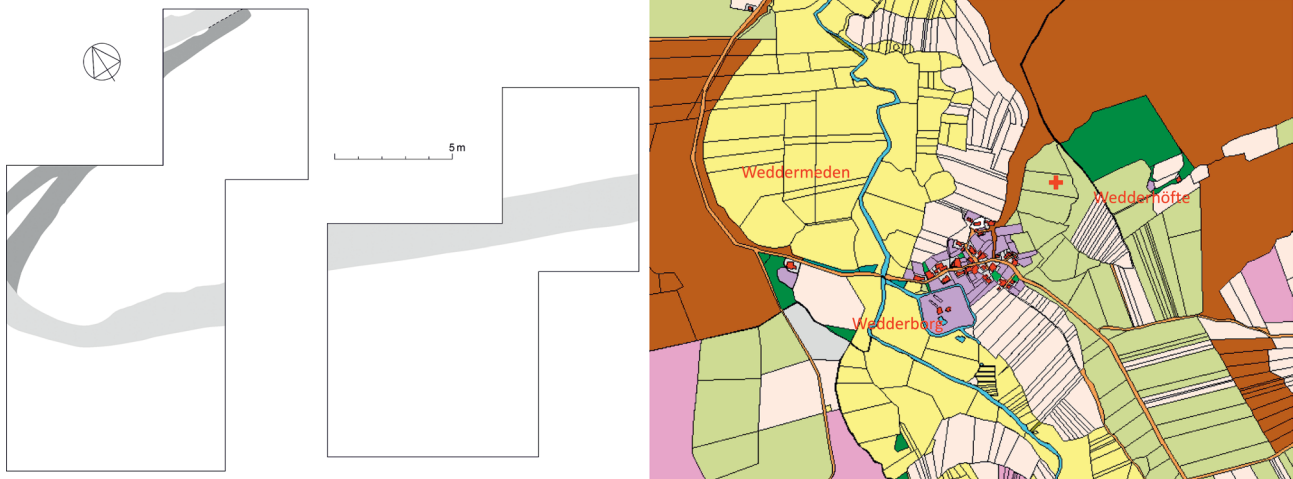


Fig. 23. The site of Wedderhøfte, the Netherlands. Several generations of late-medieval farmyard trenches (left), and their location on the 1832 cadastral map (right) (source Groenendijk & Waterbolk 1998: Fig. 49 (left); map hisgis.nl (right)).

Wollinghuizen

Satellite photos taken due east of the modern-day village of Wollinghuizen show crop marks that suggest a Gasselte-type house plan amidst trenches and pits. If late medieval Wollinghuizen coincided with these features, the habitation must have moved or shrunk in a westward direction since then. Field exploration has not been carried out as yet, so this indication remains unverified (Fig. 22).⁵⁹

Wedderhøfte

The suffix *-høfte* (single yard) refers to a hamlet in the vicinity of a 'mother' village, in this case Wedde, or to a house plot. Building excavations in Wedderhøfte in 1994 enabled archaeologists to survey two construction pits, yielding an intersection of the boundary trenches of a medieval farmyard. Pottery finds place this occupation between the 11th/12th century and about 1300 AD. The features have survived under a layer of younger plaggensoil (Fig. 23; Groenendijk & Waterbolk 1998: 105-7).

These three, maybe four, instances of derelict medieval farmyards in the direct vicinity of present *esdorp* villages (*es* meaning field and *dorp* meaning village) prompts the question what structuring processes took place in Westerwolde's rural society at the end of, or after, the late Middle Ages. Do we see a shift of farmsteads towards a more nucleated village? Or do we see a thinning out of the number of farmsteads altogether? Without further programmatic investigation, this question has to remain unanswered. In high medieval Emsland, most of the time, population growth translated into a compaction of the habitation, instead of the

foundation of new settlements, but in special cases solitary courtyards were established (Veltmann 2002: 266). The latter scenario may apply to Wedderhøfte, as the name supposes it to be an extension of Wedde.

6.1.2 Regressive forces

So far, the situation seems in accordance with that in rural Drenthe, where the late medieval settlement pattern also deviates considerably from that of the *kadastrale minuut* (Waterbolk 2009: 169-71). Waterbolk sorted out the mobility of settlement, farmland and graveyard within the Drenthe settlement territory and distinguished several stages of spatial development. From the end of the early Middle Ages until the high Middle Ages, these are as follows: 1) up to the 9th century, one or two nuclei existed within a settlement territory; 2) from the mid-9th century onwards, a greater number of concentrated settlements came into existence in the same territory; and 3) in the 12th century, a number of satellite settlements appear, but without signs of regression in the mother villages. The latter is supposed to be the period of the establishment of the typical Drenthe cultural landscape (Waterbolk 1982: 132-5). Periods of regression, occurring on a large scale in Europe during the 14th century, have been left out of the scope, due to the chosen time frame, as well as the emphasis on the mobility of the distinctive components of rural settlement life within a delineated territory. Investigation of this mobility has been advanced to the detriment of investigation of the problem definition of regression, because 'rise and fall of settlements is of all times' (Waterbolk 1982: 102, following Janssen 1977). However, social unrest and plagues, such as the mid-14th century

⁵⁹ We thank B.J. Harding, Sneek, for providing this information (pers. comm. 2008). To prof. dr H.T. Waterbolk (pers. comm. 5 June 2008), the signal seemed too weak to conclude that it related to a Gasselte-type farmhouse, especially because of its size.

plague pandemic, must have had repercussions on Drenthe's settlement structure too. The plague did reach Ostfriesland in 1349 and Meppen in 1350 (Hauptmeyer 1997: 1112-31). For Westerwolde, the earliest mention of a plague outbreak refers to Laude and Ter Apel, in 1484.⁶⁰ Population increase and population decline could both occur within a few decades, and thus demographic factors may have had a direct effect on the settlement structure, especially in regions with less buffer capacity. We consider Westerwolde to be such a region.

Rösener saw a different impact for the widespread population decline in the late Middle Ages in the distinctive German regions, that of the northwest-German *Streusiedlungen* counting amongst the less affected (Rösener 1992: 32). Frerker quotes a Corvey listing of its manors of c. 1500 in which, for the manor of Lathen, a distinction is made between 'besatten' (occupied) and 'wosten erve' (deserted farmstead), the latter no longer able to deliver the annual levy. That list does not mention the farmsteads by name, nor the reason of their abandonment, so we have to show some restraint, but Frerker also points to a 14th-century list of the Lathen manor that is more detailed about deserted farmsteads, although Corvey's *villicus* obviously doubted whether the peasants were telling the truth (Frerker 1975: 11). Nor has the cause of the desertion been traced of the "*verwoestede erve und guet, geheiten van oldes Apell*" (the deserted/ravaged farmstead and yard, of old called Apell), as mentioned in the deed of donation to the monastery of the Crosiers in Ter Apel in 1458; this could indeed be due to an Emsland raid on Roswinkel and Schoonebeek in 1453 (Groenendijk 1995: 210). *Wüstungsforschung* (literally desertion research), an interdisciplinary specialism that evolved in Germany, specifically deals with the process of settlement desertion and its motives, culminating in an extensification of land use. Denecke stresses the necessity of sorting out the chronology of the evidence as exactly as possible, as the danger of incorrectly interpreting seemingly corresponding but dissimilar evidence is always present, as well as the necessity of focusing on the late Middle Ages, a deficit noted for the discipline of archaeology (Denecke 1985: 27-8, 1994: 10-1).⁶¹ Here, archaeology and historical geography could cooperate more closely, on the settlement level to start with. We cannot escape the

impression that the above-mentioned regressive phases in Westerwolde's settlement pattern have been seriously neglected thus far.

Seeking parallels between the settlement structures of Westerwolde and Drenthe, one is tempted to consider Westerwolde, with its confined settlement territories, as a small-scale Drenthe. But we should be careful. Would this, for instance, mean a correspondingly lesser degree of mobility in the sense of Waterbolk (1982)? Even when in Westerwolde no such systematic research has been conducted and hard data are not available, some peculiarities draw attention. As a matter of fact, we have some indication of vanished settlements in medieval Westerwolde, other than on the level of individual farmsteads. Amateur finds over the years have contributed to the notion that Westerwolde numbers at least three abandoned settlements: Jipsinghuizen-Zoeres, 't Oldaarp and the Wedderbergen area.

Jipsinghuizen-Zoeres(k)

This previously unknown settlement location was discovered in 1999 beneath the Zoeres (meaning southern open field), belonging to the *marke* of Jipsinghuizen. Potsherds date the occupation of the Zoeres between the 10th and 14th centuries (Harding 2001). The Ruiten Aa, fringing the river dune on which the Zoeres settlement is situated, displays very wide meanders in this trajectory. Meanwhile, the actual settlement of Jipsinghuizen lies on another river dune beyond the Ruiten Aa. This brook can be understood as a settlement territory boundary. Obviously, Jipsinghuizen's open field system stretched southward once the Zoeres settlement was abandoned. Furthermore, Joosting reports some incongruences in the Jipsinghuizen *marke* (Joosting 1920: 134-7). Jipsinghuizen extended not only on both sides of the Ruiten Aa, as do Sellingen and Laude south of Jipsinghuizen, but also westward, as far as the Mussel valley. Although the primeval situation in Jipsinghuizen seems lost in the mists of time, some juridical singularities are worth mentioning. First, Jipsinghuizen farmsteads were under the jurisdiction of the two parishes of Onstwedde and Vlagtwedde, as was the case in adjacent Ellersinghuizen.⁶² This unusual situation may be the result of the dividing of the primeval parish of

60 RHC Groninger Archieven, Toegang 1373: Archief Klooster Ter Apel inv.no. 1, fol. 21r (reg.no. 61). Transcript and scan in: cartago.nl/nl/oorkonde/ktao61a.xml (R.M.A. Wegman, Ede, pers. comm. 13 Nov. 2020). The dating of the copy of this document should be corrected to 7 November 1484, from 31 October 1484. Undoubtedly, there must have been previous outbreaks of the plague in Westerwolde, but there are no written sources about these.

61 For the discussions on regressive settlement processes, we thank prof. dr G.J. Borger, Surhuizum (pers. comm. 4 Nov. 2019) and prof dr D. Denecke, Göttingen (pers. comm. 18 Sep. 2019) for their kind suggestions.

62 B.J. Harding (pers. comm. 12 July 2000, referring to a consultation with historian P.N. Noomen, Groningen). Joosting 1920: 131 notices an attribution to Onstwedde in an Ellersinghuizen document too, but interprets this as mistaken.

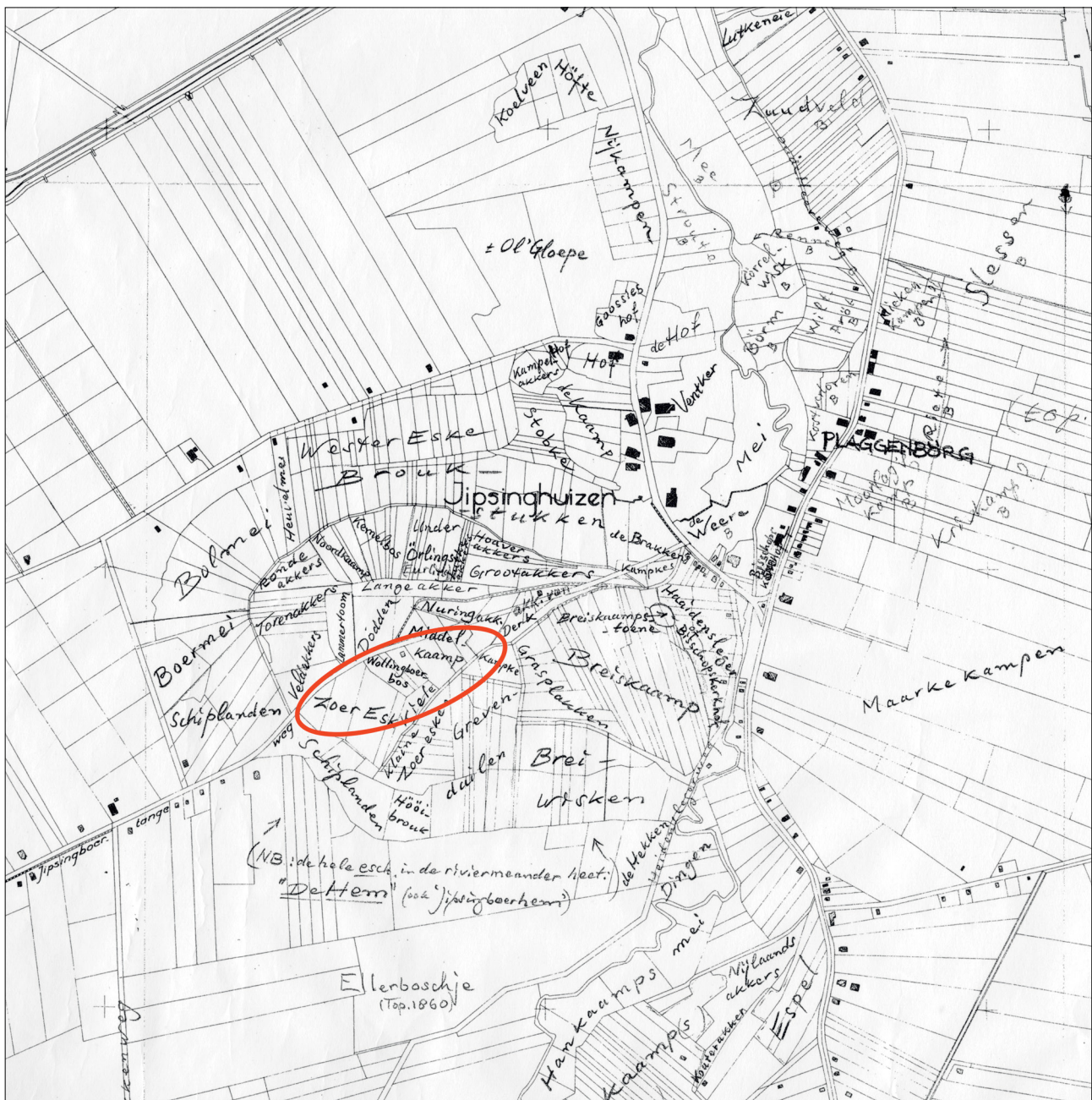


Fig. 24. Manuscript map of toponymia around Jipsinghuizen, the Netherlands, documented in the early 1770s. The deserted Zoeres settlement is indicated with a red oval (source Wieringa, n.d.).

Onstwedde, leaving the younger parish of Vlagtwedde with the Onstwedde exclaves.⁶³

The *marke* separation culminated in the 19th century. At its onset, in the 18th century, the alienation of several parts of the Onstwedde *marke* took place in which the selling *marke* shareholders claimed a temporary right of land use of some of the sold parcels (Joosting 1920: 114–6). This clause seems an echo of the old *Landrecht* stating that landed property should remain in the hands of one heir (*Anerbenrecht*). Another peculiarity of the

Westerwolde parcelling is the absence of land trade, which Muntinga explains as sticking to family property, deriving from a conservative mentality altogether (Muntinga 1945: 88).

There is more to say about the Jipsinghuizen *marke*. It comprises an exclave called Jipsingboermussel as far south as the provincial border with Drenthe, which Joosting tentatively explains as based on old rights (Joosting 1920: 121, 136). The vicinity of the Mussel brook may echo old pasturing rights. Furthermore, the totality

63 P.N. Noomen (pers. comm. 17 May 2000).

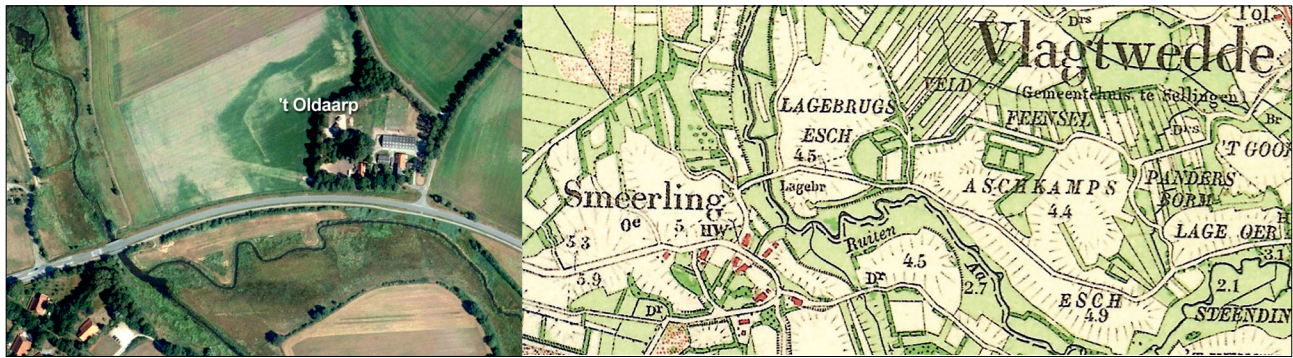


Fig. 25. The closed contour of the site of 't Oldaarp, east of Smeerling, the Netherlands, across the Ruiten Aa, still contrasts with the surrounding open fields (source 2007 NAVTEQ; Topographical map 154 Onstwedde (1902/1916)).

of the river dune including the Zoeres is named De Hem or Jipsingboerhem, *hem* in Dutch meaning protruding piece of land, here to be understood as the elongated river dune partly surrounded by the Ruiten Aa.⁶⁴ This Jipsingboerhem also comprises an enclave of the Wollinghuizen farmers, apparently a piece of forest, the *Wollingboerbos* (Fig. 24).⁶⁵

In conclusion, the vastness of the Jipsinghuizen *marke* is disproportionate with the size of the settlement on the *kadastrale minuut*. Present-day Jipsinghuizen was already occupied around AD 1000, as is demonstrated by a pottery find (Groenendijk & Waterbolk 1998: 98-9), and the Zoeres settlement existed at least between the 10th and 14th centuries, so both settlements must have been contemporaneous. The Zoeres settlement became derelict, and its name slipped into oblivion, while its location became part of the Jipsinghuizen *marke*.

't Oldaarp

The field name 't Oldaarp (the old village), seen on the map between Smeerling and Vlagtwedde, also refers to an abandoned settlement. Separated from nearby Smeerling by the Ruiten Aa rivulet, with a bordering toponym reading Lagebrugs Esch (presumably containing the prefix *lake-* = boundary water⁶⁶), this Oldaarp can be designated either as a former settlement location or as just a derelict farmyard.⁶⁷ On aerial photographs, the round contours of this patch of land still

contrast with the adjacent Lagebrugs Esch (Fig. 25). If 't Oldaarp was designated the old village, where was the new one? Smeerling has been indicated as the place of Miginward's farmstead, considered part of Onstwedde (cf. 3.1), whereas Oldaarp lies beyond the Ruiten Aa, in the parish of Vlagtwedde, so Smeerling does not seem a likely successor of Oldaarp. But neither does Vlagtwedde, considering the mutual distance of 1.5 km; moreover, we find the meaningful toponym Lage Oerde in between.⁶⁸ As a reference to primeval arable land, this *oerde* seems more related to Vlagtwedde than to Oldaarp, taking into account the distance Oldaarp-Lage Oerde. 't Oldaarp could well represent an independent settlement. This is one of the Westerwolde *enigmata* that may be solved one day. There are no stray finds to substantiate the dating of the Oldaarp occupation (Fig. 26).

Wedderbergen

The rough relief of the Wedderbergen is pedologically mapped as a drift-sand area (Bodemkaart 1980: 133; De Vires-Bruynsteen 1981: 104-7). Drift-sands occur in aeolian sands bare of vegetation. In the Wedderbergen sand-drift, we see a human factor; it may have been caused by overgrazing, shepherd's tracks, or the cutting of sods for deep-litter stables (cf. 3.2.3). We think that this process took place in historic times and we hold the medieval settlement of Loo responsible (Groenendijk 1997: 263-6). The settlement status of Loo is illustrated

64 *Hem* not to be confused with *heem* meaning house; Schönfeld 1950: 113.

65 As found in the toponym collection of J. Wieringa n.d.

66 Our interpretation of the word *Lage-* is the Dutch *leek*; for the specific clarification of *laak*, *lake* as 'boundary water', see Schönfeld 1955: 183-4.

67 Some discussion about the version *Olde Arp* mentioned in a document of 1655 (Wegman & Wegman 1993: 270) arose in a consultation with B.J. Harding (pers. comm. 27 July 1997) and dr R.A. Ebeling (pers. comm. 8 Aug. 1997 and 31 Oct. 1997) The question was, if *Arp* could be derived from *erbi* (old saxon) = yard, farmstead (Dutch: *erf*). Ebeling doubts this, because an assimilation of *b* into *f* took place long before the 17th century; besides, *darp* is encountered more often in Germany and the Netherlands in the meaning of a relocated settlement.

68 Here again the suffix *Lage* could be read as *laak*, *lake* (boundary water), as this *oerde* was bordered to the west by a small rivulet, which argues for an attribution to easterly Vlagtwedde. However, the version *Lange Ouer* (Wieringa n.d.) in the meaning of long weakens the *lake* explanation.

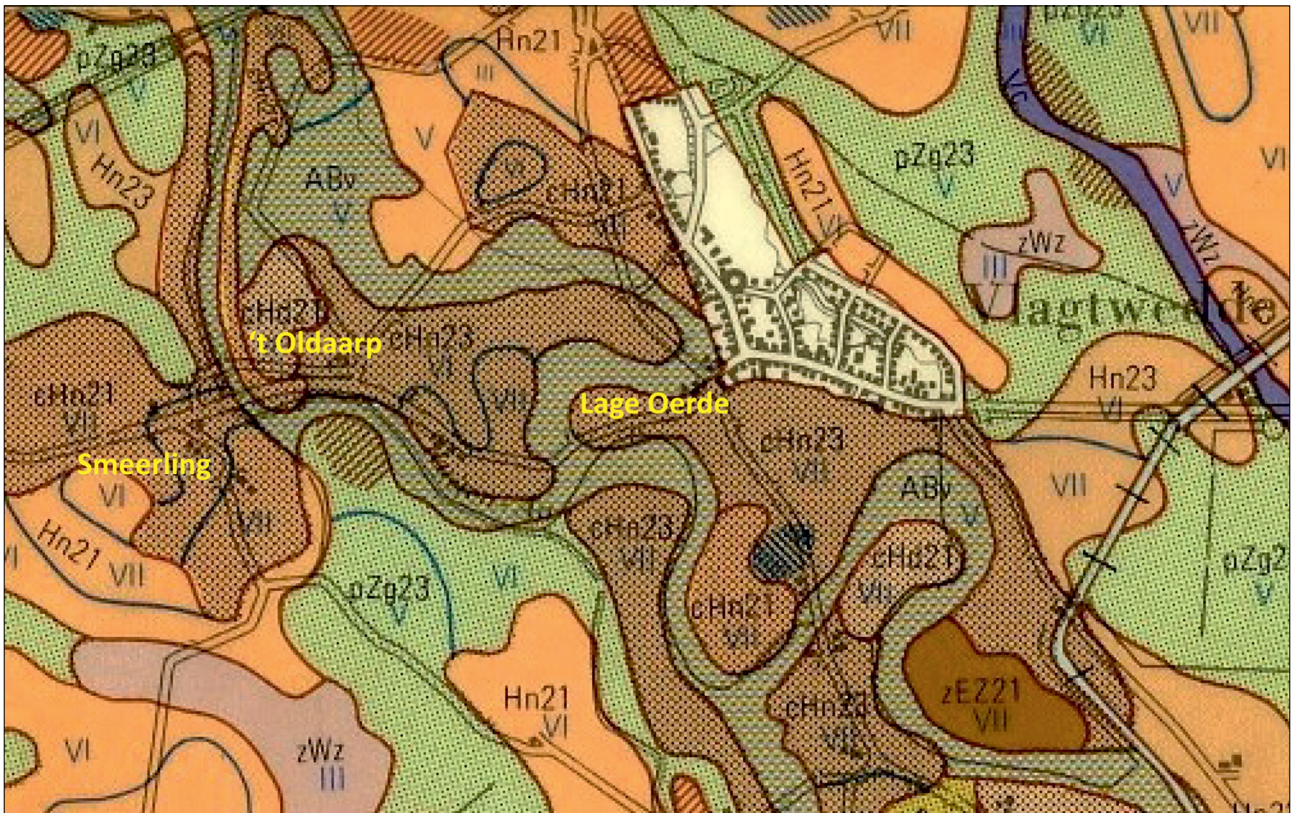


Fig. 26. Soil map showing the site of 't Oldaarp, located between Smeerling and Lage Oerde, the Netherlands, separated from each other by stream gulies (source Bodemkaart 1980: Blad 13 Winschoten).

by *kogelpot* finds.⁶⁹ Judging by its location, on a river dune along the Westerwoldse Aa, Loo could well have an early medieval origin. At some time, this settlement must have withered as a result of self-inflicted environmental problems. The drift-sand phase came to a standstill, and the Wedderbergen was recultivated in the late 15th or early 16th century, but never again housed a settlement. Formerly, the toponym Loo was explained as forest or open spot in a forest, but according to Waterbolk, there must be another, as yet unknown, significance connected with Loo-spots.⁷⁰ Spek (2004: 242-4) reads it as a utility forest with an open character, strongly influenced by humans. This Loo must have applied to a river dune along the Westerwoldsche Aa, because the peat colonists of Vriescheloo came across a brook bog, and if this were the pristine Loo, they would have named their settlement Vrieschewolde. In 1316, the toponym manifests itself as *Loe*, meaning that the representatives of the parish of Loo still called their village *Loe* (cf. 3.3.2). As this *Loe* is missing in the fief deed

of 1474 to the Addingas (cf. 3.2.3), it obviously never formed part of Corvey's properties in Westerwolde.

Settlement indicators from the 9th/10th century were recently discovered on a river dune along the Westerwoldsche Aa named De Gaast, 2 km north of Wedderbergen, directly opposite current-day Vriescheloo (Groenendijk *et al.* 2011). This 2 km space in the chain of river dunes is quite in accordance with Westerwolde's occupation pattern. However, it remains unclear whether the original Loo also included De Gaast and Lutjeloo (literally small Loo) and thus formed a cluster of settlements, because here at least two patterns coincide, representing two different agricultural systems, namely the *es* settlement and the strip cultivation. Unfortunately, we have no clues as to the social consequences of this 'clash', as we are currently not able to differentiate the chronology of events. In the present case, historical and archaeological sources are not complementary (Fig. 27).

69 The source is the record 'kogelpot sherds', found by a Ned. Heidemij employee during reconstruction works in the 1950s or before (Vasbinder n.d. [1969], item 37). Furthermore, amateur archaeologist E.R. Renken (Blijham) found some late medieval *kogelpot* sherds during digging work in the Wedderbergen recreation park in 2011, near the Westerwoldsche Aa waterfront.

70 This function might be indicated by high oak trees, hence the designation *Loo*. In Drenthe, *Loo*-names coincide with the most densely populated area (prof. dr H.T. Waterbolk, Haren, pers. comm. 20 Sep. 2017).



Fig. 27. Northern Westerwolde, the transitional area of es settlements and ribbon villages, showing river dunes (ochre) and Vriescheloo's schematized successive occupation axes (dashed red lines). It is still questionable whether the contemporary farmsteads were really lined up (sources topographical maps 136 Wedde and 173 Vriescheloo (1902), adapted by E. Bolhuis, GIA).

Anyway, Loo/Loe/Vresschenloo (as it is called in old documents) was to become one of the five primordial parishes in high medieval Westerwolde, and we think this relates to the emergence of the successful medieval peat reclamation of Vriescheloo, a colonization from beyond Westerwolde (as explained below), believed to have started in the 12th, perhaps 11th, century and whose church dates back to the 13th century to the best of our knowledge (cf. 4.2). The question whether Vriescheloo remained connected to the Wedderbergen cannot be answered at present, but there must have been a shift of interest leading to the rise of Vriescheloo and the desertion of the Wedderbergen, the latter even finally merging into the *marke* of Wedde.⁷¹ In the paragraph on cultivated plants (6.3), the success of Vriescheloo will be touched upon.

The instances quoted above presume that regressive forces affected the carrying capacity of Westerwolde's rural economy and settlement pattern. Selligen, Weende and Wedderhölte may demonstrate a settlement concentration process, taking place in or just after the late Middle Ages – the exact timing could not be established. However, Jipsinghuizen-Zoeres, 't Oldaarp and Wedderbergen represent deserted settlements, of

which Jipsinghuizen-Zoeres seems to have been abandoned in the 14th century. Social unrest in the turbulent 14th century looks to be an obvious trigger, but we must be cautious to seek the cause in a drastic event, such as outbreaks of the plague or of livestock disease.⁷² The Wedderbergen sand-drift, for example, seems self-inflicted. Political disturbances, such as the 14th/15th century feuds with their changing coalitions (Nip 2008: 250-2), should also be taken into consideration. At the same time, the formation of the Dollard sea in the northern periphery caused tremendous social pressure on Westerwolde's peat belt, but we do not know the consequences for the original colonists of Blijham, Vriescheloo and Bellingwolde. Especially in the 14th and 15th centuries, Westerwolde was confronted with migrations, people on the move seeking new opportunities. For the Westerwolde hinterland, this circumstance worked out very badly in the case of the immigrant, power-hungry Addingas (cf. 3.3.2). And what is more, the Dollard had cut off the waterway towards the river Ems. We are dealing with different processes at different points in time; that much is clear.

We think that Westerwolde and Drenthe alike were affected by the recessions raging through Europe in the

⁷¹ For the presumed disappearance of the Wedderbergen territory, see Groenendijk 1997: 263-4. According to Joosting (1920: 99), Vriescheloo never knew a *marke* organization, because it had Frisian roots.

⁷² There is no evidence of the Black Death ravaging the area of the actual province of Groningen in 1349-1350, but there were later recrudescences. The Emsland saw pest scourges in 1356 and 1362, but the sources remain vague (Simon 2003: 281-300).

14th century, but that Westerwolde, with its small-scale geographical configuration, was less resistant against its effects and suffered earlier from extensification. It is debatable whether Westerwolde's farmer community was capable to quickly recover from the serious blows it had to face in periods of regression.

6.1.3 Frisian influx

Following the colonization of Westerwolde's peat belt and the migrations provoked by the Dollard inundations, it is plausible that Westerwolde faced a medieval Frisian influx twice, and we wonder what is left in terms of toponyms and language. The latter discipline brings us no further; the Westerwolde dialect followed the 'normal' phoneme development within the *Nedersaksisch* (Dutch for Lower Saxon); possible older Frisian etymological relics were disregarded in the study of Veldman (1992). Etymologists Ebeling and Wieringa basically underline eastern, i.e. Westphalian or, more generally, north-west-German connections in Westerwolde's legends and field names (Ebeling & Wieringa 1977: 143, 145-7).⁷³ Especially the field name *droon* drew their attention, in Westerwolde occurring as *droene*, *drone* (Vlagtwedde), *droone(n)* (Veele) and *droen*, *droon* (Onstwedde). This toponym has a provenance in *mittelniederdeutsch* 'drôn' (meaning piece of arable land, plot of land at the edge of higher ground, seam) and occurs in northern Germany but not in Frisia, nor elsewhere in the Netherlands (Ebeling & Wieringa 1977: 143; Falkson 2000: 293-4).⁷⁴

Yet Frisian elements do emerge in Westerwolde, more precisely, in the peat belt surrounding Pleistocene Westerwolde to the north and west. Focusing on the contact zone Westerwolde-Reiderland, we see Frisian and Saxon elements mingling. The following toponyms may illustrate this. In Vriescheloo, we found the toponym Harssevenne for a sandy elevation (*hars*) amidst lower fen peat (*venne*). This *hars[t]* resembles the Frisian idiom for a natural height in a fen peat, the equivalent of the Groninger *horst* (J. Wieringa, pers. comm. Oct. 1987).⁷⁵ However, in Lutjeloo, we find the Saxon *eske* as well as *gaiste* (i.e. the German word *Geest*?) for arable land (Groenendijk 1997: 268-9). We believe that Vriescheloo – i.e. the strip cultivation – was developed

by Frisian colonists, 'the Frisian Loo', as Fruin (1886: 74) has already stated. The same goes for Vriescheloo's adjacent settlements, Bellingwolde and Blijham.

Hofstee, in his treatise on the Oldambt, points to the absence of *marken* in Vriescheloo; the farmers there do not express their voting rights in *mollenwaer* (a unit of surface measurement in Westerwolde) but in the Oldambt version of *deimt* (Hofstee 1938: 164-5). The identical term *deijmat* is also found in adjacent Wedde, although Wedde manifests itself as a *marke* organization (Van der Woude 1944: 111).⁷⁶ We have the impression that in the area Wedde-Vriescheloo, two agricultural systems came together and integrated ever since the surrounding peat zone was colonized, well before the Dollard inundations. It is impossible to say whether it was the 12th-century colonists who imported these designations or the refugees fleeing the 14th/15th-century Dollard floods.

Scrutinizing more Frisian influences in Westerwolde's peat belt, we come across the water name Tjamme, a Frisian designation for a streamlet (Miedema 1972: 44, n. 18).⁷⁷ We encounter this toponym twice in Westerwolde's fringe area, in the north as the bordering streamlet between Reiderland and Oldambt (later the municipal border between Beerta and Midwolda⁷⁸) and in the south-west as a watercourse that marks the back end of the strip cultivation of Veenhuizen, separating Veenhuizen from the uncultivated raised bog that extended between Veenhuizen and Ter Maarsch.

The northern occurrence, just lying outside Westerwolde, in former Easter Lauwers Frisia, should not come as a surprise, but the south-western occurrence, in Westerwolde, between Ter Maarsch and Veenhuizen, close to Onstwedde, is remarkable, indicating that the strip cultivation of Veenhuizen, no doubt of a high or late medieval origin, may have been initiated by Frisian colonists, as was Vriescheloo (Fig. 28).

Bouwte is a designation for the entirety of arable land, still in use in the former medieval peat reclamation districts of Groningen (Schönfeld 1950: 73).⁷⁹ In Westerwolde *sensu stricto* the equivalent is *es(ch)* or *esk*. We encounter the toponym *bouwte* together with *esch* once more in the medieval strip cultivation of Roswinkel, south of Ter Apel, in Drenthe. Wieringa

73 Information provided by J. Wieringa, Nedersaksisch Instituut, University of Groningen (pers. comm. 25 May 1992). Notably, the legendary designation *Aulkenvolk* ('those who commit witchcraft and sorcery'; Veldman 1977: 259) occurs in Westerwolde and Emsland (Freren, Rhede) alike, according to Wieringa.

74 Information kindly provided by dr R.A. Ebeling (Leek) (pers. comm. 18 June 2020).

75 This field name appears as *Harsse Venne* in a document of 1693 (Van der Woude 1944: 112). Also: Schönfeld 1950: 33-4.

76 Appearing in 1684 as "*twée en half deijmatten in 't Wedder Meer*" (Van der Woude 1944: 111), to be sought in the northern part of the Wedde *marke*, around the postulated deserted settlement of Loo.

77 Also Wieringa (pers. comm. 25 May 1992; see above).

78 See Wassermann 1985: 24 for the reconstruction of the pre-Dollard course of the Tjamme and its political effects.

79 Schönfeld, though, gives no further explanation of the term *bouwte*, except that it is in use in Groningen.

is absent in Westerwolde's eastern peat belt, between the Ruiten Aa valley and the Ems bank (south of Brual, that is). Do different geographical conditions underlie this choice? The northern and western peat belts consisted of a eutrophic fen peat, evolving into a raised bog. I.e. the vegetative development at the time of the construction of tower houses in this area, as we repeatedly observed during excavations where trampled surfaces had prevented the underlying peat from decomposing. The top of the remaining peat often contained an *Eriophorum* (cottonsedge) horizon. The eastern moor zone was dominated by a very wet bog dissected by landed streamlets (cf. 6.3). Besides, we can agree with Wassermann's general statement that the primary location of peat settlements in the coastal hinterland was oriented towards a *Geestrand* (edge of a sandy area; Wassermann 1985: 56), a condition that was lacking in the eastern peat belt, as the Ruiten Aa river dunes, considered as a *Geestrand*, were already occupied in the 12th century. But Wassermann's assertion disregards the factual basis of the peat reclamation, namely that the moor rivulets, such as the Westerwoldsche Aa was downstream, functioned as gateways into the raised bog.

6.2 Cultivation techniques

Especially the 18th century saw lots of agricultural innovations on the European continent. The pendulum of prevailing views on the evolution of agricultural methods kept swinging between the concept of an agrarian revolution and that of a continuity of small improvements (for a summary, see Bieleman 2008: 140-1). Until well into the 17th century, the agricultural mode of production both in Drenthe, Westerwolde and the adjacent German *Geest* was very extensive, where a low population density was reflected in small villages with relatively large farms, also in terms of livestock, as this would spread the risk under uncertain conditions (Bieleman 2008: 103-4). The extensive farming on the sandy soils resulted in a low number of farm labourers as well as smallholders (*keuters*), not so much through lack of uncultivated land, but because the big farmers feared that the smallholders would claim charity support in times of economic decline, for which the big farmers surely had to pay. Furthermore, extensive farming occurred also in response to the remote geographical situation in relation to the sale markets, which put pressure on grain prices. The entire management of farming focused on perpetuation, not on expansion, and the aversion to experiments was founded on a long cropping experience in marginal circumstances (Van

der Woud 1998: 228; Bieleman 2008: 104). As we saw above, this agrees with the observations of most romantics and agronomists about 19th-century Westerwolde.

Whether agriculture developed gradually or was a shocking event, our source to evaluate agricultural development or backwardness before written sources emerge is the soil archive. Disappeared agricultural techniques are hard to detect due to the weak record. Venema (1857) comes closest to a traditional, self-sufficient system, given his detailed description of Westerwolde's methods and crops. For older sources, the scale of observation proves to be the obstruction. For the Middle Ages, a distinction between revolution and gradual development is already hard to make. Yet natural interferences on a European scale, such as the mid-14th century plague pandemic, or on a regional scale, such as the late medieval Dollard floods, must have had their impact on society as a whole and agriculture in particular, as this was the main source of livelihood. In the soil archive, territorial conflicts are detected only by exception, such as was the case with the raid on Westerwolde in 1530, executed by the troops of Duke Charles of Guelders.⁸¹

Regarding subrecent farming, Muntinga (1945) compared 'old' Westerwolde (i.e. before the turn of the century) with 'new' Westerwolde (after the canalization in the 1910s). A mid-19th-century Westerwolde farm that mattered comprised some 76 hectares, of which about 11% was taken up by arable land, 22% by meadow and hayfield and 67% by uncultivated heathland and moor (Muntinga 1945: 98). Thus, by then, the average ground surface of a Westerwolde farm was not insignificant, and the Westerwolde farmer was not poor. As for the agricultural equipment, before 1900, the situation was all but progressive. For the narrow parcels of the open field system a shallow, difficult to operate, one-way wooden plough was used, the *omsmijter* (literally: overthruwer); on other soils, the more easily operated Münsterland plough was customary, allowing a deeper tillage (Muntinga 1945: 107-8). In Drenthe, the *umsmieter* (identical to the *omsmijter*) was an old-fashioned plough device still in use in south-eastern Drenthe; farther north, it was already considered ancient, and in the northern part of Drenthe, it was even completely unknown at the time of the assessment just before World War II (Fig. 29; Hijsszeler 1940: 164-71).⁸² The geographic proximity of south-eastern Drenthe and southern Westerwolde may have facilitated the exchange of ideas since the late Middle Ages or, conversely, may have maintained the sticking to traditional agricultural

81 Duke Charles of Guelders, who dominated Westerwolde between 1530 and 1536, ordered his warlord Berend van Hackfort in 1530 to strengthen the existing tower house in Wedde with a surrounding shield wall. For foundation purposes, this action led to the deforestation of Westerwolde's oak tree stock (Groenendijk & Van Rijn 1996).

82 Hijsszeler collected his data between 1929 and 1940 (F.R. Hijsszeler, Haren, pers. comm. 28 May 2020).

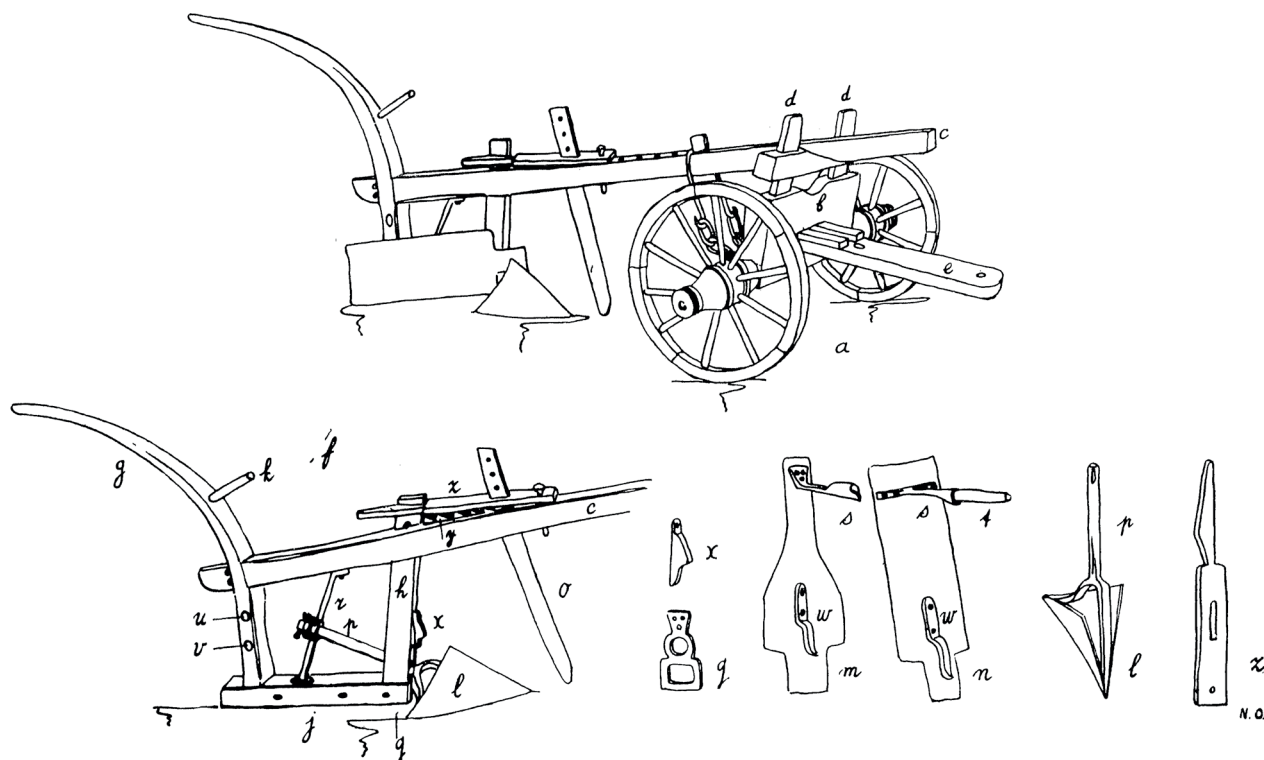


Fig. 29. The 'umsmieter' plough device, operational for quite a long period in southeast Drenthe and in Westerwolde (source Hijszeler 1940: Plaat 10).

techniques. Geertsema already recorded the same plough-types for Westerwolde, quoting in amazement that the *omsmijter* routed rather than ploughed the land and that weeding the growing crop was neglected altogether (Geertsema 1868: 114-5). Since the dissertation of Bieleman (1987) on farming in Drenthe after 1600, the idea of a self-sufficient and traditional rural economy there has been discarded by Spek (2004: 104-5). But concerning Westerwolde, we are less sure about that.

The enigmatic find of an ard share in 2013, standing upright in a peaty environment near the village of Weende, was considered anachronistic once the ^{14}C date of $605 \pm 30 \text{ BP} = 1296\text{--}1406 \text{ calAD}$ became available (GrA-62684; Groenendijk & Renken 2015). The share is considered the component of an ard based on its morphology, the wood species (oak), and wear traces on one side. The special treatment which favoured its *in situ* preservation (abandoned in a wetland, far away from arable land, oriented vertically, point downwards) has been understood as a relinquishment, a farewell to an obsolete piece of equipment. After all, inversion tillage by ploughing with a mould-board was already broadly accepted in the late Middle Ages. Nevertheless, as archaeologists tend to view the ard as a prehistoric

device, certainly due to a lack of well-dated specimens, the potential for bias is lurking. It seems more likely that ard and plough (and harrow) were in operation simultaneously, and for a long time, depending on soil circumstances, cropping plan and local preference (Van der Poel 1960-1961: 136). There is evidence that in the Landkreis Uelzen (Lüneburger Heide), the *Hakenpflug* (type of ard) was an agricultural implement even until the 19th century (Löbert 1993); a similar situation applies to the poor sandy soils of Mecklenburg.⁸³ At some point in time, the ard became superfluous and was removed from the triad ard-plough-harrow, but when and where exactly? In the subrecent Drenthe farming equipment, the ard appears to be absent from the toolkit (Geertsema 1868; Hijszeler 1940). Van der Poel (1960-1961: 194) suggests: "The ard may not have disappeared until the close of the Middle Ages, although the plough may perhaps have predominated over the ard even in protohistoric times". Anyway, the ostentatious abandonment of the Weende ard occurred as late as the 14th century or still later, taking the own age of the oak trunk out of which the share had been cut into account.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, it is a valid question whether this single event actually coincides with Westerwolde's renunciation of the ard as a tillage device (Fig. 30).

⁸³ The 'Mecklenburger Haken' was also applied until the 19th century, as evidenced by a museum copy from 1809 in the Agroneum Alt Schwerin (Alt Schwerin, Germany).

⁸⁴ An associated find of a piece of processed wood, discussed in Groenendijk & Renken 2015: 112-3, may point in the same direction.

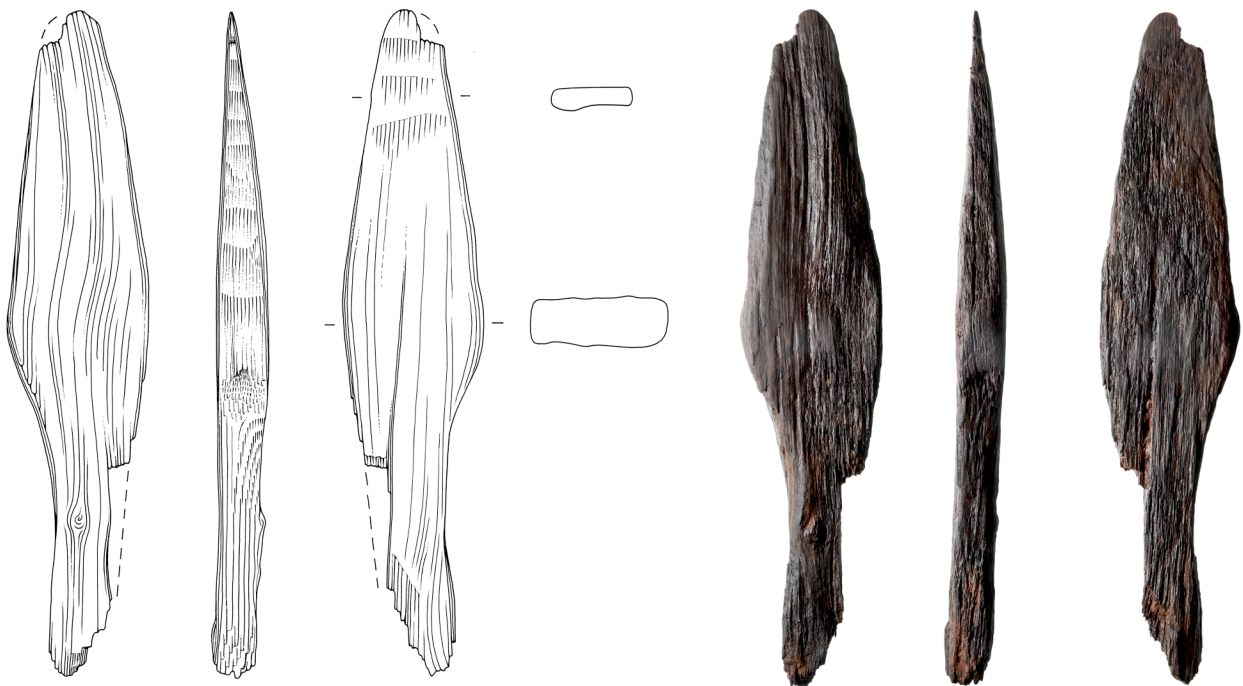
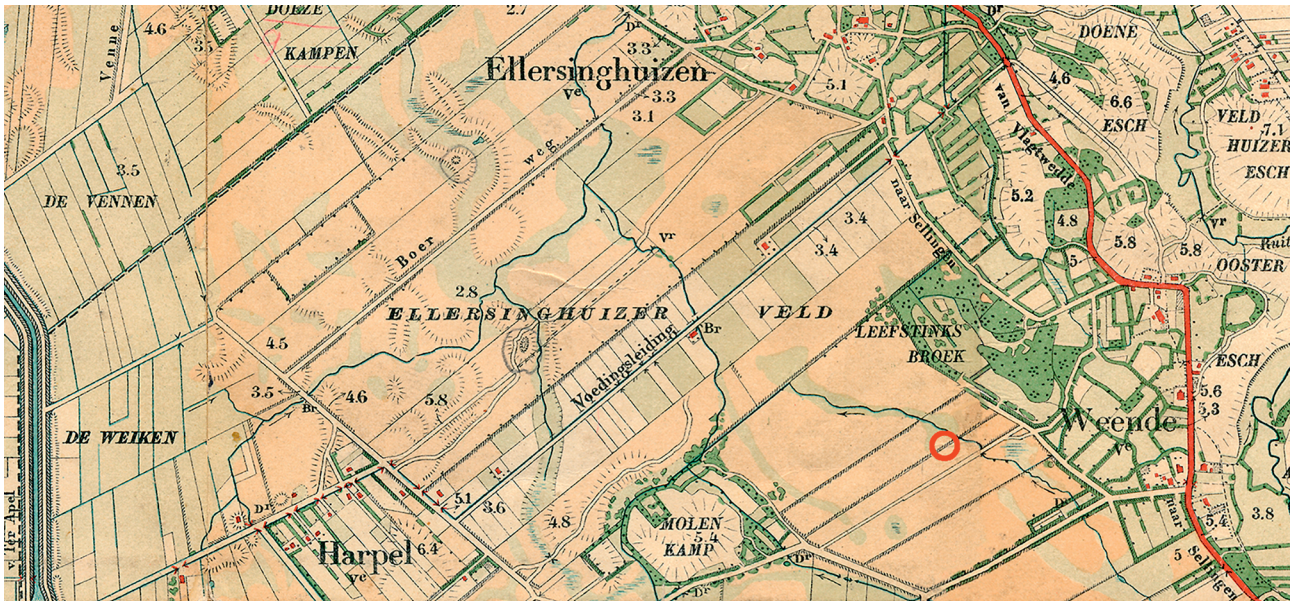


Fig. 30. The site of Ellersinghuizerveld, the Netherlands. The oaken late-medieval ard share (below) and its find spot in a wetland (above) (photo G. van Oortmerssen, Antefix; drawing M.A. Los-Weijns, GIA (below); topographical map 154 Onstwedde (1902/1916) (above)).

To view the late occurrence of the ard in medieval Westerwolde in the context of push and pull factors (Groenendijk & Renken 2015) should perhaps be reconsidered. It has been put forward that the suction effect of the innovative peat reclamations at Westerwolde's fringes (pull factor) left the less venturesome, more conservative inhabitants behind, assuming that the colonization of the surrounding peat belt took place at the instigation of the Westerwolde population itself (Groenendijk & Renken 2015: 113-4). But at second glance, the notion of a coastal influx of medieval peat colonists is gaining ground, for reasons that are not just apparent from the soil archive. Just accumulating

the required number of crofters needed to develop the competitive and large-scale reclamation of the ribbon village would have failed in sandy Westerwolde. And if large-scale reclamation proved impossible, the social implication of newcomers may even have aggravated the isolation and self-complacency of Westerwolde's old farming community, as a natural reaction against change.

Thus, comparing farming management between Westerwolde *sensu stricto* and *sensu lato* makes sense. One gets the impression that the colonists who reclaimed Westerwolde's peat belt, facing new challenges, were more open to innovative agricultural techniques,

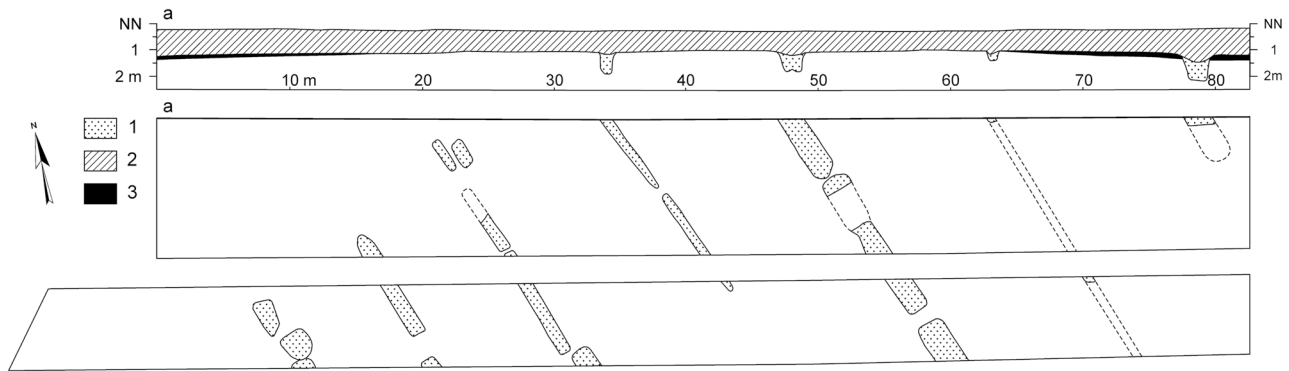


Fig. 31. The site of Scheemda-Pastorieweg (western Dollard bay), the Netherlands. Trenches at regular intervals refer to a method of sand extraction to improve the topsoil structure. 1 = trench filling, 2 = Dollard clay, 3 = subsided peat (source Groenendijk & Schwarz 1991: Fig. 9).



Fig. 32. Trenches at regular intervals and of a regular shape (esgreppels) are very abundant in Westerwolde. Image from the 1994 pilot on the open field 'Espel' near Weende, the Netherlands (photo Henny Groenendijk, 1994).

perhaps because they had already become acquainted with them in their area of origin. They made use of the mould-board plough, enabling them to plough up the soil into raised plant beds to accomplish a better superficial drainage, a new technique especially suitable for low-lying grounds (Slicher van Bath 1963: 63). The strip-cultivated peat soils will have facilitated the use of this device.

Where peat subsidence brought the Pleistocene subsoil within reach, trenches were dug out to mine the

sand as a means to improve the structure of the top soil and thereby its yield capacity. At the site of Scheemda-Pastorieweg, on a coversand elevation, in the western Dollard bay, we found trenches running at regular intervals, parallel to the medieval field orientation. Each trench consisted of separate, elongated pits or slits, lining up with what may be seen as field boundaries (mutual distance 10 m on average) but, considering their profiles, not designed as free-flowing ditches. Sand mining was perhaps meant to coincide with field

boundaries, as digging here, step-wise in pits, would not obstruct tillage as much (Fig. 31; Groenendijk & Schwarz 1991: 52).

In Westerwolde's open fields, often clusters of small, parallel trenches (*esgreppels*) are observed. Unlike in the peat belt, the trenches here run perpendicular to the field orientation and cover the entire field, instead of merely the field boundaries. In Westerwolde, the density of *esgreppels* is very intense, and through their scale they severely affected the underlying soil archive (Fig. 32). The trenches were meant to combat loss of structure in the topsoil, as they often reach into the podzol-B horizon of the subsoil. Spek considers sand extraction to have been applied for the deep-litter stables if *plaggen* were not available; in Westerwolde they occurred relatively late (18th to early 20th century; Spek 2004: 848–51). They also occur in *plaggen*soils in Emsland, although their considerable thickness there makes them distinct from those in Westerwolde (Veltmann 2002: 266; Robben 2016: 30). Tilling fields in sandy Westerwolde required different techniques than did tilling in its peat belt.

6.3 Cultivated plants

The aim of this section is to sum up the idiosyncrasies detected by palaeobotanists when studying pollen material from Westerwolde. Comparing sandy Westerwolde with its surrounding peat belt is useful regarding cultivated plants and their apparition. Unfortunately, few pollen diagrams are at our disposal: from Vriescheloo-De Gaast (2010) for the peat reclamation area and Ruiten Aa/Mussel Aa/Westerwoldse Aa system (1981); from Sellinger-Hassebergerweg (1994) as well as Sellinger-Panta Rhei (2007) for Westerwolde *sensu stricto*; and from Wessingtange-Walchumer Schloot (2017) for the Bourtange moor, adjacent to the east (Fig. 33).

The profiles from the Ruiten Aa/Mussel Aa/Westerwoldse Aa system

The study of this system (De Vires-Bruynsteen 1981) comprises nine palynological analyses, sampled by coring and via geological outcrops. For dating purposes, reference diagrams are used, supplemented with ¹⁴C dates. An objection to the method applied is that erosion and sedimentation are insufficiently taken into account, which explains some unusual outcomes as to the appearance of species (pers. comm. dr W.A. Casparie, University of Groningen, 28 Jan. 1986).

Yet some general conclusions shed light on the local appearance of cultivated plants, such as the sudden increase in *Cerealia* (corn) and *Ericaceae* (heather) in

sample 75/VB/174 in a Sub-Atlantic river dune profile near the junction of the Ruiten Aa and the Veelerdiep, near Ellersinghuizen. This may be due to cultivation and probably the introduction of *plaggen*soil fertilization (De Vires-Bruynsteen 1981: 93–6). Another profile worth mentioning is sample 75/VB/221, from the drift-sand area the Wedderbergen. The complexity of drift-sand processes impedes the making of strong statements. In the investigated dune, two buried podzol horizons were observed. The lower podzol shows a low score for *Cerealia* and field weeds and a high score for *Ericaceae*, probably representing a standstill in the sand-drift process. The upper podzol horizon shows a high *Cerealia* score and a lower *Ericaceae* score, but they appear together with *Centaurea* (cornflower), *Fagopyrum* (buckwheat), and *Linum usitatissimum* (flax), indicators of a developed field system (De Vires-Bruynsteen 1981: 104–6). The high percentages of *Ericaceae* actually point to an optimal equilibrium between grazing pressure by sheep and the digging of sods, so both the horizons may reflect the period of *plaggen*soil formation, leading to sand-drifts alternating with standstill phases, during which tillage was not abandoned altogether. Geertsema in his time still records local sand-drifts in Westerwolde, without, however, mentioning their location (Geertsema 1868: 95); Geertsema's contemporary Venema mentions some small, local sand-drifts, among them the Wedderbergen (Venema 1857: 203). Our interpretation is that both podzol horizons of Wedderbergen sample 75/VB/174 are of a late medieval or early modern origin.

The profile from Vriescheloo-De Gaast

During remodelling of the Westerwoldse Aa between Lutjeloo and Vriescheloo in 2010, a river dune called De Gaast was cut; potsherds refer to a 9th/10th to 13th/14th century occupation. A profile pit brought a cultivation layer to light that had been protected from disturbance by Dollard sediment. The pollen spectrum (Groenendijk *et al.* 2011) mentions *Hordeum/Triticum* (barley/wheat), *Secale* (rye) and *Cannabis* (hemp) as cultivated plants; whether *Brassica*-type (Cruciferae) was a vegetable or a wheatfield weed remains unclear. However, the high percentage of hemp (up to 5%) makes this cultivated plant an important crop and an early record at that. Hemp pollen were also found in the fen peat zone under Dollard clay sediment at Finsterwolde and Noordbroek (Vermue 2012: 77).⁸⁵ This is an indication that at least in the western Dollard bay area, too, with identical soil conditions, hemp was a crop plant. A market pull in connection with an increasing demand for fibre for rope, sailcloth and canvas may have been at work here, although we lack production figures or waybills for this

85 See the remarks of H. Woldring in Groenendijk *et al.* 2011: 72. The 17th-century date of the Finsterwolde profile is doubtful, as this part of the Dollard bay suffered from the floods much earlier.



Fig. 34. Soil profile from the site of Vriescheloo-De Gaast, the Netherlands. 1 = Dollard clay, 2 = homogenous plough horizon, 3 = elevation layer, 4 = older tillage layer, 5 = cover sand ridge. Hemp pollen occur in 2 and 4 (photo Henky Groenendijk, 2010).

made an attempt to cross the gully by means of spreading brushwood, branches, split trunks and construction wood. These were ^{14}C dated around AD 690–870 for the lower crossing and AD 970–1025 for the upper crossing.⁸⁶ After that, Young *Sphagnum* peat prevailed, and the rivulet saw its definitive stagnation. Only above the youngest anthropogenic interference do cultivated species emerge, such as *Secale* (rye) and *Hordeum*-type (barley-type) (cf. 3.2.3). The late apparition of rye, whose windblown pollen must originate from the arable fields 2 km west of the sampled location, was surprising compared with the general starting date of rye cultivation in the Netherlands (De Man 1995).

At Sellinger-Panta Rhei, the Hasseberg rivulet took quite another shape, as it braided over a width of about 100 m and hardly incised the mineral substratum. At a gradient of only 1‰, the flow rate must have been very low. We find ourselves in the Bourtange moor section, where peat growth started in the Atlantic or Subboreal. Fen peat growth was remarkably favoured about AD 500; the top of the sampled profile dates around AD 750.⁸⁷ Pollen of *Plantago lanceolata* (ribwort plantain),

a trampling-tolerant vegetation, suggest that this bog was extensively grazed. The occurrence of few *Secale* pollen in the upper pollen record suggests the presence of arable fields, the nearest possibility being 1.5 km west of the sampled location. The date of its horizon throws another light on the supposed 'late' apparition of rye at the foot of the Hasseberg. An earlier presence of rye in Westerwolde, although in low quantities, is plausible.

The profile from Wessingtange-Walchumer Schloot

Right at the state border, a pollen sample was taken in the fill of a landlocked branch of the river Ems, an autochthonous peat profile covering the Iron Age up to the end of the early Middle Ages, with a vegetation sequence apparently uninterrupted by sedimentation (Huizer 2017).⁸⁸ The flanking river dunes may have served as arable fields, while the process of silting up already took place. As cultivated species, we encounter *Cerealia* beginning in the Late Iron Age/Roman period (^{14}C dated 169 calBC–57 calAD) and continuing to the top of the undisturbed peat (^{14}C dated 710–975 calAD). Only few pollen of *Secale* occur, halfway the early medieval

86 GrN-21275: 1235±25 BP and GrN-21274: 1035±25 BP, respectively.

87 GrN-31347: 1200±50 BP, Boekema & Woldring 2008: 158. On the basis of the vegetation sequence in the pollen spectrum, the palaeobotanists underline the autochthonous origin of the sampled stratum.

88 After the field study, a pollen analysis was conducted by M. Dijkshoorn, ADC ArcheoProjecten (Amersfoort). The sampling took place in preparation for the EDR-Netzwerk project 'Die verschwundene Ems/De verdwenen Eems', a cooperation between GIA and Niedersächsisches Landesamt für Denkmalpflege (www.die-verschwundene-ems.de/www.de-verdwenen-eems.nl).

Table 4. Comparison of agricultural aspects in 'old' Westerwolde and its surrounding peat belt in the late Middle Ages.

| Topic late Middle Ages | 'Old' Westerwolde | Westerwolde peat belt |
|--|--|------------------------------------|
| Farming equipment | Ard; plough (presumed) | Plough (established) |
| Main crop plants | Rye, barley/wheat-type | Rye, hemp, buckwheat |
| Fertilization and soil structure improvement | Plaggensoil, <i>esgreppels</i> * | Sand admixture |
| Animal husbandry | Sheep; cattle, pig, horse presumed;** beekeeping | Cattle, pig, horse, sheep*** |
| (Farm)house construction | <i>Pfostenbau</i> , <i>Ständerbau</i> | <i>Schwellenbau</i> , tower houses |

* Recent research on *esgreppels* has shifted their dating to the 18th century and later (Spek 2004: 848-51).

** The poor preserving conditions for bone in sandy Westerwolde obscure this record. Cattle, pig and horse are presumed; information kindly provided by dr W. Prummel, Zwolle (pers. comm. 18 May 2020). In the 19th century, cattle, sheep, pig and horse are common (Geertsema 1868: 100-1).

*** See Prummel 1990 for a comparable fen peat situation at Scheemda (western Dollard bay).

trajectory. *Plantago lanceolata* is present from the Late Iron Age onwards.

Summarizing some characteristics encountered in farming and related techniques in late medieval Westerwolde *sensu stricto* and *sensu lato*, we come across several differences and similarities. In fact, field tillage is the biggest mutual disparity, as is hemp cultivation (Table 4).

Comparisons with Emsland and Drenthe

The comparison with Emsland as to cultivated plants is supported by pollen diagrams from the midstream Ems region, opposite southern Westerwolde. Samples were taken in fossil river bends west of the present Ems near Landegge and Haren and east of the Ems near Dörpen (Pott & Hüpe 2001). We adopt the most important conclusions as summarized and commented on by Robben (2016: 29-30): *Secale* occurs regularly from the Late Iron Age onwards; a domination of rye relative to other cereal types is observed at Dörpen from the 7th/8th century AD onwards, and a general increase in rye is seen in connection with the establishment of the plaggensoil economy, according to German scholars beginning in the 10th century and resulting in the so-called *ewige Roggenanbau* (everlasting rye cultivation). The earliest presence of *Fagopyrum* is stated for the 12th-14th centuries. Worthy of consideration is the strong decrease in *Secale* and culture-following plant species, ascribed to the mid-14th-century pandemic plague and the subsequent economic regression. These taxa recover again in the 15th-century pollen diagrams.

In conclusion, we find an apparent contradistinction relative to Westerwolde's 'late' apparition of rye at Sellingen-Hassebergerweg, after AD 1000, and scanty early medieval occurrence at Sellingen-Panta Rhei and Wessingtange-Walchumer Schloot. On the other hand, the strong rye decrease observed in Emsland for the

12th-14th centuries is striking. At present, we lack such detailed information for Westerwolde.

Does this general picture deviate much from the Drenthe situation? The record of charred plant remains from excavations at medieval Pesse, Odoorn and Gasselte, all situated on a Pleistocene subsoil and spread over the Drenthe Plateau, provides us with an overview of the cultivated plants in Drenthe between the 7th and the 13th centuries (Van Zeist *et al.* 1986). A comparison with Westerwolde is a bit tricky, as the analysis methods applied are not equivalent. As crop plants, the cereals *Secale*, *Hordeum* and *Avena* (oats) prevail. Differences in the proportion of each of these cereals among the settlements are apparent, and caution is advised to avoid too-generic conclusions. In Odoorn, for example, rye was predominant, but Pesse and Odoorn displayed all three cereal types, probably due to the fact that the Odoorn samples are of an early medieval date (6th-7th century). Pesse (7th-13th centuries) and Gasselte (9th-12th centuries) may reflect a later stage in the field system (Van Zeist *et al.* 1986: 266-70).

For what it is worth, we note that, of the above-mentioned cereals, *Avena* has not been encountered in Westerwolde as yet; a comparison on the basis of only few samples (which is still the state of the art for Westerwolde) is less meaningful than a comparison of many samples. Furthermore, in the Drenthe settlements, *Linum usitatissimum*, *Pisum sativum* (field pea) and *Vicia faba* (Celtic bean) are found. Field pea and Celtic bean were not observed in Westerwolde so far, but flax turned up in the Wedderbergen profile. *Cannabis* appears to be absent in the archaeological record of these three Drenthe settlements, but that should not come as a surprise. The obvious presence in Vriescheloo and Noordbroek may be explained by the dating of these samples: hemp as a crop plant seems to emerge relatively late, i.e. not before the 14th/15th century, and not exclusively on a peat subsoil. Hemp still appears to

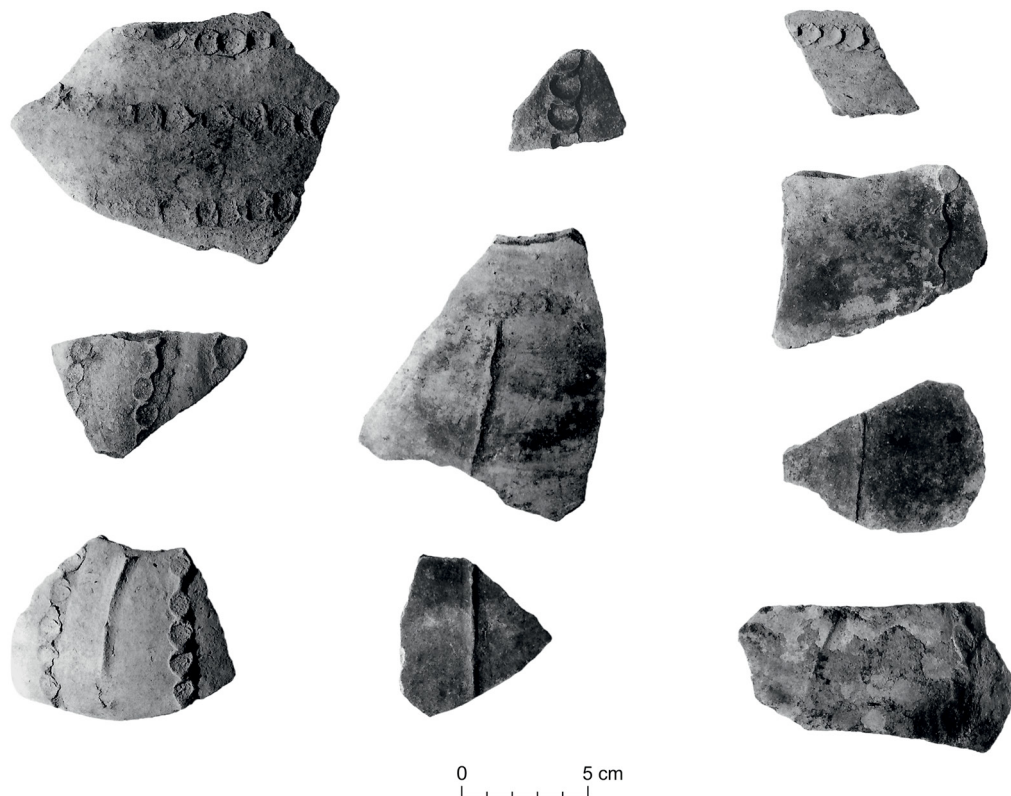


Fig. 35. Plastically decorated, late-medieval pottery from Westerwolde's fringing peat belt (source Vestingmuseum Bad Nieuweschan; photo Henny Groenendijk, 1991).

be cultivated at the start of the late Middle Ages on the Hondsrug (Messchenveld); here, the cultivation covered the late Middle Ages until the 17th century, but probably served local use (Woldring *et al.* 2007). Another informative Hondsrug location is pingo De Oorsprong, at Noordlaren; here, too, hemp was found, in the pollen zone dated between the 11th/12th and 16th/17th century (not further specified; Woldring *et al.* 2008: 178). The Hondsrug soil structure does not basically differ from that of Pleistocene Westerwolde; thus the soil type (sand or peat) does not appear an essential precondition for hemp cultivation. All in all, the high percentage of hemp in the pollen diagram Vriescheloo-De Gaast is remarkable and points to a new initiative, targeting a market crop. Hemp cultivation requires considerable animal manure (Huiting 2020: 632), an animal by-product that would have been present in this peat belt.

6.4 Pottery for daily use

What can archaeology contribute to the trade contacts existing in the Dutch-German border region? Not much, apart from a remarkable contrast between Westerwolde *sensu stricto* and its surrounding peat belt in terms of the availability of 'luxury' earthenware in

the late Middle Ages. The entire peat reclamation area of eastern Groningen displays a distinctive spread of high-quality ware known as *cordonversierd aardewerk* in Dutch and *leistenverzierte Grauware* in German, first described for Winschoten (Boersma 1964) and later placed in a wider geographical context (Stilke 1991). It concerns a *kogelpot* kitchenware, mostly sand-tempered, partly manufactured on the potter's wheel, often decorated with applied garlands and strips and fired at a relatively high temperature (Fig. 35). The distribution of this decorated pottery is a coastal phenomenon, possibly starting in the late 13th century, with a climax in the 14th century and predominant in the Groningen coastal area (Stilke 1991: Abb. 1). It should be stressed that its distribution is not limited to the elite in their brick tower houses; it is found all over the settlements. The tower houses display a different ceramic luxury element, namely imported stoneware from the Rhineland, as of the late 13th century. Differences in the *kogelpot* decoration scheme and in firing temperature imply that manufacturing occurred at different places, one of its production centres probably being Winschoten.⁸⁹ This tableware occurs in all late medieval peat reclamations fringing northern Westerwolde, but

⁸⁹ Meant is the 'Hoog Klei', a *potklei* outcrop in the centre of Winschoten, but a contemporary pottery oven has not yet been detected with certainty (Groenendijk & Bärenfänger 2008: 16-8; Jalink 2010).

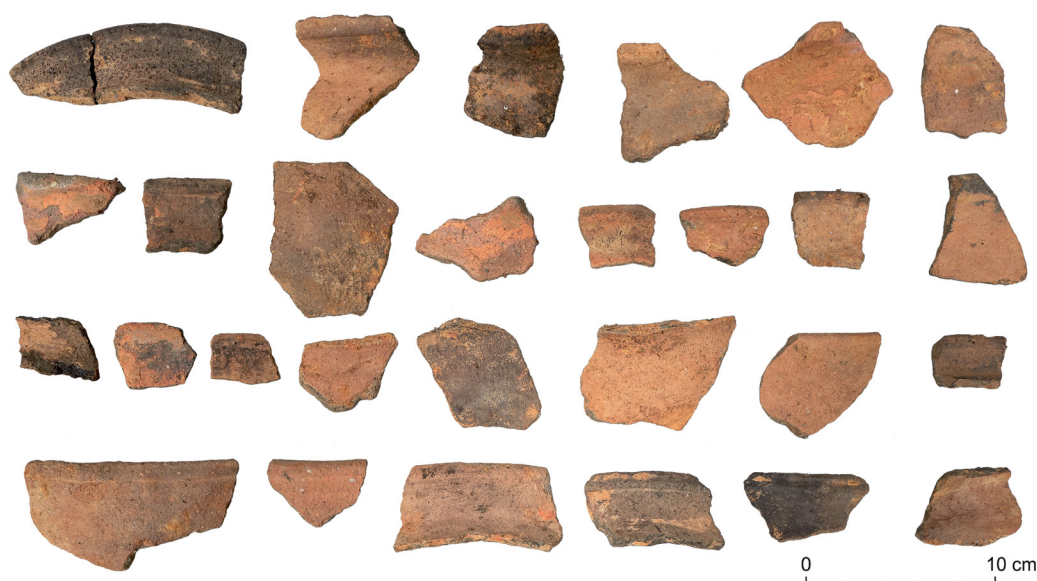


Fig. 36. High-medieval, undecorated pottery from a settlement dump in the es hamlet of Weende, the Netherlands (photo Dirk Fennema, 2020).

is far less common in Westerwolde *sensu stricto*, except for Wedde (Wedderhöfte). Its rarity here excludes the production of this type of tableware in Westerwolde itself, despite the local occurrence of the raw materials, such as loam and sand.

There is still another argument to think that Westerwolde had limited access to the distribution of luxury *kogelpot* earthenware. In the settlement of Weende, a derelict well came to light, filled with burnt loam and a dump of at least 38 ceramic pots, strongly fragmented and with worn fracture edges, dated around AD 1200 (cf. 6.1.1). This apparently locally produced Weende earthenware is definitely inferior in terms of firing, modelling and finishing to the quality found in the peat belt at about the same time. If the local Weende pottery stands for a regional ceramic tradition, the contrast with the variety in the surrounding peat belt is remarkable (Fig. 36). In conclusion: the possible local production of ordinary pottery suggests that late medieval Westerwolde *sensu stricto* was self-supporting in this respect and had hardly any access to market goods, such as imported stoneware. Impossible to say if this observation indicates a tradition of self-sufficiency or a lack of interest.

7. Conclusions and questions

Finally, at the end of our interdisciplinary quest, we want to summarize our joint observations. The comparative method enables us to come to conclusions. First we tried to put the Carolingian conquest of Saxony and its subsequent process of integration in a secular and ecclesiastical sense, in a broader spatial perspective, to better understand Westerwolde's agrarian society at the end of the early Middle Ages. Significant was

the role of some abbeys that were founded early on and that encountered in Westerwolde a development area. Much of their administration has survived, whereas written sources on the local population are absent. The preserved documents of these abbeys and bishoprics are often commented on by historians, although their comments are not always capable of withstanding criticism. As only a part of the day-to-day ecclesiastical management was written down, and what was written down has not always survived, it should not come as a surprise that rights and properties were repeatedly claimed and even contested through forgery. Regarding Westerwolde, Corvey Abbey as a landowner appears to us the authority by far from which to scrutinize its administration. Our critical review has already uncovered lots of misunderstandings in the local and regional historiography.

For the high and late Middle Ages, detailed investigation of property management in Westerwolde, compared with that of Emsland, clarified insight into the agriculture, fishery and social relationships. It became clear that the ties between Westerwolde and the abbey weakened steadily after the 11th century, as a consequence of ecclesiastical-political competition and conflicting interests between Church institutions and the nobility. The significance of Corvey in the Christianization of this region, but also the foundation of parish churches and its associated rights, needs to be reinterpreted and situated later in time. Archaeological and architectural study of Westerwolde's churches seems to support this conclusion.

To compare the Westerwolde *Landrecht* of 1470, traced back to at least 1395, with *marke* rights in adjacent regions may be another subject for further research. Scrutinizing the *Landrecht* would also include the



Fig. 37. Photo from 1993 showing the re-meandering of the Ruiten Aa near Wollinghuizen, the Netherlands, as part of a nature development programme. A fossil river arm has just been cut (dark fill), removing many cubic metres of soil archive undocumented. In the background is the Ruiten Aa as it was reconstructed in the 1960s (photo Henny Groenendijk).

question whether this codification is based on Frisian or Saxon principles or is a blend of both.

If Westerwolde's geographic isolation, imposed by an extremely elongated but narrow habitable north-south corridor amidst the Bourtange moor, was once equated with social isolation, this notion now surely needs adjustment. Research into the infrastructure and transport of goods in a wider context rebuts Westerwolde's image as a *Sackgasse* (dead end) and supposes contacts with south-eastern Drenthe and communities on either side of the Ems, the main waterway between Frisia and Westfalen. Westerwolde farmers would find markets along the Ems, perhaps rather to purchase than to deliver goods, but still. Breeding oxen or fattening up oxen as a possible export product deserve more attention.

We tried to sort out whether specific crops could have transcended subsistence farming. Admittedly, the differences between Westerwolde *sensu stricto* and its high medieval peat belt are not very significant, but dating the appearance of species is a problem. An exception could be made for hemp, possibly a market crop in the peat belt before the end of the late Middle Ages. An increase in palaeobotanical samples throughout Westerwolde is an absolute *desideratum*, as we judge crops to be a

clue to differentiate between self-sufficiency and market production. Meanwhile, from the archaeological record, we cannot dispel the notion that cultivation in Westerwolde *sensu stricto* thrived on subsistence farming. Although 19th-century written sources suggest that the Westerwolde farmer did not aspire to surplus production, this assumption needs further research.

Omnipresent regressive forces in late medieval Europe must have affected Westerwolde too, vulnerable as it was in a geographic sense with its narrow but stretched-out habitable area and low population density. Self-sufficiency did not allow the inhabitants to shut the door to a demographic decline in adjacent areas. Settlement contraction and even settlement desertion were detected in Westerwolde *sensu stricto* and obviously demand further study. Another subject of study should be the issue whether and when north and south Westerwolde differentiated, as the distance between Vriescheloo and Ter Apel still measures some 30 kms. In the more recent dialect, for example, differences persist. For these subjects particularly, a narrower time frame is expedient.

We recommend a further examination of the impact of migration, caused by land loss during the formation of the Dollard sea in the 14th-16th centuries. The

political effects are better examined than the effect on the availability of uncultivated land. In Westerwolde's peat belt, researchers have only just begun to differentiate primary colonization from secondary migratory effects during the formation of the Dollard. Above all, we want to know how migration worked out in the minds of the settled population, whether in the extant peat settlements or in 'old' Westerwolde. Examining the mindset of former societies belongs to the most difficult aspects of historical reconstruction.

We interpret the notion of backwardness as an external, mainly Oldambt opinion relative to the 19th-20th-century situation. In this context, the term more often means conservative than ignorant, whereas social deprivation is not an issue. The negative connotation does not include the settlements of Blijham, Vriescheloo and Bellingwolde. Surrounded by the thriving agricultural regions of Oldambt and the Veenkoloniën, 19th-century Westerwolde seems rather inclined to stick to its individual character, and to do so knowingly. As a matter of fact, we observe conservative elements in late medieval Westerwolde *sensu stricto*, notably in farming equipment and objects for daily use, such as kitchenware. The latter category should be analyzed in a wider geographical context, as the archaeological database is expanding rapidly. We left house construction out of the scope of this article, although anachronisms are present in roof constructions of early modern farmhouses. This specialism, demanding more study and understanding, goes beyond our knowledge.

The blend of a romantic approach and an agronomic release had its continued effect in the 20th century and actually never left the region. It even extended to the *Herinrichting Oost-Groningen* (reconstruction eastern Groningen), that ambitious reconstruction programme starting in the late 1970s and combining both incitements. The *Herinrichting* displays a struggle for balance between landscaping and scenery, but not at the cost of agriculture (Van der Veen 2012: 119-23). Looking back, we can see that 'authentic' in landscaping has lost out, because landscaping was understood as remodelling, unconsciously guided by romantic principles (Fig. 37). Meanwhile, the big loser has been the soil archive, more specifically the wetland component. 'Authentic', sadly, has conflicted with scenery, however much today's visitor may enjoy Westerwolde's biodiversity.

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