

# BESPRAK

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**Rolf H. Bremmer Jr., Stephen Laker and Oebele Vries (eds.), *Directions for Old Frisian Philology*.** Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik 73 / Estrikken 96 (Amsterdam / New York 2014). ISBN 978-90-420-3909-4. 593 pp.

Approximately every ten years, a vitamin shot is injected into Old Frisian studies in the form of a bulky edited volume with articles on the subject. The present volume is the fourth in that series, following *Aspects of Old Frisian Philology* (1990), *Approaches to Old Frisian Philology* (1998) and *Advances in Old Frisian Philology* (2007). Since the beginning, Rolf Bremmer and Oebele Vries have formed the stable core of the otherwise varying team of consecutive editors. It would be impossible to discuss all 21 chapters in this volume. Therefore, I will focus on the eight philologically orientated contributions.

The bulk of the chapters are devoted to historical linguistic aspects of Old Frisian. Mentioning their titles must suffice here: Kurt Goblirsch, 'Between Saxon, Franconian, and Danish: the obstruents of Frisian'; Colin Grant, 'Two Aspects of Nominal Style in the *Seventeen Statutes* and *Twenty-four Landlaws*'; Mirjam Marti Heinzle, 'Die schwachen Verben der dritten Klasse im Altfriesischen'; Jarich Hoekstra and Geart Tigchelaar 'kenna~kanna: the e/a-Variation in Old Frisian and Its Modern Frisian Reflexes'; Stephen Howe, 'Old Frisian Personal Pronouns: Morphology and Change'; Martin Joachim Kümmel, 'Zur Rekonstruktion der altinselnordfriesischen Phonologie'; Stephen Laker, 'The Downfall of Dental Fricatives: Frisian Perspectives on a Wider Germanic Trend'; Roland Schuhmann, 'Zur Endung runisch-altfriesisches *-u* und zur Entwicklung der Endung nom.sg.m. *a*-St. urgermanisches *\*-az*'; Laura Catharine Smith, 'Particle and Prefix Verbs: Insights from the History of Frisian and other West Germanic Languages'; Oscar Strik, 'Stability and Change in Strong Verb Inflection between Old and Early Modern Frisian'; Michiel de Vaan, 'Dutch *eiland* "island": inherited or borrowed?'; Arjen Versloot and Elzbieta Adamczyk, 'Corpus Size and Composition: Evidence from the Inflectional Morphology of Nouns in Old English and Old Frisian'.

Since the volume is arranged alphabetically, Oebele Vries's contribution is last in line. Turning the tables, I will address this article first here. Over the last decades, Vries has contributed consistently and immensely to the field of Old Frisian and semantic studies in particular.<sup>1</sup> More often than not, these studies combine the disciplines of semantics and history. In the present contribution, '*Thet is ac londriucht. Landrechte und Landrecht im mittelalterlichen Friesland*', Vries looks at the

1. See, for a recent compilation: O. Vries, *De taal van recht en vrijheid. Studies over middeleeuws Friesland*, A.T. Popkema, H. Nijdam en G. Jensma (eds.) (Gorredijk 2012).

central concept of ‘land law’ (OFris. *londriucht*, Gm. *Landrecht*) in the Old Frisian corpus. His starting point is the standard definition given by legal history: *Landrecht* / land law is a canonized collection of indigenous law, seen by a people as their law of the land. Often, these land laws were published and ratified.

Through a detailed and chronological analysis of the attestations in the Old Frisian text corpus, Vries determines that Old Frisian *londriucht* can mean both ‘a clause from Frisian traditional law (Rechtssatz)’ as well as ‘the totality of Frisian orally transmitted traditional law (Gesamtheit von mündlich tradierten Rechtssätzen)’. The formation of these totalities went hand in hand with the development of a written corpus of Frisian law. A good example of this phenomenon from the area West of the river Lauwers (present-day Friesland) is the incunabulum known as *Freeska Landriucht*, printed ca. 1485. This book contains 21 classical Old Frisian law texts. The first 15 of these were apparently considered to collectively constitute the (West) Frisian Land Law, since between texts 15 and 16 it says: *Hyr eyndighet dat Landriucht der Fresena ende alhyrnei folged Keiser Rodulphus boeck* ‘Here ends the Land law of the Frisians and after this comes the Book of Emperor Rudolf’. The contribution also contains some valuable insights into what the medieval Frisians themselves considered *londriucht* and what its relationship to Roman and Canon law was.

Next, there is Patrizia Lendinara’s contribution on what could now be called the ‘younger’ Old Frisian psalter glosses, dated c. 1200, since very recently some older fragments have come to light, dated to the first quarter of the 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> Due to the fact that these fragments consist of four pieces of parchment, which can be reconstructed to two strips of one page of a manuscript, this new text contains only eight words in Frisian. However, these are real interlinear glosses, placed beneath the Latin text of psalm 7.3. The Latin text has been dated to the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, slightly older than the Old Frisian glosses.

Lendinara’s article thus gains even more depth, since her analysis of the glosses in manuscript fragment Groningen UB 404 (the “younger” psalm glosses) can now also be compared to the new find. The Groningen glosses have already been studied extensively and Lendinara makes explicit use of these earlier studies, especially of the edition by Erika Langbroek.<sup>3</sup> Lendinara firmly puts the Old Frisian Psalter glosses into a comparative perspective and gives an outline of the Old English, Old Dutch and Old Saxon traditions. This context is very helpful to ascertain the value of the Old Frisian evidence in this respect. I will mention two

2. Erika Langbroek, in collaboration with Francis Brands, ‘So viel geschrieben, so wenig geblieben. Eine neue Entdeckung: unbekannte altfriesische Psalmglossen’, *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 74 (2015), 135-146.

3. E. Langbroek, ‘Condensa atque Tenebrosa; die altfriesischen Psalmen: Neulesung und Rekonstruktion (UB Groningen Hs 404)’, in: R.H. Bremmer, G. van der Meer and O. Vries (eds.), *Aspects of Old Frisian Philology*. *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 31–32 (Amsterdam and Groningen 1990), 255–284.

aspects: first, Lendinara concludes that the Old Frisian tradition was not influenced by other existing gloss traditions, as has been suggested in the past. Secondly, she points out that the Old Frisian glosses show that the Frisians already had a firmly established legal tradition around 1200, since a few of the gloss words come from what Lendinara calls the 'juridical lexicon'. Lendinara leaves open whether this refers to an oral or a written tradition. All in all, this is a very interesting contribution to the psalter glosses.

Concetta Giliberto, a colleague of Patrizia Lendinara at the University of Palermo, also tackles a particular Old Frisian genre and puts this in a wider medieval European perspective. In her case, it is the genre of otherworldly literature, as can be glimpsed from the Old Frisian poem *Thet Freske Riim*, a late medieval, spun-out take on how the Frisians won their freedom. Through a detailed analysis of the passage dealing with visions of heaven and hell, Giliberto is able to show that certain elements in this text have parallels in otherworldly literature from other parts of Europe, such as the well known *Visio Pauli*, but that there are also images that are exclusively Frisian. One example is the depiction of a solitary tree standing in hell beside which four demons sit in silence, striking the damned hanging from their limbs. Giliberto's analysis once again shows that Frisia took part in many intellectual traditions in medieval Europe. We are now mostly unaware of this because of the enormous lack of medieval source material, largely brought about by the complete destruction of almost all libraries and archives of the Frisian monasteries during the Reformation in the 1580's. This is underlined by the fact that the only remaining copy of *Thet Freske Riim* is a manuscript written by the seventeenth-century state historian Simon Abbes Gabbema (1628-1688).

The contributions by Kees Dekker and Henk Meijering are both fine examples of methodological exercises. Kees Dekker shows that the Frisian reflexes of Latin *catena* 'chain' are not old. The term occurs in only one or two texts, most notably in *Haet is riocht* 'What is law?', a text which partly goes back to a Latin original. Thus an *ad hoc* translation OFris. *kathene* arose. In the younger incunable *Freeska Landriucht*, the form *kathene* is replaced by *kede*, which Dekker shows must have been borrowed from Low German *kede* 'which may quite possibly have originated as Southern German *cadina* from Latin *cadena* and travelled north in the area east of the Rhineland'.<sup>4</sup> Dekker concludes his article with some wise words any philologist should take to heart: 'Textual and historical evidence, as well as the development of the semantic field in which a lexeme participates, are equally important – and in many cases indispensable – for the investigation of loan words'.

Equally thorough in its methodological setup is Meijering's contribution, dealing with the question whether or not later copies of Old Frisian charters can be used for linguistic analysis. Meijering makes a case for incorporating copies or drafts of original charters in historical linguistic studies. Because of a strong emphasis on originals in Old Frisian linguistic studies, these are now largely

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4. Dekker, 'Latin Chains and Frisian Bondage', 65.

overlooked. One of the interesting cases is a charter from 1453 concerning an annual market in Oostergo. There are two originals, which are both printed in the classic edition of Old Frisian charters by Pieter Sipma, but there are also a number of medieval copies that contain interesting linguistic features. Each copy has its own story and deserves to be looked at.

The last three contributions concern the Old Frisian law texts and law manuscripts. The question of their respective age is brought forward several times. First, there are Johanneke Sytsema's observations on Codex Unia: the most archaic of the Old West Frisian law manuscripts, lost since the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century but copied by Franciscus Junius, probably somewhere between 1668 and 1674. In 2012, Sytsema made a diplomatic digital edition of Codex Unia, as part of a project initiated by the Fryske Akademy.<sup>5</sup> This article could be viewed as an extended version of the introduction she wrote for that digital edition, providing the reader with additional information on various aspects of both Codex Unia and the copy Franciscus Junius made. Because Junius did not copy the texts in Codex Unia in the same order he found them, reconstructing the original Codex Unia turns out to be a challenge.

Anne Popkema takes the age-old discussion on the primacy of Old Frisian in the law texts one step further. Were the Old Frisian law texts composed in Frisian right from the start or have they been translated in the vernacular from Latin (now lost) originals? The case seemed closed some decades ago, but Rolf Bremmer brought the topic back to life in 2004 in his book on the coming of literacy to the Frisians, *Hir is eskriven*.<sup>6</sup> Popkema now tries to put matters in a wider perspective, both in terms of looking at the entire Old Frisian tradition until ca. 1400 and making some European comparisons. He comes to the conclusion that Old Frisian was the legal language in principle for law texts in a setting of domestic use. Foreign contacts may have lead to a Latin translation of those texts, as has been attested e.g. for the Latin versions of the *Seventeen Statutes*, the *Twenty-four Land Laws* and the *General Compensation Tariff* in the 13<sup>th</sup>-century Hunsingo manuscripts. Popkema further points to the fact that some early 14<sup>th</sup>-century texts, such as the *Statutes of the Opstalsbam*, seem to have been written in Latin primarily, which might have been caused by Frisian slowly being replaced by Low German in the area east of the river Lauwers during this period. This might have been the reason to prefer Latin. This suggestion certainly deserves more consideration. All in all, this is a valuable contribution to the discussion.

Finally, Rolf Bremmer takes the discussion on the primacy of Latin he reignited in *Hir is eskriven* one step further. The discussions concerning the primacy of the

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5. A more accurate rendering of the outline of this project would have been fortunate: compare footnote 9 in Sytsema's contribution with the online edition at <http://tdb.fryskeakademy.eu/tdb/index-unia-en.html>.

6. R.H. Bremmer, *Hir is eskriven. Lezen en schrijven in de Friese landen rond 1300* (Hilversum 2004).

vernacular in the Old Frisian law texts and the traces of orality that can be detected in them can both be traced back to the first Romantic scholars who discovered the Germanic heritage in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. After World War II, a long period of Germano-scepticism followed, which lasted roughly until the late 1990's. It is too much to say that we have come full circle, but it is interesting to see that discussing the orality in Germanic vernacular traditions is 'salonfähig' again. I think this is especially true for such a small discipline as Old Frisian studies, where progress tends to go slower.

One of Bremmer's great strengths over the years has been to detect a viable line of research in other fields and apply this to Old Frisian. This usually pays off, as in this case. Inspired by studies on the orality of Scandinavian and Welsh law by Stefan Brink and Huw Pryce respectively, Bremmer sets about applying the nine characteristics of orality described by Walter Ong in his 1982 classic study on orality. As was to be expected, he has no trouble finding these characteristics in Old Frisian texts, proving that in medieval Friesland 'a situation arose in which orality and literacy interacted, allowing for a gradual transition from the one phase to the other'.<sup>7</sup> The contribution – the largest in the volume – contains many examples and offers many insights into Frisian oral culture. Bremmer concludes that 'the Old Frisian written laws offer a far richer field for exploring vestiges of the oral traditions in which they were rooted than critics have realized'.<sup>8</sup> Of course, it would be oversimplifying matters to say that Grimm and his generation were roughly right all along and that the postwar 'hangover' caused scholars to question everything that even remotely reeked after being 'Germanic'. It is nice to see that we have finally passed this phase and can now again enjoy the beautiful Old Frisian law tradition for what it is, having gained more insight in the process. There is much more to explore, as Bremmer puts it.

In all, it is almost impossible to say something conclusive about an immense project such as the present volume. Verging on a total of 600 pages, this volume is almost too much. The historical linguistic contributions alone would have constituted a fair volume. Old Frisian historical linguistics can be studied relatively easily and be incorporated into the wider international study of Germanic and Indo-European historical linguistics, as the contributions by various international scholars in this volume attest to.

Old Frisian philology is another matter. I think that it is telling that there are fewer contributions on this topic in this volume and that by and large they have been written by specialists in Old Frisian studies. It would seem to me that Old Frisian studies deserve a separate volume on medieval Frisian (legal) culture. And especially there, a more thematic approach could take our insights into various aspects of this culture a number of steps further. This discipline needs some serious effort to be brought up to date. This wish would have been much more unrealistic,

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7. Bremmer, 'The orality of Old Frisian Law Texts', 4.

8. Ibidem, 39.

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though, had it not been for Bremmer, Vries and their team editing this volume and the three preceding ones, so Old Frisian scholars owe them thanks for all their sturdy efforts over these past years.

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