

# An Introduction to Old Frisian



# **An Introduction to Old Frisian**

History, Grammar, Reader,  
Glossary

Rolf H. Bremmer, Jr.  
University of Leiden

John Benjamins Publishing Company  
Amsterdam / Philadelphia



The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences — Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bremmer, Rolf H. (Rolf Hendrik), 1950-

An introduction to Old Frisian : history, grammar, reader, glossary / Rolf H. Bremmer, Jr.  
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Frisian language--To 1500--Grammar. 2. Frisian language--To 1500--History. 3. Frisian language--To 1550--Texts. I. Title.

PF1421.B74 2009

439'.2--dc22

2008045390

ISBN 978 90 272 3255 7 (Hb; alk. paper) / ISBN 978 90 272 3256 4 (Pb; alk. paper)

ISBN 978 90 272 9004 5 (Eb)

© 2009 – John Benjamins B.V.

Reprinted with corrections, 2011.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, by print, photoprint, microfilm, or any other means, without written permission from the publisher.

John Benjamins Publishing Co. · P.O. Box 36224 · 1020 ME Amsterdam · The Netherlands

John Benjamins North America · P.O. Box 27519 · Philadelphia PA 19118-0519 · USA

# Table of contents

## Preface

ix

## CHAPTER I

### History: The when, where and what of Old Frisian

1

The Frisians. A short history (§§1–8); Texts and manuscripts (§§9–14); Language (§§15–18); The scope of Old Frisian studies (§§19–21)

## CHAPTER II

### Phonology: The sounds of Old Frisian

21

- A. *Introductory remarks* (§§22–27): Spelling and pronunciation (§§22–23); Axioms and method (§§24–25); West Germanic vowel inventory (§26); A common West Germanic sound-change: gemination (§27)
- B. *Ingvaemonic/North Sea Germanic sound-changes* (§§28–35): (1) Nasalization and rounding of long and short *a* before nasals (§§28–29); (2) Loss of nasal before voiceless fricative plus compensatory lengthening (§§30–32); (3) Fronting of WGmc *ā* (§§33–35)
- C. *Proto-Frisian sound-changes* (§§36–71): (4) Development of the West Germanic diphthongs *\*au*, *\*ai* and *\*eu* (§§36–38); (5) Fronting of WGmc *\*a* > PFrisc *\*æ* (§§39–41); (6) Palatalization and assibilation of velar plosives (§§42–44); (7) *I*-mutation (§§ 45–47); (8) Breaking (§§48–50); (9) Labio-velar mutation (§§51–53); (10) Loss of intervocalic *-h-* and contraction (§§54–57); (11) Loss of unstressed prefix *\*ga-/\*gi-* (§§58–59); (12–13) Grimm's Law and Verner's Law (§§60–64); (14) Metathesis of *r* (§§65–67); (15) Loss of final *-n* (§§68–70); End of Proto-Frisian changes (§71)
- D. *Overview of the origin of Old Frisian phonemes* (§§72–78): Short vowels (§§72–73); Long vowels and diphthongs (§§74–76); Consonants (§§77–78)

## CHAPTER III

**Morphology: The inflections of Old Frisian**

53

Word-classes, case and number, gender, verbs (§§79–82)

- A. *Pronouns*: Definite article and demonstrative pronouns (§§83–86); Personal pronouns (§§87–91); Possessive pronouns (§92); Interrogative pronouns (§§93–94); Relative pronouns (§95); Indefinite and impersonal pronouns (§96)
- B. *Nouns*: Classification (§§97–98); Weak nouns (§99); Strong nouns: masculine (§§100–102), neuter (§§103–104), feminine (§§105–07); the *i*-declension (§108); the *u*-declension (§109); Minor declensions (athematic and other) (§§110–113)
- C. *Adjectives*: Declination (§114); Strong declension (§115); Weak declension (§116); Comparison of adjectives (§§117–118); Irregular degrees of comparison (§§119–20); Comparison of adverbs (§121)
- D. *Numerals*: Inflection (§§122–123); Cardinals and ordinals (§124); Miscellaneous numerals (§125)
- E. *Verbs*: Types and features (§§126–127); Strong verbs (§§128–130); Class I (§131); Class II (§132); Class III (§133); Class IV (§134); Class V (§135); Class VI (§136); Class VII (§137); Weak verbs, two classes (§138); Class 1 (§139–140); Class 2 (§141); Preterite-present verbs (§§142–148); Anomalous verbs (§149)
- F. *Summary and Paradigms*: Verbal inflections: infinitives (§150); Various inflections (§151); Strong verbs (§152); Weak verbs: Class 1 and ‘to have’ (§153); Class 2 (§154); General remarks (§155)

## CHAPTER IV

**Lexicology: Word formation and loan words in Old Frisian**

87

- A. *Word formation and affixation* (§§156–157): Nouns: Agentive suffixes (§158); Abstract suffixes (§159); Concrete suffixes (§160); Adjectival suffixes (§161); Adverbial suffixes (§162); Prefixes (§163); Linking morphemes (§164)
- B. Compounding (§§165–168)
- C. *Loan words* (§169): Celtic (§170); Latin (§§171–173); Continental languages (§174); Loan translations (§175)

## CHAPTER V

**Syntax: The sentence elements of Old Frisian** 97

- A. *Concord* (§§176–77)
- B. *Cases* (§178): nominative (§179); accusative (§180); genitive (§181); dative (§182); prepositions and their cases (§183)
- C. *Verbs: Mood* (§184): indicative (§185); subjunctive (§186); imperative (§187); infinitive (§188); Tense (§189): simple present (§190); simple preterite (§191); compound tenses (§192–195); Voice (§196)
- D. *Word Order* (§§197–198)
- E. *Various Constructions* (§199–203)

## CHAPTER VI

**Dialectology: The faces of Old Frisian** 109

- Diversity and uniformity* (§204); Old Weser Frisian (§205); Old Ems Frisian (§206); Old West Frisian (§207–211); Word-geography (§212); Methodology (§213)

## CHAPTER VII

**Two Long-standing problems: The periodization of Frisian and the Anglo-Frisian complex** 119

- A. How ‘Old’ is Old Frisian? (§§214–219)
- B. The Anglo-Frisian Complex (§§220–225)

**Reader** 129

**Glossary** 187

**Glossary of names** 220

**Bibliography** 221

**Index of forms in chapters on grammar** 229



## Preface

The aim of this book is given in the title: it claims to be an introduction to Old Frisian. The need for such a book has long been due, especially one that is written in English since the last introduction to Old Frisian in that language appeared in the late nineteenth century. It is true, Thomas Markey's *Frisian* (1981), a general survey of the language with much attention for the medieval period, is still available, but it lacks, for example, texts and a glossary. All other introductory books on Old Frisian are in German. Bo Sjölin's concise survey *Einführung in das Friesische* (1969), which devotes a considerable part of its contents to Old Frisian, offers neither texts nor glossary and is out of print. Likewise out of print is Paolo Ramat's *Das Friesische. Eine sprachliche und kulturgeschichtliche Einführung* (1976), which is particularly helpful for the historical and linguistic background. Ramat also offers a few small texts with grammatical comments, but his book lacks a grammar and glossary. Finally, Walter Steller's *Abriß der altfriesischen Grammatik* (1928) is the only book that is to some extent comparable in outline to the present one, but again has been long out of print.

The reason for writing *An Introduction to Old Frisian* is clear: Old Frisian is an independent, if small, branch of Germanic. In this language has been preserved a relatively large and interesting corpus of legal texts of mainly Germanic customary law. In addition, a scattering of specimens of other genres has survived which helps fill in our knowledge of the cultural interest of the literate medieval Frisians. The Old Frisian language has especially been studied for its linguistic importance: its vocabulary is often archaic in comparison to that of the contemporary neighbouring languages, its phonology and morphology frequently present problems of relative chronology and reordering, problems which also regard the position of Old Frisian within the West Germanic context, especially its close relation to English. Moreover, from a socio-linguistic point of view, it is fascinating to see how the language (with greater or lesser success) tried to cope with the pressure exercised on its speakers and writers by Low German from the east and south, and by Dutch from the west.

The book has been arranged in such a way as to afford students who first come to the language sufficient information for reading the texts on their own and for gaining an adequate insight into the variety of text genres and shapes of Old Frisian. Having completed this book, the road is open to further independent reading and study. The grammatical chapters are intended first of all to supply the necessary knowledge for

reading the texts. Moreover, an effort has been made to supply material that will be of use to the advanced student who is interested in the earliest period of the Frisian language and/or in comparative Germanic linguistics. This material usually appears in small print. Serving two masters is a dangerous endeavour: some may think that what is being offered here is too much, while others would have wished for more.

The structure of the book is as follows: a general historical introduction provides the necessary background information on the history of the medieval Frisians, their language, their literature and the relevance of Old Frisian studies (Chapter I). Chapter II begins with an outline of the most important Old Frisian sounds, and is followed by those sound changes which have given Old Frisian its individual shape from West Germanic to c.1200, the time from which the earliest manuscripts survive. Chapter III surveys the inflectional and conjugational system of Old Frisian. It is perhaps wisest for those who want to proceed to reading the texts quickly to begin with this chapter: §§83–85; §§87–93; §95; §§99–100; §§103–105; §§138–141; §§115–117; §§152–154. Cross-references in Chapter III to relevant sound changes explained in Chapter II will help to understand seemingly disturbing deviations from the ‘normal’ patterns. From here on, the student may proceed to the discussion of the strong and weak verbs, and so on. Chapter IV provides an insight into the various aspects of the Old Frisian vocabulary, while Chapter V presents those syntactic features of the language that are helpful in reading the texts. Chapter VI presents an overview of the most important dialectal features of Old Frisian. Chapter VII, finally, discusses two problems that have moved many pens: the periodization of Old Frisian and the relation between (Old) English and (Old) Frisian. The texts in the Reader are given in an ascending degree of difficulty. It has been my aim to provide texts from a wide variety of manuscripts and an equal variety in subject matter. For didactic purposes the language of the first texts has been regularized somewhat in order to speed up familiarization. The explanatory notes provide comments on language and contents. All forms occurring in the Reader have been included in the glossary, but no references have been made there to the specific texts in which they occur, for reasons of space. The bibliography, finally, speaks for itself. However, students who have become still more curious should consult my *A Bibliographical Guide to Old Frisian*, which offers a full analytical bibliography of Old Frisian studies up to 1992. For surveys and concise discussions of various important topics relating to Old Frisian, I have regularly referred to the encyclopaedic compendium by Horst H. Munske (ed.), *Handbuch des Friesischen/Handbook of Frisian Studies* (2001), with contributions in both German and English. *Altfriesisches Handwörterbuch*, the new concise dictionary of Old Frisian by Hofmann and Popkema (forthcoming 2008) will also prove to be of great profit to the discipline in comparison to Hofmann’s make-shift revision of Holthausen (1925/1984).

An advantage of having written this *Introduction* is that it has given me the opportunity to look afresh at language and literature alike. Therefore, what is presented

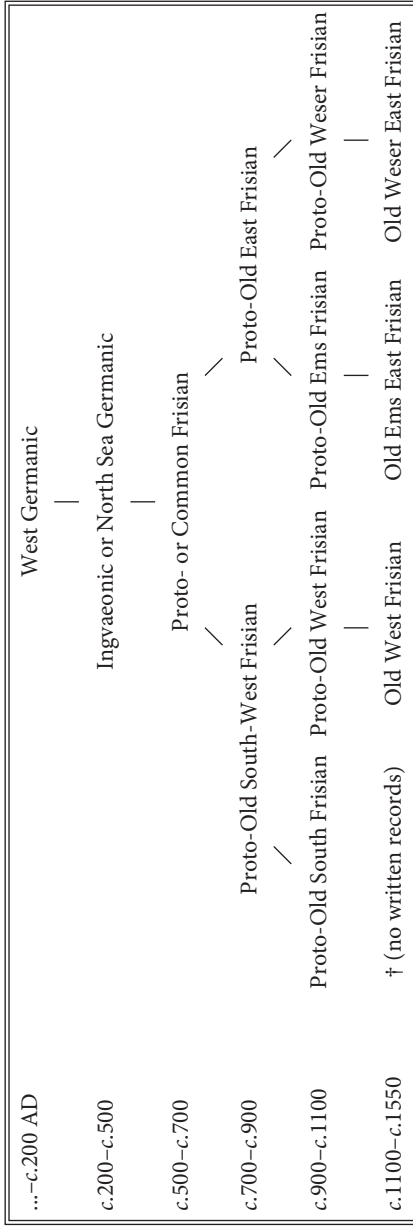
in this book is not merely a rehash of existing grammars and readers, but a digest of recent developments and interests. I believe that the book offers many new insights and data which will help the student to appreciate the intrinsic value of the Old Frisian language and literature.

I am greatly indebted to Patrick Stiles, who not only encouraged me, some fifteen years ago, to write this book, and indeed has helped me to conceptualize it, but who has also contributed substantially to Chapter II (Phonology) and commented on an almost final version of it. A first draft of the book was used at Harvard University when, as the Erasmus Lecturer in the History and Culture of the Netherlands, I was invited to teach a graduate course on Old Frisian during the Spring Semester of 1994. I would like to thank the participants in this course, in particular Joseph Harris, Daniel Donoghue, Charles Reiss and Jeff Bourns. Revised and enlarged versions have since then been used for Old Frisian courses taught by Philippus Breuker (Leiden), Michiel de Vaan (Leiden), Jarich Hoekstra (Kiel), Anne Popkema (Kiel), Han Nijdam (Amsterdam) and Oebele Vries (Groningen). Their suggestions for improvement have been gratefully included into the present version. My gratitude for advise, comments and help in various matters are also due to Dirk Boutkan (+), Kees Dekker, Daniel O'Donnell, Tette Hofstra, Tom Johnston, Stephen Laker, Henk Meijering, Martina Noteboom, Arjen Versloot, two referees, and, of course, the students of Old Frisian courses whom I have taught myself. I owe a special word of gratitude to Karling Rottschäfer who has obliged me with many points for improvement. It is needless to say that I myself remain responsible for the contents of the final product. The material side of the production was in the able hands of Kees Vaes and Pieter Lamers of John Benjamins Publishing Company.

The present book differs in outline and presentation from all its predecessors. Those familiar with Old English textbooks will detect similarities with such well-known primers and readers as *Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Primer* and *Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Reader*, Albert H. Marckwardt and James L. Rosier's, *Old English Language and Literature*, Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson's *Introduction to Old English*, Peter Baker's *Introduction to Old English* and Randolph Quirk and C. L. Wrenn's *An Old English Grammar*. Such similarities are not incidental, but stem from my long-time teaching experience with these books. Their inspiration is also gratefully acknowledged here.

#### Note to the reprint

This reprint has given me the opportunity to make a number of minor typographical corrections and some small stylistic improvements. I am particularly grateful to Tom Johnston, Patrick Stiles and Oebele Vries for their helpful suggestions.



**Table 1.** Periodization of Frisian from West Germanic down to its various branches of Old Frisian (adapted from Århammar 1995: 71). Years are by approximation. Proto-Old South Frisian represents the unrecorded languages as spoken in Holland between the Maas and the Vlie. Not in this table is North Frisian. Island North Frisian developed from Proto- or Common Frisian due to emigration of groups of Frisians before 800 AD, while Mainland North Frisian developed from Proto-Old Ems Frisian, as the result of emigration of groups of Ems Frisian around 1000–1100 AD. No written evidence survives of the Old East Frisian branches after c.1450.

## Chapter I

# History

## The when, where and what of Old Frisian

### The Frisians. A short history

§1 Today, the Frisian language is used in certain areas along the North Sea coast. To be precise, in the Netherlands: in the province of Fryslân/Friesland (c.400,000 speakers, about 75% of its inhabitants). In Germany: in Saterland, immediately south of the present district of Ostfriesland, Niedersachsen (c.2,000 speakers), and in the districts of Nordfriesland (c.10,000 speakers) and of Pinneberg (Heligoland, c.300 speakers), both in Schleswig-Holstein. In both countries, the language has a limited status. In the Netherlands, nevertheless, Frisian is recognized by law as an official language beside Dutch. As a spoken language, it enjoys a relatively healthy existence, owing to a fair-sized number of speakers (comparable e.g., to the number of speakers of Icelandic). As a written medium for all domains of the language, however, its position is weak, threatened as it is by Dutch. For the varieties of Frisian spoken in Germany, the situation is much worse. The fact that it is the language there of mainly agrarian communities which lack the support of a sizeable, well-educated group of speakers and writers has brought about that, sociolinguistically speaking, Frisian functions on the level of a dialect.

§2 The distribution of varieties of Frisian today reflects the outcome of a long historical process. When the Frisians enter history through the works of Roman and Greek authors (notably Tacitus, *Germania*, *Annales* and *Historiae*; Ptolomy, *Geographia*), they appear to live north of the Rhine estuary, up to the River Ems. It was a region just outside the Roman Empire, but the Romans made their influence felt. A number of times the Frisians were forced to pay tribute as subfederates, and, more than once, they rebelled against these attempts to subject them to Roman rule. On the other hand, Frisians served as mercenaries in the Roman legions, witness, e.g., their tribal name on votive stones found in Britain. Archaeological finds from the *terpen* (artificial mounds built to protect the inhabitants from flooding) make clear that trade was intensive between the Frisians and the Romans throughout this period. Whether the Frisians already were a Germanic tribe at the time is a moot point. It has been suggested on account of onomastic indications that they spoke a non-Celtic and non-Germanic, but nonetheless Indo-European dialect, and were only Germanized gradually in the early centuries of the Christian era. However this may be, like English, Dutch and German (High and Low), Frisian is a branch of West Germanic.

§3 With the retreat of the Roman legions from the Low Countries in the early fifth century, documentary information on the Frisians discontinues for more than two centuries. When they reappear in historical sources, they seem to have extended their territory considerably, occupying or dominating the entire coastal districts from the Sinfal, a bay on the south bank of the Scheldt estuary (near Bruges) to the Weser estuary in the north. They were ruled by kings ('war lords'), and their economy was based on cattle-breeding and seafaring. The North Sea being sometimes called the 'Frisian Sea' (*Mare Frisicum*) by contemporary (non-Frisian) sources testifies to their importance as a maritime tribe. In the late seventh century, the Franks began to extend their territory towards the north and first conquered the coastal area between the Scheldt and the Rhine. It was in this part (*Frisia Citerior*) that Willibrord started preaching the Gospel in 690. Both Frankish and missionary activities were temporarily brought to a stand-still during the reign of King Redbad (d. 719), but were renewed soon afterwards. This resulted in Charles Martel ('The Hammer') defeating the Frisians in 734 and establishing Frankish rule as far as the Lauwers. Christianization was also resumed by, amongst others, Boniface (martyred at Dokkum in 754), Liudger and Willehad. The subjugation of the Frisians to the Franks was completed by Charlemagne as a result of his punitive campaign against the combined Frisian-Saxon uprising under the Saxon Widukind. From the reign of Charlemagne dates the earliest Frisian legal codification, the so-called *Lex Frisionum*, drafted in Latin shortly before 800. This (draft) capitulary divides the Frisian territory into three regions: from the Sinfal (in the Scheldt estuary) to the Vlie (today a passage to the North Sea between the islands of Vlieland and Terschelling), from the Vlie to the Lauwers, and from the Lauwers to the lower reaches of the Weser. Of these three, the second region is the Frisian heartland. The late ninth and early tenth centuries saw recurrent Viking invasions in the Frisian lands. The Franco-Frisian port of Dorestad was sacked and plundered several times, and Viking leaders even were allowed by Frankish emperors to rule parts of Frisia, notably in the Rhine and Weser estuaries on the condition that they defended these areas against other Viking invaders. However, the Scandinavian presence never developed into something similar to the Danelaw or Normandy.

The loss of the Frisians' political independence prevented the development of an administrative centre in Frisia which might have provided a fertile ground for literary products. Also, as their conversion had been orchestrated from three different centres, the Frisian territory became divided ecclesiastically among the bishops of Utrecht, Münster and Bremen. These two facts – loss of independence as well as the absence of important secular and religious cultural centres within the Frisian territories itself – will have frustrated the development of a multi-faceted vernacular literature.

§4 With the division of the Carolingian empire at the Treaty of Verdun (843), Frisia was allotted in its entirety to Lotharinga (the Middle Empire), but the Lotharingian

kings gradually lost their grip on the region. After the Treaty of Meerssen (870), Frisia was allotted first to West Francia but soon afterwards to East Francia. Owing to the fact they had switched quite frequently between the various Frankish kingdoms within a fairly short period of time, the Frisians succeeded in regaining some degree of independence within the Holy Roman Empire. Their natural habitat was to their advantage in this effort, secluded as it was from the inland regions by extensive marshes and peat-moors. To all intents and purposes, theirs was the only region within the Frankish sphere of influence to have escaped the full implications of the feudal system. Frisia between the Vlie and the Ems during the eleventh century owed allegiance to the counts of the (Saxon) Brunonian house, while in the twelfth century Frisia west of the Lauwers was nominally ruled by the counts of Holland. With decreasing success, both countships tried to maintain their authority over the Frisian lands (*terrae*). For some time, too, Frisia west of the Lauwers was jointly ruled by the counts of Holland and the bishops of Utrecht, the so-called Condominium (1165–1256). By the close of the thirteenth century, the counts of Holland had conquered Frisia west of the Vlie, a conquest begun around 1100. The clearest textual witness to the supremacy of the count of Holland over Frisia between the Vlie and the Lauwers is presented by the opening section of the *Skeltanaricht*, which describes in detail on what conditions the count should come to Frisia on his yearly itinerary. In East Frisian texts, the *greva*, or ‘count’, never figures as a political reality in the administration of the lands east of the Lauwers. In 1345, Count William IV of Holland was defeated and killed at the Battle of Staveren (frequently referred to as the Battle of Warns) in a dramatic attempt to reestablish his power in Frisia west of the Lauwers. East of the Lauwers, the political picture after 1100 is less clear, but they were mainly Saxon counts who tried to establish their rule in the East Frisian regions, if in vain. Hence, the Saxons often appear in Old East Frisian texts as the arch-enemies of the Frisians.

§5 After the turn of the millennium, the construction of dikes and the reclamation of land from sea gradually made the earlier way of living on *terpen* redundant because the population became less dependent on the tides of the sea. Moreover, the inland marshes and moors were being artificially drained and developed into arable land. These new water engineering techniques required a high degree of social and political organization. In the course of the twelfth century, the structure of power in the Frisian lands became based on a loose federacy or league of the so-called Seven Sealands. Its members convened annually at the *Upstalsbam* (Du. *Opstalsboom*), a natural elevation in the landscape and traditionally the place of general meetings in Brokmerland, not far from present-day Aurich. There is little evidence of the league having produced legal documents before 1300. The *Superior Statutes* (*‘Urkerá’*) could be one such document (see §13, no. 6). The league was given a renewed and more formal shape by the *Statutes of the Upstalsbam* (1323), drafted in Latin. The renewed federacy, however,

was short-lived. Significantly, there is no sign of these statutes having been translated into Old East Frisian. The Old West Frisian versions suggest that more importance was attached to these statutes there than in the East Frisian lands. Much more than sharing the same language, or partaking in the same political union, the Frisians distinguished themselves from neighbouring tribes by a shared legal tradition.

Frisian society in the High Middle Ages was socially stratified into three estates: *bellatores*, *oratores* and *laboratores*. However, unlike in much of Europe, the Frisian aristocracy was not made up of a feudal nobility, but consisted both of allodial landowners (called *nobiles*, *potentes* or *divites* in contemporary Latin sources and *ethela* or *rika* in Old Frisian) who lived off the income of their landed properties and of freeholding peasants who farmed their own, hereditary lands (called *einervad* lit. 'own inherited', so not in lease or in feudal tenure). Both groups considered themselves not subject to any feudal overlord but owing allegiance only to the king (i.e., the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire). Hence they called themselves 'Free Frisians' implying that they were exempt from feudal obligations. They administered the Frisian lands according to a communal system that was inspired by that of the emerging cities outside Frisia. Instead of a single ruler exercising authority, judicial decisions were taken at periodical meetings (called *thing* or *werf*) in which each free man had a vote. Judges were chosen from among their ranks and rotated annually. The absence of a monopoly of power, where it continued until the end of the Middle Ages (see §6), implied a continuation of the early medieval vengeance culture. When all attempts at reaching a reconciliation in court had failed, vendetta remained the only option to regain injured honour for a party. This situation explains the abundance of regulations concerning the organization of feuding expeditions and the long lists of compensations for physical and immaterial injuries (on the latter, cf. Bremmer 1998) in relation to a person's *wergeld* ('man compensation'), i.e., the value of someone's life expressed in money in relation to his position in society (e.g., Text VII).

The church in Frisia, too, had its own legal courts (*sineth* or *send* 'synod') in which especially matters of immoral conduct, such as adultery, abortion, neglect of Sunday observance, sacrilege or offences against clergymen were judged. The church was the channel through which a new stream of rules and decrees ('canons') joined the native tradition. In absence of the bishop, the *send* was presided by the dean, who, west of the Lauwers, had to be 'free and Frisian', fully consecrated and the son of a layman born in wedlock. East of the Lauwers – and this was unique – the dean (or 'provost' as he was called) was a layman and his office was often passed down from father to son. Again unique was the right of laymen to found a church on their land without first asking the bishop's permission, as long as they donated sufficient land to maintain a priest and a church. From 1150 onwards, members of the Frisian elite also actively participated in the founding of monasteries.

Finally, to the third estate belonged the half-free (*letar*) and unfree (*unein*), leaseholders (*hereman*), farmhands (*heine*, PL), maids *to ku and querna* 'for cow and quern',

skippers, pedlars and, towards the end of the Middle Ages, most inhabitants of the emerging towns. For all of the three estates, then, we find legal provisions in proportion to the importance credited to them.

§6 Some noble families, however, gradually extended their influence and assumed the title of *haudling* (*capitanus*, *-eus* ‘captain’ or ‘chieftain’). In the fifteenth century, the Cirksena dynasty consolidated their power in the lands between the Ems and the western border of the Bremen diocese and in 1464 Ulrik Cirkesena was created the hereditary count of East Frisia. With the by then Low German-speaking port of Emden as their capital, the Frisian language was abandoned there in administrative matters in favour of Low German. As a consequence, the Frisian laws were translated into Low German and partly maintained their force in that region in an adapted form until the introduction of the Napoleonic code in 1809.

Rüstringen, Astringen and Wangerland ceded their communal rights to the *haudling* Edo Wiemken and his descendants, while the last of this line, Maria of Jever, bequeathed her rights to the (Saxon) Counts of Oldenburg in 1575.

From about 1400 onwards, the Low German speaking Hanseatic city of Groningen extended its economic sphere of influence to the Frisian lands surrounding it (the ‘Ommelanden’), between the Lauwers and the Ems. Their lack of any central political body worked against the highly individual Frisian lands, so that Groningen also imposed its political will through a policy of ‘divide and rule’ at the expense of the Frisian independence. As a result, the Frisian language ceased to be used for any kind of writing in the Ommelanden by the middle of the fifteenth century. Translated into Low German, the ancient laws remained in force in this region until c.1600 (Johnston 2001b).

§7 West of the Lauwers, internal strife amongst the Frisians likewise led to political disintegration. From the early fifteenth century onwards, a decades long and violent struggle between two factions resulted in virtual anarchy. Often, these factions – known as *Skier* ‘Grey’ and *Fet* ‘Fat’; the former, according to tradition, grouped around the Cistercian monasteries whose monks wore grey habits, the latter around influential chieftains who prided themselves in their ‘fat’ cattle – asked non-Frisian powers, such as the city of Groningen, to support their position. Eventually, in 1498, Duke Albrecht of Saxony was invoked to establish order. As a result, the last of the Frisian lands lost its independence. In 1504, the traditional laws, which had already largely given way to Roman and canon law, were declared invalid and replaced by Saxon regulations. In a fairly short time, Frisian as the administrative language was replaced by Dutch mixed with Low German, first by the Saxon Chancery language, because the Duke of Saxony appointed administrators from Dresden to manage his affairs in Leeuwarden. After the Habsburg ruler Charles V had acquired both Frisia west of the Lauwers and the city of Groningen with its Ommelanden (as well as the rest of the Low Countries)

around 1525, the administrative language became a southernly coloured Dutch, as from then on (until the revolt of 1568) the central government of the Low Countries resided in Brussels.

§8 The fate of the North Frisians was somewhat different. What is North Frisia now had not yet been inhabited by Frisians in the Roman period, but was colonized by them later in two successive waves. Frisians traders and farmers first settled the islands of Heligoland, Sylt, Föhr and Amrum and some other ones that have since been swallowed by the sea, probably following the trade route to Scandinavia (Haithabu and Ribe), some time in the late seventh or early eighth century. From where in Frisia they came is a moot point; in any case, their origin cannot be established linguistically. The assumption therefore is that at the time of the departure of what became the Island North Frisians, Proto-Frisian had not yet developed into its various distinctive dialects (cf. Århammar 2001a).

The marshy lands of mainland North Frisia were reclaimed much later – after 1000 (because of the diking technique), but before *c.*1200 (when they are mentioned by the Danish author Saxo Grammaticus). On account of certain dialect features these settlers hailed from the region where Old Ems Frisian was spoken. They were probably invited by the Danish king, as their reputation as water engineers stretched all over the Low German Plain. For centuries onwards, North Frisia belonged partly to the Danish kingdom and partly to the Duchy of Schleswig.

## Texts and manuscripts

§9 Apart from just under twenty runic inscriptions dating from about 500 to 800 A.D. (ed. Quak 1990; cf. Page 2001) as well as some stray words in Latin texts (Nielsen 1994), the earliest Frisian text to survive in manuscript dates from *c.*1200. It concerns a fragment of a Latin Psalter with interverbal Frisian glosses (ed. Langbroek 1990). On linguistic grounds, the glosses are thought to derive from Fivelgo (north-east of the city of Groningen). The oldest entire Frisian manuscripts to have come down to us are the First Brokmer Codex (B1),<sup>1</sup> written on internal textual evidence after 1276 but not later than 1300, and the First Rüsting Codex (R1), dated on paleographical grounds to *c.*1300. Whereas the former manuscript contains only one text, the latter is a miscellany of mainly legal texts. However, it cannot have been the first attempt at compiling an Old Frisian manuscript. Some of the texts contained in it are not original for more than one reason: the scribe must have had more than one exemplar before him when he compiled his anthology, as appears on one occasion from his including

---

1. For a key to the sigils with which the Old Frisian manuscripts are referred to, see §14.

two different versions of the same text (*Prologue to the Seventeen Statutes and Twenty-four Land-laws*, Text IV). When, where in Frisia, and at whose instigation these law codes were written down is not (yet) certain. The fact that the vernacular was preferred over the Latin – the traditional administrative language – suggests a time when jurisdiction had become a local affair without too much interference from distant, non-Frisian rulers, perhaps not long after 1225. Indicative for a well-established canon of texts by 1300 is the inclusion in R1 of the most important of the ‘pan-Frisian’ legal documents: the *Seventeen Statutes* (Texts V, VIa, VIII), the *Twenty-four Land-laws* (Texts Id, VIb) and the *General Register of Compensations* (Text Ic, VII). Like R1, all other medieval Frisian manuscripts produced east of the Lauwers are collections of legal texts, the latest one being the Fivelgo Manuscript from c.1450. The only exception is the *Brocmonna Bref* (Text XI), a set of legal regulations drafted around 1276 by the colonists of a district newly reclaimed from marshland. It is clear, though, that the contents of the *Brocmonna Bref* are connected to and supplement the regulations of the Emsingo district, from where the reclamation activities had been organized.

§10 Law and language proved so closely connected that no other text genres in Frisian have survived in independent manuscripts from the Frisian districts east of the Lauwers, with the exception of the glossed psalter fragment mentioned in §9. What little evidence remains of the existence of non-legal genres is usually contained in the legal collections themselves and in one way or another such texts can usually be associated either with legal matters or with historiographical accounts related to the ‘Matter of Frisia.’ They comprise short items, such as *The Five Keys to Wisdom* (Text II), *The Fifteen Signs of Doomsday* (Text III), and *The Ten Commandments* (Text IV). Religious texts from this area, in as far as they have come down to us, are written in either Latin or Middle Low German/Middle Dutch. A few Frisian charters and administrative documents with an East Frisian provenance survive, but it seems that here the position of Frisian had become so marginal after 1400 that it never stood a fair chance when the language of charters changed from Latin to the vernacular: Low German had already gained a higher prestige or, perhaps more importantly, proved more accessible to a larger public. In the lands between the Lauwers and the Ems, we find no original Frisian texts written after c.1450. From the late fifteenth until the end of the sixteenth century, there was an explosive reproduction of Old Frisian material in Low German translation in this area. Compared to the extent of the survival of Old Frisian manuscripts, the Low German corpus of manuscripts is enormous. The impulse for this multiplication of Low German law texts was highly ideological: the (now Low German speaking) ‘Frisian’ Ommelanden demarcated their special, independent position in this way with respect to the ‘Saxon’ city of Groningen. Ideological texts were borrowed especially from west of the Lauwers, but most of these – except

perhaps such texts as *Rechten ende Wilkoeren* ('Rights and Statutes') and the *Excerpta Legum* ('Extracts of the Laws') – were probably never in use in legal practice. On the other hand, law texts stemming originally from the Ommelanden themselves (Vredewold, Langewold, Humsterland, Hunsingo, Fivelgo and Oldambt) were still used (especially as reference works at the regional courts or *werven*) throughout the sixteenth century. The vast majority of these local texts have survived only in Low German but were certainly translated from Old Frisian exemplars now lost (e.g., Johnston 1998b). Notwithstanding the fact that Frisian was given up in these regions so many centuries ago, the Low German spoken there in modern times still displays many traces of Frisian, especially in place-names and personal names as well as in vocabulary and in syntax (E. Hoekstra 2001; Scheuermann 2001).

§11 For Frisia west of the Lauwers, the heartland of the Frisian territory, the diversity and quantity of texts is somewhat greater. Besides some major legal manuscripts, well over one thousand charters and other administrative documents survive in Frisian (Vries 2001b). Also in this part of Frisia only, it seems, a number of chronicles of various length were produced, as well as texts with legendary matter; they provide a welcome change in genre (Texts XVII, XIX). The poetry that survives is of a historiographic nature and devoted to the 'Matter of Frisia'. Examples are *Fon alra Fresena Fridome* (Text XVI; although surviving in an Old East Frisian form, the original was composed west of the Lauwers), *Hoe dae Fresen Roem Wonnen*, and the long verse narrative *Thet Freske Riim*. Some texts appear in prosimetrum (i.e., half prose, half poetry), such as the semi-historiographical, semi-legal *Book of Rudolf* or some of the wedding speeches that fortunately survive in a Basle manuscript and testify to vernacular preaching in Frisian during the later Middle Ages (Text XVIII). Bible translations, whether whole or partial (with the exclusion of the *Ten Commandments*, Text IV) are signally absent, as are liturgical and devotional monuments. One will also look in vain for lyrical poetry or romances.

After Dutch had become the written medium for the administrators appointed by the Duke of Saxony, shortly after 1500, Frisian ceased to be used for official documents and correspondence, in a movement from higher to lower bodies of administration. By 1540, the production of Frisian documents had virtually come to a halt. A charter from 1547 drafted in Frisian is a last gasp of the language as a public medium. Only in the early seventeenth century do we see a hesitant attempt in this area to find a place for written (and printed) Frisian again.

Frisia west of the Vlie, in the area now made up by the provinces of North- and South-Holland, gradually (from south to north) had to give way around 1100 to a new name: Holland, under the rule of the counts of Holland. By 1300, the counts had managed to subject all of the former Frisian territory up to the Vlie. However, until today the northernmost part of North-Holland is still called (somewhat confusingly) 'West-Friesland', a testimony to a different reality in the past.

§12 No Frisian vernacular documents survive from the erstwhile Frisian district between the Scheldt and the Flie. Whether and to what extent Frisian was spoken as far south as the Scheldt estuary remains a scholarly debate. Fact is that the Frankish conquest of the southernmost part of early medieval Frisia brought along a shift of language. Gradually, the area where Frisian was spoken was pushed back to the north, and it is to be assumed that south of the line between Haarlem and Amsterdam the inhabitants had given up speaking Frisian in favour of Low Franconian (Dutch) by 1000. Vestiges of Frisian in this area survive in isolated words, in certain syntactic phenomena and in place-names. A complicating factor is the moot question whether such remnants are really Frisian or should rather be seen as Ingvaeonic (or North Sea Germanic) traits that were shared by the coastal Frankish dialect (Bremmer 2008b). In the area to the north of the line Haarlem–Amsterdam, Frisian remained in use much longer, perhaps even up to 1600 in certain remote pockets. This is also evidenced by a strong Frisian substratum in its local dialects today (Versloot 2003). However, no written medieval Frisian from this area survives.

§13 Many Old Frisian texts are older than the manuscripts in which they survive. Although it is often hard to say with absolute certainty how old certain texts are, there is consensus that at least parts of some legal regulations (e.g., *Seventeen Statutes*) reach back into Carolingian times. Whether these older law texts were originally drafted in Latin or immediately in Frisian has been and still is a matter of much debate. In the lands neighbouring on Frisia, no vernacular law texts are known from before 1200.

Below follows a survey of the most important texts, listed according to their (estimated) relative age. The list is much indebted to Sjölin (1969: 9–15), Munske (1973: 98–105) and Johnston (2001a), but may deviate from these sources when these scholars put a date much before 1200. Most of these texts listed below appear in the collective editions of individual manuscripts in the dual language series *Altfriesische Rechtsquellen* by Buma and Ebel, and others (1963–1977) (see §14). Mention is therefore made here only of monograph editions of individual texts.

1. The *Seventeen Statutes* and *Twenty-four Land-laws* (or *Customary Law Regulations*). These are the earliest and most widely distributed of the legal texts. Their respective numbers were fixed probably in the early decades of the thirteenth century, when they were written down in Frisian. Whether some or all of these statutes and land-laws were first drafted in Latin or immediately in the vernacular is a matter of debate. The *Land-laws* were collected somewhat later than the *Statutes*. The contents of some of the *Statutes* were drafted during the late eleventh century, the *Land-laws* sometime between the early twelfth and the mid-thirteenth centuries. The recensions of these texts differ considerably from manuscript to manuscript. A synoptic edition of the *Seventeen Statutes* with commentary, translation and glossary: Hoekstra 1940.

2. *The Elder 'Skeltanariocht'*. Compilation of instructions for the legal administration of West Lauwers Frisia, particularly concerning the duties of the *skelta*, the most important legal magistrate. Drafted c.1200 with older elements. Editions: Steller 1926, with commentary and glossary; Fairbanks 1939, with commentary and English translation. Breuker 1996, a fourteenth-century Middle Dutch translation with commentary and background articles.
3. *General Register of Compensations*, so called as opposed to the many local such registers. The *General Register* survives only in Old East Frisian texts, but on account of passages from it in local Old West Frisian registers it must also have been known in the lands west of the Lauwers. The register contains a listing and qualification of injuries and the concomitant compensations. Its money system is basically Carolingian. Late-nineteenth-century scholars dated the text to the eleventh century, but if so it must have been in Latin. In all likelihood, it was written down in Frisian in the (early?) thirteenth century. The *General Register* is unique for the Germanic *wergeld* system in its size and detail. Even more detailed are a number of regional registers of compensations. Edition: Nauta 1941 (excluding F), with commentary and glossary.
4. The *West Lauwers 'Sendriocht'*. A collection of instructions for ecclesiastical jurisdiction (*send* = synod), compiled during the thirteenth (?) century, but in part containing much older, perhaps even ninth-century elements, in view of, for example, the unlimited application of ordeals and the mention of baptizing pagans. Edition: van Buijtenen 1953.
5. *The Legend and Statutes of Magnus*. As these *Statutes* contain elements from other texts such as the *Elder 'Skeltanariocht'*, they probably date from the later thirteenth century. The legendary leader Magnus seems to have entered the Frisian scene early in the same century.
6. *The Superior Statutes ('Urkerá')*. These statutes, ranging in number from five to seven, have usually been linked with the League of the Upstalsbam (§5), a political movement active east of the Lauwers from before 1200 until into the early fourteenth century. With varying degrees of success, this league aimed at creating greater coherence among the Frisian districts. The *Urkerá*, so-called because they were supposed to prevail over any other Frisian law, probably date from the thirteenth century.
7. *Exceptions ('Wendar') to the Seventeenth Statute*. Cases in which the defendant was not allowed to swear an oath of innocence. The extant versions differ markedly. Date of origin: early thirteenth century?
8. *Exceptions to the Sixteenth Statute*. Cases in which the defendant was not entitled to compensate his crime with money. The extant versions differ markedly. Date of origin: early thirteenth century.
9. *The Eight Dooms ('Decrees')*. A short collection of jurisprudence on matrimony, minority, guardianship, leasing of property and succession. Perhaps early thirteenth century.

10. The *Younger 'Skeltanariocht'*. Jurisprudential extension of the *Elder Skeltanariocht*. Late thirteenth century. Edition: Van Klaarbergen 1947, with commentary and glossary.
11. *The Book of Rudolf*. An imaginative compilation in prose and poetry of historiographical narrative, native law and canon law, attributed to a (spurious) Emperor Rudolf, with an ideological agenda of propagating the 'Frisian Freedom'. Drafted thirteenth century. Edition: Bos-Van der Heide 1937, with grammar. Fragments: Gerbenzon 1961.
12. *Fon Alra Fresena Fridome*. Poetic version of the (spurious) Latin *Privilege of Charlemagne*. Composed late thirteenth century. Edition: Sipma 1947, with commentary.
13. *Prologue to the Seventeen Statutes and Twenty-four Land-laws*. A treatise on the divine and secular origins of law. Date: c.1250.
14. The *Hunsingo Statutes* of 1252. Regulations concerning penal, procedural and civil law from the Hunsingo District. Edition: Simonides 1938, with commentary.
15. The *Brocmonna Bref*. Detailed legal regulations for the newly reclaimed Brokmerland, surviving in two, slightly deviating versions. Drafted between c.1250 and 1300. Edition: Buma 1949a, with glossary.
16. The *Emsingo Book of Compensations*. A collection of penal and civil law from the Emsingo District. Drafted thirteenth or early fourteenth century.
17. *Haet is Riocht?* A catechism on the essence and purpose of law, influenced by Roman and canon law, of which exists a shorter and a longer version. Drafted thirteenth or early fourteenth century. Synoptic edition of shorter version: Buma/Gerbenzon 1963: 29–40.
18. The *Statutes of the Upstalsbam*. Regulations intended for entire Frisia, drafted in Latin during a general assembly at the Upstalsbam in 1323. All Frisian versions originate from west of the Lauwers. Edition: Meijering 1974, with commentary and glossary.
19. *Processus Judicii* or 'Procedure of Justice'. A guide for legal procedure based on Roman and canon law, translated from the *Summa 'Antequam'*. Drafted fourteenth century.
20. *Autentica Riocht*. Regulations excerpted from mainly Roman and canon law. Date: c.1400. Edition: Brouwer 1941, with commentary and glossary.
21. *Excerpta Legum*. A collection of Roman and canon law, extant in four recensions. The most complete of these is known as *Jurisprudentia Frisica*. Drafted fourteenth century. Edition: Buma/Gerbenzon 1993; commentary: Gerbenzon 1956.
22. *Old Frisian Wedding Speeches*. Three short speeches, written c.1445. Edition: Buma 1957, with commentary and glossary.
23. *Thet Freske Riim*. A historiographical narrative in verse on the early (legendary) history of the Frisians. Before 1490. The poem was also translated into Middle Dutch as *Tractatus Alvini*. Edition: Campbell 1952, with commentary and glossary.
24. *Gesta Fresonum*. A fifteenth-century Frisian translation of the early (?) fourteenth-century *Historia Frisiae* in which the highlights of Frisian history are paralleled with those of the Old Testament. Edition: Buma/Gerbenzon/Tragter-Schubert 1993.

25. *Snitser Recesboeken*. A collection of mainly ‘police’ records of petty crimes brought before the burgomasters and aldermen of Sneek (Frisian: Snits), running from 1490 to 1517. Edition: Oosterhout 1960. No commentary or glossary, only index of names (Oosterhout 1964).

26. *Charters, Chronicles, Letters*, and other official and private documents mainly from West Lauwers Frisia. About 1300 such documents have survived, the bulk of which was written between 1450 and 1525. The earliest one dates from 1329, the latest from 1547. Editions: Sipma 1927–41; Vries 1977; Gerbenzon 1965, 1967; Meijering 1986.

§14 The majority of the texts listed above have come down to us in more than one manuscript, in versions that often differ markedly from one another. The manuscripts in which they are found are on the whole younger than the date at which the individual texts were (supposedly) drafted. In the complicated process of copying and adapting, the form of the language was usually updated. Most of the manuscripts have received modern editions. The first comprehensive edition, arranged according to texts rather than to manuscripts, is von Richthofen 1840a. His edition is very reliable by the standards of his time and still useful, although he did not include any texts from F, U, Ro, A, P, and Fs (on these sigils, see below). On the other hand, von Richthofen also included medieval Low German law texts that were current in the Frisian lands, and which are often translations of law texts originally written in Frisian. Still very useful, though in places outdated, of course, is his accompanying dictionary to the Frisian texts in his edition (von Richthofen 1840b). Individual manuscripts and charters were diplomatically edited in the series *Oudfries(ch)e Taal- en Rechtsbronnen*, in 14 volumes (discontinued), provided with extensive introductions and Old Frisian–Dutch glossaries (apart from vols. 1–3 and 14 which contain no glossaries, only indexes of names; vols. 4 and 6, which have only word indexes, and vols. 5 and 12–13, with Old Frisian–German glossaries). All Old East Frisian manuscripts as well as the Old West Frisian manuscript J have been edited with a facing German translation in the series *Altfriesische Rechtsquellen* (discontinued). Following the format of the *Altfriesische Rechtsquellen* is the edition of Codex Aysma (Buma/Gerbenzon/Tragter-Schubert 1993). A generous selection of Old Frisian legal texts, including a complete version of the *Brocmonna Bref*, with facing Dutch and Frisian translations and with magnificent illustrations is Vries (2007).

The number of surviving Old Frisian manuscripts is fairly limited and it possible therefore to present here a survey of the most important ones. In Old Frisian studies it has become customary to refer to these manuscripts with a sigil, rather than to the actual shelf mark of the libraries in which they are kept. Sjölin (1966, 1984) has pointed out that the titles given by Buma and Ebel to the individual volumes of their series *Altfriesische Rechtsquellen*, such as *Das Rüstinger Recht* or *Das Emsinger Recht*,

are misleading (cf. §213). Only very few of the texts contained in these manuscripts had any explicit relevance for the district from which they stem. Practically all of the collections of legal texts in these manuscripts are of a supraregional nature, with the exception of the *Brocmonna Bref* (B1 and B2). Most importantly, the legal compilations are not to be seen as official laws issued by legislative authorities, but as private collections intended for practical purposes.

An important aspect supporting the collection and survival of the Old Frisian legal codices has been their ideological value (Johnston 1998a). Through such collections of legal texts, of which there must have been dozens of manuscripts, the Frisians as it were demonstrated their independent position within the German (Holy Roman) Empire.

The order in which the manuscripts are presented here is chronological.

- B1:** The First Brokmer Manuscript or *Brocmonna Bref*, after 1276 but before c.1300. Oldenburg, Niedersächsisches Staatsarchiv, Bestand 24–1, Ab. Nr. 3. Editions: Buma 1949a; Buma/Ebel 1965.
- R1:** The First Rüstring Manuscript, c.1300. Oldenburg, Niedersächsisches Staatsarchiv, Bestand 24–1, Ab. Nr. 1. Editions: Buma 1961; Buma/Ebel 1963.
- B2:** The Second Brokmer Manuscript, completed 1345. Contains the *Brocmonna Bref* in a slightly longer version than B1. Hanover, Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, Sign. XXII, 1423. Editions: see B1.
- R2:** The Second Rüstring Manuscript, copied c.1780 by Gerhard Oelrichs from a now lost manuscript from 1327. Contents not identical with those of R1. Hanover, Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, Sign. XXII, 1431. Editions: Buma 1954; Buma/Ebel 1963.
- H1:** The First Hunsingo Manuscript, c.1325–50. Leeuwarden, Tresoar, Hs R2 (R = collection von Richthofen). Editions: Hoekstra 1950; Buma/Ebel 1969.
- H2:** The Second Hunsingo Manuscript, c.1325–50. Its contents are identical with those of H1, but presented in a different order. Also contains Latin versions of several pan-Frisian laws. Leeuwarden, Tresoar, Hs R 3. Editions: see H1.
- E1:** The First Emsingo Manuscript, c.1400. Groningen, Universiteitsbibliotheek, P.E.J.P. Hs. 13. Editions: Sipma 1943; Buma/Ebel 1965.
- E3:** The Third Emsingo Manuscript, c.1450. Its contents are not identical with those of E1 or E2. Leeuwarden, Tresoar, Hs R 1. Editions: Fokkema 1959; Buma/Ebel 1965.
- F:** The Fivelgo Manuscript, between 1427 and c.1450. Also contains some Low German legal texts. Leeuwarden, Tresoar, Hs R 4. Editions: Sjölin 1970–75; Buma/Ebel 1972.
- E2:** The Second Emsingo Manuscript, after 1450 but not much later. Its contents are not identical with those of E1 or E3. Also contains Low German law texts. Groningen, Universiteitsbibliotheek, P.E.J.P. Hs. 14. Editions: Fokkema 1953; Buma/Ebel 1965.