

Pre-Christian gods and animal symbolism, especially the worship of Wodan and Donar, in Noord-Holland (the Netherlands), 5th–8th centuries

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Including a summary of the book *North Holland in the 1st millennium*

Originally published in: Noord-Holland in het 1e millennium

Original pdf: https://collectie.huisvanhilde.nl/noord_holland_in_het_eerste_millennium.aspx

Translation by Suzanne Needs

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Citation

Eerden, R. van & J. Nicolay, 2024: Pre-Christian gods and animal symbolism, especially the worship of Wodan and Donar, in Noord-Holland (the Netherlands), 5th–8th centuries. (translation of: Voorchristelijke goden en diersymboliek, in het bijzonder de verering van Wodan en Donar (5e-8e eeuw), 2023. In: J. Nicolay, & R. van Eerden (editors), Noord-Holland in het 1e millennium. Castricum, 776-822).

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Pre-Christian gods and animal symbolism, especially the worship of Wodan and Donar, in Noord-Holland (the Netherlands), 5th–8th centuries

Rob van Eerden & Johan Nicolay

This English-language article is a translation of Chapter 12 of the book *Noord-Holland in het 1e Millennium* (North Holland in the 1st Millennium). For the other chapters, see the Dutch-language [online version](#), as well as the English translation of the summary of the entire book, which is appended to this article. Some of the figures mentioned here are from other chapters in the book; they are included in this article to aid the reader, and the cross-references are shown in blue, rather than in red. For the location of North Holland in northwestern Europe and for the locations of the main places and regions mentioned in this article, see the [overview maps](#) below.



Map 1: The location of the province of North Holland; red dotted.



Map 2: Frisia in Early Medieval times; the province of North Holland encircled in red. Orange areas are the most densely populated regions and the white dots and names represent some of the most important archaeological sites mentioned in this text (drawing J. de Koning).

12.1 Introduction

An intriguing but difficult to grasp aspect of the cultural life of the inhabitants of North Holland during the 1st millennium is the belief system and the associated worshipping of gods. This belief system underwent profound changes with the rise of Christianity, as described in the [next chapter \(13\) of the book](#). Very little is known about which gods the missionaries encountered and the extent to and rate at which pre-Christian ideas and practices were abandoned.¹ Because insight into these aspects is of great significance for an understanding of archaeological data from the 1st millennium, this chapter presents previously published and new information about the belief system in the area of early medieval Frisia. The aim is to gain insight into the worship of gods during the 5th–8th centuries and how this is recognisable to archaeologists in material culture - with particular attention to animal symbolism on metal objects.²

What do we mean by a “belief system” (or religion) in a still pre-Christian world? In a study of “ritual depositions” (or sacrifices) in wet contexts in the Oer-IJ area during the period from the Stone Age to the Roman period, a belief system is defined by the archaeologist Kok as (translation) “a symbolic-cultural system of ritual acts, supported by an elaborate and predominantly shared conceptual image that includes culturally postulated superhuman actors”.³ As a historian, Mostert sees the following elements as unmistakably part of a (Christian) belief system (translation) “We speak of religious people or groups if their activities conform to a number of specific, interrelated forms. Those forms are part of a system consisting of three domains: ‘faith,’ ‘works,’ and ‘symbolic rituals’”.⁴ This involves believing and thinking – as well as acting – individually or collectively, in words, images or gestures.

1 See Block 1974, 64.

2 See also [Chapter 8](#).

3 Kok (2008, 25) is quoting McCauley & Lawson (2002, 13). For a useful definition of “ritual deposition”, see Nieuwhof 2015, 78.

4 M. Mostert, lecture, “Nederland wordt Christelijk” (tr. The Netherlands becomes Christian) (Amsterdam, Nov. 15, 2019).

We know little about the belief system in the first four centuries of the Common Era. There seems to be a big gap between what we encounter archaeologically and what the Roman author Tacitus, as an outsider, says about it around 100 AD.⁵ Tacitus describes the faith of the Germanic peoples living in the extensive area east and north of the Rhine and mentions some of the gods important to them, but calls them by their to-him-familiar Roman names. These names are generally believed to correspond more or less with the names of gods mentioned later, in early medieval sources: Tius, Donar and Wodan, to whom, according to Tacitus, sacrifices were also made.⁶ It is uncertain, however, whether this equivalencing is justified, although the names of the days of the week in Latin and the Germanic translation of these names do suggest a connection (see below). For North Holland, we know of only one goddess by name, namely Baduhenna, who was worshipped near Velsen, in a sacred forest.⁷ The North Holland soil archive yields many cases of remains of ritual practices that seem to have been strongly focused on the seasons and fertility, from pits, wells, (dug) pools and watercourses.⁸ These usually involve sacrifices at seemingly specifically chosen locations in the landscape, in which pottery, (worked) wood and both human and animal bones play a role (Fig. 12.1). Which gods and/or forces of nature were central to these sacrifices is largely unknown.

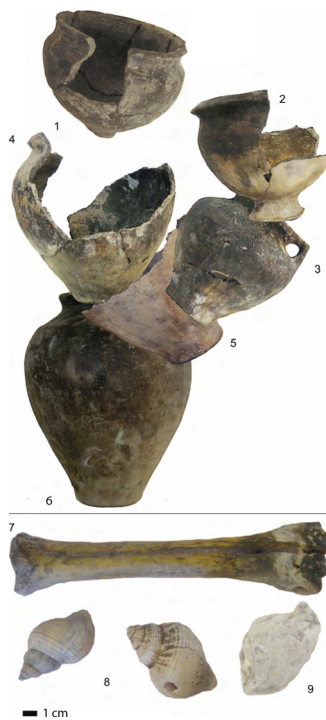
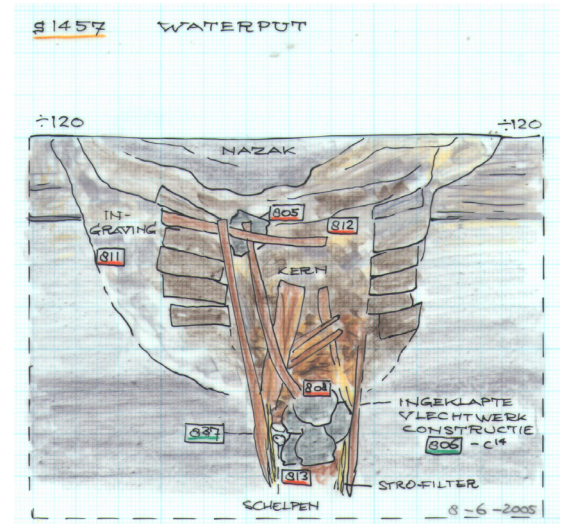


Fig. 12.1 Examples of a ritual deposition from the Roman period in what is now the Dutch province of North Holland. In a well at Uitgeest-Waldijk, dateable to the late 2nd or 3rd century, six (parts of) pots (1–6); a white pebble; shells (of whelks); and a cattle bone (7–9) were deposited. Left: A photo of the finds. Right: a drawing of a cross-section of the well (the latter after De Koning, 2008, Figs. 4.41a and 4.42).



In the ensuing centuries, when some aspects of the world of the gods were written down only indirectly, and from a Christian perspective, ritual deposits seem to have lost significance. The main archaeological testimony to the worldview is the “imagery” on metal objects, which is the focus of this chapter. That this religion was a strong and difficult to eradicate force, with which the early medieval Frankish rulers had their hands full for centuries to come, is clear from the written sources (translation):⁹ “Frisian paganism as we find it described in some of the lives of the saints and in texts from the Utrecht mission post was presented by the hagiographers as a done deal. But the reality was different. Utrecht was an advance post in the struggle against paganism; it would be a long time before Christianity would really take root in these regions.”

This chapter first outlines the history of research into pre-Christian beliefs for the “Germanic world” to which North Holland belonged in the Early Middle Ages. Then the imagery on a selection of metal objects from the area of early medieval Frisia, as part of the southern North Sea world, is described, supplemented by the discussion of some other objects from North Holland that may be related to the pre-Christian belief world. The main part of this chapter is the interpretation of these objects, including their imagery. For this purpose, use is made of the information from written and linguistic sources, including the Edda which proves to be of great significance precisely for the interpretation of imagery in the southern North Sea region.

5 Tacitus, *Germania* IX.

6 See Todd 1992, 104; Schuyf 1995, 32; Holzapfel 2001 45–84; Nordberg 2004, 121–122; Janson 2013, 145–150; Vermeijden & Quak 2017, 122–123.

7 Tacitus, *Annales* IV, 73.

8 Despite our doubts about some of their interpretations, see Therkorn 2004; Kok 2008.

9 Mostert 1999, 27.

12.2 History of research

Tracing objective information about the pre-Christian religious world in our area is a perilous business, for remnants of it seem to have been almost completely obliterated and destroyed during the many centuries since Christianization.¹⁰ Especially in the saints' lives of missionaries, "pagan" practices are depicted in a particularly negative, but also very abstract and seemingly clichéd way.¹¹ Mostert summarises this as follows (translation): "The authors are by no means impartial. They are resolutely opposed to pagan practices, which they characterise as filthy and godless: the gods of the pagans are idols, false gods, phantasms. The pagans are possessed by the devil. Their doctrine is a doctrine of error".¹²

Only a few historians, archaeologists and other researchers have seen fit to bring together the existing information in a thorough manner and give knowledge of the pre-Christian religious world a respectable place within the study of (pre)historic societies. The "Germanic religion" is usually mentioned in passing when discussing other subjects and is usually dismissed as an apparently more "primitive" worldview.¹³ There is, however, much (popular) scholarly material available on the Vikings and their gods, without awareness of a more extensive area south of Scandinavia that had a strongly related culture and religion in the centuries before the Vikings, before the arrival of Christianity.

When the Dutch literature is examined, there appears to be, traditionally, a generalised but unfocussed and poorly substantiated idea that pre-Christian humans believed in, among others, the gods Wodan and Donar: the well-known Germanic duo of gods that we know from two names of day of the week, namely Wednesday, "Wodan's day", and Thursday, "Donar's day".¹⁴ After the glorification of Germanic culture and its associated religion in the years before and during World War II, things were quiet around Germanic mythology for some time, in the knowledge that Nazi ideas about cultural history were largely based on fantasy. Nevertheless, we should see De Vries's postwar standard works, being a continuation of his work from the 1930s, as a "restarting point," albeit that this author was virtually a loner in his interest in this topic at that time and that he remained so for a long time.¹⁵

Blok's standard work *De Franken in Nederland* (The Franks in the Netherlands) (1974) summarised the meagre knowledge about "pagan" worship, albeit mainly as a prelude to the world the Christian Franks brought to an end. Since then, not much new in the way of relevant literature has actually been added in the Netherlands. An exception is Schuyf's *Heidens Nederland* (The pagan Netherlands) (1995). There are also publications by Mostert, who, like Blok, discusses paganism as the *pièce de résistance* for the Christianisation of the Netherlands.¹⁶ Blok was well aware of the problem of limited and often difficult to interpret sources, but attempted to reconstruct the pagan worldview by combining written sources with place names and iconography on archaeological artefacts. He also considered folk beliefs and customs to be relevant sources. At the same time, he believed that when studying the Germanic religious world, researchers has been very wary of (translated) "exaggerated, romantic and politically coloured mythologising", whereby excessive prosaicism, culminating in disinterest, overshoot the mark.¹⁷ Schuyf primarily takes a landscape approach, explaining where and why "pagan" remains exist in today's landscape. Mostert tentatively follows some early Christian texts and seems to assume familiarity on the part of their authors with the pre-Christian gods, in the absence of information to the contrary. He correctly points out the significance of the Germanic personal names and their slow disappearance after the introduction of Christianity.¹⁸

A fairly recent and, for this chapter particularly instructive survey of Germanic mythology, which, the authors claim, covers both Scandinavia and the rest of Germanic-speaking Europe, is (translated) "From Aegir to Ymir: Characters and Themes from Germanic and Nordic Mythology", by Vermeyden and Quak (2000). In this overview, the authors go through all the names of gods and divine beings in the Germanic world and discuss their characteristics based on written sources (especially the *Edda*, see below).¹⁹

Internationally, a similar development in the portrayal of Germanic mythology can be observed. With the work of Grimm, the tone is set in his *Deutsche Mythologie* of 1835, in which, within the context of German state formation, he presents an image of a more or less uniform Germanic (read: Scandinavian, English as well as continental) religion, leaning heavily on the *Edda*. The subsequent episode of glorification of Germanic culture in the 1930s and 1940s has already been touched upon. Yet in 1984, Simek, in his work *Lexikon der germanischen Mythologie*, nevertheless gives another almost old-fashioned, all-encompassing consideration of Germanic/Nordic mythology.²⁰ Among the explicit "believers" in the existence of an overarching, Germanic group of gods (pantheon), we can also include Todd, Holzapfel and Janson; they see indications of a more or less related "Germanic religion" throughout Europe north of the Alps (Fig. 12.2).²¹

10 See Blok 1974, 64.

11 See historical entries in Looijenga *et al.* 2017.

12 Mostert 1993, 134.

13 Theuws & Hiddink 1996, 67.

14 See Grimm 1835; De Vries 1957 (1st ed. 1935-1937).

15 Among others, De Vries 1941; 1957; 1961. From 1926 to 1946, De Vries was a professor at Leiden University. He lost this position because of his collaboration with the German occupiers during World War II; he was then a member of the Nederlandsche Kultuurraad (tr. Dutch Cultural Council).

16 Among others, Mostert 1993; 1999.

17 Blok 1974, 63.

18 Mostert 1993, 135.

19 Vermeyden & Quak 2000.

20 Simek (1984, *Einleitung*) believes that a Germanic culture as important as classical civilization existed from 1500 BC to 1000 AD, extending geographically to Iceland in the north and the Black Sea in the east.

21 The archaeologist Todd (1992) discusses the "early Germans" from prehistory to the Middle Ages. The ethnologist Holzapfel (2001) depicts "Germanic culture" as a patchwork that needs to be considered in context (including in terms of worship and mythology), while the linguist Janson (2013) also assumes a high degree of both cultural and religious cohesion within the Germanic language area.



Fig. 12.2 A richly decorated harness mount with kidney-shaped pendant forming part of a horse harness from a Langobardic grave in Hauskirchen, Gänserndorf, Austria, dating to circa 500 AD. The visual imagery, with the tops of the two bird's heads curling towards each other, also occurs in Scandinavia. Rectangular harness mounts: 3.8 × 2.6 cm, pendant: length 6.2 cm (collection and photo Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna).

It is quite notable that the pre-Christian religious world has received quite a lot of international attention in recent decades, at least by sceptically inclined historians who usually have less (recent) knowledge of the archaeological or linguistic sources. The most extensive pieces with a strongly sceptical slant have been written by authors who question the most well-known historical sources (see below).²² In particular, they question the picture of a generally applicable Germanic pantheon (with Wodan as chief god) of the kind indicated by the names of the days of the week. The historian Wood takes into account that the naming of the old pagan gods in the Carolingian period actually refers to alternative and reprehensible Christian movements.²³ He correctly points out that the written sources constitute relatively weak evidence for a (temporally and geographically) general worship of the Germanic pantheon, but at the same time does not rule out the worshipping of Wodan in certain parts of Europe.²⁴ Shaw, essentially a follower of Wood, perhaps goes even further: he believes that the "supreme god" Wodan, whom he views as at most a local, fairly briefly venerated deity, is more or less a figment of the imagination of the early Christians (more specifically: the Carolingians of the 8th century). At the same time, he believes, the citing of Wodan in texts (often misinterpreted by modern scholars), served to moralise within the Church, by pitting good (the true god) against evil (Wodan, who may or may not have existed).²⁵ Finally, according to him, Wodan cannot readily be equated with the Scandinavian Odin, whereas elements of Wodan worship from England may have influenced the image of Odin there during the Early Middle Ages.²⁶

All in all, Shaw is very dismissive of earlier visions of such Germanists as Grimm, De Vries and Simek, presumably in part in response to an understandable fear of an exaggerated yearning for an overarching, cultural-religious identity within the "Germanic" part of Europe. Although the counter-arguments are fair warnings against an overly simplistic view, they nevertheless seem to too resolutely push aside undeniable indications of a pre-Christian religious world. Historians and archaeologists thus seem caught between two doctrines: 1) they accept the earlier existence of worship of Germanic gods but mention the fact that the (written) sources leave much to be desired in terms of consistency of information or 2) they deny (or downplay) the earlier existence of a Germanic pantheon and are left with a series of clues that are actually too "tenacious" to reason away. An intermediate position is occupied by researchers who acknowledge some degree of similar worship of the Germanic-Nordic gods, but in a more regional and diverse "reality", which in the written sources is overlain with Roman and Christian-Frankish thinking.

12.3 Archaeology: Imagery on objects

No archaeological remains of temples and sanctuaries from the 1st millennium are known from North Holland. Traces of pre-Christian belief are virtually absent in the funerary culture here, although a few graves indicate the existence of a ritual that deviated from the usual treatment of the dead.²⁷ The character of the only well-recorded sacrificial site, in the Broekpolder residential area site, near Beverwijk (see below), shows that cult sites were actually little more than natural places in the landscape and are therefore difficult to recognise archaeologically. The inhabitants of early medieval Frisia as good as lacked written language and expressed themselves to only a limited extent artistically, as the archaeological evidence shows.²⁸ A special and very interesting source of information is the decoration on metal objects, as part of an iconographically readable "visual language".

The study of this imagery has a long history internationally and aims to interpret the symbolic-religious, perhaps even magical, meaning of some of the dominant ornamental elements. These elements formed part of a visual language that was presumably easily "legible" to the makers and wearers of the jewellery because they referred to (for them) well-known mythical tales and heroic stories told or sung about at festivals and other gatherings. With the advent of Christianity, the significance of this imagery was nearly completely erased. What further complicates our "reading" of the imagery is that the formal language is almost always subtle, highly symbolic and distinctly ambiguous.²⁹

²² See, among others, Wood 1995; 2018; Palmer 2007; Shaw 2002.

²³ Wood 1995, 253.

²⁴ Wood 1995, 259-262; 2018.

²⁵ Shaw 2002, 2.

²⁶ Shaw 2002, 2.

²⁷ See Chapter 11.

²⁸ See chapters 6 and 8 (pottery and metal); it cannot be ruled out that wood and textiles, which preserve poorly archaeologically, were more richly decorated.

²⁹ See, among others, Nicolay & Van Eerden 2021, 2.

Visual language nevertheless constitutes an important means of gaining insight into the pre-Christian belief system, especially considering that the jewellery shows original elements of this belief system, without distortion or omission by later authors. An important assumption in the interpretation of the imagery is that in both Scandinavia and in the neighbouring North Sea region it was composed of strongly related elements. These elements will be briefly discussed here for some groups of objects from the southern North Sea area that show a lot of detail in their decoration: brooches, bracteates, pendants, helmets and sceattas from the 5th-8th centuries. As a supplement to these, some additional finds are presented for North Holland that were probably associated with the early medieval religious world: club-shaped pendants and a wooden figurine. Before we attempt to interpret the religious significance of these objects using information from the historical sources, we present a discussion of these objects and the images that are visible on them.

Imagery on brooches

In the southern part of the North Sea region, brooches harking back to Scandinavian prototypes in form and decoration were in use from the mid-5th century onward. In southern Scandinavia an ornamental style popular during the 5th and 6th centuries is referred to as Animal Style I.³⁰ Characteristic of this decorative style are stylised animal figures located on the rectangular headplate and along the edges of the teardrop- to diamond-shaped footplate. The animal figures often flank a stylised human face rendered either frontally or in profile. The earliest brooches with this animal and human symbolism are considered by Haseloff to belong to his "Jutland fibula group" (earliest dates circa 460) and show a similar imagery to the older brooches that are also characteristic of southern Scandinavia, in the "Nydam style" (circa 420-460).³¹ The Nydam style goes back to decoration on bronze buckles and decorative fittings of late Roman belts (circa 350-460), which are ornamented along the edges with animal figures from Greco-Roman mythology.³²

Within Scandinavia, the Nydam style and Animal Style I can be regarded as a northern decorative style, one that, compared with the late Roman examples, shows a much more complex imagery, with "proprietary" animal figures. From the late 5th century, this imagery also became popular outside Scandinavia, with the imitation of Scandinavian prototypes in the coastal areas of the southern North Sea area and on the continent leading to the development of regional variants. One of the early imitations of this style of brooch was found a few years ago with the aid of a metal detector, near the Frisian town of Holwerd (Fig. 12.3, No. 1).³³ The brooch is made of silver, the obverse of which is gilded. From top to bottom, the following decorative elements are recognisable: two quadrupeds rendered in profile, on either side of a human face rendered frontally (headplate); a human face in profile (bow); and two curled birds' heads in profile above four star-shaped motifs (footplate) (Fig. 12.4).



Fig. 12.3 Two silver-gilt brooches from the 6th century, found at Holwerd (1) and Achlum (2), in present-day Friesland, and a fragment of a silver fibula from Vatrop, in Wieringen, North Holland (3). The fronts of the specimens from Friesland show a visual language in which the 'human face between two animals' is key. That this motif was also known in North Holland is evident from the fragment from Vatrop. The remnant of this headplate shows the same kind of human face as the headplate of the brooch from Achlum. Nrs. 1-2: same scale, lengths 5.5 cm and 6.2 cm; nr.3: different scale, length 2.0 cm (Achlum: collection and photo Fries Museum, Leeuwarden; Holwerd: photo F. de Vries, ToonBeeld; Vatrop: collection and photo Huis van Hilde, Castricum).

In a more complex execution, elements of the same imagery are visible on another early imitation: an imposing, similarly gilded silver brooch from the English site of Bifrons (Fig. 12.5).³⁴ The headplate consists of two fields, the inner one, again, showing two animal figures on either side of a highly stylised, human face with moustache and beard, rendered frontally. In the centre of the bow is a second human face, also rendered frontally. The footplate shows two more stylised faces within circular elements, again rendered frontally and flanked by similar quadrupeds to those along the margins of the headplate.

³⁰ Salin 1935, 214 ff.

³¹ Haseloff 1981, 8 ff. (Nydam style), 18 ff. (Jutland fibula group).

³² For Late Roman animal figures, see Haseloff 1973; 1981, 6.

³³ Nicolay 2017.

³⁴ Chadwick Hawkes 1981, 718-721 (in: Haseloff 1981).



Fig. 12.4 Details of the human faces and the quadrupeds on the brooch from Holwerd (see Fig. 12.3; photographs F. de Vries, ToonBeeld).



Fig. 12.5 Silver-gilt brooch from the 6th century, found at the English site of Bifrons, near Canterbury. The front shows the same imagery, in more complex form, as the brooches from Holwerd and Achlum (see Fig. 12.3). The animal and human figures that are central in this visual language are visible in the drawing (right). Length 13.3 cm (collection and photo The Kent Archaeological Society/ Maidstone Museum, UK; drawing after Haseloff 1981, Fig. 25).

When the human and animal figures on the brooches from Holwerd and Bifrons are compared, one decorative element appears to be key: a face between two animals.³⁵ On the brooch from Holwerd, this motif is visible on the headplate (face between two quadrupeds) and on a combination of the bow and the footplate (face between two bird's heads). The brooch from Bifrons shows the exact same motifs. In addition, on the footplate, five additional faces are flanked by animal figures: quadrupeds on either side of two round faces and quadrupeds on either side of three faces within the diamond-shaped centre section. The frontally rendered faces are interpreted by Haseloff as "masks," going back to the classical depiction of the god Oceanus among his familiars.³⁶ The animals with curved beaks are interpreted as birds of prey; the quadrupeds, which are depicted without much definition, are assumed, because of the position of their legs, to be represented in running posture.³⁷ Interestingly, the animal figures may also have been depicted as "intermediate creatures," consisting of parts of two different animals. In addition, there are human-animal figures, such as quadrupeds with a human face.

In the Dutch coastal region, the brooch from Holwerd, manufactured between about 480 and 550, provided the inspiration for a new type of brooch.³⁸ Brooches of this "Achlum type" are made of gilded silver and known only from present-day Friesland.³⁹ The only complete brooch, from Achlum (Fig. 12.3, No. 2), shows the following decorative elements: a stylised human face between two intertwined animal figures that also form the hair of the head (headplate); two hanging animal heads with curved beaks (the "shoulders" of the footplate); and two inward-curling animal heads, also with curved beaks (terminal of the footplate). The headplate, again, depicts a face between two animals; the other animal heads form symmetrical pairs, but they do not flank a central face. On the animal heads in the upper part of the brooch, the round ornamental disc that is attached in the centre of the bracket and filled with enamel may have symbolised a face, as is recognisable on the brooch from Bifrons.

A fragment of a fibula identical in shape to the brooch from Achlum was found with the aid of a metal detector near Vatrop, Wieringen, North Holland (Fig. 12.3, No. 3). This find constitutes a concrete indication that the visual language outlined above was also known in North Holland. The (possibly once gilded) silver alloy fragment shows the central face of the headplate, the ends of both flanking animal figures/braided hair, and, in the break of the bow, half of the hole for attachment of the central decorative disc.

From the mid-6th century onwards, the Achlum-type brooches, in turn, inspired a new type of brooch characteristic of the area of early medieval Frisia. These "Domburg fibulae," of which currently nearly 250 are known, were made exclusively in (tinned) bronze and remained in use well into the 7th century. A characteristic feature of these brooches is the kidney-shaped element, not only at the termination of the footplate, but also at the location of the headplate. Both the headplate and the footplate show two mirrored animal heads with curved beaks, which at the same time together form a stylised human face – as a regional variant of the face

³⁵ For other examples of the "face between two animals," see Haseloff 1981, 131-140.

³⁶ Haseloff 1981, 86.

³⁷ Haseloff 1981, 95 (birds of prey), 99-111 (quadrupeds).

³⁸ The brooch from Holwerd belongs to Nielsen's Tournai type (Nielsen 2009, 83-84).

³⁹ Nicolay 2014, 87-88.

between two animals.⁴⁰ In the earliest specimen, the animal heads on the headplate are still executed in Animal Style I; in the later specimens, these same animal heads, on both the headplate and the terminal of the footplate, consist of no more than curved loops (Fig. 12.6). Because the animal–human motif was, apparently, so well known, the kidney-shaped parts may also have been left undecorated. On the footplate of some of the brooches, the hanging birds' heads are recognisable as comma-shaped motifs; in many instances, the shape of the footplate was apparently sufficient to refer to these animals. Only occasionally is a stylised human face within a circular disc depicted in the centre of the bracket, as a rudiment of the face on the bracket of the older brooches described above.

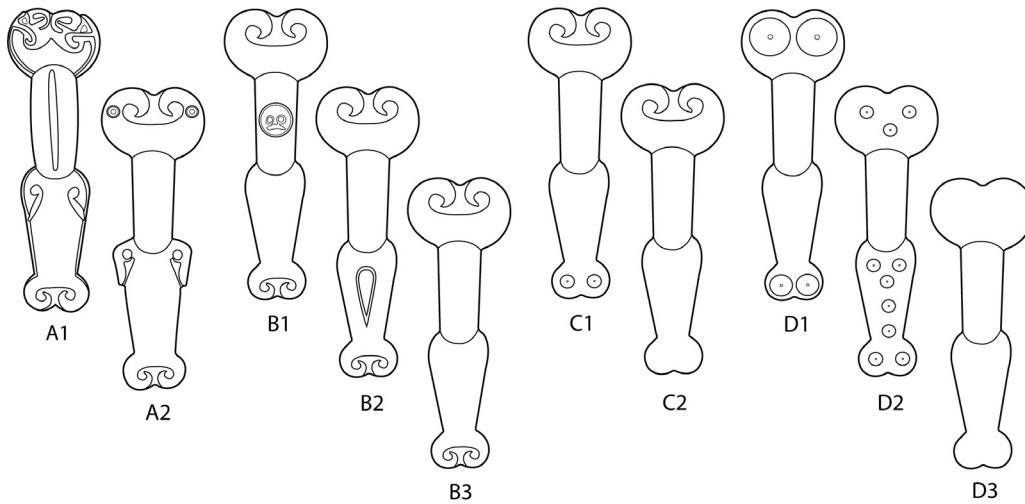


Fig. 12.6 Types of Domburg fibulae from the second half of the 6th century and the 7th century, which show, in various stages, the simplification of the motif of two bird's heads curling towards each other, on both the headplate and the end of the footplate. At the same time, the 'hanging birds', which are represented as comma-shaped motifs on the shoulders of the footplate, are disappearing. Not to scale (drawings J.A.W. Nicolay).

Exceptional are the few Domburg fibulae that show more detailed decoration of the footplate, as described in detail in Chapter 8 for a unique brooch from Heiloo (see Fig. 8.7).⁴¹ Grooves and hollows in the footplate can be interpreted as a frontally rendered face with curled moustache, flanked by animal heads that form the shoulders of the footplate. At the same time, these grooves and hollows form a horse's head viewed from above, the end knob being the edges of the nostrils (Fig. 8.23). Finally, the Domburg fibulae as a whole can be interpreted as standing figures, with a face flanked by birds' heads (headplate); a neck (bow); and a torso with arms, legs and feet (footplate with end knob).



Fig. 8.7, No. 5 The Domburg fibula from Heiloo (collection and photographs Huis van Hilde, Castricum).

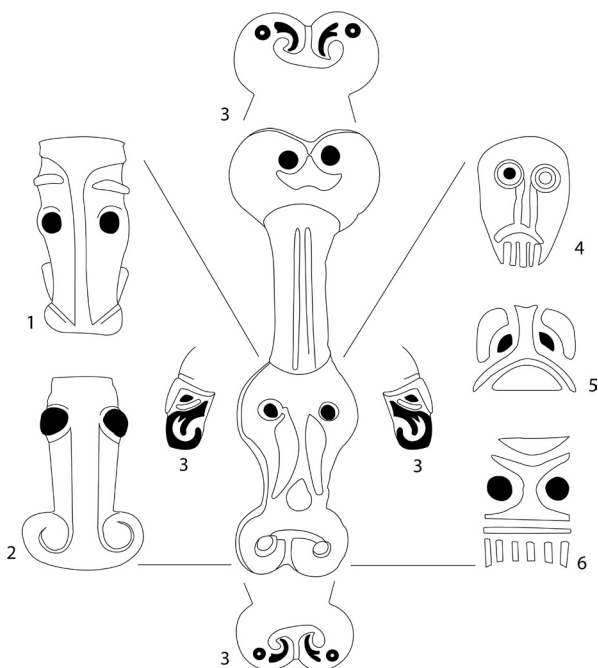


Fig. 8.23 Drawing of the Domburg fibula from Heiloo, showing human faces and animal figures all around, as seen on other 5th- and 6th-century objects from the Dutch–German coastal region. The motifs are from: 1 a cruciform fibula from Westerwijtwerd, Groningen; 2 a cruciform fibula from Achlum, Friesland; 3 disc-on-bow fibulae from Achlum, Friesland, and Wieringen, North Holland, respectively (see also Fig. 12.3); 4 a strap tongue from Elsfleth, Lower Saxony; 5 disc-on-bow fibulae from Achlum and Wieringen (see Fig. 12.3); and 6 a bow fibula from the vicinity of Holwerd, Friesland (see Fig. 12.3). Not to scale (drawing J.A.W. Nicolay).

⁴⁰ See Section 8.7.

⁴¹ See also Nicolay & Van Eerden 2021.

Despite the differences in design among the brooches discussed, within the southern North Sea region the same theme appears to be central to the depicted visual language from the late 5th to the 7th century: a human face between two animals. All the brooches depict pairs of birds that, given their curved beaks, represent birds of prey. It is not easy to determine which animal species are often also depicted in pairs as quadrupeds. Possibly they are horses or wolves, as on the brooch from Holwerd, where fur or a mane can be discerned as comb-like motif (see Fig. 12.4).

Visual language on bracteates

Imagery closely related to that found on the brooches is also visible on so-called bracteates, which are round pendants of sheet gold into which an ornamental motif has been stamped. Just like the Nydam style and Animal Style I were inspired by late Roman belts, bracteates go back to late Roman (coin) medallions. They originate in Scandinavia and were frequently imitated, especially in the southern part of the North Sea region.⁴² Although no specimens are known from the province of North Holland yet, a recent find from Katwijk-Zanderij (province of South Holland; Fig. 8.20, No. 8) indicates that bracteates were almost certainly also in use within North Holland. The earliest bracteates show the bust of a Roman or Byzantine emperor encircled by a Latin inscription (type A). Soon new motifs (especially animal figures) and runic writing were added to the bust, and the stamp motifs were executed in sharper relief (types B and C). At the same time, bracteates showing a snake-like motif appeared, also executed in sharp relief (type D). The Scandinavian bracteates, including imitations from the southern North Sea region, date from the mid-5th to the second quarter of the 6th century.⁴³ Type D bracteates, as well as those with a bust in sharp relief, were probably produced no earlier than circa 475. Finds from women's graves show that bracteates remained in circulation until the third quarter of the 6th century, so they overlap chronologically with the brooches described above.

All bracteates from the Dutch coastal area are executed in gold and can be dated roughly between 450 and 550. With the exception of the recent find from Katwijk-Zanderij, these pendants have only been found in the present-day province of Friesland. Together with some very similar bracteates from the adjacent, German coastal area that are also executed in gold, the finds will be briefly discussed here by type, with particular attention to the animal figures and human body parts (or weapons) that are recognisable in the imagery.⁴⁴



Fig. 8.20 Selection of metal objects from the Merovingian and early Carolingian periods found at the rural settlement site of Katwijk-Zanderij: bird fibula (1); cruciform fibula (2); cast disc fibula (3); disc-on-bow fibula (4); Domburg fibulae (5–7); bracteate (8); wrist-clasp (9); and belt mounts (10). The objects are made of gold (8), gilded silver (10) and bronze (1–7, 9). Scale 1:1, except for 8, scale 2:1, and 10, not to scale (photographs ADC ArcheoProjecten, Amersfoort).

42 For an overview, see Axboe 2007.

43 Axboe 1999; 2007, 142–148.

44 Information based on Pesch 2007; Nicolay 2014 (supplemented by the bracteate from Katwijk).

Within the southern part of the North Sea region, bracteates of the same types are also known from England, where execution in other materials (silver and bronze) and production stamps provide concrete evidence that Scandinavian prototypes were indeed imitated locally.⁴⁵

Two type A bracteates, from Hitzum (Fig. 12.7, No. 1) and from Sievern, Germany, show very similar imagery: a bearded face in profile, with a runic inscription along the outer edge. The meaning is clear only in the case of the runic inscription on the bracteate from Sievern: *r writu* (tr. I write r[unes]), presumably referring to the person depicted on the bracteate.⁴⁶

A B-bracteate from Sievern shows a kneeling person with raised head (Fig. 12.7, No. 2). Two snake-like animals wind around his arms. A bracteate of the same type from Heide, Germany, depicts a dancing person, with a quadruped and a bird along his S-shaped arms (Fig. 12.7, No. 3); a runic inscription can be read as *alu*, presumably referring to a beverage consumed at celebrations in the reception hall of a king or other leader.⁴⁷

Three closely related C-bracteates are known from Dokkum and from Sievern (Fig. 12.7, No. 4); a specimen from De Valom shows the same motif in more stylised form (Fig. 12.7, No. 5). On these bracteates, the face of a man is visible; with long, wavy hair; a moustache; and, on the Frisian specimens, also a beard. On the man's forehead a triangular jewel is visible, which may continue into a bird's head with curved beak. The face shown in profile is depicted above a galloping horse with elegant hooves; in some examples, richly decorated straps of harness run across a horse's chest.

Seven type D bracteates from Achlum (see Fig. 12.7, No. 6) and one each from Ferwerd (Fig. 12.7, No. 7) and Katwijk (see Fig. 8.20, No. 8) can be assigned to two groups on the basis of their size and central stamp motif: a group of relatively large bracteates on which the head, body and legs of the snake-like animal are interconnected (Fig. 12.7, No. 6) and a group of smaller bracteates on which the snake-like animal is depicted as a separate element (Fig. 12.7, No. 7). Other differences between the two groups include the shape of the animal heads (horse-like heads versus birds' heads) and the depiction of the human elements: hands and feet as part of the snake-like animal on the large bracteates and an isolated human ear on the smaller specimens. Snake-like animals with human hands and feet are unknown from the Scandinavian world, so this is a "proprietary" interpretation of an originally Scandinavian visual language. Seven type D bracteates from the Sievern hoard show a snake-like animal with a bird's head; the human elements are an isolated lower leg and ear, as well as a spear and a bow along the outer edge of the stamped motif.

The bracteates from the Dutch–German coastal area show a fascinating imagery that is similar throughout that area and that was also popular in the English part of the southern North Sea region. The human faces are of a bearded man with long hair (types A and C), in which a "bird jewel" is sometimes placed (type C); an entire person may also be depicted, in kneeling or dancing position (type B). The animals depicted are presumed to be horses, birds and snake-like animals with horses' or birds' heads, often depicted with human body parts or attributes (all types). The birds have curved beaks and are consistently depicted as birds of prey. The few runic texts on the bracteates discussed seem to refer to the ability to write runes and to festive drinking rituals.⁴⁸



Fig. 12.7 A selection of gold bracteates from the late 5th century and 6th century, found along the Dutch–German North Sea coast: 1 Hitzum, Friesland (type A); 2 Sievern, Lower Saxony (type B); 3 Heide, Schleswig-Holstein (type B, copy; original has been lost); 4 Sievern (type C; Lower Saxony); 5 De Valom, Friesland (type C); 6 Achlum, Friesland (type D); and 7 Ferwerd, Friesland (type D). All to the same scale; length largest bracteate 5.6 cm (1, 6 and 7: collection and photographs Fries Museum, Leeuwarden; 2: collection and photo Museum Bad Bederkesa, Germany; 3: collection and photo Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum Hannover; 4: collection and photo Niedersächsisches Institut für Historical Küstenforschung, Wilhelmshaven, Germany; 5: private collection, photo M. Eversen).

45 See Behr 2010, 65-71; Nicolay 2014, 238-242.

46 Hauck 1970, 135.

47 Looijenga 2003, 194-196.

48 See also Fig. 12.26.

Imagery of a kidney-shaped pendant

A recent gold find from Texel is a kidney-shaped pendant from the 6th or 7th century that was worn on a cord around the neck (Fig. 9.11).⁴⁹ Similar pendants (or fragments of them) have also been found in Friesland, as well as in the Scandinavian and northern Frankish areas.⁵⁰ The jewel, like the bracteates, stems from the tradition of the coin pendants and has a lobed eye. Kidney-shaped pendants occur in various designs, but the main feature is always the two bird's heads with strongly curved beaks, angled towards each other, that we are already familiar with from the already mentioned fibulae of the Achlum and Domburg types. The resulting kidney shape can, at the same time, be regarded as a stylised human face, so that the human–animal motif is once again represented.



Fig. 9.11 Kidney-shaped pendant from the island of Texel, North Holland, the front of which is decorated with gold wire. The ends of the kidney shape show two bird's heads with pointed beaks, curling towards each other. Width 2,3 cm (private collection; photographs Huis van Hilde).

Visual language on helmets

Helmets whose form was inspired by late Roman (officers') helmets were in use in Scandinavia during the 6th and 7th centuries. These so-called crested helmets, which are known from a few rich ship burials, show a complex imagery that includes some elements that are comparable to those on the brooches, bracteates and kidney-shaped pendants. The helmets have an iron helmet cap that continues into a characteristic nose and cheekbone guard at the front (see Fig. 12.8). Braiding, which is sometimes replaced with vertical strips of iron, is suspended from the bottom of the helmet cap. The most characteristic part of the helmet is the bronze crest that runs centrally over the length of the helmet cap, with stylised animal heads at either end, also in bronze. To create the impression of a mask, bronze eyebrows, which also terminate in animal heads, have been attached to either side of the animal head, above openings for the eyes. The outside of the helmet is partially or completely decorated with plate bronze, in which all kinds of animal and human motifs have been stamped.



Fig. 12.8 Crested helmets from ship burials in the Swedish municipalities of Vendel, Uppsala (1, grave XII) and Valsgärde, Uppsala (2, grave 8). Not to scale (Vendel: collection and photo Historiska Museet, Stockholm; Valsgärde: collection and photo Museum Gustavianum, Uppsala).



Fig. 12.9 Reconstruction of the crested helmet from a ship burial at Sutton Hoo, Suffolk, England (burial mound 1) (collection Sutton Hoo High Hall exhibition; photo Wikimedia).

Closely related to the Scandinavian crested helmets is the famous helmet from the Sutton Hoo ship burial (Fig. 12.9).⁵¹ This helmet has an iron, rather than a bronze, crest, inlaid with silver wire, terminating in animal heads of gilt bronze. In addition to the eyebrows, a nose, moustache and mouth in gilt bronze have been added to the front, so that a complete face is represented. Together, the moustache (tail), nose (body), eyebrows (wings) and an additional animal head on the front of the helmet form a bird in flight.⁵²

The animal heads at the ends of the crests and eyebrows on Scandinavian helmets and English imitations have elongated, beak-shaped mouths and are likely birds' heads; anomalous are the eyebrows of the helmet from Sutton Hoo, which, given the presence of tusks, end in two boars' heads.⁵³ Further information about the significance of the imagery on crested helmets is provided by the motifs stamped into the sheet bronze that are clearly visible on all of these helmets (Fig. 12.10), supplemented by the motifs on three bronze stamps for applying these motifs from Torslunda, Sweden.⁵⁴ In addition to decorative braided ornamentation some with still recognisable animal figures, the following six motifs with animal and human figures are recognisable:⁵⁵

49 See also Chapter 8.

50 See the discussion of this pendant in Chapter 8.

51 Bruce-Mitford 1978, 138 ff.; see also Marzinzik 2007. For a recently discovered crested helmet from the "Staffordshire hoard," see Fern & Speake 2019.

52 Bruce-Mitford 1978, 169, Fig. 126 (interpreting the bird as a "dragon").

53 Alkemade 1988, 251–253.

54 For the stamps, see Bruce-Mitford 1974, 214–222; Axboe 1987.

55 Bruce-Mitford 1978, 186–202; Alkemade 1988, 241–251; see also Mortimer 2011, 49–60.

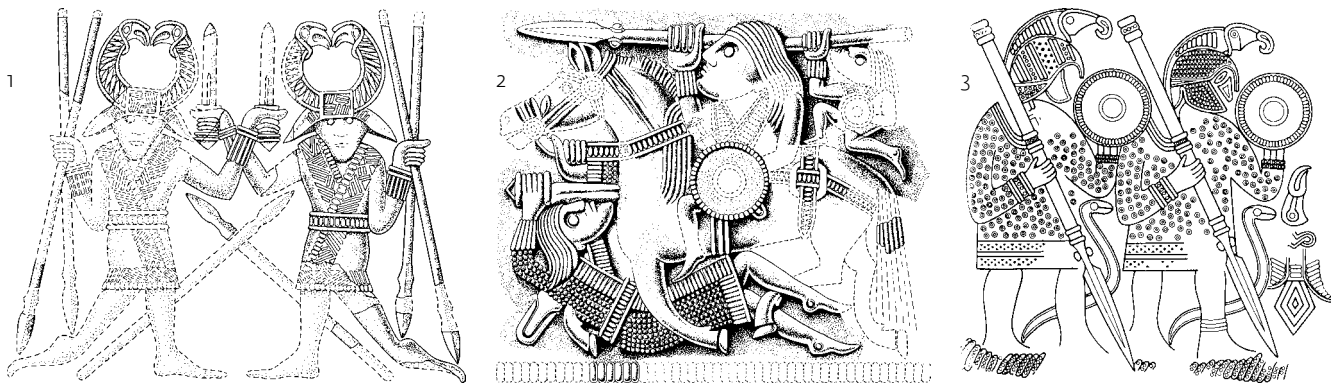


Fig. 12.10 Three motifs stamped into sheet bronze that decorated the outside of the crested helmets from Sutton Hoo (burial mound 1; upper left and lower left) and Valsgärde (burial mound 7; bottom right). The drawings show the motifs 'dancing warriors,' 'rider on horseback' and 'warriors in a row', as explained in the text. Not to scale (drawings after Bruce-Mitford 1978, Figs. 140, 143 and 164).

- 1. Rider on horseback.** The rider wears an ornate tunic and usually a helmet that terminates in a bird's head at the front or is mounted with a boar, and he is armed with a spear and shield. Below the galloping horse, trampled warriors may be depicted, or a smaller person accompanying the horse, or a snake. The rider is accompanied by two birds or by a smaller person with raised arms, a spear or shield in one hand, the posterior end of the rider's spear in the other hand, and a helmet terminating at the top in two birds' heads bending towards each other.
- 2. Man between two animals.** A standing man, in some cases in chain mail, is depicted between two standing animals whose heads are facing the man. On one of the stamps from Torslunda, the man's sword is sticking out of the animal to his left.
- 3. Man next to animal.** A standing man wearing an ornate tunic or long trousers or leggings is depicted next to a standing animal (species unclear), whose head is turned towards the man. The man has an axe in one hand and a cord that encircles the animal's neck in the other.
- 4. Warriors in a row.** Two or more warriors stand side by side, armed, facing the same direction. They wear chain mail; a helmet that terminates in a bird's head at the front or on which a boar has been mounted; a sword (in the hand or on a sword belt); and, often, a shield. At the warriors' feet, a serpent and a bird are sometimes depicted.
- 5. Warring warriors.** Two armed warriors face each other in an active pose and are engaged in combat. They wear chain mail or an ornate tunic, a shield, a sword, and alternately a spear or a helmet.
- 6. Dancing Warriors.** Two warriors depicted in frontal view wear ornate tunics, helmets terminating on top in two animal heads bending towards each other, a sword in one hand and two spears in the other. Behind the warriors are two crossed spears. On one of the stamps from Torslunda, the warrior on the right has been replaced by a warrior dressed as a wolf. The warrior has a spear in one hand and is pulling a sword from its scabbard by the grip with the other hand.

The motif of the rider on horseback derives direction from the images on Roman equestrian tombstones, of which many are known from the Rhineland. Non-Roman additions are the snake, the two birds and the smaller person with "bird helmet" who appears to be assisting the warrior. The other motifs have no direct parallels in the Roman Empire and can be considered part of a local imagery. The man between two animals is a motif known also from the brooches already discussed as "human face between two animals". Here, however, the man appears to be engaged in a fight with the animals (perhaps as a variation on the Christian theme of Daniel in the lion's den), from which a vanquished animal, with a cord around its neck, is depicted as the third motif. The last three motifs revolve around warriors, armed and in various positions. Animal figures are represented in only a limited way, but are part of the most visible part of the equipment, namely the helmet, with a single bird at the front (crested helmets, of which only the anterior bird's head is visible, at the end of the crest); two birds with curved necks towards the top ("bird helmets," not known archaeologically); and a naturalistically rendered wild boar on top ("wild boar helmets," known archaeologically from England).⁵⁶ The birds mostly have curved beaks and, as on the brooches and bracteates, are depicted as birds of prey. Warriors wearing bird helmets (or birds on their heads) are also depicted several other metal objects, including pendants with the image of a face or a standing man, which are found in both Scandinavia and England (Fig. 12.11).⁵⁷ Small male heads, executed as leather fittings, also show a bearded face with a bird helmet or bird on the head (Fig. 12.12).

⁵⁶ For finds of "wild boar helmets," see Bruce-Mitford 1974, 223-242; 1978, 205-206 (Benty Grange); Marzinzik 2007 (Wollaston).
⁵⁷ See <https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/36287>, with references to other English finds.

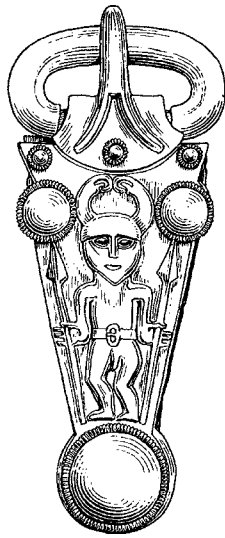


Fig. 12.11 Bearded man with 'bird helmet', on a gold buckle from Finglesham, Kent, England. Length 8.0 cm (collection and photo Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; drawing after Chadwick Hawkes & Grainger 2006, Fig. 2.102).



Fig. 12.12 Bronze harness mounts from Blakeney, Norfolk, England, in the form of the frontally rendered face of a bearded man with bird's heads on his head or helmet, length 3.7 cm (1), and a gilded harness mount from Hampshire, England, of a bearded man with the same birds on his head or helmet, length 3.8 cm (2) (1: Portable Antiquities Scheme, object NMS559; 2: Portable Antiquities Scheme, object BERK-DB4E15).

That the imagery on the helmets was probably also known in North Holland is indicated by two finds from neighbouring areas. East of North Holland, from the Frisian town of Hallum, two bronze animal heads were found, originating from a helmet crest of Scandinavian type (Fig. 12.13).⁵⁸ From the area south of North Holland, from the burial ground of Katwijk-Klein Duin, in South Holland, comes the gilt bronze terminal of a luxury drinking horn (Fig. 12.14) that either constitutes an English import piece or was copied locally.⁵⁹ The tip shows a similar bird's head with curved beak as the helmets of warriors depicted on the sheet bronze and silver of crested helmets from Scandinavia and England.

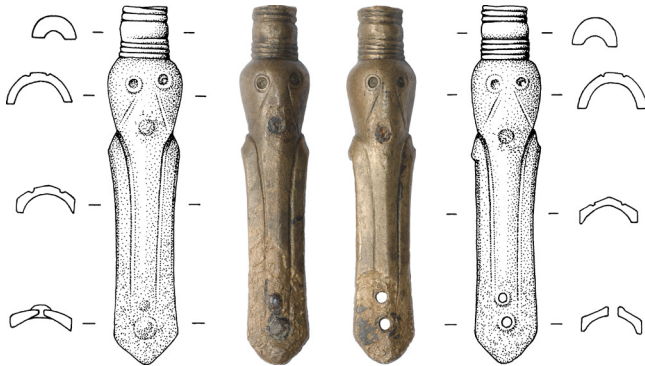


Fig. 12.13 Photographs and drawings of the two bronze animal heads from a terp (dwelling mound) near the Frisian village of Hallum that once formed the ends of a helmet crest. Length both objects 7.6 cm (collection Fries Museum, Leeuwarden; photographs G.J. van Oortmerssen and drawings M.A. Los-Weijns, both © University of Groningen/Groningen Institute of Archaeology).



Fig. 12.14 Two views of the gilt bronze end of a drinking horn from the late 6th or first half of the 7th century, from a cremation grave at the site of Katwijk-Klein Duin. The terminal consists of a bird's head with strongly curved beak. Length 6.8 cm (collection Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden; photo A. de Kemp).

Imagery on sceattas

A male face with fierce hair, a beard and a stern gaze is visible on a coin type characteristic of the southern North Sea region: the sceatta. It is uncertain where the sceattas with the male face, also referred to as series X, were struck. Today, it is assumed they were produced in the Danish coastal area and especially in the trading town of Ribe, although production farther south along the North Sea coast can definitely not be excluded.⁶⁰ Minting took place during the late 7th and 8th centuries, during the period when the Dutch coastal area was being Christianized and missionaries mention the worship of pagan gods. Some of the sceattas are generally identified as belonging to the "Wodan monster type," of which many variants exist (for a specimen from Castricum, see Fig. 12.15), but without iconographic support.⁶¹ Characteristic elements of the effigy on both sides of the coin are: a frontally

58 Nicolay *et al.* 2017; Nicolay & Pelsmaeker 2018; Nicolay 2019.

59 Dijkstra 2011, 243-244, Fig. 6.14; Nicolay 2014, 105, Fig. 5.6.

60 For production in Ribe, see Feveile 2008, 64-65; Søvsø 2018, 80-81.

61 See, for example, Op den Velde 1982, 46.

rendered face with wild hair, often a round or oval thickening in the area of the forehead, and an equal-armed cross with thickened ends on either side of the face. The reverse shows a snake-like animal biting its own tail.



Fig. 12.15 Front and back of a silver sceat from the late 7th or early 8th century, found in the settlement site of Castricum–Oosterbuurt. The front shows a human face with wild hair. Usually this type of sceat shows a thickening at the location of the forehead and a cross with thickened ends either side of the head. The reverse of this coin shows a depiction of a serpent-like animal biting its own tail. On this specimen, this is not easy to see, due to wear and tear. Diameter 1.2 cm (collection and photographs Huis van Hilde).

Club-shaped bone pendants

Excavations in the Broekpolder, near Beverwijk, in 1996–1998 uncovered a “sacrificial pool” that is dated to the 6th–7th century, but which may have been in use as an open-air cult site as early as the first centuries of the Common Era.⁶² Two so-called Donar amulets, or Donar clubs, were found during the excavation, which must have been thrown into the pool (Fig. 12.16, Nos. 1 and 2). They are beautifully worked bone pendants, decorated with lines and equal-armed crosses, which bear strong similarities to one excavated in Leiderdorp, South Holland (Fig. 12.16, No. 3).⁶³ Other finds are known mainly from the Frisian–Groningen terp area, where the clubs have a round or square cross-section and are mostly decorated with point (-circle) motifs and grooves.⁶⁴

Club-shaped pendants made of bone, bronze, silver and gold have been found within Europe in areas where (mainly) Germanic-speaking peoples lived.⁶⁵ The pendants date from the 4th to 7th centuries and are believed to be imitations of an important symbol from the Roman world: the club of Hercules.⁶⁶ This is said to be evident not only from the club shape, but also from the decoration with dot-circle motifs, representing knots, as are recognisable on metal clubs of Hercules.⁶⁷ Finds from inhumation graves show that the pendants were worn on the body by women and children, often at the crotch region and thus suspended from a hip belt. A good example is a bone pendant found in a woman’s grave in Wijncaldum, Friesland, slightly above her knee (Fig. 12.17).⁶⁸



Fig. 12.16 Two club-shaped pendants with incised crosses and parallel grooves, made of bone, from a ‘sacrificial pool’ in the Broekpolder residential area at Beverwijk–Heemskerk, North Holland (1 and 2). A very similar pendant was found near Leiderdorp, South Holland (3). The pendants date from the 7th century; from left to right, their lengths are 5.8, 5.8 and 6.6 cm (1 and 2: collection and photographs Huis van Hilde; 3: collection and photo Province of Zuid-Holland).

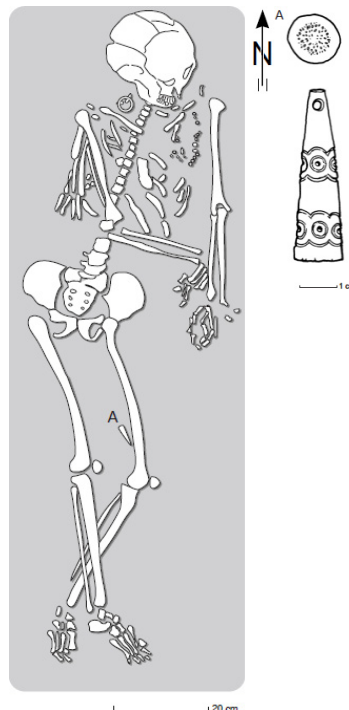


Fig. 12.17 Woman’s grave found in the terp known as Wijncaldum–Tjitsma, Friesland. A club-shaped pendant made of bone (indicated with red circle in the photo and the letter A in the drawing, which shows the verso) was found by the woman’s left knee (photo © Rijksuniversiteit Groningen/Groningen Institute of Archaeology; drawings J. de Koning).

62 Therkorn 2004, 47; personal communication M. Kok, Rotterdam.

63 Dijkstra *et al.* 2016, 338–339; another club-shaped pendant from South Holland, with a round cross-section, was found in the Rijnsburg–De Horn cemetery (Dijkstra & Van Grinsven 2020, Fig. 21).

64 For Frisian finds, see Roes 1963, Pl. Ll; see also Dijkstra *et al.* 2016, 338–339, with references.

65 See Werner’s (1964) inventory.

66 Werner 1964, 181–183.

67 See Werner 1964, Table 20; see also Grimmsma 2019, 87–89.

68 Cuijpers *et al.* 1999, 305–322.

A wooden anthropomorphic figure

During the excavation of a rural settlement at the site of the new Heiloo-Zuiderloo housing estate in 2012, half of an anthropomorphic figure carved from a piece of oak (maximum length 51 centimetres) was found.⁶⁹ The figure was found in the cut of a well that was constructed shortly before 630, so the original, still-intact object can be dated roughly in the 6th century.⁷⁰ The object is shaped like a head on a stem, with a flat back (Fig. 12.18). The head is ovoid, with a long, straight nose; a short, incipient eyebrow arch; an oval, recessed area in the cheek area; thick lips with slightly downturned corners; and a neck that extends into the pointed stem. Wooden figures are also known from other parts of Europe, including figures with somewhat similar heads from Denmark (Ejsbøl, 2nd-3rd century) and Norway (Grimstad, 3rd-5th century) (Fig. 12.19).⁷¹



< Fig. 12.18 Photograph and drawing of a wooden anthropomorphic figure (mirrored and supplemented) from a well cut in the settlement site of Heiloo-Zuiderloo (probably 6th century), length 51 cm (collection Huis van Hilde; photo S. Lange; drawing R. Timmermans).

> Fig. 12.19 Example of a more complete wooden figure with head from Grimstad, Agder, Norway, 3rd–5th century. The image gives an impression of the original form of the sculpture from Heiloo shown in Fig. 12.18. These kinds of statuettes, which probably had a spiritual meaning, are also found in other parts of Europe, including in northern Germany and Scandinavia. Length 115 cm (collection and photo Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo).



12.4 Written sources: Gods, religious practices and cult sites

Interpretation of the elements of the visual language seen on the archaeological objects presented above, should preferably rely on information from historical sources relating to the same area (southern North Sea region and Scandinavia) and to the same period (late 5th-8th century). The most important written sources are briefly discussed here, to establish their potential for such interpretation, and this discussion is supplemented by information from linguistic sources.

Regional written sources

1. Utrecht, or Old Saxon, baptismal vow
2. *Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum*
3. *Lex Frisionum*
4. Lives of the saints

External written source

5. Edda

Other linguistic sources

6. Names for days of the week
7. Personal names
8. Place names
9. Runic inscriptions

Within the selection of written sources, a distinction was made between "regional sources," which relate specifically to early medieval Frisia during the emergence of Christianity (8th century), and an "external source," namely the Icelandic *Edda*, which concerns a text that was published in late medieval Scandinavia (13th century). Although these sources are more recent than the objects discussed above, they still provide important information about the names and possible characteristics and familiars of pre-Christian gods, on the one hand, and about religious practices and cult places associated with these or other gods, on the other.

69 Lange 2017, 293 (cat. no. 165).

70 The tree furnishing one of the planks of the pit formwork was cut down in 626/627 (personal communication M. Dijkstra, University of Amsterdam).

71 See Van der Sanden & Capelle 2002, Figs. 16-17 (14C dating Grimstad: p. 72).

Regional written sources

These sources specifically concern the area of early medieval Frisia, but were written by outsiders during the 8th century, from a Christian perspective.

Utrecht, or Old Saxon, baptismal vow

An exceptional document is the Utrecht, also known as the Old Saxon, baptismal vow, written down in a West Germanic language. This explains why the sentence “gelobistu in got almachtige fadaer” is still quite easy to follow for modern-day Dutch speakers: Geloofst u in god almachtige vader (tr. Do you believe in god the almighty father?). It is plausible that this promise was written by Boniface in Utrecht in the late 8th century, although the text is also thought to be an Old Saxon baptismal promise.⁷²

The baptismal vow was a device by which the inhabitants of the territories subjugated by Carolingian rulers were to renounce their belief in the old Germanic religion and affirm their faith in God the Father, Christ as God's Son, and the Holy Spirit. The text, some lines of which are shown in Figure 12.20, is of great importance because, most exceptionally, it mentions the native names of three Germanic gods.⁷³

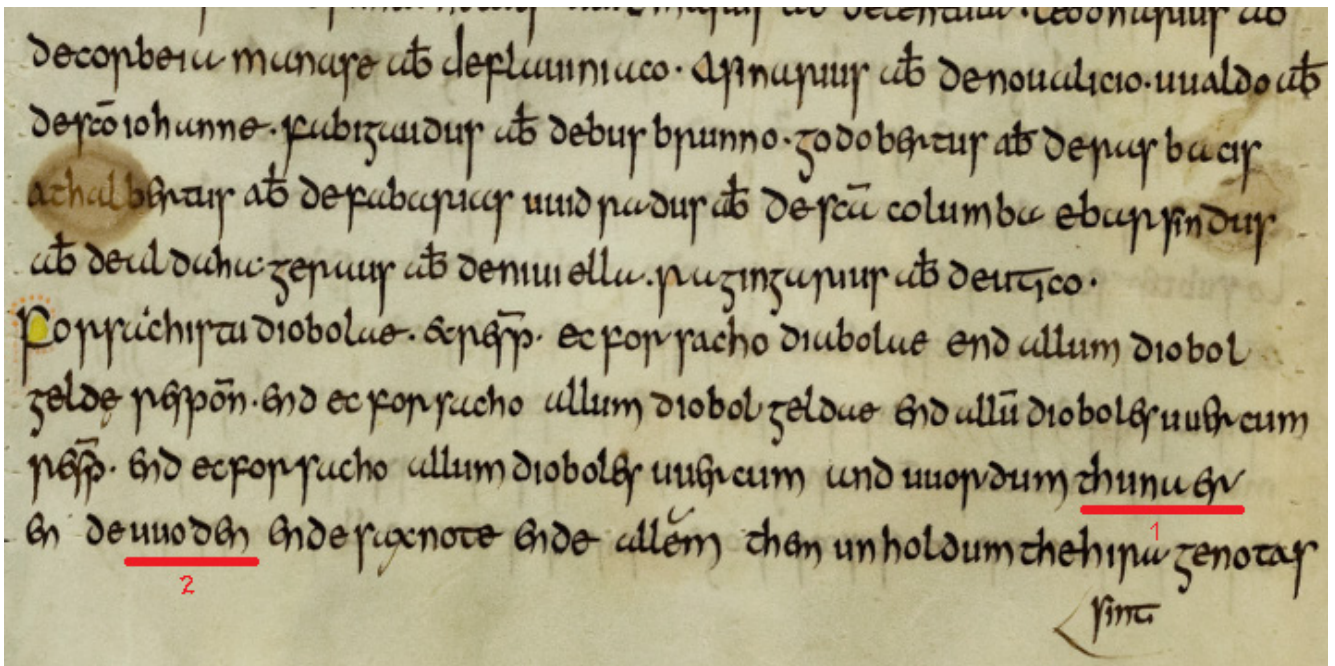


Fig. 12.20 Part of the Utrecht, or Old Saxon, baptismal vow. In this text, the names of Wodan (2) and Donar (1) are legible (manuscript in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vatican/ Rome: Palat. lat. 577, ff. 6 v-7r; photo Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Rome).

Question to the (un)believer:

Forsächistu diobalae?

End allum dioboles uuercum?

Answer:

End ec forsacho allum dioboles uuercum and uuordum, thunaer ende uuoden ende saxnoteende allum them unholdum the hira genotas, sint.

Translation of the question to the (un)believer:

Do you renounce the devil?

And all the works of the devil?

Translation of the answer:

And I renounce all the works and words of the devil, Donar and Wodan and Saxnot and all the idols that are their companions.

The names of the deities Donar and Wodan are also mentioned in their Latin form in the next historical source. The deity Saxnot is otherwise unknown. This name literally means “companion of the Saxons,” which could indicate that this was a “Saxon” tribal god.⁷⁴

72 See the discussion in Kolner 2018; for the first option, see Mostert 1999, 26.

73 Latin text and translation after Schuyf 1995, 9; see also Mostert 2009, 128-129.

74 Vermeyden & Quak 2000, 163.

Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum

This “list of superstitious and pagan customs” is a Christian-Frankish text, in Latin, listing 30 objectionable pagan customs of the Frisians and Saxons.⁷⁵ The list was prepared in church circles, probably in the mid-8th century, and contains some of the oldest known Dutch words, including the word *nodfyr* (tr. distress fire). There is much debate about the exact genesis of the text and also about the area in which it was used by missionaries.⁷⁶ Given the spelling of some of the words in the original Germanic dialect (such as *nodfyr*, above, and *dadsisas*, below), the text could have been made anywhere in northwestern Europe. In a manuscript held in the Vatican library in Rome, the *Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum* appears immediately after the baptismal pledge already discussed. This may suggest that the texts are related in content, albeit that a number of the names differ considerably from each other.

The list is probably a table of contents of council decrees, written by church representatives who had little sympathy for pagan practices and wanted to forbid them.⁷⁷ The list gives an extremely rare insight into some pre-Christian customs, which can be assumed to have also existed in some form or other in early medieval Frisia.⁷⁸

De sacrilegio ad sepulchra mortuorum: On sacrilege by the graves of the dead

De sacrilegio super defunctos id est dadsisas: On sacrilege above the dead, the meal for the dead

De casulis id est fanis: On small buildings, that is, shrines

De sacris siluarum quae nimidas vocant: On tree sanctuaries, which they call *nimidas*

De sacris Mercurii, vel Jovis: On sacrifices to Mercury [Wodan] or Jupiter [Donar]

De sacrificio quod fit alicui sanctorum: On the sacrifices for their saints

De flacteriis et ligaturis: On amulets and bindings

De fontibus sacrificiorum: On sources where sacrifices are made

De auguriis vel avium vel equorum vel bovum stercora vel sternutationes: On omens using birds, horses or cattle dung and sneezing

De feriis quae faciunt Jovi vel Mercurio: On feasts they hold for Jupiter [Donar] or Mercury [Wodan]

What is clear is that in the area to be Christianized, gods were worshipped, shrines and sacred trees (or groves) stood, amulets were worn, sacrifices were made to gods, and rituals were performed around the graves of ancestors. It is notable that two of the gods are mentioned (as Latin variants) who (in Germanic) are also prominent in the baptismal pledge: Wodan and Donar.

Lex Frisionum

This “Law of the Frisians” is a legal text describing common law in early medieval Frisia (Fig. 12.21). The text is a still unfinished, somewhat sloppy “draft” version of what should have become a true legal text at some point.⁷⁹ It was taken down in Latin around the year 790, by order of Charlemagne. The *Lex Frisionum* is primarily a penal code: it lists what the punishment was for murder, wounding, theft and breaking of the marriage vows. The only surviving version of the *Lex Frisionum* was printed in the 16th century; the original manuscript has, unfortunately, been lost.

The jurisdiction of the *Lex Frisionum* ran from the Zwin (the present border of Flanders and Zeeland) to the river Weser (in Germany). The laws from the central part of Frisia, between Vlie and Lauwers, were central to the code. For the areas southwest and east of there, deviations from this legislation were specifically noted. North Holland belonged to the western part of Frisia, where certain punishments and fines were thus different from those in the central part of Frisia.

The *Lex Frisionum* contains remarkably many pagan elements, which apparently were still considered so essential by the Christian authority that they were given a place in the draft version of the code. The following can be noted as being practices with pagan elements: the killing with impunity of a duellist, an arsonist or a newborn child (Article V.1) and the determination of a god’s judgment by lot (Article XIII.1 and 2).⁸⁰ Also illustrative is the last article, added as an appendix to the enumerated laws:⁸¹ “Whoever breaks into a sanctuary and takes away one of the sacred objects there shall be taken to the sea, and on the sand, which is covered by the flood, his ears shall be cleft, and he shall be castrated and sacrificed to the god whose temple he dishonoured.”

The wording of this article is more narrative than a legal rule. If the Frankish authorities had ever made an official version of the “Law of the Frisians,” this particular article would probably have been deleted.

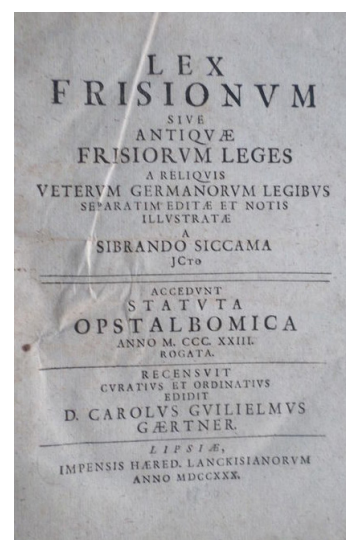


Fig. 12.21 Frontispiece of the oldest surviving, 16th-century printing of the *Lex Frisionum*, a collection of Frisian laws that were committed to paper in unfinished form around 790 AD. Some laws, as well as the ‘temple violators article’ that was added at the end of the legal texts, refer to pre-Christian customs (photo Wikimedia).

75 Mostert 1999, 26-27; 2004, 21-37; see also Weiler 1989, 117.

76 See, for example, Kolner 2018, 7.

77 Personal communication M. Mostert, Utrecht University.

78 Latin text and translation after Van Eijnatten & Van Lieburg (2006, 57); see also Mostert 2009, 129-130.

79 Siems 1980, 348; Timmer 2000, 18.

80 See also Algra 2000, 147-152; Timmer 2000, 17-45.

81 See <http://www.keesn.nl/lex/>: article Add. XI.1; translation by K. Nieuwenhuijsen (for this translation, see also Van der Tuuk 2013, 271).

Saints' lives

A few of the saints' lives (also known as *vitae* or hagiographies) from the 8th century known to us deal with the pre-Christian belief system.⁸² As a rule, the texts are linked to the political context in which they were written; therefore, they should not be seen as a realistic representation of historical events, but as texts with a specific purpose.⁸³ Nevertheless, the saints' lives provide important information about the presence of pre-Christian cult sites, which are mentioned in various sources, either as temples or in the form of idols.

The *Vita Wulframi* indirectly mentions idols of stone and wood. Some intended – and through Wulfram's intercession prevented – human sacrifices to unnamed gods are also described, mainly to make clear that the Frisian leader Radbod, as a pagan, was cruel and without pity.⁸⁴ The presence of pre-Christian cult sites in the area of early medieval Frisia is evidenced by two entries in the *Vita Willibrordi*.⁸⁵ The first entry relates to Fositesland (presumably Helgoland), where Willibrord settled after rather unsuccessful missionary work in Denmark. It is mentioned that several shrines to the deity Fosite were built there; that a spring on the island was dedicated to this deity; and that, apparently, sacred animals grazed here that no one dared touch. To show the power of his own god, Willibrord had three people baptised in the spring and some of the animals slaughtered – without being punished by Fosite. The second mention relates to *Walichrum*, or Walcheren, in present-day Zeeland, where Willibrord destroyed the idol of an unknown deity who was worshipped there.⁸⁶ Finally, the *Vita Bonifatii* recounts the fanatical adherence to pre-Christian gods in early medieval Frisia, the destruction of churches and about the revival of idol worship and the construction of shrines.⁸⁷

The location of the two cult sites in the *Vita Willibrordi*, at the extreme ends of the Frisian territory, was presumably intended to turn Willibrord into an apostle of all Frisians.⁸⁸ Although the location of the holy places is thus uncertain, the *Vita Bonifatii* shows that similar cult sites presumably occurred elsewhere in Frisia. The same picture emerges from the destruction of sanctuaries in the coastal area between Vlie and Lauwers, after the defeat of the Frisian leader Bubo at the hands of the Frankish leader Charles Martel, in 734.⁸⁹

External written source: *The Edda*

The sources discussed above contain little information about the gods mentioned, such as their characteristics, appearance and attributes. However, this information can be found in a more recent, "external" source, namely the *Edda*. The designation *Prose Edda* refers to a collection of texts about gods and heroes, written in Iceland in the first half of the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson. Another manuscript containing some of the same texts in poem form is known as *Codex Regius* (or *Poetic Edda*) and was penned around 1275 by an unknown author. Although both sources are viewed primarily as Icelandic cultural heritage, the content is presumably meaningful for a much wider area. It is likely that the coastal area of early medieval Frisia falls within this area, given the similarities in imagery on metal objects from Scandinavia (which from the Viking Age onwards includes Iceland) and from the southern North Sea area.

What is important in the context of this chapter, is that the mythological stories in the *Edda* give a detailed picture of the pre-Christian pantheon. That these stories were written down in the 13th century is explained by the fact that Scandinavia was Christianized a few hundred years later than the continent and the pagan world of gods thus survived for much longer there. It is actually remarkable that such a manuscript has survived in Iceland but not in Denmark, Sweden or Norway. This must have to do with the fact that until the advent of Christianity, people in northern Europe hardly had a culture of writing and, above all, that the Church did not encourage the recording of pre-Christian stories.

Within the pantheon described in the *Edda*, two gods occupy the principal place: Odin and Thor (referred to outside Scandinavia as Wodan and Donar).⁹⁰ Odin was the god of knowledge, wisdom, battle, the afterlife, magic, medicine and runic writing.⁹¹ This god was missing one eye, wore a blue cloak and hat with wide brim, had on his arm the gold ring Draupnir and had as weapon the spear Gungnir.⁹² Odin's "familiars" were his white, eight-legged horse (Sleipnir) and a variety of powerful predators that could be classified as scavengers: wolves, ravens, eagles and possibly wild boars.⁹³ Odin had the ability to communicate with these animals and temporarily assume their form. In the guise of the raven, among others, Odin ate from the dead on the battlefield. Odin acted here as a



Fig. 12.22 Modern likeness of Wodan/Odin in the studio of a visual artist in Austria. The depicted deity is missing one of his eyes, wears a wide hat and cloak, and is accompanied by some of his animal familiars, in the form of ravens and wolves – as described in the medieval *Edda* (photo R. van Eerden).

82 For an overview of relevant passages, see Looijenga et al. 2017 and also Chapter 13 of this book.

83 See, for example, Van Egmond 2000, 37–46.

84 See Looijenga et al. 2017, 154–157.

85 See Looijenga et al. 2017, 166.

86 See Halbertsma 2000, 216, 218.

87 See Looijenga et al. 2017, 174–175.

88 Van Egmond 2005, 34.

89 Halbertsma 2000, 229.

90 In the naming of Wodan as Odin, a typical Scandinavian language development can be seen, namely the omission of the w at the beginning of a word, as, for example, in the Dutch words *wol*, *wolf* and *wood* (wool, wolf and word); compare the Swedish "ull," "ulv," and "ord."

91 For a detailed description of this complex figure, see in particular Vermeyden & Quak 2017; Hedeager 2011.

92 See Vermeyden & Quak 2017, 94.

93 Nordberg 2004, 137–149.

medium, guiding the fallen from their earthly existence to the afterlife and at the same time accepted the bodies of the dead as offerings and actually admitted them to Valhalla. Two animals we know by name are the ravens Huginn (sense, thought) and Muninn (thought, memory) (Fig. 12.22). These birds flew over the world daily and provided Odin with information and predictions. With the eight-legged horse Sleipnir, Odin is said to have raced through the sky or led an army of the dead, of chosen fallen warriors.⁹⁴

Whereas Odin is portrayed as mysterious and subtle, Thor, the god of thunder, is portrayed as down-to-earth, honest, straightforward and decisive. Thor was a god who killed giants with his mythical hammer, called Mjöllnir, and rode his goat cart through the clouds, causing lightning and thunder. Thor was revered as a god who stood for physical strength, for lots of eating and drinking, for rain and prosperous agriculture, for fertility and for justice. Apart from the billy goat, no other familiars are mentioned.

Another deity that can be associated with animals as they may have been depicted in the imagery discussed, is Freya (wild boar and falcon). Other than those animals, both horses and eagles are generally associated with positive divine powers. In contrast, the snake and the dragon (a mythical animal) refer to the dark "underworld". Finally, the *Edda* mentions the wolf Fenrir, a monstrous creature that is an enemy of the gods.⁹⁵

Other linguistic resources

An important supplement to the historical sources are several linguistic sources, namely the names of the days of the week, personal names, place names and runic inscriptions.

Names for the days of the week

In southern Europe, the days of the week were named after commonly known gods, and it was no different in the northern Europe. The Romans had adopted from the Greeks the custom of naming the days after celestial bodies: the sun, the Moon, and five planets. The five planets, in turn, were named after gods. In the Germanic area bordering the Roman Empire, four of those gods' names were "translated" by replacing them with the names of their own gods. Here the gods were named not after Mars (French: *mardi*), Mercury (*mercredi*), Jupiter (*jeudi*) and Venus (*vendredi*), but after the apparently (more) familiar gods Tius (Tuesday), Wodan (Wednesday), Donar (Thursday) and Frīja (Friday). Farther north still, in Scandinavia, Roman gods were associated with Tyr (Swedish: *Tisdag*), Odin (*Onsdag*), Thor (*Torsdag*) and Freya (*Fredag*), indicating the interrelatedness of Tius–Thyr, Wodan–Odin, Donar–Thor and Frīja–Freya.⁹⁶ That the naming of the days of the week in the Roman and Germanic worlds was strongly interrelated is evident from the names of the remaining days – which refer to the Moon, the sun and the planet Saturn. The Roman names seem to have been transformed into native names precisely because of the strong similarities between "southern gods" and "northern gods," either in Roman times or perhaps only in the Early Middle Ages.⁹⁷

Germanic names are literally everyday words in much of Europe to this day, in the Netherlands, German-speaking countries, England and Scandinavian countries. In Germany, the situation is more linguistically complex because Wednesday is now called *Mittwoch* there. Until well after the Middle Ages, however, in at least the northern half of Germany, this day was also called "*Wodanstag*," and the names of the other "god days" retained their original names.⁹⁸ This indicates not only a linguistic connection with the "Germanic world", but also a connection in terms of the world of the gods and presumably in the ideas, rituals and customs associated with them.

That "pagan" names of gods were able to survive in a Christian Europe should be considered noteworthy.⁹⁹ Indeed, the Church forbade anything associated with the worship of gods other than Christ, with severe penalties for older, "demonic" practices. The names of the days are the most tangible evidence that Wodan, Donar, Tius and Frīja were also known in early medieval Frisia – indeed, so well known that they were able to withstand the ravages of time and even firm attempts to ban them. In Germany, this attempt to ban the name of the "highest" Germanic deity finally succeeded, a testament to the fight the Church was engaged in against the power and significance of the pre-Christian gods.¹⁰⁰ Wednesday is now called *Mittwoch* there, instead of the Old German *Wōdanesdag*.

Personal names

Chapter 11 explained how the names that people in early medieval Frisia gave to their children had specific meanings. These meanings could relate not only to personal and character traits, but also to strength, protection, bravery and courage. In addition, remarkably many names had to do with battle and weapons. Finally, some of the men in Frisia had names that refer to wild, resilient animals or scavengers, including the wolf, the bear, the boar, the eagle and the raven (with associations with Wodan). Examples of these names-with-meaning that occurred specifically in North Holland include Gerhelm (English: spear-helm), Saxger (sword-spear), Wibald (sacred-courageous), Evorbald (wild boar-courageous), Wulfbold (wolf-courageous), Refnulf (raven-wolf), Aldchrafan (old/revered raven), Hidulf (battle-wolf), Redulf (fame-wolf) and Aldolf (noble-wolf). The personal names tell us indirectly about the religion of the time, through the regular mention of certain name elements that are also mythologically significant, for example through associations with Wodan.

94 Vermeijden & Quak 2017, 150.

95 For the animals mentioned in this paragraph, see Vermeijden & Quak 2017, 63, 71, 120, 216.

96 For Scandinavian names for the days of the week, see Rausing 1995.

97 Shaw 2002 (94–95), however, sees the names as "fabrications" from the 8th or 9th centuries (see also Wood 2018, 892).

98 See, among others, Goos 2011, 50; see also Shaw 2007, 386–401; for *Wodanstag*, see Grzema 2011, 221–223.

99 See, for example, Strutynski 1975, 379.

100 See Grzema 2011, 215.

Place names

Two of the oldest place names in North Holland, which date back to the Early Middle Ages and possibly to Roman times, refer to the presence of pre-Christian sanctuaries.¹⁰¹ The first name is Heiloo, meaning holy forest.¹⁰² The second name is Hargen, derived from the Old Dutch *harag*, meaning sanctuary; the name is related to the Old High German *harug* and the Old English *hearg*, meaning forest/sanctuary.¹⁰³ Both place names attest to pre-Christian cult sites in the coastal region of early medieval Frisia, which apparently may have consisted of forests or open spaces within them.

Runic inscriptions

The pre-Christian, Germanic-speaking peoples are generally considered to be without a written language, but this is not entirely correct given the existence of runic writing.¹⁰⁴ Two periods of runic writing are distinguished: an "archaic" period, from the 2nd to the 7th century, with only single words or short texts, and a period in which runic writing in Scandinavia shows further development and saw wider social use there.¹⁰⁵ In the Netherlands, only runic inscriptions from the first period are known. These are inscriptions on mostly bone objects from the Frisian–Groningen dwelling mounds (Dutch: *terpen* or *wierden*) (about 20 items) and on a portion of a sword from the site of Tiel-Bergakker.¹⁰⁶ Almost all of the inscriptions are short personal names or names of (magical) objects and actions. The only objects found in North Holland with runes on them are sceattas of what are referred to in much of the English literature as the "Frisian runic type", and what are today referred to in the Netherlands as the "Continental runic type" (see Fig. 11.5).¹⁰⁷

Gods' names are rarely mentioned in runic inscriptions, although an inscription on a piece of antler from Wijndaldum may refer to the Germanic god Inguz.¹⁰⁸ Exceptional is the runic text on a brooch from Nordendorf, in southern Germany, because of the explicit mention of the names of Germanic gods (Fig. 12.23). The inscription reads, "logapore / wodan / wigiponar."¹⁰⁹ The symbol "p" represents a "th" sound, as we know it from English. The prefix "wigi" before the name of Donar is derived from *wīgian (to sanctify) or from *wigan (to fight). Thus, as a thunder god, Donar is referred to as "holy thunder" or "fighting thunder" in the inscription. It is unclear whether the name "Logapore" refers to a third deity or, perhaps, to the name of the person who made or received the fibula as a gift.¹¹⁰ In 2020, a 5th-century hoard was found in Vindelev, on Jutland, Denmark, comprising a bracteate with a highly instructive runic text. It reads, among other things, "iz Wōd[a] nas weraz" (with clearly recognisable the first three runes WOD, which we recognise from the fibula of Nordendorf). The meaning of the text is "He is Wodan's man." This jewel and the text make it clear that in Scandinavia in the 5th century, and almost certainly in the centuries that followed, Wodan was also the name of the god later known as Odin. It is this god who is presumably depicted on the bracteates, surrounded by numerous mythological symbols, such as birds and the horse (Fig. 12.24).



Fig. 11.5 A sceat, a silver coin from around 700 with runes, from Bakkum, municipality of Castricum, North Holland. Diameter 1,2 cm (collection and photo Huis van Hilde).



Fig. 12.23 A special indication of the worship of specific gods in the Germanic-speaking part of Europe north of the Alps is this silver-gilt fibula from an Alemannic grave in Nordendorf, Bavaria, Germany, datable to the mid- or late 6th century. On the back of the headplate, the names of the gods Donar and Wodan are given in runes. The runes for the name of Wodan are indicated in red in the photo. Length 13,5 cm, width headplate 7 cm (collection and photo Kunstsammlungen und Museen Augsburg, Archäologisches Zentraldepot, Augsburg, Germany).

101 For the age of these names, see Van Berkel 2017, 8.

102 Block 1974, 63; see also Schuyf 1995, 71.

103 Block 1974, 63; see also Schuyf 1995, 39.

104 See, among others, Page 1987, 6.

105 Looijenga 1997, 211.

106 For an overview, see Looijenga 1997 (Tiel-Bergakker: p. 176); 2003.

107 See Chapter 11.

108 Looijenga 1997, 56; 2003, 325.

109 De Vries 1957, 310–311; Düwel 1982; see also Looijenga 1997, 144.

110 Compare Schwab 1981, 45 (receiver/owner) and Düwel 1982, 80 (deity); see also De Vries 1957, 311.



Fig. 12.24 A recently discovered bracteate from the 5th-century gold hoard of Vindelev, Jutland, Denmark. The runes for the name of Wodan are indicated with red in the photo. Length 4.5 cm (collection and photo A. Mikkelsen, Nationalmuseet Copenhagen).

12.5 Interpreting the (imagery on) archaeological objects

From the scattered information in historical sources on toponyms for the Dutch coastal area, including present-day North Holland, a picture emerges of pagan practices at graves and in temples and sacred groves, where ancestors and various gods were worshipped. We know the name of only the occasional god who was specifically worshipped in this coastal area (Fosite). Thanks to the pledge of faith, we know three gods by name that were presumably worshipped more generally: Donar/Thor, Wodan/Odin and Saxnot. Based on the names of the days of the week, it can be assumed that the same was true of Tius/Tyr and Frīja. How these gods were interrelated within early medieval Frisia and how they formed part of an overarching mythology is unknown. Thanks to the recording of the *Edda*, the youngest version of such a mythology, has, at a time of the emergence of Christianity, survived only for the Scandinavian world. Although the *Edda*, mirrored in Christianity, may present the world of the gods too much as a single system, it is the only source with detailed information about individual gods, including their familiars.

That the *Edda* may also be important for the Early Middle Ages and for other parts of the Germanic world is evident from the imagery on Scandinavian brooches, bracteates and helmets that were imitated in, among others, the southern North Sea region. The metals minted with the head of a bearded male and two birds' heads above the head (Fig. 12.12) are also concrete evidence of the important place Wodan must have had in the southern North Sea region. It is possible that images of the heads of bearded males between birds on the end knobs of sword scabbards, to be dated to the 5th century and known primarily from the Frankish Rhineland, represent an early stage of this expression. A fine example of such an end knob was found at Lent, Gelderland (Fig. 12.25).¹¹¹ The detailed depiction of animal and human figures on brooches of the Achlum type, Domburg fibulae and kidney-shaped pendants, as well as the unique representation of human hands and feet on some of the bracteates from Friesland, shows that this imagery was not simply copied, but was understood by the inhabitants of the Dutch coastal region and also had an important symbolic value for them. Central to both the Scandinavian and the regional imagery is the relationship between a human face or fully rendered person and specific animal species, sometimes even depicted as combined human–animal figures.



Fig. 12.25 The head and figure of a man between two bird's heads curling towards him, decorating a 5th-century scabbard tip from Lent, near Nijmegen, Gelderland, Netherlands. Dimensions 4.5 × 2.7 cm (collection Museum Kasteel Wijchen; photo R. van Eerden).

The departure point for the interpretation of this symbolism is the iconographic analysis of Scandinavian brooches conducted by Olsen.¹¹² Using information from the *Edda*, she concludes that the bearded man depicts Odin, as the head of the Scandinavian pantheon. This god is always flanked by two of his familiars, in the form of animals with which he could communicate: horses, wolves or birds (of prey), including his two ravens, Huginn and Muninn.¹¹³ See, for example, the pendants from Kirkemosegård, near Spentrup, Jutland (Fig. 12.26) as parallels of the gold pendant from Texel (Fig. 9.11)¹¹⁴ Wodan is therefore also called the raven god.¹¹⁵ In addition, according to Olsen, other elements from Scandinavian mythology are also depicted: the footplate symbolises the world tree Yggdrasil (literally: horse of Yggd = Odin); the three curves in the footplate symbolise the three sacred springs under this tree; the bow and central disc symbolise the cosmos (celestial vault and sun); and the striking animal head on some of the brooches symbolises the wolf Fenrir, who swallows Odin at the end of time.¹¹⁶

111 Hulst & Van Es, 1991.

112 Olsen 1998; 2006.

113 Olsen 2001, 117–120; 2006, 487–493, 503; for communicating with animals, see also Seebold 1992; 1994.

114 Clemmensen 2015, 109–142.

115 Vermeijden & Quak 2017, 139, 143.

116 Olsen 1998, 37–38; 2000, 119; see also De Leeuw 2002, 79–84.



Fig. 12.26 This late-6th-century gold hoard, found at Kirkemosegård, Spentrup, to the north of Randers, on Jutland, Denmark, consists of a large, gold-plated fibula and a series of pendants. The pendants exhibit pairs of bird's heads with curved beaks turned towards each other, as are also visible on the gold pendant from Texel (see Fig. 9.11). This makes it plausible that the goldsmiths in the North Sea region knew each other's work and were in contact with each other were through an exchange system of gifts with mythological representations. Dimensions largest kidney-shaped pendant 1.6 × 1.5 cm (collection Østjylland Museum, photo M. Dyer).

Hedeager also interprets the "face between two animals" on the brooches as an effigy of Odin.¹¹⁷ Odin in particular was able to contact spirits and ancestors in the underworld, either by going into ecstasy or by temporarily detaching his soul from his body. According to Hedeager, the animals on brooches and bracteates were not only Odin's familiars, but also the animal forms his soul could assume if he wanted to enter the underworld.¹¹⁸ Especially in the imagery on bracteates, these attributes of Odin occupy a prominent place, showing dancing and floating persons surrounded by a variety of animal figures. Even more concrete is the depiction of snake-like animals with human hands and feet, depicting Odin during his process of transformation.¹¹⁹ The isolated ears, lower legs and eyes depicted around snake-like animals are also presumably related to this divine attribute.

The animals central to Hedeager's work are also associated by Nordberg with Odin, in his role as lord of Valhalla: the reception hall for warriors who died in battle.¹²⁰ To enter this hall, a warrior had to be chosen by Odin's Valkyries (also called Walkuren: battle goddesses) after a heroic death. The *Edda* frequently describes how the bodies of such warriors are eaten by ravens, eagles and wolves. According to Nordberg, these animals can be thought of as incarnations of Odin, who took the form of an animal to receive the ultimate sacrifice of an illustrious warrior.¹²¹ Although archaeological finds are not considered in Nordberg's analysis of the *Edda*, the animals he mentions do correspond to some of the animal figures that are also central in the imagery on brooches and bracteates.¹²²

The animal heads and stamped motifs on the crested helmets are also associated with Odin by Steuer.¹²³ The animal figures not only offered the wearer of the helmet divine protection in battle, but also served to secure the inclusion of these warriors in Odin's Valhalla after they had died an honourable death. The warrior on horseback, as well as the standing, fighting and dancing warriors, are part of a visual language in which the wearer of the helmet presumably saw reflected his future role as a warrior of Odin (or Wodan). During battle, some of the warriors could even be dressed as wolves or bears, according to the *Edda* as "warriors of Odin."¹²⁴

Although Alkemade links the imagery to the illustrious past of deceased ancestors, to which the fighting and capturing of wild animals may indeed refer, an important aspect of the helmet from Sutton Hoo simultaneously argues for a link to Odin.¹²⁵ The pieces of almandine with which the left eyebrow (the right eyebrow seen from the wearer's point of view) is inset are lacking the pieces of gold foil that are present behind the almandine in the right eyebrow. When this helmet was worn near a fire, only one of the eyebrows would light up, whereby the wearer presented himself as a representative of the one-eyed deity.¹²⁶ The original wearer of the helmet belonged to the royal house of the Wuffingas, who had their burial ground at Sutton Hoo and who are historically known to have included Odin/Wodan in their lineage. From a striking difference in the rendering of the eyes, it appears that a pendant with "bird helmet" from Uppåkra, Sweden (Fig. 12.27), is an effigy of Odin.¹²⁷ On the basis of this pendant, the small person with "bird helmet" behind the warrior on horseback on one of the stamped motifs of the crested helmets can probably also be interpreted as an effigy of Odin/Wodan in his role of helper in battle, accompanied by his two ravens.



Fig. 12.27 Bronze pendant of a standing man with moustache and (damaged) 'bird helmet' (compare Fig. 12.10), found in Uppåkra, Scania, Sweden. From the striking difference in the execution of the eyes, with the left being convex and the right being concave, it can be inferred that it is the deity Odin who is being depicted. Length 5 cm (photo B. Almgren, Lund University Historical Museum).

117 Hedeager 1999; 2005; 2011; see also recently Pesch 2017.
 118 Especially Hedeager 1999, 152; for animal figures, see especially Hedeager 2011, 61 ff.
 119 See also Olsen 2001, 118.
 120 Nordberg 2004, 153-185.
 121 Nordberg 2004, 142.
 122 For these animals, see also Hedeager 2011, 66-98.
 123 Steuer 1987, 202-203.
 124 Simek 2007, 35.
 125 Alkemade 1988, 254-284.
 126 Mortimer 2011, 26-27; Price & Mortimer 2014.
 127 Mortimer 2011, 26, figure on p. 27.

It is usually not possible to say to which specific attribute of Odin/Wodan the imagery on individual objects with human–animal figures refers. It should be borne in mind that the imagery can contain “layered symbolism” and refer to several characteristics simultaneously, as was discussed for a Domburg fibula from Heiloo in Chapter 8 (see Fig. 8.7). This also explains that a figurative language on comb helmets that, on the one hand, refers specifically to Odin/Wodan may, on the other hand, have been combined with elements from stories about heroic ancestors. It is this hybrid imagery that is characteristic of the Scandinavian world, and this mostly makes it impossible to arrive at an unambiguous interpretation of imagery on brooches, bracteates and crested helmets.

For the sceattas of the “Wodan monster type,” it has recently been assumed by Grimmsma in a well-substantiated analysis of the imagery on both sides of the coins that it is not Wodan, but Donar who is depicted.¹²⁸ The noticeable and consistently depicted thickening in the area of the forehead of the person with wild hair is linked to a story from the *Edda* that describes the battle between Thor and the giant Hrungrnir. During the battle, Thor threw his hammer at the giant, at the same time as the giant threw a whetstone at Thor. The hammer shattered the whetstone, a fragment of which remained stuck in Thor’s forehead, even after he was victorious in the battle. The snake-like animal on the reverse is also known from the *Edda*, namely as the Midgard snake, which is so large that it encircles Earth and bites itself in the tail. During the final battle (Ragnarök), at the end of time, Thor manages to kill this snake. However, he himself dies from the venom the snake spewed at him.

The club-shaped pendants traditionally referred to as Donar amulets are also presumably related to the deity Donar. In a still-valid overview, Werner sees the club of Hercules and the hammer of Donar/Thor as strongly related attributes.¹²⁹ In the Germanic world, the club of Hercules is said to be linked to the qualities of Jupiter as god of thunder, after which, from the 4th century onward, the club became an important attribute of Donar/Thor, as we know from the *Edda* for the Scandinavian deity. The already mentioned sacrificial site in the Broekpolder, because of the “Donar amulets” found there and because of finds of nails with round heads resembling clubs, is linked by the excavators with the worship of a Donar-like deity.¹³⁰ Intriguing are the many hundreds of rounded, white stones believed to have come from the Dutch rivers area and also deposited at the sacrificial site, perhaps in association with the same deity. The white pebbles have also been found elsewhere in North Holland (Uitgeest and IJmuiden) in wells from the Roman period and from the Early Middle Ages (see Fig. 12.28), so a relationship with Donar is also possible there.¹³¹ The fact that “Donar amulets” were often worn near the crotch could point to an association with fertility – one of the qualities that can be associated with Donar/Thor according to the *Edda*.

More difficult to interpret is the wooden statue from Heiloo. Only if one of the eyes were to be abnormally rendered or closed could an association be made with Odin/Wodan. Because the sculpture from Heiloo is missing half, identification as Wodan or another deity (or perhaps a non-godly figure, such as an ancestor) is not possible. And however tempting it may be, it is not possible on the basis of this isolated find, to establish a link with the place name Heiloo (from the Dutch *heilig bos*, or holy wood), or to the presence of three healing wells (the Willibrordus well, the Adalbertus well, and the Runx well) thought to be related to pre-Christian practices.

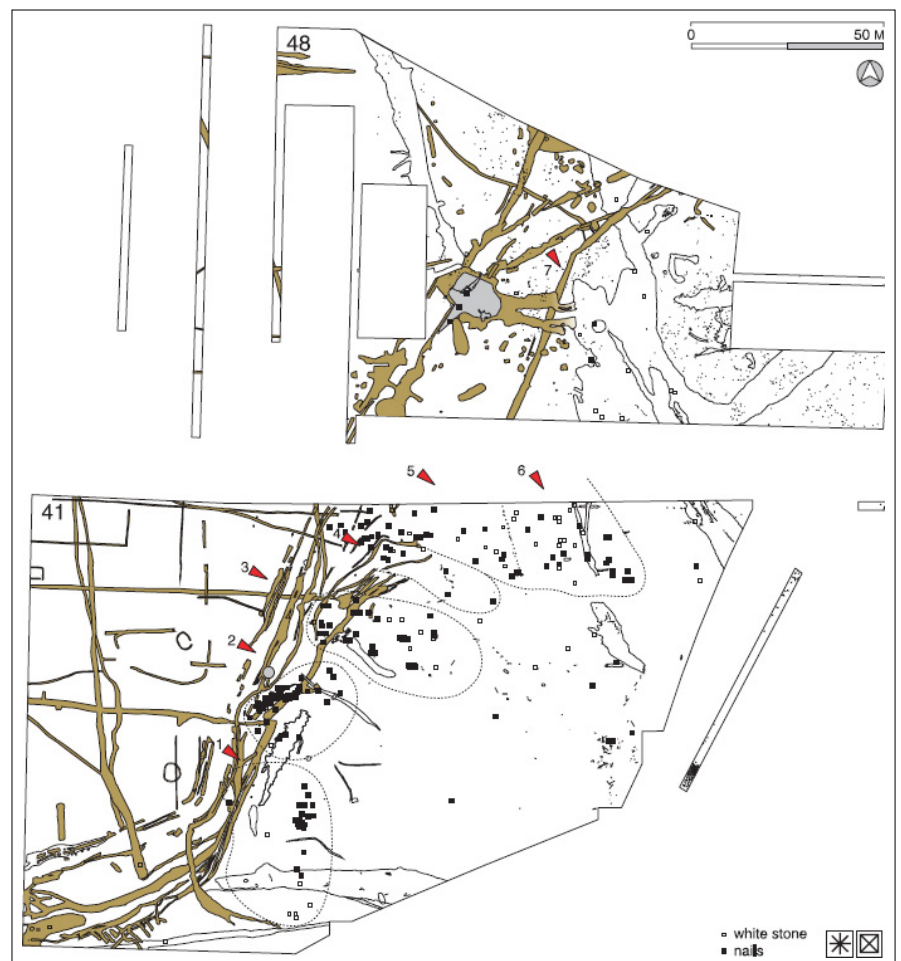


Fig. 12.28 Overview of ritually deposited stones (mostly white pebbles; open squares) and nails (solid, black squares) in the sacrificial location Broekpolder, near Beverwijk. The stones may have been deposited in the Late Iron Age or Roman period or during reuse of this location in the Early Middle Ages. The six phases of use of the passages in the series of ditches that formed the separation between a wet lowland (to the right of the ditches) and higher land (to the left of the ditches), are indicated by red triangles (after Therkorn 2009, 97).

¹²⁸ Grimmsma 2019.

¹²⁹ Werner 1964.

¹³⁰ Therkorn et al. 2009, 86; see also Kok 2008, 127.

¹³¹ De Koning 2007, 108–114 (Uitgeest, wells 2 and 3); personal communication J. de Koning, Hollandia, IJmuiden.

12.6 Conclusion

An attempt has been made to combine archaeological, written and linguistic sources in order to reconstruct religious worship before the advent of Christianity. The great significance of the pre-Christian religious world for the inhabitants of early medieval Frisia is evidenced indirectly by the vigorous eradication of these “demonic” forces by the first missionaries. Concrete clues to pre-Christian customs, cult sites and names of some gods are provided by a variety of 8th-century historical sources, supplemented by the information from linguistic sources. By linking this information to the Icelandic *Edda*, which was recorded later, it has proven possible to establish the religious significance of some groups of archaeological objects. North Holland, as part of early medieval Frisia, was part of an overarching belief system that extended from at least the southern North Sea region into Scandinavia. Within this belief system, the worship of two gods was central: Wodan/Odin (associated with battle, bravery and wisdom) and Donar/Thor (associated with fertility). We know little about which actions were associated with the worship of these gods and in which places this worship took place, either historically or in terms of names – and archaeology provides little additional information.

From the names for the days of the week, it can be deduced that Wodan/Odin and Donar/Thor were two of the gods worshipped as “general gods” over a vast area during the Early Middle Ages, but it cannot be excluded (indeed, it can even be assumed) that there were regional differences in their characteristics, attributes and familiars. Changes through time can also be assumed, although the information from the 13th-century *Edda* still seems to apply well to imagery from the late 5th–8th centuries. The origin of both gods, as worshipped in early medieval Frisia, goes back at least to the phase of renewed settlement in North Holland (late 5th century). Although culturally speaking the new inhabitants expressed strong ties to the Frankish world, religiously speaking we see an orientation toward the northern, Scandinavian world – perhaps in response to the threatening expansion of the Frankish empire.¹³² The worship of Wodan (Domburg fibulae, 6th–7th century) and Donar (club-shaped pendants, 6th–7th century; sceattas, late 7th to 8th century) can be traced within early medieval Frisia into at least the 8th century, when missionaries try to ban their worship.

¹³² For a cultural orientation to the Frankish world, see [Chapters 6](#) (pottery) and [8](#) (metal). See also Nicolay 2017, 510–512.

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Summary

1 INTRODUCTION

For many years, archaeologists working within the Dutch coastal region, including North Holland, have observed significant phases in the 1st millennium. The initial centuries of this era indicate a densely populated area with a rich material culture. However, a period then followed during which identifying human presence became notably challenging. It wasn't until the final centuries of the 1st millennium that habitation displayed signs of resurgence after a somewhat hesitant restart, gradually returning to its former level.

The intervening era, spanning approximately from the 3rd to the 8th centuries, remained shrouded in scientific and archaeological mystery. The excavation in 1995 and 1996 at the site of Oosterbuurt in Castricum, which yielded the remarkable find of a 4th-century woman's skeleton, appeared to change this understanding. However, her find turned out to be exemplary for archaeology in this period: some questions were answered, but many new ones came in their place.

Now is opportune timing to consolidate our knowledge about the 1st millennium, particularly its central (3rd to the 8th) ages, within this publication. The central question revolves around whether a complete break in population and culture occurred during the 4th and/or 5th centuries, or if a degree of habitation continuity persevered in North Holland after all.

The favourable timing for this synthesis is partly because reports on some major excavations of the past have been published in recent years, but also because important new investigations have been carried out. The knowledge that has thus become available forms a good basis for a thorough, relatively complete synthesis on various aspects of life in the 1st millennium. Chapter 1 emphasises that the history of occupation should not be seen primarily from the point of view of the 'writing elite', namely the Romans, the Frankish dynasties, and the church, but from the point of view of the inhabitants of the coastal area itself, referred to in written sources as Frisians. The culture of North Holland, a peninsula intricately linked to north-western Europe, positioned amidst the Rhineland, the British Channel and shores, and Scandinavia, is examined with a strong emphasis from an international perspective. To this end, as many archaeological sources as possible are deeply (re)studied and aspects such as landscape, economy, language, socio-political organisation, and religion are also considered from that perspective.

A thorough and well-documented knowledge summary of the period is important for our understanding of the development of North Holland in a general sense, but certainly also as a basis for new archaeological and other forms of scientific research. This synthesis can thus be the basis for a provincial archaeological research agenda and form the foundation for related scientific studies on, for example, provenance and kinship relations through DNA analysis and isotope research.

2 THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LANDSCAPE

The basis of existence in the western Netherlands was and is the unusual, dynamic coastal landscape. North Holland consists mainly of soil material that shows great landscape dynamics: apart from a few Pleistocene cores, it is sand and clay brought by water and wind, often topped by a stratum of peat. This means that important parts of the landscape were formed relatively recently, i.e., during the last 10,000 years, and that even in that geologically short period, profound changes took place. These factors contribute to the challenging nature of studying the coastal landscape in terms of human subsistence conditions. It means, for example, that due to the erosive action of the sea, shifting and drying out and 'ossification' of peat, many remains of human presence from earlier periods have disappeared forever or are hidden under a thick layer of shifting dune sand.

Chapter 2 attempts to reconstruct the landscape history particularly for the areas hardest hit by erosion, especially in the second half of the 1st millennium. An important conclusion is that between the known core areas of Kennemerland, Texel and Wieringen there must have been a large area of salt marshes and peat margins where a proportionally large number of people lived. These occurrences also allow us to conclude that many of the disappeared place names in areas such as *Texla* and *Wiron* could be designated as shires (also known in English as 'gauge'), referring to administrative divisions of land. The latest archaeological analyses also show that several tidal inlets were already present in the coastal system of North Holland in the Iron Age, providing effective drainage for the many peat areas in the Noordkop. At the same time, these tidal inlets posed a risk of erosion due to the sea's increasing ebb and flow, leading to significant coastal vulnerability.

3 SHIRES, PRIMORDIAL PARISHES, AND SETTLEMENT TERRITORIES

The first written texts about North Holland since the Romans were authored by representatives of ecclesiastical authorities. At the time, these ecclesiastical bodies were closely related to the administrative, Frankish authority. The activities of the church and its administrative division provide insight into the primary settlement clusters within the province during the advent of Christianity. In the latter half of the 1st millennium, North Holland was divided into four official shires (administrative regions), which are comprehensively documented from an archaeological perspective, as detailed in chapter 3: *Kinhem* (Kennemerland), *Texla* (present-day Texel and surrounding area) and *Wiron* (present-day Wieringen, also with surrounding area). Regarding the fourth shire, *Nifterlake* (the Gooi- and Vecht area), our archaeological knowledge is limited, so this region is largely beyond the scope of this book. A final important area is the region around *Medemelacha* (present-day Medemblik), about which we know more archaeologically but which officially was not a real shire.

The first churches of North Holland were founded in *Kinhem* in the early 8th century, followed shortly afterwards by the construction of churches at *Texla* and *Wiron*, from which daughter churches were later established. The distribution of these churches nicely reflects the size of the original ecclesiastical parishes (primal parishes), and within them the main settlement territories. Church bodies played an important role in village formation and later presumably in the large-scale reclamation of the peat bogs.

4 THE SETTLEMENTS

Within the shires, primary parishes and settlement territories encompassed the communities where people lived and thrived. The fifty most relevant archaeological excavations, both recent and older, are discussed in chapter 4. Among these, the Kennemerland region features the most substantial amount of available information. The narrative that emerges from the data describes that in the 1st millennium, the core of economic existence was the virtually self-sufficient homestead house with a mixed farm. People lived in scattered or small clusters of cottages with outbuildings, built in places strategically chosen based on pragmatic considerations. Surpluses were presumably exchanged or sold in local markets, and the income generated allowed for the acquisition of wheel-thrown pottery, hand mills and other imports, especially from the German Rhineland. An area where we know from place names, certain historical sources, and sporadic archaeological finds to have hosted significant human habitation, yet has seen minimal excavation, is the extensive salt marsh and peat area between Kennemerland and Texel.

If the habitation periods of the fifty settlements are visualized in a diagram, a clear (almost) absolute habitation gap becomes evident between about 300/350 and 450/475 AD. An oval defence structure in Castricum-Oosterbuurt, unique for the Dutch coastal area, is so far the only indication of human presence around 400 AD. Determining whether and how the establishment of church foundations and the Frankish conquest of the western coastal region in the initial half of the 8th century influenced changes in settlement structure, landscape layout, and usage proves challenging due to the limitations of existing archaeological data. It remains unclear how the spatial liberation of the elevated arable lands, a characteristic of North (and South) Holland suggesting a degree of central organization, was achieved before the year 1000.

5 FARMHOUSES AND BARNs

The core of the settlements consisted of homestead houses and outbuildings, which are discussed in chapter 5. The analysis of these mainly timber-built structures is possible due to the availability of new data from both past and recent research, for example at *Uitgeest*, *Bloemendaal*, *Heiloo* and *Den Burg* (Texel). This study of buildings, based on structures identified from ground features in the soil, also seems to point to the already mentioned habitation gap in terms of building tradition.

Nevertheless, farm building from the first phase of the Early Middle Ages does seem to contain aspects that we are still familiar with from the Roman period. This may indicate that there was a small remaining population passing on this knowledge, at least in Kennemerland. The construction of residential stable houses from the 6th century onwards simultaneously points to a cultural influence from the Old Rhine area and the central Dutch river area. The result was a 'melting pot' of local, southern and, to a lesser extent, northern influences, resulting in one-, two- and three-aisle layouts of the stable houses. If the earliest architectural features from the period directly following the habitation gap suggests mainly a southern origin, they provide an indication that the origin of the new inhabitants of early medieval North Holland is from the central Netherlands.

6 LOCAL, HAND-FORMED POTTERY IN THE ROMAN PERIOD

Pottery is an important source of archaeological information for the entire 1st millennium. During the initial centuries of the era, hand-formed pottery dominated, but for a long time it was considered scientifically inaccessible. Locally, pottery produced without a potter's wheel shows three cultural influences in North Holland. Ever since the Iron Age, we have known of a local pottery tradition in North Holland that has strong similarities with that of the northern Netherlands. Already in the centuries before the beginning of the era, pottery most resembles that of the present-day province of Friesland. At the start of the 1st millennium, a second area also appears to be of great influence: the regions of Groningen, northern Drenthe and northern Lower Saxony. The third cultural influence is Roman. Influence from Roman culture can be seen in certain types of hand-formed pots, even though this pottery itself is present only in limited amounts within the soil of North Holland. Additionally, the physical presence of Romans (notably at Velsen) is confined to a brief period in the early 1st century AD.

A significant conclusion from the study of the local, hand-formed pottery, which results in a comprehensive typology presented for the first time in chapter 6, is that this material occurs in a few places in the province until the 4th century AD, but dates no later than around 350 AD. The fact that this is followed by a period in which locally crafted pottery is almost completely absent provides further evidence for a sharp decline in population. The distinctive pottery of the mound area in the late 4th and 5th centuries, the so-called 'Anglo-Saxon pottery', is completely absent in North Holland.

7 POTTERY IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

Unlike the local pottery from the first half of the 1st millennium, imported pots are dominant in the 5th and 6th centuries. The pottery used by the new inhabitants of North Holland, following the aforementioned habitation gap, was primarily crafted using a potter's wheel and thus were imported wares from the Rhineland. This production area seems to indicate a similar origin of the new arrivals from the period after the occupation gap as the building plans mentioned above. The discussion of the pots, jugs and bowls in chapter 7 allows us to date the arrival of the first newcomers fairly precisely, namely in the second half of the 5th century and presumably from 475 onwards. It is noteworthy but not surprising that this oldest turned pottery occurs mostly in the same locations as the youngest hand-formed pottery from the Roman period: in Kennemerland and on Texel.

Unlike the northern mound region, a native pottery tradition was absent in North Holland for a period of several hundred years. It is only during the 8th century that the picture changes again: slowly but surely, a new style of hand-formed pots emerges, rivalling the imported wares in terms of numbers. The transition from the Merovingian to Carolingian period seems to be an important turning point here, resulting in the emergence of a new, leading pot type, the 'globular pot'.

8 JEWELLERY, BELTS, AND SWORDS

Metal objects that were worn visibly on the body, such as brooches or fibulae, buckles, and hair needles, show how the inhabitants of North Holland presented themselves culturally during the Late Roman period and Early Middle Ages. These objects also offer clues about their connections with the surrounding areas. From the 6th to the 8th century, a greater understanding of the chronology and geographic distribution of these highly symbolic objects has emerged, partially due to the analysis of previously unknown collections of amateur detectorists. During that time, those who possessed and used these items were under the influence of two powerful cultural movements: from the southern regions, the Frankish culture, which drew inspiration from the legacy of Roman fashion and the subsequent rise of Christianity, and from the northern regions, the influence of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian cultures, characterised in part by non-Christian motifs. Under the influence of both currents, a separate 'North Sea culture' arose around the southern North Sea, within which the Dutch coastal area formed a smaller cultural area. Characteristic of this smaller cultural area are certain types of brooches that are also regularly found in North Holland.

By examining the newly collected material presented in chapter 8, it becomes increasingly evident that the northern influence included depictions of animal figures and human faces on certain metal objects, likely linked to the worship of the deity Wodan (in Scandinavia Odin). At the end of the 7th century and into the 8th century, such mythological representations gradually disappeared, and Christianity became the main inspirational factor. This transition is illustrated by the appearance of typical church symbols, such as the Latin or equal-armed cross.

9 ELITE NETWORKS AND KINGDOMS AROUND THE NORTH SEA

Based on finds of precious gold objects, chapter 9 attempts to link administrative and political structures to historical information. The early written sources, which cover only a short period (late 7th and early 8th centuries), a limited area (central river area), and focus on the 'kings' Aldgisl and Radbod, are no longer taken as a primary starting point when reconstructing early medieval kingship. The valuable items exchanged as gifts between leaders and their followers provide a more useful perspective on the system of leadership, possession, and power relations. Within North Holland, based on gold coins and jewellery, a remarkable dichotomy appears to have existed in the 6th and 7th centuries. The southern part, the area of *Kinhem* and the area of *Texla* and *Wiron* formed two separate kingdoms in the 6th century, which at the end of that century began to align with different spheres of influence, with the southern network centred around the Rhine estuary and a 'northern' network centred around Westergo in Friesland. The original domain of the 'Frisian kings' was presumably not in the river area but around the centre on the Rhine estuary. In the late 6th century, their influence was extended to Kennemerland and, in the context of the power struggle between the Frankish groups (the Austrasian and Neustrian nobility), their economic and military influence in the area around Utrecht also became noticeable.

This remarkable division within early medieval North Holland can be directly attributed to the 'step-by-step' conquest by the Franks in the first half of the 8th century. Following the death of Radbod, the southern network (the Rhine estuary and Kennemerland) was first conquered around 720, and subsequently, the northern network (Texel, Wieringen and Friesland up to the Lauwers) around 734 in a follow-up offensive. The territories thus brought under Frankish control were, through royal grants to the nobles Gerulf and Dirk I, the basis for the emergence of a centralised authority, which would eventually be called the county of Holland in the 13th century.

10 DEALING WITH THE DEAD AND BURIAL RITUALS

In addition to the numerous questions that traditionally exist around the habitation gap in the 4th and 5th centuries AD, archaeologists have long been contemplating the treatment of the dead in the 1st millennium. This is particularly due to the absence or scarcity of human burials from both the Roman period and the Early Middle Ages in North Holland.

A complete survey of human remains, presented in chapter 10, leads to two remarkable conclusions. First, until the 9th century, most people were not laid in a grave after death, but left in locations that are not yet identified, but were presumably outside of settlements. After the bodies were 'defleshed' by dogs or predators, parts of their bones were collected and used as ancestral objects within the settlement, and often eventually buried. This proved to be a persistent tradition that certainly continued locally into the 9th century. Fascinatingly, ancestral bones took on a different meaning in a Christian context, namely as sacred relics that are venerated to this day.

Secondly, larger burial grounds from the Early Middle Ages, akin to those found in South Holland, the Gooi and Friesland, are presently completely absent from the coastal area of North Holland. One explanation may be that, unlike habitations, they have not yet been found archaeologically and may lie under the sand of the Younger Dunes. Only at the end of the 1st millennium do we gradually see a transition from pre-Christian practices to Christian rituals, which coincides with the appearance of the first burial grounds (or cemeteries) around churches.

11 LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN NORTH HOLLAND

In chapter 11, we discuss language culture, referring to the spoken language, place names and personal names. The development of the spoken language in North Holland during the 1st millennium cannot be separated from the comings and goings of people. There are virtually no written sources in the local language from the Roman period or Early Middle Ages, yet many elements of these can be reconstructed based on later sources. The analysis of language remnants in areas elsewhere around the North Sea, with which cultural and linguistic contacts existed, also provides important information.

On this basis, the following picture can be drawn. In North Holland, a language that we refer to as Frisian developed from North Sea Germanic dialects in the 5th and 6th centuries. This language was spoken along the entire Dutch coast and was strongly related to Old English, North German, and southern Scandinavian dialects. From the south of the country, Frankish (also a Germanic but not a North Sea Germanic dialect) emerged during the Early Middle Ages, from which the eventual Dutch emerged. In the place names of North Holland, we often recognise remnants of old dialects, but they also offer insights into the ancient landscape there. In the oldest personal names, we often recognise elements that parents evidently deemed significant for their children, particularly positive personal qualities, such as strength and bravery, and occasionally even incorporating the names of weapons and resilient animals. The latter category can possibly be related to the 'service animals' of the god Wodan that we presumably also see on metal objects in the aforementioned imagery, such as the wolf and the raven.

12 PRE-CHRISTIAN GODS

It is assumed that many actions of people in the 1st millennium had no direct practical or economic purpose but had to do with the worship of gods or other forms of ritual action. We know quite a lot about the religious world in the first centuries of the era in North Holland based on archaeological sources, in the form of ritual deposition. This involves presumably sacrificing objects in pools, pits, and wells. Written sources from this period are almost non-existent, and general descriptions of the religious world as we know it from the works of Tacitus, for example, prove difficult to reconcile with archaeology. From the Early Middle Ages, preceding or concurrent with the onset of first Christianisation, we have a small number of written sources regarding the world of faith, and much less archaeological evidence comes to light in chapter 12. By clerics who stayed in Frisia, mention is made of several 'pagan' customs that people found reprehensible and abhorrent and that had to be banished at all times, such as the worship of ancestors and gods. Among the few Germanic gods specifically mentioned in these sources are Wodan and Donar, whom we also know thanks to our weekday names (in Dutch: woensdag and donderdag, in English *Wednesday* and *Thursday*).

A new and relatively underutilized source of information within Dutch archaeology on the worship of Wodan particularly is the analysis of mythological representations on metal finds. This focuses on a bearded male face among animals (mostly bird heads, but sometimes abstracted quadrupeds). For the meaning of these figures, we draw on a source that at first sight seems a bit far-fetched, namely the late medieval Icelandic *Edda*. This work turns out in parts to provide a plausible explanation for the images, not only for Scandinavia but certainly also for other areas around the North Sea that were also culturally strongly oriented towards the northern world.

13 CHRISTIANISATION: 'PAGANS' BECOME CHRISTIANS.

As the Franks progressively extended their dominance over the coastal region from the south, the introduction of Christianity took place in North Holland, a process described in chapter 13. The first missionaries who arrived in the Dutch coastal area towards the end of the 7th century, and particularly during the 8th century, encountered a local population that practiced the worship of multiple 'pagan' deities, actions that conflicted with the missionaries' beliefs. This population also engaged in a variety of distinct rituals associated with these practices. The Frankish rulers strongly supported the missionary work. With the foundation of the first churches, a three-stage process took effect to convert the population from paganism to Christianity. In the first stage, ritualistic practices, such as sacrifices and maintaining holy places, were banned. Then, in the second phase, the construction of churches enabled regular church attendance for the entire population. Finally, in the third phase, converts were guided to integrate the principles of Christianity into their entire mindset and emotions.

Partially due to disruptions caused by the Viking presence in the 9th century, this entire process unfolded in an unruly manner. Not only did non-Christian practices endure, numerous variants of the true Christian creed, considered as 'heresy', also persisted for a long time. Not until the 11th century were there enough churches to enforce church attendance, while the Christianisation of the internal behaviour of the population, after a slow start in the 8th and 9th centuries, did not begin to take off in earnest until the 10th century. Thus, a substantial and complete transition from paganism to Christianity did not actually take place until the 1st millennium drew to a close.

14 SYNTHESIS: WHAT DO WE KNOW NOW?

The Malta Convention includes the obligation to carry out archaeological research in construction activities. The concluding synthesis of 'North Holland in the 1st millennium' is primarily intended as an aid to this. The newly acquired insights can serve as a starting point for research relating to North Holland in the Roman period and Early Middle Ages. Upon reading the various chapters, it should be evident that we have acquired a significantly deeper understanding of many fundamental subjects. However, it's also apparent that certain areas offer opportunities for additional investigation, through archaeological excavation, and analysis of history, linguistics, and natural sciences. As formulated in chapter 14, the following themes deserve more attention in this respect, whether or not linked to research in specific parts of North Holland:

- The landscape of the northern half of North Holland and the reclamation of the peat areas.
- The depopulation of North Holland from the 3rd century AD and indications in local pottery development for this depopulation.
- The significance of the oval defence wall and moat from the mid-4th century AD in Castricum.
- The cultural background and related origin of the 'newcomers' in the 5th century AD.
- The distribution of gold, and elite networks and power centres within North Holland.
- Evidence of the worship of native gods, including Wodan, in the form of unique deposits and images on metal finds.
- The Frankish conquest in the 8th century and the cultural and especially organisational changes associated with it (including in relation to the layout of the cultural landscape).
- The origins of Medemblik and the construction of the Texel-Den Burg castle in the 8th century, in the context of Frankish occupation.
- The burial rituals during the Roman period and Early Middle Ages, and the tracing of burial sites from both periods under the shifting dune sands.
- The chronology and phasing of the Christianisation of society from the 8th century onwards.
- The nature of the power and governance of Danish Viking leaders in the mid-9th century when they were given the area of North Holland on 'loan' from the Frankish king to protect against other Vikings.
- The possible link between the large-scale shifting of the ancient dune landscape and large-scale reclamation of the peatlands.