Chapter 6
Conclusion
Throughout the medieval period, textual references postulate dynamic and recurring relations between ‘Frisian’ and ‘Viking’ in the Viking Age, whilst metal-detected objects found in Frisia increasingly underline the relation of the Frisian coastal area with the Viking sphere around the North Sea. This multidisciplinary study set out to explore historic Frisia in the framework of this Viking Age North Sea world, in order to highlight the connectivity between the Frisian and Viking spheres through its reflection in written and material sources. The main research question is to what extent and in what way Frisia displays connectivity with this Viking sphere and how this is reflected in selected material culture and texts. By creating an understanding of Frisia in relation to the Viking sphere that dominated the North Sea world at this time, we revise the idea of Frisia as only part of the Carolingian sphere and add to it the image of Frisia’s relation to the Viking sphere. In doing so, we create a more detailed and nuanced understanding of the dynamics around the North Sea, as we recognise that the various spheres – Frisian, Viking, Frankish – are in fact overlapping segments to a large extent. Moreover, we place the Viking Age material within Frisia in its context, that is the North Sea instead of the Continental context, and in doing so find even more sources that illuminate the connectivity between the Frisian and Viking spheres. This way, we make a necessary start to filling a blank spot on the map, which can and expectedly will increasingly be filled in the years to come.

As it is recognised that Frisia’s Viking Age situation cannot be studied without taking into account the periods preceding and following it, the historical-archaeological framework sketches the developments of Frisia in relation to the different spheres by which it was touched at various moments in time. This concept of spheres has been chosen over the idea of territories in order to capture the fluid character of cultural areas that do not necessarily coincide with formal boundaries. It becomes clear from the sketch of these developments in the historical-archaeological framework, as it in fact does throughout the entire PhD thesis, that through the shifting of spheres of influence and power, with their embedded economic, cultural and religious aspects, Frisia has been connected with different worlds and traditions though time, the connection with the North Sea area being the most prominent. In the longue durée, Frisia changes from being a central point on an metaphorical East-West axis of the movements of people in the Migration Period, to becoming a central point on both the east-west axis from Denmark to the British Isles and on the North–South axis between the Viking and Continental worlds. Within this development, from forming the most south-western part of the non-Christianised, Germanic northern world, Frisia becomes the northern corner of the Christianised, Continental world. At least, this was formally the case. In this PhD thesis, we paused following the shifting spheres at the Viking Age to see that it is exactly in that period that the liminal zones of the Frankish and the Viking sphere move across and, in fact, coincide in the Frisian coastal zone. Frisia thus is connected to both and, therefore, becomes central in the overlapping of spheres as part of the larger transition of spheres, but without becoming the geographical centre of either. To characterise this particular situation the term liminality is used. This
concept is connected to the situation of transition, of not belonging to one sphere entirely but of having the possibility of being connected with various spheres simultaneously. Also, it refers to the outer zones of the spheres themselves with their individual systems of value, world views and spheres of transaction. As a result of this Viking Age liminality, Frisia develops a new kind of ‘central’ position between the two central powers and their centres, namely an important connecting position. Because of this, Frisia as a coastal area between the waterways Zwin and Weser could be taken out of its formal Carolingian context, by which it is strongly influenced, and be reviewed within the Viking sphere around the North Sea in the case studies.

To establish the connectivity between the Viking and Frisian sphere, meaning the way in which the areas and people cohere to the extent that they become socially meaningful, the distinctive unity of the spheres together, their typical mobility and the extent to which this appears embedded in and structuring for society, we analysed a range of textual sources and portable metal objects. The premise on which this is based is that connectivity and cross-cultural contact are reflected in both the distribution of material culture and in elements recorded in texts. A representative and exemplary group of material, portable metal-detected finds from Frisia relating to dress, jewellery and to the typical Viking sphere of silver was selected to form the corpus of the case studies on material culture. The corpus of texts for the non-material case studies consists of a wide range of written sources from the pre- to post-Viking period, of different types and from various regions, as long as their relevance to the Viking Age and the question of connectivity could be established. This is possible because the developments in what are perceived to be formative periods, as sketched in the framework, not only determined the Viking Age events themselves, but also the way in which they were subsequently recorded and valued in written sources, and connected to the contemporary situation throughout the medieval period. Together, these different types of sources represent the Viking Age horizon in time and geographical sphere and point us to the structural and embedded connectivity. By taking into account written sources from the pre- to post-Viking eras and placing them next to material culture, however, we are dealing with evidence of a differing nature and temporality. In addition, there are many biases of the sources that needed to be borne in mind when using them. Therefore, the methodology was set out to assess the nature, temporality and especially the relevance of sources to this Viking Age horizon in time and space. This was done with the idea of a radar image in mind, which reflects a schematised picture based on different wavelengths, to which the various distribution maps, maps of spheres and information from the written sources can be compared. Due to this different nature and temporality of the sources, or the different wavelengths, they are each analysed in their own chapter through case studies.

The analysis of the content of the written sources yields a number of recurring themes that are of importance, both in the Frisian and non-Frisian texts. These include the occurrence of Vikings in the Frisian material, referred to by imagery of floods and armies, and what to do with them. The Frisian legal texts provide codified
regulations for dealing with people taken captive by Vikings and with people who actively join them. One of the further key aspects expressed in this Frisian source material is this position of Frisia between the Frankish and the northern worlds, which simultaneously are used as symbols of the present and past, respectively. We have already mentioned the liminality of Frisia in relation to the Viking and Frankish worlds, but the liminality of our topic is, in fact, manifold. It equally applies to being on the junction between the maritime and Continental world, between land and sea, between past and present and between North and South. Moreover, it refers to the Viking Age situation of transition through the shifting of spheres itself, through which Frisia finally changes from one sphere to the other. This situation is such a key transformative event for Frisia that it is codified in the core of the Frisian legal tradition and identity. That the struggle between the two major spheres, powers and world views – that is the Christian Carolingian and the non-Christian Viking – has become represented as a struggle between ‘North’ and ‘South’, between old and new, between heathen and Christian and between unfree and free in the Frisian sources is therefore extremely significant and understandable. It even becomes connected to their ultimate characteristic: the Frisian freedom. This freedom is equated with Charlemagne’s Frankisation of Frisia by the incorporation and related Christianisation, making everything before ‘past’ and related to the ‘North’, and everything after ‘present’ and related to the ‘South’. The geographical and metaphorical North is painted off as a grim, heathen corner of the world to which Frisia was once subdued. The fact that there is a need to so clearly swear off all ties with this heathen northern world after the Viking Age, but projected back onto it, can only be explained by the fact that this was not a self-evident matter, because Frisia still had a strong connection to this North, as can be read between the lines. The Frisians needed to clearly stress their relation with the Franks and with Christianity, in order to stress that the time of heathenism and coherence with the Danes or the North belonged to the past. Not only this aspect signals that there was a problematic situation that they needed to come to terms with in the Viking Age and later, it also becomes clear from those instances where we see that Frisians were causing the Franks problems, such as when they were disobedient and joined Vikings to create new warbands, for instance as part of the Great Heathen Army in England. This idea of Frisians becoming Vikings, voluntarily as well as involuntarily, is definitely present in the Frisian legal corpus and can be expected to have occurred structurally.

Although the transition from heathen to Christian is represented, in hindsight, as a direct and swift transition in the Frisian sources, this clearly was not the case. Neither does it seem the case that it was only with what is called the second Christianisation that Frisia became Christian. Rather, we should infer from the way the texts represent the period from about 800 into the eleventh or even twelfth century as a long period of Christianisation through syncretism, hybridism and relapses into paganism. Apparently, there was a diffuse relationship with Christianity, probably partly because of its connection to Frankish overlordship and because of the strong ties with the North Sea world that was still partly non-Christian. Moreover, there
could be differences between the various people and groups of Frisians, such as the pacified, Christian Frisians and the non-Christian, non-pacified Frisians. That the relationship with Christianity is more diffuse than we are sometimes able to tell, seems to be indicated in the material culture by the occurrence of the crucifix pendants dating to the Viking Age. These, together with the references to early churches and people like Walfrid, placed next to the references to ‘heathenism’ and disobedience, as well as the idea of the long process of second Christianisation, mark the syncretism or hybridity during the Viking Age.

One of the reasons for this position of being connected to the North, whilst forming part of the South, is Frisia’s strong historic connection to this area and its people, as recorded in social memory. This North Sea world that used to be a Frisian world around the mare Frisicum, had by the Viking Age become a Norse sphere, but the Frisian links with it still persisted. That these mutual ties dating back to, particularly, the Migration Period and the early medieval period of blooming trade were of great significance, is expressed by the way the relations are taken up in historic and literary sources, including in what can be regarded as forms of origin myths, and the stress that is placed on shared histories and dealings. These include shared traditions, stylistic elements and narrative motifs going back to the period of the Germanic migrations, which are subsequently put to use in Viking Age contexts and had significance for a Viking Age audience. The role of these shared histories, characteristics and experiences is significant for social relations and for forms of perceived kinship. They also reflect the importance that is given to travel, to distance, to crossing the sea, to the maritime world and to the relation with North Sea neighbours before and in the Viking period. The way these events and recurring themes are reflected and connected to the Viking Age and to the later medieval period in written sources from the Viking Age and the (twelfth and) thirteenth centuries, makes us regard the Migration Period, Viking Age and the thirteenth century as formative periods. Each of the periods has a relevance for the study of the Viking Age, albeit through different layers, temporalities and forms of condensed and mythologised history.

Possibly, this problematic relation of Frisia with the North ties in with the various hints and the rather striking image of Frisia being regarded as part of the Danish sphere in the Viking Age, at least by the Danes. There are two possible ways of explaining this. Either Frisia, or a part thereof, indeed is part of the Danish power sphere it is controlled by Danes to whom the Frisians pay tribute, or Frisia is part of Francia formally in terms of taxes and borders, but still chooses to join the Viking sphere on occasion and quite easily moves within it. This would mean that the Franks had little control over at least some of the Frisians, and this may then also be one of the underlying reasons for granting the Danes their benefices in the Frisian area. Although there are multiple references to Frisia as part of the Danish sphere of power and area – in Danish sources, Frisian sources and also in Adam of Bremen’s quote that ‘from that time Frisia and England are said to have been subject to the Danes’ – it cannot be established with certainty from the sources themselves what exactly that meant. Could it also be related to the Danish
benefices in Frisia, for instance, or to a general idea of Frisia as part of a shared, Germanic, North Sea sphere whose inhabitants join the Vikings. What we can say is that similar to the long period of Christianisation, there is an equally long process of Frankisation or perhaps ‘Continentalisation’ through which Frisia is only slowly taken out of its Germanic North Sea context.

Apart from references to Vikings in Frisia and to Frisians as part of a Viking sphere, there also are recurring instances of people travelling between the Viking world and Frisia in sources from various relevant times and places. To some extent there is a shared tradition of connecting specific Vikings, whether historical, fictional or a combination of both, to Frisia in one way or another. Sometimes, this may be related to the Great Heathen Army, but in the cases of Egill Skallagrimssonar and Rothlaib/Rudolf, who are both mentioned as raiding in Frisia, this is not necessarily the case. The latter first tries his luck in Viking Ireland, after which he goes to Frisia, and this indicates how Danish Vikings could easily move between these two regions on their quest for a power base. Furthermore, it is one of the examples that show a general and shared understanding of ‘Frisian’ and ‘Viking’ as concepts. The sons of Ragnarr Loðbrók, in particular Ubba or Ubbe ‘the Frisian’, and Danish pretenders to the throne who acquire power in the form of benefices and tributes, are cases in point of Vikings in relation to the Great Heathen Army in England. In the case of Ubba, his nickname ‘the Frisian’ is related to this context and it is debatable whether ‘Frisian’ here is meant to signal that he is Frisian by birth and ancestry, by affiliation of his warband which contains Frisians, by being a ruler in Frisia and/or by having just arrived in England from Frisia. A similar explanation could in fact be given for the role of Redbad, who as a Frisian ruler operates in a nominally Frankish area and in relation to the Frankish aristocracy (cf. Van Egmond 2005). Regarding Ubba, each option or combination thereof is possible, and the analysis of the written corpus in general indicates that Frisians were most likely amongst the warbands in the Great Heathen Army. Related to this, and especially apparent in the non-Frisian sources, is that there is a constant travelling between Frisia and the Viking world, meaning both Scandinavia and the British Isles. Frisia appears as both a destination and a stopover, and is clearly situated within the Viking Age North Sea geography and travel sphere. The idea of Frisians as an important people in the North Sea world already starts in the Migration Period and does not cease in the Viking Age, as can be seen by the stressed shared history and heritage and the occurrence of Frisians in battle-lists and runic inscriptions, even though it changes. What this shows us is that whilst acknowledging the biases of the written sources we should not forget their potential, and this thesis has contributed to the idea that texts of a diverse nature and with different biographies can indeed be fruitfully applied to the study of the Viking Age, as long as we establish their relation to it.

Through the choice of objects that are analysed in the material case studies, we have focused on identity and transactional spheres as material elements of connectivity. Most of the objects in our corpus can be dated to the ninth and tenth centuries, and into the eleventh, but the case studies also show that there is potential in material, such as the horse harness material, from the later Viking Age. Again
emphasising that the Frisian finds only represent a small number which have been brought together despite many biases rather than a full picture, it nevertheless is very plain that the objects related to the Viking sphere are not only found in trading centres or well-known nodal points, but are also scattered along the coastal area. This presents us with a different picture than trade and contact via one central place like Dorestad. It leads us to think that we are dealing with smaller-scale and rather freely organised activities as well, which seem to date mainly after Dorestad’s heyday and, most importantly, to occur within a shared maritime zone – especially since most of the find types are restricted to the Frisian coastal zones and sometimes major rivers. This ties in with the theoretical argument of Loveluck and Tys (2006) that the coastal area is less controlled and that exchange here is conducted by more or less free and mobile ‘peasant-traders’ who focus on the maritime world and even display a maritime group identity. Moreover, it ties in with Besteman’s observation that the silver finds related to the Viking world in the Netherlands are from the northern coastal area and Walcheren, and that they are not necessarily connected to trade. Even if the dirhams are related to any form of trade – which he doubts – then in the period after the decline Dorestad it had been decentralised to these areas (Besteman 2004, 33). Because although the finds discussed here are single finds, when plotted with their parallels they present a rather dense distribution pattern around the southern North Sea. This becomes particularly clear when we present a combined distribution map of the two first material case studies and the spheres (Fig. 6.1) and compare it to the palaeographical map of AD 800 (Fig. 2.4) This also shows how much closer the coastal area is to the Danish and British regions over sea than it is to the inland, when we realise that the easiest and quickest routes went over water.

Such a distinctive, maritime unity is a clear sign of the connectivity around the North Sea, also in the Viking Age. Moreover, our case studies present a similar image on the basis of both male and female dress items, which are used for conveying identity, and for items related to the sphere of transactions and beyond. Despite not relating to trading centres or nodal points specifically, it is fair to say that, through the analysis, we do see some possible core areas, like Counts, particularly Westergo, the Walcheren area and the Texel/Wieringen region, which seem to have been habitational cores as well. Whilst the latter two areas at some point became Danish benefices, Central Frisia did not, and so we have to stress that the zone that shows connectivity with the Viking world stretches beyond the briefly Danish-controlled area, as well as beyond the trading centres. In addition, quite a large part of the material found is (potentially) from after both the short period of benefices and the heyday of Dorestad, and so also is not limited in time to the phenomenon of Danish power bases and main trade centres, as known from textual sources. Finds along the major rivers, including Dorestad, were of course known before, so our finds can be added to this picture. The analyses of the portable metal objects have made it very clear that in the Viking Age, Frisia was touched and influenced by the Viking sphere of influence, as the various distribution maps visually emphasise.
This detectable Viking sphere of influence in our distribution maps and visualisation of spheres can be said to be a filter superimposed on the more fundamental layer of Frisia as part of the Frankish/Frisian sphere that characterises most of the material culture. In general, however, we must bear in mind that the Viking influence is mostly found in these types of objects and is recognised through this type of filter.\(^97\) The thin layer of ‘Viking finds’ is not just one of chance finds with no context or meaning, as is sometimes believed, but represents a structural and meaningful relation with the Viking sphere that has also left traces in the written sources into the late medieval period, just as in the soil. As the exchange of objects and sharing of activities and culture is never free of meaning and connotations, this already creates a form of unity. Acceptance of the objects that clearly relate to the Viking sphere and world view like the brooches, weights and dirhams, also represents a cognitive process of acceptance. The fact that much of the material is restricted in distribution to the Frisian part of the Continent is striking and can be explained in two ways. Either the objects were not distributed to the area south

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\(^97\) For example, the number of recognisable Viking burials outside Scandinavia, even in England, is relatively small. However, the number of Viking disc brooches, to name just one type of object, is vast.
of Frisia because it would not have been acceptable there, whilst it was acceptable in Frisia due to the very different relation to the Viking sphere, or the objects did reach the area south of the Frisian sphere, but were subsequently changed in form and used as raw material, in order to be no longer recognised as relating to the Viking sphere. This also represents a difference in reception of the material and its connected values. The distribution maps obviously show where the boundary of the distribution and/or acceptance of recognisable Viking-sphere material is, and this is at the southern boundary of the Frisian sphere. Whilst formally being part of the Carolingian realm, and also in terms of (material) culture being largely influenced by it, Frisia can be said to display a strong connectivity to the Viking sphere or even be said to be at the edges of the Viking world, within the boundaries of its sphere of influence.

We have to recognise that in the present study, we have only examined one very portable and recognisable category of material culture, namely metal objects of specific types, yet these make it clear that Frisia is touched by the sphere of Viking influence and shares elements with it. Because of the coinciding of this Viking sphere with the Frankish sphere, which together have an area of overlap that is situated in Frisia and that does not follow the formal boundaries precisely, this convergence of spheres can be said to present an almost invisible boundary that is a liminal zone. The visible and formal boundaries of the northern world, which separated Frisia from the rest of the Continent, since it lay south of Frisia, in pre-Viking times, moves to the north in the Viking Age, taking its trading centres with it. Despite this shift, the invisible border of the northern sphere is still located south of Frisia. This PhD thesis, and in particular the material in the case studies, has made this invisible boundary of the Viking sphere visible again. Not only has the study of finds revealed objects of types that, as far as we know, had not been found or recognised in Frisia, the Netherlands or the Continent before, it also has put beyond doubt that there is much more ‘Viking material evidence’ here than previously thought or generally recognised. Together, this has changed our image, and it ties in with research by other scholars and specialists, such as that of numismatist Simon Coupland, to name just one. Moreover, as this makes clear, there is a great potential for this corpus to grow through recording schemes, raised awareness and the exchange of knowledge among scholars of the ‘Viking world’, and between scholars and metal detectorists.

It is evident that finding a textual reference to Vikings in Frisia or a number brooches of Viking type in Frisia is not enough to find connectivity, it is the combination of the aspects of different types of finds, the various textual references and the shared elements through time, that shows the connectivity. This is why it is so important to connect written and material traces in a multi-disciplinary study and to highlight here what the combination of the analyses reveals. The general image that emerges of travel and connections from the written sources relates well to the image of the distribution maps that follow from the material case studies. Furthermore, the maps and image from the texts together indicate the ‘conceptual’ context in which the selected finds from Frisia should be placed.
Through the choice of objects, we focussed on identity and transactional spheres as material connectivity, whilst in the analyses of the texts we have looked at the representation and characteristics of mutual connections, and what meaning they are given. Overall, the analyses of the portable metal objects in relation to the written evidence show that in the Viking Age, Frisia displays clear connectivity with the Viking sphere of influence – and much more so than we used to think.

The combination of sources here, furthermore, shows that the North Sea connections in the Viking Age are so embedded because it was a long-term connectivity with roots in the Migration period that – contrary to what much research says – did not cease or diminish in the Viking Age after the expansion of the Frankish realm, even though it changed character. The connectivity remained, found its own dynamics and would have been different from the Migration Period connectivity, but was also building on it and referring to it. The importance of the Viking Age connectivity is not just shown by the Viking Age finds and references themselves, but maybe even more so by the post-Viking references in Frisian and Scandinavian sources. That it is so embedded in society is shown by how it is taken up in the Frisian legal tradition in a number of ways, and can be seen as ultimately formative. Connectivity through maritime mobility is, in fact, a strong part of the identity of Frisia, as is its constant position between Continental and North Sea. The hybrid identity of the Frisians stems from their connectivity to both the Continental (Frankish) and North Sea (Viking) spheres, and the combination of Frisian, Frankish/Continental and Viking/North Sea elements, also in the material corpus. This shows that the connections between the Viking and Frisian spheres go beyond short-term events like Viking raids. They, in fact, are present over a longer period of time and on different scales, and are mutual rather than a one-way phenomenon.

Moreover, together the case studies show that what the written sources – for which the moment of inscription is in the High Middle Ages – present is not only a constructed reality that is projected back onto the Viking Age, but to a considerable degree a Viking Age reality as well. This reality is one of a very dynamic Viking Age along the entire coast of Frisia and is particularly related to a number of core areas. The portable metal objects associated with the Viking sphere that are found in Frisia represent the material embodiment of the connectivity with the Viking sphere, or even the social relations between the two spheres. Therefore, they can be said to be the materialised connectivity, whilst we also have the textualised connectivity. As this study attempts to unravel the Viking Age connectivity as reflected in both written and material sources, we need to approach these within a wide conceptual framework, in relation to each other and with an open mind to be able to detect all the reflections.

One of the most striking points to arise from the combination of sources in this study, is Frisia’s strong connectivity with the Viking sphere in the British Isles, which in turn is closely connected to south Scandinavia or present-day Denmark (Fig. 6.2). The relation between Frisia and the British Viking areas comes to the fore in all case studies, indicating that the Frisian coast was closely associated with the Danelaw, the areas that were covered by the Great Heathen Army, the
related southern Scandinavian areas and the Viking world around the Irish Sea, either directly or indirectly. The distribution of some artefact types suggests that the closest connection with the Viking sphere, in fact, is with the Danelaw. From this it follows that when studying an area like Frisia in a Viking perspective, we should broaden our scope and take the wider Viking world outside Scandinavia into account. Instead of looking at a Scandinavian, Viking impact in a region like Frisia, the wider scope allows us to look at the mutual relations between two areas, spheres of influence and worlds, and assess the extent to which they connected structurally. In this approach of shared spheres and connectivity, it often does not matter whether a particular actor is Frisian or Scandinavian, which is often hard to establish anyway: what matters is that they operate in the same sphere.

Fig. 6.2. The strongest sphere of connectivity for Frisia, this may also extend across the Irish Sea into Ireland in some cases.

For future research, the approach of connectivity and spheres taken here seems very fruitful. As it moves away from the idea of one society impacting another, it enables us to see other aspects, details and nuances. Our perspective allows us to study more and layered sources, to include aspects of identity, fluidity and mentality, and also to study connectivity between areas or groups that already have a long-standing relationship and, therefore, a lot of shared cultural baggage. Focussing in more detail on the relation between the Viking sphere in the British Isles and Frisia would be a very interesting and promising line of research. The potential of such
research will be greatly enhanced by the instalment of the Portable Antiquities of the Netherlands database and cooperation with the PAS and other European recording schemes which are now in place or being installed. In addition, the possibility of applying methods including DNA and isotope analysis for human remains and material analysis on objects, naturally holds potential when studying the movements of people and objects, their provenance and, for objects, aspects of their manufacture. A similar potential as for Frisia can be seen in research on other liminal areas or edges of the Viking world, where we can look into how new groups and identities were formed. These processes and outcomes should not a priori be compared to the situation in Scandinavia itself or in the Danelaw with its very strong Viking impact; instead, each of these areas should be studied in its own right. Moreover, the connectivity in various regions should be studied as a Viking Age phenomenon, but perhaps not only as a ‘Viking phenomenon’, as it includes a mixture of people from all sorts of backgrounds who together create new identities, of which aspects may be considered Viking or be related to the Viking sphere. As has become clear from the present study, the lines between Viking, which includes Scandinavian but is not restricted to it, Frisian and ‘multi-ethnic’, which in fact should be reframed as ‘multi-geographically originated’, are not hard lines but more permeable boundaries, and the terms are not always helpful. We can call it Viking or we can call it Frisian, Danish, maritime or southern North Sea-related, but whatever we choose to call it, the image remains that the coast that used to be known as Frisia was well connected to the Viking sphere around the North Sea in the period that we call the Viking Age, and particularly in the ninth, tenth and into the eleventh century.

Altogether this study makes clear that there indeed is a vast degree of connectivity between ‘Frisian’ and ‘Viking’, or between the coastal area known as Frisia and the Viking sphere around the North Sea. Although Frisia was relatively firmly situated in a Frankish frame since its incorporation and Christianisation in the course of the eighth century, it has a very different position than the rest of the Frankish realm regarding the Viking Age North Sea world. The North Sea creates a unity amongst the various bordering regions, despite their internal differences, through the phenomenon of connectivity, also in the Viking Age. Needless to say, this was a maritime connectivity. This dialectic with the Viking sphere fits in a longer tradition of strong relations with the neighbouring areas around the North Sea and can be said to have been structural. As such, Frisia was successful in being a more or less neutral, or at least a multi-religious and multi-cultural, sphere in which the actors from various spheres could meet and exchange: a liminal zone. The intermediary position of Frisia goes beyond trade and is connected to the spheres of economy, culture, politics, warfare and religion, as well as to the idea of a maritime North Sea world. It is determined by a high mobility and connected possibility to be active in different cultural areas and power spheres. This position of Frisians as middlemen, as a liminal and simultaneously highly central group, is what determines

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98 Despite biases and methodological difficulties within this field as well, see Geary and Veeramah 2016.
Frisia’s connectivity with the North Sea world and what can be seen as the Frisian way of life. The connectivity to both the Continental and the North Sea world is part of the hybrid identity of the Frisians, which is even reflected in the core of their legal tradition, and it is the combination of Frisian, Frankish (Continental) and Viking (North Sea) elements that characterises it. We can thus state that Frisia forms its identity in relation to the Viking sphere in a larger degree than we previously thought. As such it can be seen as structuring and fundamental to society. Frisia, through its position in the liminal zones of the two spheres, becomes a depot for wealth and cultural negotiation. Nevertheless, it remains between two centres and as such does not become the central focus of either spheres with which it is connected. Liminality, not belonging to one sphere completely but to two, sometimes shifting spheres simultaneously, creates opportunities for connectivity with other areas, resulting in cultural links, shared material culture and textual traditions. Through its connectivity with the Viking North Sea world stretching from Scandinavia to the British Isles, and with the Continent, Frisia was central because it was liminal.

Fig. 6.3. Frisia’s central and liminal position in relation to the various spheres of influence.