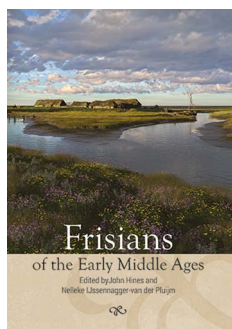


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JOHN HINES & NELLEKE IJSSENNAGGER-VAN DER PLUIJM (ed.). 2021. *Frisians of the Early Middle Ages* (Studies in Historical Archaeoethnology 10). Woodbridge: Boydell; 978-1-78327-561-8 hardcover £90.



The 10th volume in the *Studies in Historical Archaeoethnology* series, founded by the late Professor Giorgio Ausenda in the 1990s, perpetuates early medieval archaeology's dominant focus on ethnicity. This in itself is not a critique: overall, the chapters and discussions reveal an up-to-date understanding of this complicated topic. I found it, however, regrettable that the volume as a whole lacked a clear theoretical standpoint with regards to the study of ethnicity and ethnic identity within archaeology.

A major strength of *Frisians of the Early Middle Ages* is that it is multi-disciplinary, drawing on archaeological and textual sources and combining different disciplinary perspectives. Another asset is its broad geographical perspective, including the entire region identified as 'Frisia' in the early medieval *Lex Frisionum*—the coastal region between the Weser in North Germany and the Zwin on the modern Belgian-Dutch border—as well as the North-Frisian islands along the west coast of Schleswig-Holstein, although western Frisia is least well-represented.

The first chapter, by the volume's editors and Ian Wood, introduces the topic of 'Frisian' identity and situates the volume within the wider context of the archaeoethnology series. As with previous volumes, it publishes proceedings from a specialist symposium. The one on 'the Frisians' was held in 2018 when Leeuwarden, the capital of the Dutch province of Friesland, was European City of Culture. Although Ausenda's viewpoint on archaeoethnology is explained, the chapter could have done more to outline current understanding of ethnicity in early medieval archaeology as a point of departure for the other contributions.

Four of the following chapters are worth mentioning specifically at this stage because of their explicit handling of and relevance to the issue of ethnicity. First, Robert Flierman's chapter stands out for problematising the "historical entities ... behind the labels 'Frisian' and 'Saxon'" head-on, aiming to establish whether, and when, there were also "distinct Frisian and Saxon *peoples*" (my emphasis) (p. 224). This seems a core issue that any book on archaeoethnology should take as its starting point.

Second, Johan Nicolay's chapter makes a clear-cut distinction between different types of group memberships that constitute people's identities—including co-resident, socio-political and religio-ideological—achieved through analysis of decorative metalwork. This emphasis on diversity within an overall network of relationships would also have formed an excellent starting point for the volume as a whole. Annet Nieuwhof's discussion of pottery styles and social relations, bridging the 'Old' Frisian (Roman period) and 'New' Frisian (early medieval period), complements this well. After questioning the significance of ethnic identity as a

matter of concern to the Frisians themselves, the focus shifts onto regions of origin and interaction to explain and analyse socio-cultural networks and longer-distance contacts.

Finally, given the relevance of historical linguistics for the study of early medieval ethnicity, Arjen Versloot's contribution also deserves to be mentioned here. After deconstructing the 'Anglo-Frisian' hypothesis that imagined a straightforward relationship between 'peoples' and their 'ethnic and linguistic profiles' (p. 340) and replacing it with a more dynamic model for linguistic change, Versloot successfully combines this with the archaeological evidence. The result is, again, a dynamic picture that complements Nicolay's and Nieuwhof's archaeological perspectives well.

This leads me to a second point of critique, which is that the coherence of the volume overall does not invite people to read it cover to cover. Although the chapters all contain much of interest, their order seems random. For example, given the importance of the *Lex Frisionum*, Han Nijdam's in-depth discussion of this key source—and its implications for our understanding of Frisian kingship and legal assembly—would have been useful earlier on in the volume instead of as Chapter 5. Likewise, the chapters that are currently 4 and 9 would have worked better back-to-back. Nelleke IJssennagger-van der Pluijm looks at the evidence for maritime connectivity from an interdisciplinary perspective; and Gilles de Langen and J.A. Mol take a landscape-historical approach to deconstruct the well-established image of early medieval Frisia as a maritime zone which is dominated by traders, in favour of a more heterogeneous region grounded in agrarian productivity.

The remaining contributions in the volume are certainly all worth reading too. Wood focuses on the political relationship between Frisians and Franks in the lower Rhineland through a straightforward historical analysis of textual sources. John Hines's interdisciplinary discussion of religion and conversion, including (naturally) a discussion of Radbod's near-baptism and last-minute reconsideration, is—as always—perceptive and convincingly written. Tineke Looijenga discusses runic literacy through finds of runic inscriptions on objects, providing a well-illustrated and detailed overview of the Frisian corpus.

Egge Knol's excellent overview of material culture in Frisia (predominantly the northern part of the Dutch provinces of Groningen and Friesland) is vital reading for anyone wanting to familiarise themselves with the early medieval Frisians and the challenges surrounding the study of their surviving material culture. Similarly, Bente Majchczack provides a useful, up-to-date overview of the settlement archaeology of the North Frisian region. Both would have benefited from more theoretical engagement with the question what constitutes "typically 'Frisian' traits" (p. 25) or a "Frisian identity" (p. 190), especially because they reveal an implicit understanding of the complex nature of early medieval identities. A single chapter, however, cannot exhaustively deal with everything and a more theoretically engaged opening chapter—or a different chapter order—might have framed contributions like these better.

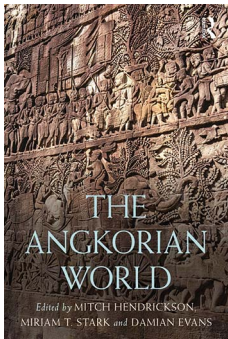
Frisians of the Early Middle Ages is certainly worth purchasing (and now also available as paperback). What it lacks in overall coherence, is more than made up for by the quality of scholarship. A nice 'extra' are the transcripts of the discussions at the symposium, which

sometimes are as insightful as the chapters themselves. In essence, it is an excellent volume to dip in and out of.

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MITCH HENDRICKSON, MIRIAM T. STARK & DAMIAN EVANS (ed.). 2023. *The Angkorian World*. Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge; 978-0-81535-595-3 hardback £190.



Since the end of the Khmer Rouge dark age, Angkorian studies have undergone a renaissance which is now encapsulated in this remarkable volume. Enabled and supported by the Apsara Authority, a new generation of Khmer scholars have united with foreign specialists to distil a wealth of new information on virtually every aspect of the origins, history, society, economy, the industry and the environment of the Angkorian world into a single volume. With its six sections comprising 35 chapters and 90 contributors *The Angkorian World* indeed has a global intent.

The late sixteenth-century archives of the Portuguese Indies in Lisbon contain reports from the first Europeans to encounter Angkor: describing a great stone city, abandoned and overcome by the jungle. At that time, they thought it impossible that indigenous people had created the city; Alexander the Great or Emperor Trajan were suggested as being responsible. In 1861 Henri Mouhot wrote (and it was posthumously published) that Angkor Wat was erected by some ancient Michelangelo. During the French colonial period, western scholarly enquiry began in earnest and the Mission archéologique d'Indo-Chine, which later became the École française d'Extrême Orient, was founded in Saigon in 1898. This was dominated by Georges Coédès, whose magisterial translation of the Angkorian inscriptions underwrote the construction of the dynastic sequence and listed the names of the sovereigns who ruled from Angkor between AD 802 and the mid-fifteenth century. Given the virtual absence of any information on the prehistoric societies in Southeast Asia, whom Coédès described as poor savages still in the Stone Age, there was a widely held view that the civilization of Angkor owed its being to Indianisation. The notion was easily understood at the time owing to the use of the Sanskrit language, the worship of Hindu gods, Buddhism and the influence in Europe of South Asian art and architecture.

At the onset of this Angkorian world a rise of entrenched social inequality is first identified among coastal communities of the Mekong Delta, exposed to burgeoning maritime exchange that brought Indian and Chinese goods, ideas and visitors to Southeast Asia. Miriam Stark