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# Metal Detection and the Frisian Kingdom. Questions about the Central Place of Northern Westergo in the Early Middle Ages

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## I THE FRISIAN KINGDOM

The Frisian Kingdom of the Early Middle Ages has always appealed to the imagination of scholars and amateur historians, especially in Friesland, now a province of the Netherlands. However, medieval written sources tell us little about the location, size and structure of this supposed political entity. This is not surprising because as soon as the Frisian world, which had almost no written culture, came into close contact with the advanced written culture of the Merovingian Kingdom, it became politically and militarily subordinated to its southern neighbour. Frisian leaders do not therefore feature prominently in seventh- and eighth-century *historiae*, *vitae* and *annales*.<sup>1</sup> In fact, all we know of Aldgisl and his successor Redbad († 719) was that they played a leading role in the coastal and river region of the Netherlands, and that some outsiders regarded them as kings.<sup>2</sup> Their residential capital (possibly a temporary one) was in Utrecht and their power probably extended to the central river region of the Netherlands and possibly to the coast of Holland.<sup>3</sup> We do not know whether they originally came from the coastal region in the north of the Netherlands or whether their authority was recognized by the inhabitants of this area.<sup>4</sup>

Although the creation of a centre of political power in *Frisia* in the second half of the seventh and the beginning of the eighth century may have been a direct result of the northward expansion of the Merovingian Kingdom, dominated by the Austrasian elite,<sup>5</sup> it is generally accepted that the kingdom of Aldgisl and Redbad dates back to a predecessor from the early seventh century, the sixth century or even earlier.<sup>6</sup> The core area of this earlier kingdom would not have been situated in the Kromme Rijn region but in present-day Friesland. However, there is little or no *historical* evidence for this hypothesis.<sup>7</sup>

Since time immemorial there has been a tacit assumption that the original core area was the area to which the Frisian language was restricted in historical times.<sup>8</sup> *Archaeological* research, however, appears to provide solid support for the view that Friesland was a political, or even royal, centre in the late sixth and the first half of the seventh century. The gold objects and coins found in Friesland since the middle of the nineteenth century (about 1.5 kilos in total), are remarkable in both nature and quantity, and in national and international terms for that period.<sup>9</sup> We need only look at the distribution of sixth- and seventh-century gold coins in the northern and central parts of the Netherlands and bordering parts of Germany to appreciate how large Friesland's share is in the quantity of valuable objects known to us from the Early Middle Ages (fig. 1).<sup>10</sup> Some have even regarded the discovery in 1953 of the Wijnaldum brooch, a jewel of

1 *cf.* Wood 1994.

2 *cf.* Heidinga 1997, 17–22.

3 *cf.* Van Es 1994, 90 and De Langen 1995, 180.

4 We know that Bubo played an important role in the first half of the eighth century in the northern part of the Netherlands, but in the sources he is referred to not as king but simply as *dux*.

5 *cf.* Wolf 1982, for modern and early-modern examples of state creations outside Europe in response to trade and political expansion from the West.

6 *e.g.* Heidinga 1997, 20; 1999a and 1999b.

7 Of relevance here is the prominent position of the area between Vlie and Lauwers in the early ninth-century (!) *Lex Frisionum*.

8 This is an example of the romantic notion that a people lives the longest in the area where it is indigenous.

9 *cf.* Nicolay 1998.

10 Pol (in prep.). All maps in this article were made in MapInfo and CoralDraw. ADC World Map was used for the cartographic background.

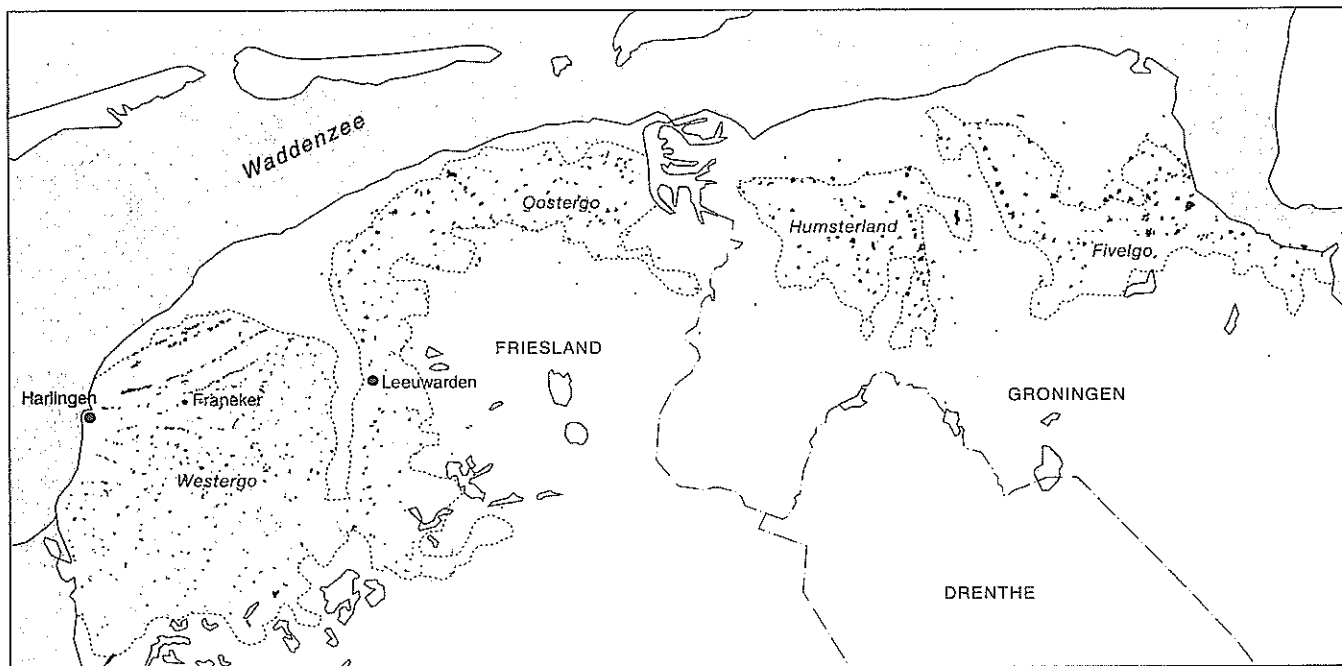


Figure 1 Situation of the areas; dwelling mounds (terps) are indicated in black.

unmistakable royal quality,<sup>11</sup> and in the early 1990s, also at Wijnaldum, of raw materials and waste products from silver- and gold-smithery, as direct evidence that kings and/or their retinue of artisans had been present in Friesland.<sup>12</sup>

Many past studies have examined the gold finds from the northern part of the Netherlands.<sup>13</sup> Johan Nicolay recently brought these studies together in his excellent prize-winning doctoral thesis.<sup>14</sup> His summary is particularly valuable because it includes recent finds made with metal-detectors. Nicolay detects a tripartite division in the distribution of gold finds in the northern part of the Netherlands, which can be interpreted in social-political terms. The largest number of gold finds, and the most remarkable ones, are concentrated in

northern Westergo. Nicolay believes we should view this region as a political, perhaps even royal, centre. Around this core region is an area with a sizeable number of gold object finds. However, they are less densely concentrated and no royal jewels have been found. This transitional area incorporates southern Westergo and Oostergo. And finally, in the third and largest area, there is a low concentration of gold finds. Nicolay includes the Groningen terp region, the bordering peat areas and the Pleistocene sandy soils of Friesland and northern Drenthe in this peripheral region. On historical and archaeological grounds, we could justifiably include Texel and the province of Noord-Holland, or even Zuid-Holland and the central river region, but they fall outside the scope of Nicolay's maps. In his discussion, Nicolay presents the most comprehensive support for the view, put forward two decades ago, that Westergo, or northern Westergo, occupied a central place in an early-

11 Schoneveld 1993 (with further references) and Gerrets 1997. It is important to remember that although the wearer of this piece may have been of royal birth, it does not necessarily mean that a royal residence was located at or near the find site. It was most probably a piece destined for scrapping (Van Reekum and Nijboer 1999). There are various indications that, together with other pieces intended for scrapping (e.g. the gold mount of a very special sword hilt; see fig. 13), gold in the form of ingots and coins, and rough and worked garnet, it served on the spot for the

production of new objects, decorated with *cloisonné*. But we know nothing of the status of these new 'Frisian' products (cf. Bos and Nijboer 1996 for the discovery at Wijnaldum of a mould which may have been used for *cloisonné* decoration).

12 Besteman *et al.* 1992; Gerrets 1997; Zijlstra 1990-94.

13 See, for instance: Boeles 1951<sup>2</sup>; Mazzo Karras 1985.

14 Nicolay 1998. This thesis was awarded the annual 'W.A. van Es Prize' and the bi-annual thesis prize from the 'Fryske Akademy'.

medieval Frisian Kingdom.<sup>15</sup> And some archaeologists believe that the group of terps at Wijnaldum in turn occupied a prominent place in the region. In this paper we would like to question the assumed central role of both Westergo, or northern Westergo, and the Wijnaldum terp group.<sup>16</sup> We believe that the concentration of gold in the core region and in and around Wijnaldum is largely the product of widely varying opportunities for metal detection in different parts of Friesland. It goes without saying that this view has important implications for interpreting the distribution of the many other metal finds in the north of the Netherlands.<sup>17</sup>

*The study of depositional and post-depositional processes*

Since the mid 1970s archaeologists have been very interested in the way in which the archaeological record has come about.<sup>18</sup> Two questions determine research into this complex process. 1 How does past human thinking and action relate to a material heritage that is potentially visible to archaeologists? 2 How does this heritage become visible in archaeological terms? We will discuss both these questions briefly here. The first examines whether, as a result of human activity, parts of the material culture end up in the ground (in other words, in 'deposition') without being recovered by later generations who know of the deposition. We refer here to *depositional* processes. For example, in many rituals relating to death, objects belonging to the dead person are either passed on to relatives or placed in the grave. In the first instance, the action cannot be archaeologically recoverable (nor can the reasons and motives for the action); in the second instance it can.<sup>19</sup> And there is no reason to assume that there is a compelling link between the two ways of dealing with objects – inheritance on the one hand

15 e.g.: Besteman *et al.* 1992, 19; Bos 1995; Knol 1993, 237–238; Zijlstra 1990–1994.

16 Questions have already been raised, albeit for completely different reasons, about the view that Wijnaldum functioned as a royal residence in the Early Middle Ages (De Langen and Noomen 1996, 10–11). De Langen and Noomen correctly reject the view that the name Wijnaldum can be associated with the legendary King Finn and they question the weight that should be attached to late-medieval chronicles, in which a domain of King Redbad is mentioned as being in the vicinity of Wijnaldum. However, we are left with the question of whether Wijnaldum's lack of importance in the Late Middle Ages necessarily reflects its status in early-medieval times.

17 Different categories of Frisian metal finds have been the object of study. Roman coins can be found in Van der Vin 1992

and deposition as a burial gift on the other.

The second question examines the factors that determine whether or not the material culture that has finally come into deposition forms part of the current archaeological database. We refer here to *post-depositional* processes. The factors that determine archaeological survival are extremely diverse and are heavily influenced by the research region. Examples here include the natural covering of objects by sediments, movement and/or destruction of objects as a result of erosion, weathering of objects, human activities that bring objects to the surface, and the system whereby various archaeological institutions register found objects.

Dutch archaeologists have recently put forward some original ideas regarding depositional processes. In a study of the production, circulation and deposition of early-medieval swords, for example, Theuws and Alkemade have shown that there is considerable regional variation in the extent to which swords were given as burial gifts in the area between the rivers Seine and Rhine.<sup>20</sup> What is remarkable is that swords are not usually listed in grave inventories in the 'rich' core areas of *Francia*, in other words, in areas with a stable, hierarchical social structure. There is no doubt that swords played a significant role here – as documented in historical sources – but when their owner died they were probably returned to the king or lord or passed on/handed down instead of being interred with the dead. Burial rituals in this region did not form a competitive ritual arena because fixed rules of succession already governed the allocation of positions of power and access to them. However, we do find swords in graves in relatively peripheral areas that had recently entered the sphere of influence of one of the

(since the completion of his study, however, metal detection has boosted the number of Roman coins found by a large percentage (see table 1). Galestin and Erdrich, Bos and Pol will shortly publish studies on Germanic and Roman *fibulae*, Carolingian *fibulae* and sixth- and seventh-century gold coins respectively. As part of the NWO project 'Settlement and landscape in early-medieval *Frisia*', doctoral and other students are working on an inventory of the large quantity of *fibulae* that date from the time of the migration period and the Early Middle Ages.

18 Of fundamental importance here are Clarke 1973 and Schiffer 1976.

19 Archaeologists are alerted to forms of inheritance if objects occur in depositions that differ in age from the remaining material.

20 Theuws & Alkemade 1999.

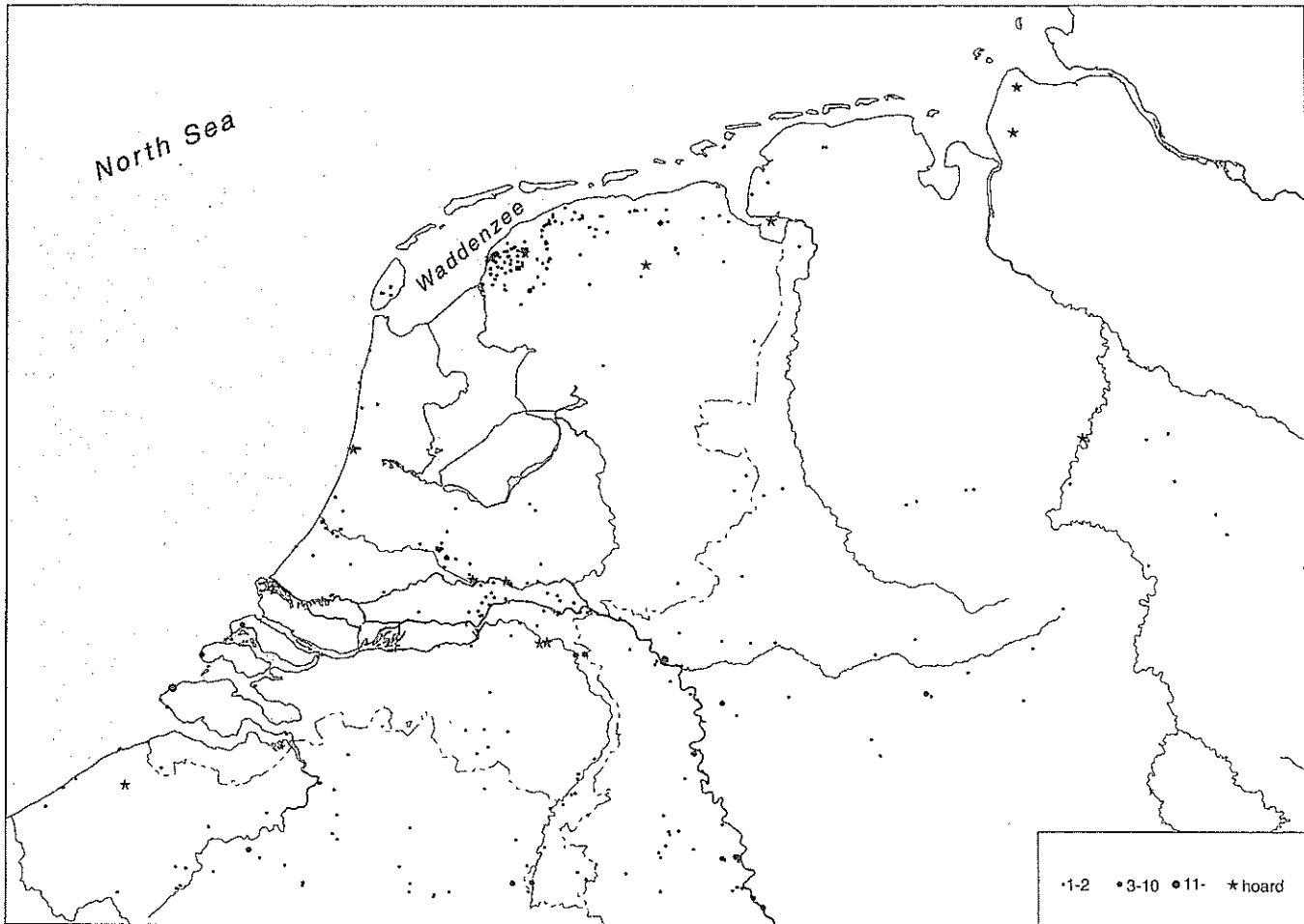


Figure 2 Find sites of gold coins from the sixth and seventh century in the Netherlands and bordering areas of Belgium and Germany (adapted from Pol, in preparation). The shaded area is above 300 m NAP.

Merovingian centres of power. It is precisely in these areas that new elites, formed on the basis of intensive contacts with the Merovingian world, manifested themselves in costly burial rituals.

Two recent doctoral theses from Amsterdam have also examined more closely the relationship between the archaeological visibility of social structures and processes on the one hand, and ritual deposition practices on the other.<sup>21</sup> Both authors, Diepenveen and Hiddink, raise questions about the tendency among archaeologists to view valuable burial finds or

monumental gravestones solely as a reflection of important political constellations or changes. According to Diepenveen, the extent to which social structures and changes to the burial system are recoverable is largely determined by whether a society's funeral ritual functions as an arena in which socio-political relations are formed and confirmed. The funeral ritual can lose this role over time without there necessarily being a destabilization or disintegration of power networks. On the contrary, such a change usually points to the emergence of more formalized social relationships.<sup>22</sup> In this respect too, differences may also exist between contemporary, neighbouring societies. While one society may be characterized by an elaborate and expensive funeral ritual, the same may not be true at all of a neighbouring society that is not fundamentally different

21 Diepenveen-Jansen 2001; Hiddink 1999.

22 Compare the results of the study by Theuws and Alkemade.

in a socio-political sense. In the latter society, however, small and rare finds – such as the chance remains of prestigious objects in settlements – reveal that the same valuable goods play a role in defining elite positions, albeit in ritual arenas other than the funeral ceremony. Hiddink's thesis, which examines the societies in the area between the rivers Rhine and Weser from the first century BC to the fourth century AD, provides a good illustration of this last point. Archaeologists view these societies as being archaeologically 'poor', certainly in comparison with societies on the Elbe or in Denmark. However, as Hiddink demonstrates, there are no historical grounds for assuming that the societies he has studied differed greatly in social-political terms from these other, archaeologically much richer, societies.<sup>23</sup> It is therefore possible, Hiddink continues, that in the area between the rivers Rhine and Weser the social position or status of the deceased was expressed in parts of the funeral ritual that were archaeologically invisible, such as in meals or rituals that focused not on the body but on another human constituent such as the soul. In other words, it is more likely that 'ritual communication' about the social order was communicated through channels that have left no archaeological traces.<sup>24</sup> If we examine the ethnographic data of a remarkable form of ceremonial gift exchange, the *potlatches* of the Kwakiutl, a group of Indians from the northwest coast of Canada, it becomes clear that we sometimes have to take this last possibility into account.<sup>25</sup> Anthropologists and archaeologists with an interest in political economy have always devoted particular attention to these much-frequented festive gatherings because the organizers are obliged *in turns* to distribute an ever-increasing amount of food and to give or destroy an ever-increasing quantity of gifts. In the long run, of course, such a cycle of competitive celebrations has its winners and losers, which is why it is seen as a striking example of a ritualized transaction, characteristic of tribal societies, that is decisive for the status of the participants.<sup>26</sup> However, the *potlatch* also exists among neighbouring groups of the Kwakiutl and it has not occurred to

archaeologists that there is considerable regional variation in the specific occasions which give rise to *potlatches*. Although the *potlatch* of the Kwakiutl is not usually directly related to rituals surrounding a specific moment in the life cycle, there is a certain relationship to marriage. Hundreds of kilometres to the west, however, the Tlingit, who have a similar culture and history, organize *potlatch* ceremonies almost exclusively in connection with funeral rituals. Although Kwakiutl and Tlingit societies are very similar in social-political terms, there is a direct link between this regional variation and the social structure of the two societies. The Tlingit do not have clear rules governing inheritance, and the funeral therefore provides an opportunity to settle this through competition. The Kwakiutl, on the other hand, have a clear right of primogeniture, so there is no reason to choose the funeral as an occasion for organizing a *potlatch*. In contrast to the Tlingit, however, the Kwakiutl do not have rules governing the choice of marriage partner. The *potlatch* therefore offers them the opportunity to win titles through competition that increase the chance of a marriage partner of a higher rank. The available ethnographic data does not immediately show whether and how both forms of *potlatch* are expressed in an archaeological legacy that is potentially recoverable, but we can assume that there is considerable variation as a result of regional differences in the occasions – marriage or funeral – when *potlatches* are organized. If we proceed from the traditional premise that the 'poor' or 'rich' style of burial ritual is of great social-political importance, this variation could put us on the wrong track when making an archaeological study of social structures in the region.

Dutch archaeologists have also shown an interest in post-depositional processes, although at best they have seldom progressed beyond describing them in *qualitative* terms.<sup>27</sup> Fokkens' exemplary study shows us how complex and fraught with uncertainties a quantitative evaluation of these processes can be, even for a relatively small, geographically homogeneous

23 Hiddink 1999, section 9.1.

24 Hiddink states in this regard that the lack of opulence in the final resting place in this area can be traced back at least to the middle of the Iron Age.

25 Vertovec 1983 presents a clear survey of the most important literature (see also: Kan 1989).

26 This is not an exhaustive description of the *potlatch*. Although

recent research recognizes that the *potlatch* affects the allocation of status positions, it also emphasizes that the ceremonial exchange gives expression to a particular world view by recalling events and relationships from a mythical age in which all cultural phenomena had their origin (Vertovec 1983, 338).

27 For the north of the Netherlands in the Early Middle Ages, see, for example: Knol 1993, 47–50.

area.<sup>28</sup> In order to map the archaeological visibility of find sites on the Frisian-Drentian plateau, Fokkens was obliged to consider a multitude of natural and anthropogenic factors: natural erosion or covering, weathering, land use, covering by peat, fertilization and cultivation, reclamation, and of course the activities of professional and amateur archaeologists. His treatment of these separate factors shows that a numerical evaluation can only be approximate. This raises the question whether the end product, Fokkens' map of archaeological visibility, does not suggest too great an accuracy. We cannot proceed beyond designating areas as being of good, reasonable and poor archaeological visibility, an assessment which could perhaps have been made per micro-region without the need for complicated calculations. Moreover, as Fokkens himself points out, it is difficult given the variations in archaeological visibility to arrive at a distribution of potential finds by extrapolating from the existing distribution of finds.<sup>29</sup> These issues aside, Fokkens' study presents a useful overview of the problems we face when examining the post-depositional factors that determine the distribution of finds in even a relatively small area. However, if we assess a distribution map like the one in figure 2, we are dealing with a research area which comprises a large number of geological, topographical, social-economic, political and administrative regions. In the following section we will investigate the extent to which regions may differ with regard to the depositional and post-depositional processes that determine the distribution of finds and the inter-regional differences in this distribution. To illustrate this, we will compare sandy areas in the south of the Netherlands and the north of Belgium on the one hand with the terp area on the northern part of the Netherlands on the other.

*Depositional and post-depositional processes and the distribution of early-medieval gold coins*

Various sixth- and seventh-century gold coins have been found in the sandy soils of the Dutch province of Brabant and the Belgian provinces of Antwerp and Limburg which could give us a picture of early-medieval coin circulation in this part of the Merovingian empire. Unfortunately, however, we cannot regard the coins found as the archaeologically visible product of random losses. The majority of early-medieval gold coins found in the Pleistocene sandy soils in the south of the Netherlands and the north of Belgium have come exclusively from middle and late seventh-century graves.<sup>30</sup> We might at first be inclined to regard the presence of gold coins in graves as an incidental continuation of the classical Mediterranean tradition of placing money in the dead person's mouth or hand as payment for the journey over the River Styx. However, because there does not seem to be any tradition of using a Charon's obol in this area, where occupation has been well-documented since about the middle of the sixth century,<sup>31</sup> we could perhaps assume that these coins, which bear a Christian cross, served as a Christian *viaticum*, or provision for the journey to the hereafter.<sup>32</sup> In the earliest stages of Christianization, there were no opportunities for people in this region to participate regularly in the Eucharist or in religious rituals marking stages in the life cycle, such as death, or to be buried near a church,<sup>33</sup> although they felt a need to distinguish themselves from the heathens, especially after death.<sup>34</sup> But whether this last interpretation is correct is not relevant to the fact that early-medieval gold coins in this area are almost exclusively visible in a specific archaeological context, namely that of the late-Merovingian burial ritual. However, it would be

28 Fokkens 1998, 50–80.

29 Fokkens 1998, 80. This problem can probably be overcome with the advanced analytical applications of different Geographical Information Systems. However, we should add that retrieving base data for the *precise* identification of the effect of many post-depositional processes is very time-consuming or altogether impossible.

30 Fourteen coins (two of which were found before 1860) are known from this area, which does not include the Schelde valley, the Brabant side of the River Meuse and the Dutch/Belgian Meuse valley. Nine of them (64%) come from graves. We cannot rule out that some of the individual finds come from graves as well.

31 Theuws 1988.

32 It is important to understand here that placing the host in the grave was expressly forbidden.

33 This idea arose in discussions with Frans Theuws; cf. Paxton 1990, 32–34.

34 This interpretation seems particularly appropriate for the recent finds at Dommelen (1x) and Geldrop-Genoehuis (2x); (Theuws 1988 and 1993). Here gold Charon's obols were discovered in late seventh-century graves which were part of small burial grounds situated on farmsteads. The establishment of these small burial grounds appears to have been prompted by the inhabitants' need to dissociate themselves from the old, possibly heathen, burial grounds (or, if the settlements were established by new, southern colonists, by the need to dissociate themselves from existing, possibly heathen, burial grounds) at a time when the nearest graveyard was probably in Maastricht, 65 km to the south.

reasonable to assume that they also circulated in this area in the first half of the seventh and even in the sixth century. It is even possible that gold coins only become visible at a the time of religiously motivated changes to the burial ritual. Such changes would undoubtedly have had social-political motivations as well, but would not correspond simply and unambiguously to changes in the production, introduction and circulation of gold coins.<sup>35</sup> The distribution of early-medieval gold coins in the above region also highlights the importance of the study of post-depositional processes. Relatively few coins from this area were found by chance (3x) or with metal-detectors (2x). Most coins (9x) come from excavations of burial grounds where the graves were situated at a considerable depth, sometimes under thick man made soils (*essen*).<sup>36</sup> We should therefore assume that the number of coins discovered represents just the tip of a well-concealed iceberg, as each group of dwellings in this area would have had burial grounds containing one or more similar coins.<sup>37</sup>

The situation in the northern terp-region of the Netherlands is very different indeed. In terms of the depositional processes determining the distribution of early- medieval gold coins, it would be difficult to imagine a greater contrast than between the sandy soils in the south of the Netherlands and the north of Belgium on the one hand and the clay soils of Friesland and Groningen on the other. It is almost certain that all coins in these latter provinces did *not* come from graves, although we do know of burial grounds in this area.<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately, aside from this negative fact, we know almost nothing about the reasons for deposition because in most cases we know little about the circumstances of the finds. There have long been doubts as to whether such valuable finds were the result of random losses. Thanks to detailed archaeological research into important settlements dating from the

migration period in the Danish area (Gudme on the island of Fünen, in particular), we know that gold objects occur as ritual depositions in some settlements in both small and relatively large quantities.<sup>39</sup> *Perhaps* the large number – in national and international terms – of valuable finds in the northern part of the Netherlands can also be included in this category. Until now it has been impossible to identify them as *Versteck-horte* or as *Votiv-depots* on the basis of the find context. The two regions differ greatly in terms of post-depositional processes too. In the Pleistocene region of Brabant in the Netherlands, and Antwerp and Limburg in Belgium, it has been the relatively large-scale cultivation in the middle and second half of the twentieth century and the varying response to it on the part of professional archaeologists that has largely governed finds of early-medieval gold coins. As a result of this activity, the burial grounds, which lay quite deep or beneath thick man made soils (*essen*), could be located and excavated. In the Holocene region of the northern part of the Netherlands on the other hand, it was *terp digging*<sup>40</sup> in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century and the archaeological activities of provincial associations and museums that played a decisive role in coin finds. It is generally accepted that the terps have been dug virtually throughout the terp region and with equal intensity,<sup>41</sup> but as we shall see below, this is a misconception. Recently, since the early 1980s, amateur metal-detection has begun to play a significant role in the terp region. Gold coins in the sandy areas in the south of the Netherlands and the north of Belgium are inaccessible to metal-detectors because they occur in burial grounds which cannot be affected by agricultural activity. In the northern clay-area of the Netherlands, however, they are accessible because they are incorporated in settlement layers that outcrop into

take hold here until long after the gold coins under discussion had disappeared from circulation.

39 Vang Petersen 1994. Small gold treasures were even found in post holes in Gudme.

40 Terp digging for the fertile terp soil had probably already begun at a local level in the High Middle Ages. In the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, the terps were dug on a large commercial scale and the soil was transported over long distances, even outside Friesland. Subsequent references in this article to *terp digging* refer mainly to the large-scale commercial digging of terps.

41 Arjaans 1991.

35 See Theuvs 1988, 1991, 1994 and 1999: for the fundamental sociol-political and socio-economic changes in the sandy area of the south of the Netherlands and the north of Belgium in the Late Merovingian Period.

36 We also know of no Merovingian burial grounds that have been unearthed through ploughing.

37 For the Dutch Kempen alone, Theuvs calculates approximately thirty settlement areas (Theuvs 1988).

38 Knol 1993, 150–188. Coins were probably not used in the burial ritual because people did not share classical Mediterranean beliefs about the use of a Charon's obol. In addition, unlike the Dutch-Belgian sandy region, Christianization did not successfully

fields. It is not our intention here to describe the history of terp digging or of archaeological research in this area; that has been done elsewhere.<sup>42</sup> But we would like to point out that the chance of finding early-medieval gold objects and coins in this area has been *relatively* high because of the large-scale disturbance to the soil in comparison with other regions.<sup>43</sup> Although there was no systematic supervision by professional archaeologists during terp digging, the work was not carried out in a completely uncontrolled fashion. Members of provincial archaeological associations and curators of provincial museums have been involved in the terp diggings since the beginning, sometimes driven by a strong numismatic interest.<sup>44</sup>

Despite the almost complete absence of a national system for the systematic registration of metal-detector finds in the Netherlands in the 1980s and 1990s,<sup>45</sup> many recent metal finds in the north of the Netherlands have not disappeared unseen into collections or onto the market. We should mention here the important work for Friesland of Zijlstra, Bos, Galestin (University of Groningen) and Erdrich (University of Amsterdam). Metal-detectorists generally report their gold coin finds in this area to the National Museum of Coins and Medals. In this article we would like to investigate the effects of intensive metal-detection on the distribution of early-medieval gold objects and coins in the north of the Netherlands.

*The distribution of early-medieval gold objects and coins in the northern coastal area of the Netherlands*

Figure 3 brings together all gold finds from the fifth,

sixth and seventh centuries, including worked<sup>46</sup> and unworked coins from Friesland, Groningen and northern Drenthe.<sup>47</sup> This figure differs in content and form on a number of points from that of Nicolay. Firstly, for reasons of clarity, we have grouped the gold objects into fewer, slightly different categories.<sup>48</sup> Secondly, the figure also includes gold coins from the fourth century and the first half of the fifth century. Given the strong archaeological evidence for a hiatus in habitation or for a tiny number of inhabitants in the period 300/350–425,<sup>49</sup> we may assume that these coins did not arrive in the area until the first half of the fifth century and that they did not play a role there until the late fifth century or later. Thirdly, we opted for smaller symbols to represent the different finds. This may at first seem an arbitrary choice, but we should not forget the effect that the design of distribution maps has on our perception. For reasons of clarity, symbols should not be too small but in figure 3 we have consciously avoided the impression of overwhelming quantities that Nicolay's figure suggests. Similarly, it seemed appropriate to allocate a more modest place to objects that could be regarded as raw materials or the waste products of goldsmithery. Apart from these relatively minor changes, the picture does not differ very much from Nicolay's, and his tripartite division seems appropriate. Figure 3 also highlights the special place occupied by the terp group of Wijnaldum and its immediate surroundings. We should of course bear in mind that a substantial portion of the finds from this terp group comes from the Wijnaldum-Tjitsma excavation.<sup>50</sup>

42 See Arjaans 1991: regarding terp digging; Knol 1993, 47–50 and De Langen 1991, 1992, 131–141 (both with further references) regarding archaeological research.

43 Considerably more than half of the terps have been partly or completely dug. We view the archaeological richness of the Frisian terp-region first and foremost as the result of this large-scale destruction.

44 In this respect there is a big difference between the large-scale peat digging in large parts of Drenthe in the eighteenth century or earlier, when substantial quantities of finds probably disappeared, possibly not unseen but certainly without being registered.

45 cf. Bos 1998.

46 Worked coins are those which have been pierced, have had loops added to them or which are set into rings.

47 Most of these finds originate from the late sixth and first half of the seventh century (Nicolay 1998, 70–71).

48 The following are included in a single group: a coin pendants, looped or mounted bracteates and pendants ('pendants'); b rings,

an earring and a bead ('other jewellery'); c gold thread, hack-gold, gold ingots, a touch needle, melting pieces and gold droplets ('raw material, tools or the waste products of gold-smithery'); d gold foils, a pyramid-shaped button, belt mount and other ('other objects'). A new find at Peins has been added to group 'b': a ring-shaped ingot (?), 0.9 mm in diameter and weighing 1.45 gr. Unlike Nicolay, we regard the gold sword mount from Wijnaldum, which contains eight small golden nails, as raw material for gold-smithery, rather than as a treasure.

49 Erdrich 1999 and Bazelmans 1999b (with further references to earlier literature relating to Boeles' ideas about an Anglo-Saxon invasion and more recent literature relating to a late Roman hiatus in habitation).

50 Besteman *et al.* 1999. This is the only modern large-scale excavation in Friesland where metal-detectors and sieves were used systematically. This produced seven gold objects and five gold coins from the Early Middle Ages.

We have already referred to the important role of metal detection in new gold finds in the terp region (see table 1). This begs the question of how the use of this tool has modified the earlier distribution resulting from terp digging. Nicolay too is conscious that metal-detector finds could be over-represented or under-represented in some areas. For example, the large number of detector finds in northern Westergo and the small number in southern Westergo and Oostergo might be attributable to the predominance of arable land in the former region and pasture in the latter.<sup>51</sup> However, Nicolay does not seem to take this possibility very seriously because he claims that the distribution of metal detection finds corresponds roughly to that of the *total* number of finds.<sup>52</sup> At the end of the section in which he examines how representative the research material is, he sums up by saying that the known distribution of gold finds in the northern terp region is representative for the early-medieval situation. It is this assumption that we wish to re-examine below, particularly in relation to the use of metal-detectors. To this end we have reproduced the gold finds from the north of the Netherlands on four different maps. They show gold object and worked coin finds on the one hand and unworked coin finds on the other, and finds made with and without metal-detectors (figs. 4–7). It is important to remember when interpreting these figures that we are dealing with relatively small numbers. Nevertheless, if we bear in mind the number of terps in the northern part of the Netherlands, some points become abundantly clear. If we examine the distribution of gold objects and coins found without metal-detectors (figs. 4 and 5), we see on the one hand,

as in figure 3, a marked difference in the density of finds between Friesland and Groningen, but on the other hand, in contrast to figure 3, a relatively diffuse distribution over Westergo and Oostergo in ‘rich’ Friesland. Although the total number of objects and coins found in Westergo differs significantly from that of Oostergo<sup>53</sup> and all treasures come from the former region, the difference is not as large as if in our comparison of both regions we take into account the huge difference in the number of terps between Westergo and Oostergo – as an indicator of the number of early-medieval settlements and hence of population.<sup>54</sup>

Whereas the small number of finds makes it difficult to point to regional differences in Oostergo, this is not the case in Westergo. Although there are few finds in northern and southern Westergo, there is a concentration of finds in a small area directly south of the Harlingen–Franeker line. In this regard however, it is important to note that regions in Westergo differ in the extent to which terp digging took place and terp finds were reported. By placing all terp diggings in Westergo on a single map, we can refute Arjaans’ claim, put forward in his article on commercial terp diggings in Friesland, that there does not appear to be any spatial pattern to the digging.<sup>55</sup> For instance, the digging he records is clearly under-represented in ‘empty’ northern Westergo in figures 4 and 5 (*i.e.* the part of Westergo north of the Harlingen, Franeker and Beetgum line, that is highly relevant for recent gold finds) and in south-western Westergo.<sup>56</sup> It is therefore not surprising that we see no evidence of an even distribution throughout Westergo if we examine the

51 Arable land is ploughed several times a year or worked in some other way which makes it highly accessible. Cultivated terps are susceptible to erosion caused by levelling by ploughing, water, wind, the laying of drains etc., which leads to an increasing number of surface finds or finds during cultivation. Pasture, on the other hand, is only ploughed occasionally (often less than once every ten years), and the grass cover renders it relatively inaccessible. Whereas farmers do not object to people walking over a fallow field, they do oppose holes being dug in fields intended for hay making or grazing.

52 Nicolay 1998, 8–10. It would have been more correct to compare the distribution of finds made with or without a metal-detector.

53 If we do not include the excavation at Wijncaldum-Tjitsma in the finds made without a metal-detector, then in Westergo there have been 61 objects from 13 sites (including 52 objects from 4 treasures) and 37 coins from 30 sites (including coin treasures),

and in Oostergo 11 objects from 11 sites and 29 coins from 25 sites.

54 A glance at the ‘Map of terps in the province of Friesland’ (Boeles 1951<sup>2</sup>) reveals that 70% of the Frisian terps are found in Westergo and 30% in Oostergo. For Westergo, however, Knol names 196 early medieval sites and for Oostergo 139 (Knol 1993, 94–100). Knol is probably presenting a distorted picture of the true early medieval relationships in the number of settlements because more terps in relative terms have been dug in Oostergo. A comparable relative over-representation of finds in Oostergo is apparent from an inventory of finds cited in the ‘terp books’ (closed in 1959) of the Fries Museum (Volkers 1992, map after p 121).

55 Aarjans is possibly unaware of a pattern because he reproduced all terp digging on six different, chronologically consecutive maps. In Oostergo, his statement does not seem to apply either.

56 In particular the terp row of Wijncaldum-Berlikum and the three rows to the north are relatively intact in Frisian terms.

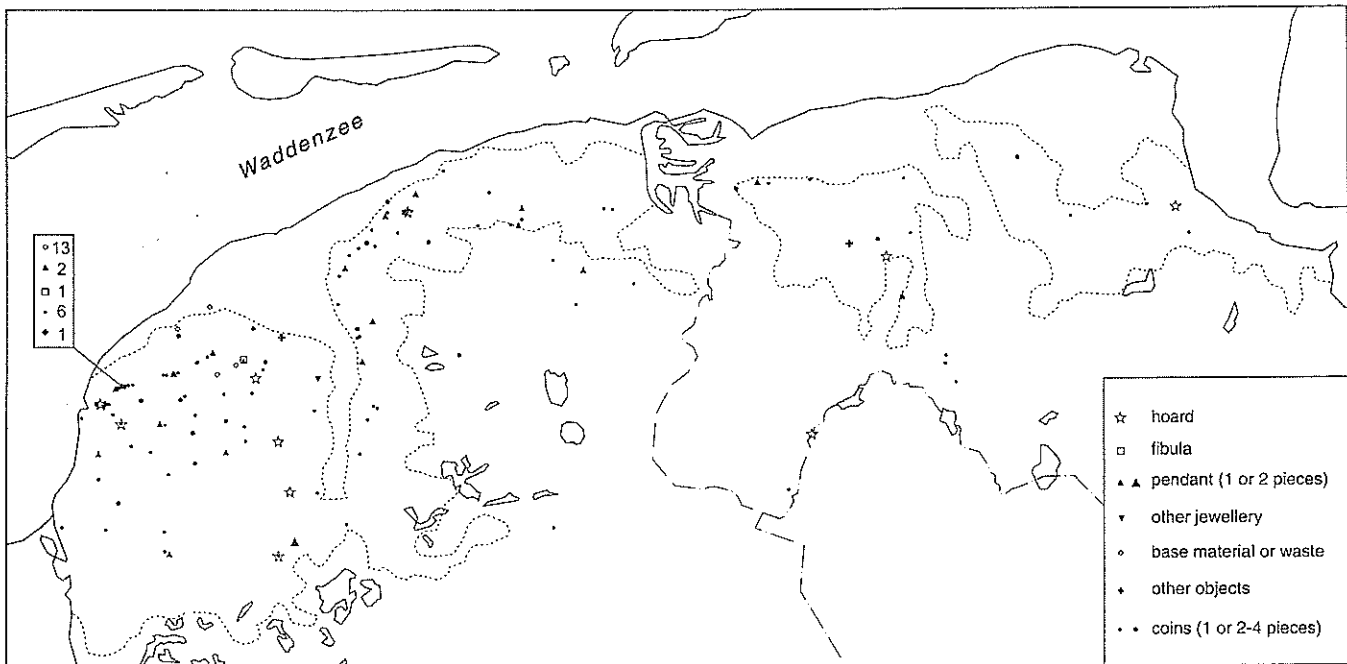


Figure 3 Distribution map of early-medieval gold finds in the terp region in the northern part of the Netherlands (after Nicolay 1998, with supplements, Pol in preparation, and unpublished material from the National Museum of Coins and Medals). The dotted lines enclose the terp regions (after Halbertsma 1962, 8).

finds reported to the 'Friesch Genootschap' (Frisian Society) during the time of the terp diggings. Volker's<sup>57</sup> mapping of the reported finds show that they are concentrated in the oldest part of the silted-up estuary of the proto Boorne; in other words on the rows and groups of terps at and to the south of the Spannum, Tzum and Almenum line, and at and to the east of the Winsum, Dronrijp and Menaldum/Beetgum line. Both to the north and south of this area there is a decreasing density of reported finds. We must therefore consider the possibility that the find distribution as shown in figures 4 and 5 is strongly influenced by post-depositional factors, in other words by the history of terp digging and the archaeological response to it. As already mentioned, what strikes us in figures 4 and 5, especially if we disregard the recent excavation finds

of Wijncaldum-Tjitsma, is the small concentration of finds in northern Westergo in the area directly to the south of the Harlingen-Franeker line, but not above it. The prominent place of this area as evident from figure 3 appears to be almost wholly attributable to metal-detector finds. We see this clearly in figures 6 and 7. If we take into account the boundary between arable land and pasture, we see that in Westergo both gold objects and gold coins have almost without exception been found in the 'Bouwhoek' and not the 'Greidhoek' (agricultural areas in Friesland dominated by arable land and pasture respectively). As we have already seen, this area was almost empty on maps showing finds made before the introduction of metal-detectors. Now, thanks to metal detection, the area on the map has not just filled out, but leaving aside the treasures, has emerged as the richest area. In the space of little more than fifteen years, 23 gold objects and 32 gold coins have been found in the arable farming area north of the Harlingen, Franeker, Menaldum/Dronrijp and Beetgum line (28% and 44% respectively of the total for Westergo).<sup>58</sup> Significant here too is that the number of

<sup>57</sup> Volkers, map after p 121. *cf.* Note 54.

<sup>58</sup> Among the 23 gold objects, however, there is a sizeable new category of finds: gold ingots, hack-gold and melting pieces. We see a comparable effect of the use of new techniques at the

excavations at Wijncaldum-Tjitsma where, for the first time, gold thread, a touch needle and gold droplets were found using metal-detectors and sieves. (Nicolay 1998, 10, 61-67 and 138-139).

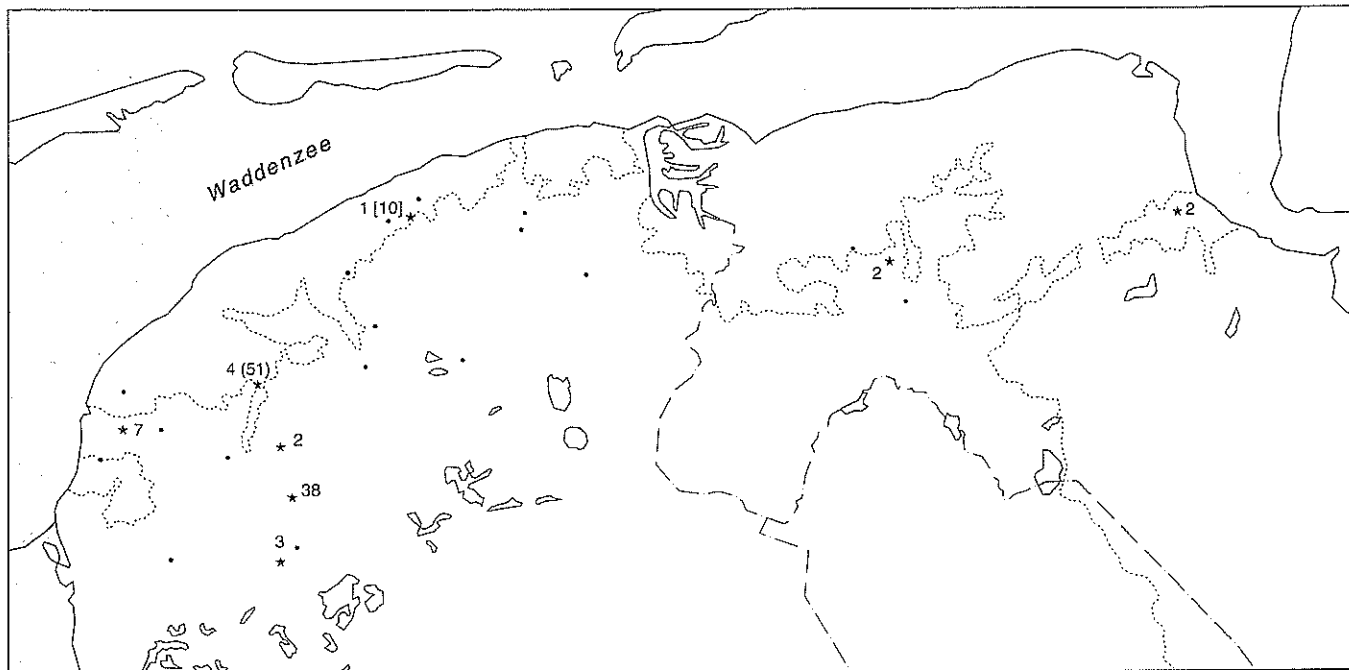


Figure 4 Early-medieval gold objects in the coastal area in the north of the Netherlands, found *without* a metal-detector (after Nicolay 1998, with supplements). These were individual finds (dots) and treasures (stars). The reported finds were: number of gold objects (if more than one); number of coins; number of other objects. The dotted line marks the boundary between arable land and pasture in the terp region.

find sites with more than a single coin is greater in figure 7 than in figure 5 (the 37 coins found without metal-detectors come from 31 sites and the 35 coins found with metal-detectors from 15).

So how should we interpret this newly arisen difference between northern Westergo on the one hand, and southern Westergo and Oostergo on the other? Is it an artefact of metal detection or does it reflect early-medieval differences in the quantities of deposited gold? If we compare the opportunities for metal detection in the different regions we see strong evidence for the former. But before we begin the interregional comparisons, it is important to point out the possible self-reinforcing nature of metal detection in northern

59 Considerable media attention was associated with the excavations at Wijnaldum-Tjitsma in the early 1990s, with the special metal finds always receiving the greatest attention.

60 Assuming in both areas a roughly equivalent destruction of the terps through digging. As we have seen above, this assumption

Westergo. Detector amateurs, much prefer areas where there is a good chance of making a find, where notable excavations have been made<sup>59</sup> or where collectors are active.

An evaluation of the difference between northern and southern Westergo must take account of one of the key conclusions to be drawn from figures 6 and 7, namely that gold finds made with metal-detectors occur almost exclusively in the Bouwhoek. The Greidhoek is almost empty of finds despite the large number of finds made there when the terps were dug. Particularly striking is the lack of finds in the area directly to the south of the Harlingen-Franeker line, the area that emerges as the richest in Westergo on maps of finds made without metal-detectors. Also significant is that two of the three coin finds made with a metal-detector outside the Bouwhoek come from the small area of *arable* land around Pingjum. Given the Greidhoek's head start when metal-detectors were first introduced<sup>60</sup> (more coins were found there when the terps were dug), we could expect a greater number of metal-detector finds had there been equally favourable opportunities for

may not be tenable because fewer terps have been affected in the Bouwhoek. In that case, when comparing both areas, we should take into account the fact that it is easier to find gold coins with a metal-detector than with a shovel.



Figure 5 Early-medieval gold coins in the coastal area in the north of the Netherlands, found *without* a metal-detector (after Pol in preparation, and unpublished material from the National Museum of Coins and Medals). The dotted line marks the boundary between arable land and pasture in the terp region.

metal detection.<sup>61</sup> We shall see below that there is also a very significant difference between the Bouwhoek and the Greidhoek in the distribution of *Roman* coins found with metal-detectors.

At first glance the above considerations do not seem to apply when comparing northern Westergo and Oostergo. Not all of Oostergo is in use as pasture land: in the *coastal* terp region it alternates between arable land to the north of Stiens and pasture to the south. So gold object and coin finds appear to be absent in areas where we might well have expected them. And yet this almost complete lack of metal-detector finds within the Oostergo arable area is surprising if we look at the relatively rich starting position when metal-detectors were introduced (see table 1). We should also consider that the pasture land of Oostergo is not comparable in all respects to that of Westergo. For instance, whereas

the terp series Wijnaldum, Dongjum and Berlikum in northern Westergo, which is very productive in metal detection terms, has seen large-scale cultivation but little building or digging, the important terps in the series Stiens, Hijum, Ferwerd/Hogebeintum and Holwerd have been built on and largely dug. As with the Greidhoek in Westergo, we shall see below that the distribution of Roman coin finds in Westergo, divided into finds made with and without a metal-detector, lends clear support to the idea that, for whatever reason, metal detection has failed to produce finds in a potentially rich region.

When examining the considerable difference between Groningen and Friesland, apparent from the maps showing finds made both with and without metal-detectors, we cannot overlook the simple fact that the number of terps in Groningen is considerably smaller than in Westergo and smaller than in Oostergo.<sup>62</sup> However, we should also point out that conditions are favourable for metal detection in the Groningen terp-region. Although many terps in Groningen have been dug or built on (though no more on average than in Friesland), many are accessible to metal-detectors

61 We should reiterate here that south-western Westergo may be under-represented in terms of finds made when the terps were dug (see above).

62 See map II in: Halbertsma 1962. Knol (1993, 100–102) gives 107 early-medieval find sites for Groningen (compare 196 for Westergo and 139 for Oostergo).

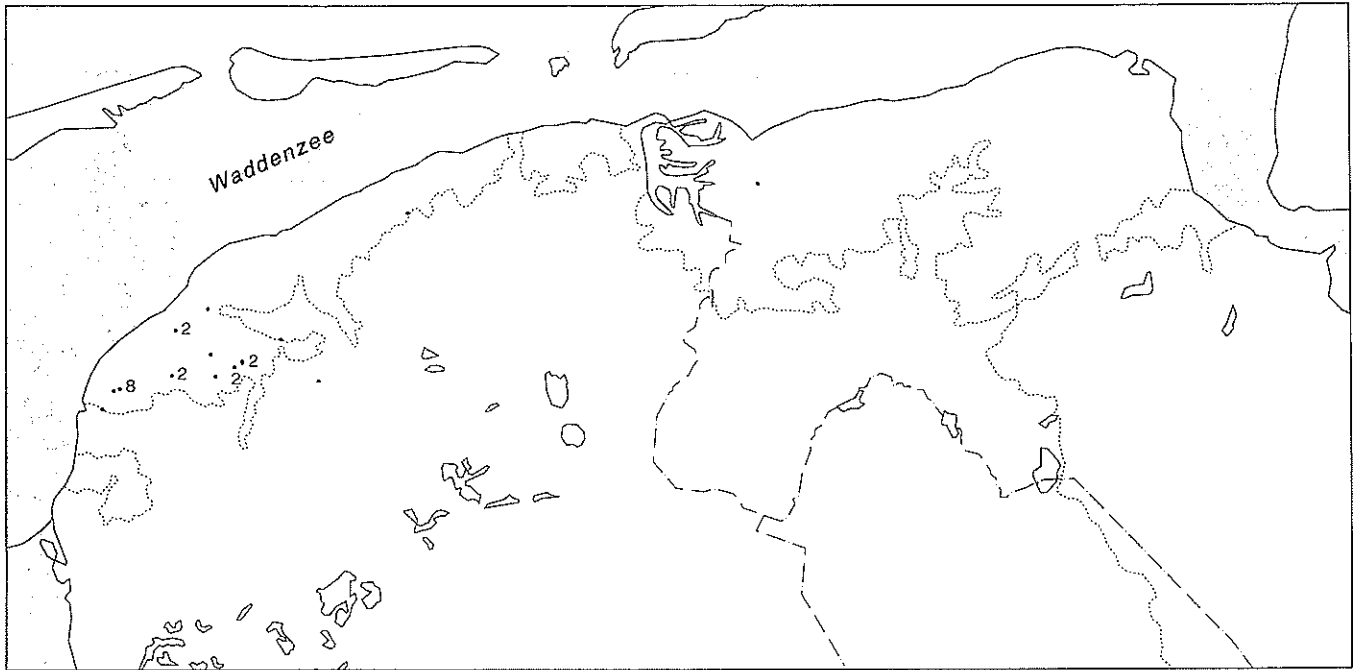


Figure 6 Early-medieval gold objects in the coastal area in the north of the Netherlands, found *with* a metal-detector (after Nicolay 1998, with supplements). The dotted line marks the boundary between arable land and pasture in the terp region.

because they are ploughed every year. Detector amateurs may be less active in Groningen, but that could simply reflect the fact that fewer coin and other metal finds have been made there.<sup>63</sup> Neither should we lose sight of the role played by possible differences in deposition practices. It has been assumed that deposition practices in the Early Middle Ages were the same for the entire terp region because it forms a single cultural Frisian entity. However, if we include the area directly to the east of the Eems in our comparison, there may be grounds for questioning this assumption. If we look at figure 2, Groningen would appear to form

a transitional area in terms of the number of gold coin finds between Friesland and the almost empty Saxon area. Merovingian-Saxon contacts are historically well-documented for the sixth and the first half of the seventh century<sup>64</sup> and it therefore seems unlikely that there were major differences in the extent to which Merovingian gold was introduced in the Frisian and the Saxon areas.<sup>65</sup> If post-depositional factors do not play a role, which is uncertain,<sup>66</sup> the gold there, in contrast to Frisia, has either been melted down and assimilated into other valuable objects or it has systematically failed to end up in archaeologically recoverable deposition. By mapping Roman coin-finds (figs. 8 and 9), we can confirm our suspicion that the differences within Friesland are largely the result of regional variation in opportunities for metal detection.<sup>67</sup> There are striking similarities between figure 8 and figures 4 and 5, and

63 But we need to explain why this apparently applies to all periods.

64 Wood 1994, 163–164.

65 For example, in the eighth-century *Historia Langobardorum* (III-6), Paulus Diaconus refers to gold-adorned Saxons, who return home from a long foray and trading journey in Gaul during the reign of the Merovingian King Sigebert (561–575).

66 In Oost-Friesland, for instance, relatively few terps have been dug and inland find sites have possibly been well-covered by anthropogenic soils.

67 Our assumption here is that the *original* distributions of Roman coins and early-medieval gold coins are quite independent of one another. But is this assumption correct? Although there is a clear Late Roman hiatus in habitation, the largely comparable geographic, environmental and ecological situation in Roman and early-medieval times, combined with the early-medieval preservation of the Roman terp landscape, can *in theory* have led to the same regional social-political differentiation.

Table 1 Roman and early-medieval coin and gold finds in Friesland, the northern coastal area and the rest of the Netherlands: the influence of metal detection.

NB Treasures are counted as one. After Nicolay 1998 (with supplements); Pol in prep.; Van der Vin 1992; and unpublished material from the National Museum of Coins and Medals, Leiden.

	<i>gold objects</i> <sup>1</sup>		<i>gold coins, sixth and seventh centuries</i> <sup>2</sup>		<i>Roman coins</i>		<i>gold coins, sixth and seventh centuries</i> <sup>2</sup>	
	Friesland and Groningen		Friesland		Friesland		the Netherlands (excluding Friesland)	
with detector	12	25.5%	39	25.2%	541	60.0%	141	28.3%
without detector	35	74.5%	116	74.8%	361	40.0%	358	71.7%
<i>total</i>	47	100%	155	100%	902	100%	499	100%

<sup>1</sup> Ring mounted, pierced and looped coins (coin pendants) included.

<sup>2</sup> Looped, pierced and ring-mounted coins (coin pendants) not included.

between figure 9 and figures 6 and 7.<sup>68</sup> Firstly, we see a high degree of correspondence between the distribution of Roman coins found without metal-detectors and the distribution of early-medieval gold finds, as well as of archaeological finds during terp digging.<sup>69</sup> Figure 8 also shows a relative lack of finds in southern and south-western Westergo, particularly north of the Harlingen-Franeker line. Compared to Oostergo and the central part of Westergo, finds are under-represented in these areas, either because relatively few terps were dug, or relatively many terps were dug in the period before the Friesch Genootschap was established, or there was relatively less intensive supervision of digging activity by members of this society. Secondly, with the introduction of metal detection, the area north of the Harlingen, Franeker and Beetgum line has emerged as the key area for Roman coin finds (figure 9, cf. 6 and 7), both in Friesland as a whole and in Westergo.<sup>70</sup> This is true not just of the number of find sites, but of the number of individual finds per site as well,<sup>71</sup> which confirms the widely varying opportunities for metal detection in the Bouwhoek and the Greidhoek. Thirdly, figures 8 and 9 reveal for Oostergo a remarkable discrepancy between coin finds made with and without metal-detectors. Whereas the number of Roman coin finds in Westergo

and northern Westergo has trebled in the last twenty years, Oostergo has seen only a 50% increase (see table 2). On the basis of other finds, it is generally assumed that Oostergo occupied a prominent position both within and beyond Friesland in Roman times.<sup>72</sup> We would therefore be correct in assuming that metal detection in that part of Oostergo to the north of Stiens has proven largely unsuccessful despite the obvious potential of this area and despite the fact that it consists mainly of arable land that offers regular opportunities for metal-detecting under good conditions. Large-scale building on the terps and the effects of digging in this area have probably created serious obstacles to finding coins with metal-detectors.

#### Conclusion

We have shown above that regional variations in the terp region in the northern part of the Netherlands with regard to the distribution of early-medieval gold objects and coins should not lead us to assume that there were important social-political differences between the various terp regions in the last quarter of the sixth century and the first half of the seventh century. Instead, this variation can largely be explained as the product of regional variation in: a commercial and non-

68 We would like to express our warm appreciation to Drs Bouke Jan van der Veen and Dr Jos van der Vin (both from the National Museum of Coins and Medals, Leiden) for supplying information on the finds contained in the FMRN-Friesland (Van der Vin 1992) and the unpublished, extensive supplements to this.

69 Volkers 1992, map after p 121.

70 Of the 202 coins found in the Greidhoek, 66 (32.7%) were found with metal-detectors and 136 (67.3%) without. Of the 355

coins found in the Bouwhoek, 309 (87%) were found with metal-detectors and 46 (13%) without.

71 Important here is the increase in the average number of individual coin finds per site from 2.1 for the period before the introduction of the metal-detector to 5.0 thereafter. See above for a comparable effect for finds of early-medieval gold objects and coins.

72 e.g. Galestin 1992, 28-34.

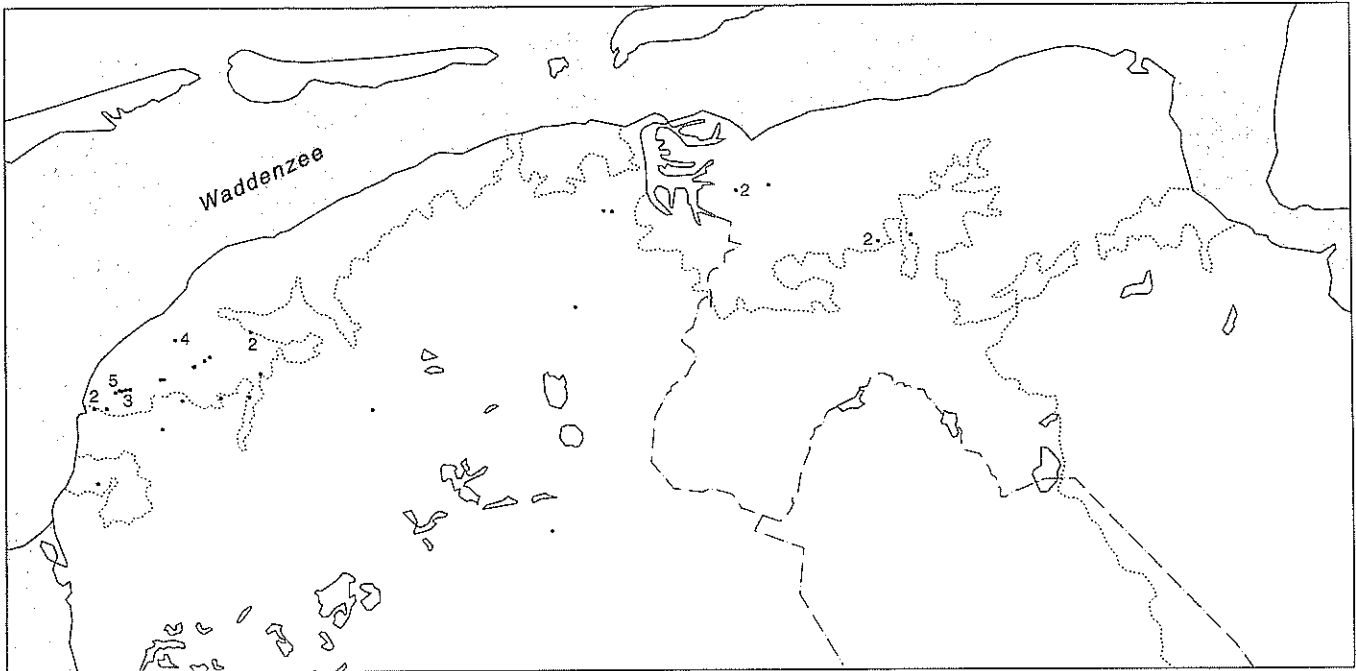


Figure 7 Early-medieval gold coins in the coastal area in the north of the Netherlands, found *with* a metal-detector (after Pol in preparation, and unpublished material from the National Museum of Coins and Medals). The dotted line marks the boundary between arable land and pasture in the terp region.

commercial terp digging; *b* opportunities for metal detection; *c* the archaeological response to both these activities.

In a negative sense the distribution of finds in southern and south-western Westergo is most strongly determined by post-depositional factors. The lack of finds in this area could be attributable to the fact that relatively few terps have been dug here in comparison with many other parts of Friesland.<sup>73</sup> Also, at the time of the terp diggings, members of the Friesch Genootschap may have exerted considerably less 'control' here because of the relative distance from Leeuwarden in comparison with closer areas such as Oostergo.<sup>74</sup> Finally, the introduction of metal-detectors has not been able to make up for lost ground because the whole of southern Westergo consists of pasture, which does not lend itself well to metal detection.

73 The terps in this area are sometimes covered with a layer of clay and are generally smaller and lower than in the rest of Friesland.

The situation is slightly different in central Westergo, the area directly to the south of the Harlingen, Franeker and Dronrijp line. Here commercial terp digging in the late nineteenth and early-twentieth century and a degree of supervision by the Friesch Genootschap have resulted in many finds. However, the advent of the metal-detector has not led to more finds because this area too is predominantly pasture land, which is unfavourable for metal detection.

Whereas in most parts of Friesland the distribution of finds is determined largely by finds made when the terps were dug, this is not the case in northern Westergo, the area north of the Harlingen, Franeker and Beetgum line. Until recently this area was relatively poor in finds in general, and in early-medieval gold object and coin finds in particular. This is hardly surprising, as the terps in this area were of little interest for exploitation because, like their surroundings, they consisted of very sandy clay and were therefore less suitable as a source of fertilizer. The nature of the soil in northern Westergo, combined with the area's relatively high location, became significant once again when the metal-detector made its appearance. In contrast to most

74 This point requires further research because not all the members lived in Leeuwarden.

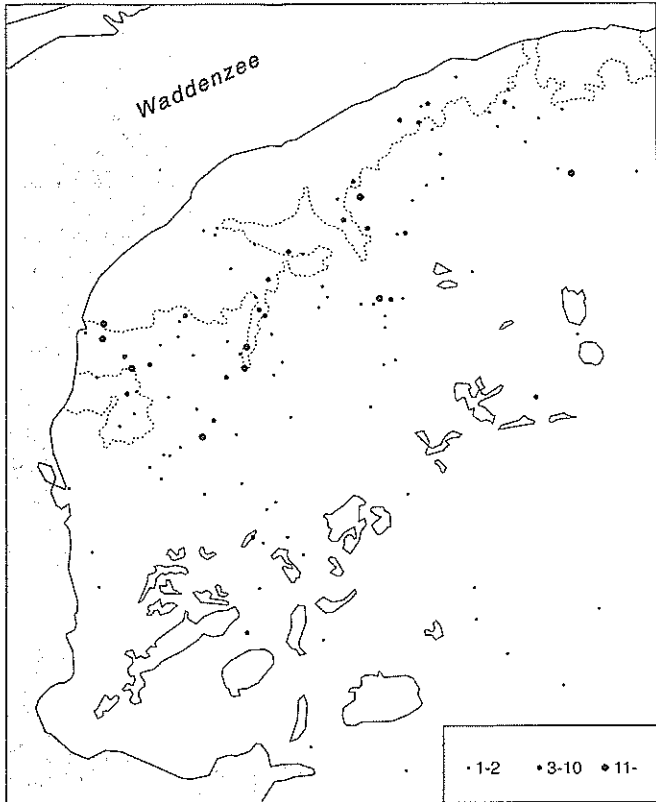


Figure 8 Roman coins from Friesland, found *without* a metal-detector (after Van der Vin 1992, and unpublished material from the National Museum of Coins and Medals). The dotted line marks the boundary between arable land and pasture in the terp region.

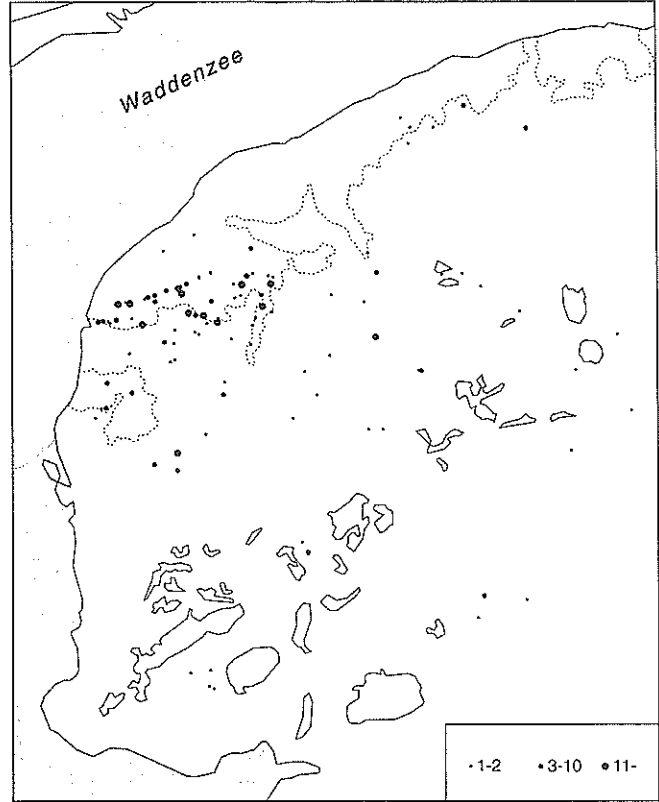


Figure 9 Roman coins from Friesland, found *with* a metal-detector (after Van der Vin 1992, and unpublished material from the National Museum of Coins and Medals). The dotted line marks the boundary between arable land and pasture in the terp region.

Table 2 Roman and early-medieval coin finds in the different terp regions of Friesland: the influence of metal detection. NB Treasures are counted as one. After Pol in prep.; Van der Vin 1992; and unpublished data from the National Museum of Coins and Medals, Leiden.

	<i>Roman coins</i>						<i>gold coins, sixth and seventh centuries</i>					
	Westergo		Oostergo		Friesland		Westergo		Oostergo		Friesland	
with detector	463	68.6%	46	30.9%	541	60.0%	35	48.6%	3	10.7%	39	25.2%
without detector	212	31.4%	103	69.1%	361	40.0%	37	51.4%	25	89.3%	116	74.8%
<i>total</i>	675	100%	149	100%	902	100%	72	100%	28	100%	155	100%

of the rest of Friesland, large parts of the region, including the terps, make good arable land rather than pasture. And compared to pasture, arable land provides significantly better opportunities for metal detection. The presence of relatively intact terps, severe erosion of the terps as a result of agricultural activities, and the presence of outcrops of early-medieval layers mean that metal-detectors have been able to locate a considerable quantity of gold objects and coins in northern Westergo. As a result, in twenty years, northern Westergo has been able to make up for all the lost ground in terms of the number of finds and has even emerged as the richest region in absolute terms. However, we should place this wealth in perspective by pointing out that it is much easier to find gold objects and coins with a metal-detector than with a shovel, which was the tool used when the terps were dug.

The situation in Oostergo is different again. The terps in this region, including the large and important village-terps, have been severely affected by digging. This fact, and the research efforts of some members of the Friesch Genootschap in Oostergo, explains why the area features so prominently on all distribution maps, with the exception of maps showing metal-detector finds. Although, technically speaking, much of Oostergo at present offers considerable potential for metal detection because it consists of arable land, few new finds have been made here. This is undoubtedly attributable to the severe disturbance of the terps, but also to the fact that many terps, insofar as they have not been dug, have been built on and are therefore inaccessible.

Finally, we should examine the situation in Groningen. As in the different parts of Friesland, with the exception of course of northern Westergo, the distribution of finds is largely the result of large-scale commercial terp digging. We can assume a roughly comparable degree of activity in Friesland and Groningen on the part of amateur archaeologists, provincial societies and museums, though there was perhaps more intensive activity in Friesland and a greater focus on coins. For recent finds it is important to understand that Groningen offers favourable opportunities for metal detection because it is an area of arable farmland. In this respect Groningen is comparable to northern Westergo. We should point out, however, that in

contrast to that part of Friesland, the terps in Groningen have been more severely affected by digging and more frequently built on. In conclusion, we may say that the considerable difference in the number of gold finds in Friesland and Groningen cannot be explained by the influence of post-depositional factors.

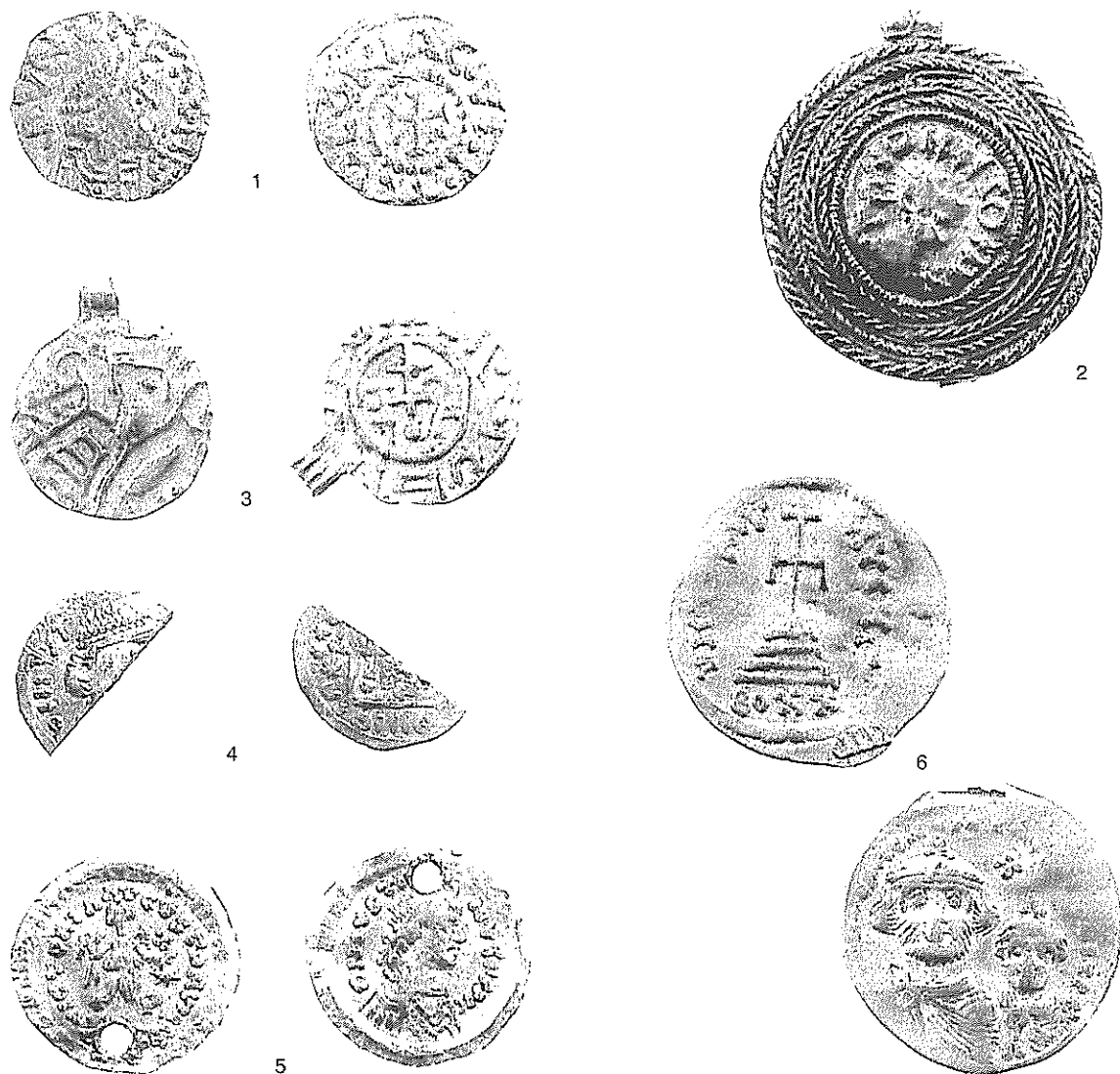
We now have a better understanding of the influence of post-depositional processes on the distribution of gold objects and coins in the northern part of the Netherlands. But what are the implications for our understanding of the structure of the society (or societies) in the early-medieval terp region? A full reply to this question is beyond the scope of this article because it would involve a study of the specific nature and distribution of the gold objects<sup>75</sup> and other categories of finds. We would also need to conduct further historical and archaeological research into the different hierarchical modalities of early-medieval 'Germanic' social-political structures and the extent to which these are archaeologically visible. Nevertheless, we are in a position to make two observations.

Firstly, it is difficult to be more explicit about the implications referred to above because we can make a qualitative, but not a quantitative assessment of post-depositional processes. This is particularly evident if we compare the northern part of the Netherlands with other regions that belonged to *Frisia magna*. How can we compare the number and distribution of gold finds in the Frisian and Groningen terp region with those in the provinces of Noord- and Zuid-Holland and the central river area, areas with fundamentally different post-depositional processes?

Secondly, we are in a reasonable position to identify the post-depositional processes that have determined the distribution of finds in Friesland and Groningen and roughly the extent to which they have done so. If we take these processes and the number of terps per region into account, we observe a strong concentration of gold objects and coins from the late sixth and first half of the seventh century, a relatively even distribution throughout Friesland and a significant difference in find density between Friesland (high) and Groningen (low).<sup>76</sup> These observations seem difficult to reconcile with a fully-fledged *polity*, whose centre lay in Friesland or northern

75 *cf.* Nicolay 1998, 11–68.

76 *cf.* De Langen (1995, 182) who also states: *that the internal differences in the Frisian salt-marsh region are quite minor.*



Westergo,<sup>77</sup> and hence with the regional, socio-political differentiation that Nicolay sketched. We would have expected to encounter few finds in the stabilized – in social-political terms – Frisian centre and many in the peripheral areas which over time forged stronger links with the centre. Instead, we are dealing here with a competitive system of *Gefolgschaft* relationships, perhaps developing as a result of the influx of Merovingian gold, which is oriented to several lords or kings and which includes people from all hierarchical levels in the

77 cf. De Langen 1995, 182–183.

Figure 10 Since the early 1980s considerable quantities of early-medieval gold coins have been found in the terp region in the north of the Netherlands. These finds have almost exclusively been made with a metal-detector. They include many unworked coins (1), but also ring-mounted coins (2), looped coins (3), halved coins (4), or pierced coins (5). In some instances the loop has been removed (6).

settlement system. Two major assumptions play a key role in this interpretation. The first is that the gold finds known to archaeologists adequately but not fully reflect the amount of gold in circulation in the different periods from the beginning of the fifth century to the

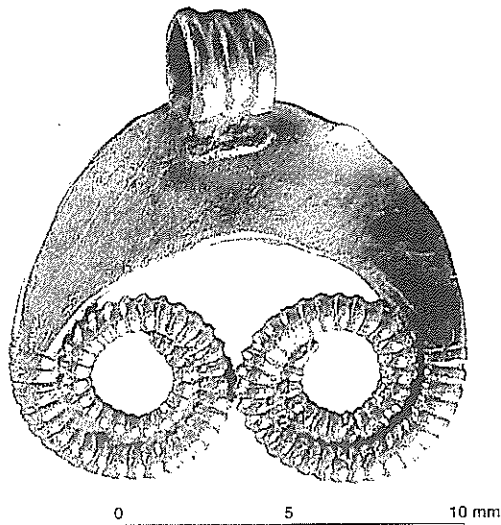


Figure 11 When metal-detectors are used in the coastal area in the north of the Netherlands, they unearth not just gold coins but other gold objects as well, such as this pendant from Wijnaldum.

seventh century. In theory, gold may have circulated in comparable or larger quantities, and in similar circuits, in the fifth and sixth century, but for whatever reason came into deposition in smaller quantities or not at all. The second assumption is that gold played a substantially different role in or had a substantially different effect on the social-political structure compared with other, more or less prestigious objects of exchange. In this regard it is unfortunate that the inventory of gold finds is not supplemented by one for other important objects of exchange (although the latter are perhaps less likely to be archaeologically recoverable; cattle are a good example here). So in theory, Friesland may have had a comparable social-political system throughout the early-medieval period, in which different categories of exchange objects played a prominent role at different times. In this way the system becomes more or less recoverable over time, depending on the chance – in that it is dictated by

78 Roymans 1990, Bazelmans 1998 and 1999a.

79 However, this could also help us to put into perspective the

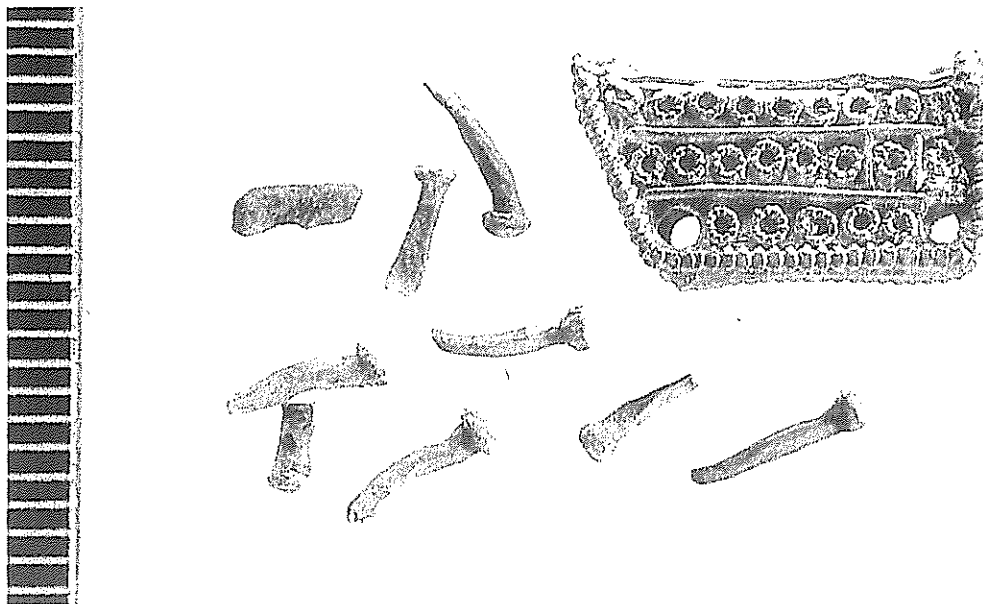


Figure 12 Wijnaldum-Tjitsma. Metal-detectors play a key role in modern excavations.

outsiders – presence of gold.<sup>78</sup> If the large concentration of gold finds in Friesland and the almost complete lack of finds in neighbouring areas (Groningen, Noord- and Zuid-Holland, and Drenthe) is an accurate reflection of the medieval situation rather than a product of widely varying post-depositional processes, which is certainly not the case for Groningen, that would make the geographical range of this Frisian network of kings, lords and followers relatively small. However, we must remember that for the time, and in national and international terms, a large number of people were living in early-medieval Friesland.<sup>79</sup>

inter-regional importance of the concentration of gold finds in the Frisian terp-region.

Figure 13 Wijnaldum-Tjitsma. Folded gold filigree mount, enclosing nine gold nails. The mount was probably part of a very valuable sword. Together with other finds at Wijnaldum, it suggests that goldsmiths worked here.



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