

## A Tribal Trinity: The Rise and Fall of the Franks, the Frisians and the Saxons in the Historical Consciousness of the Netherlands since 1850

To the question ‘Who were the most ancient inhabitants of our country?’, the only possible answer for Dutch schoolchildren in 1848 — the year in which the realm of the Netherlands received its first Constitution and in turn became a modern nation-state — was ‘The most ancient inhabitants of our country were the Frisians and the Batavians.’<sup>1</sup> The emphasis however was certainly on the latter tribe, the Batavians. Whereas the Frisians until then played a minor role in the historical consciousness of the Dutch,<sup>2</sup> references to the Batavian ‘ancestors’ had, from the very beginning of the Dutch republic, served as a powerful foundation myth. *Batavi* was a Latin name for a fairly small tribe which probably lived in the ‘Betuwe’ — a region situated at the Northern border of the Lower Rhine in what is now the province of Guelders (Gelderland) — when the Romans arrived during the first century AD. Near the beginning of the Christian era, they acquired the status of a *gens foederata* in the Roman Empire, which implied that they provided the Empire with troops for the fleet and for the Imperial Guards (*corporis custodes*) but were exempt from paying taxes. In AD 69, during the advance on Rome of the counter-emperor Vitellius, a Batavian army, allied with other tribes of the region, ignited a rebellion under the lead of Gaius Iulius Civilis. For a short time, they succeeded in tearing the whole of *Germania Inferior* apart from the Roman Empire, but by no later than AD 70 the emperor Vespasian had already restored the old order. It is probable that the Romans and the Batavians signed a new treaty.<sup>3</sup>

It was the Dutch Humanists who, by rediscovering Tacitus from the end of the fifteenth century onwards, claimed the Batavians to be the ancestors first of the Gueldrians and later of the Hollanders. But only after the Dutch Revolt against the Spanish (1568–85), which resulted in the proclamation of an independent Dutch Republic (1648), did the myth gain great momentum, partially because of the potential parallels which could be seen between the Batavian and the Dutch Revolts. The Batavians were no longer the ancestors of the Hollanders alone, but of the Dutch people as a whole.<sup>4</sup> If one group appealed more than others to this myth, it was not so much a geographical as a social-political one: the so-called ‘Regents’, a class of rich merchants who, residing mainly in Amsterdam, formed the economic core of the Dutch Republic and who, in politics, were the main advocates of the Republican ideal. As such, they were often opposed to the more conservative ‘Orangists’, emanating mainly from the old Dutch aristocracy — though enjoying popular and Calvinist support — and propagating a strong monarchical regime around the ‘Stadtholders’, who in practice always belonged to the house of Orange. It was no wonder that when in 1619 the first Dutch trading-town was founded in Indonesia, it was called ‘Batavia’ (in 1949 to become Djakarta). And when during the Occupation of the Netherlands by the French Revolutionaries (1795–1813), a part of the anti-Orangist bourgeoisie (who preferred to be called ‘Patriots’ instead of ‘Regents’) decided to collaborate with the new, ‘enlightened’ European Power and were enabled to install a satellite government, they baptized the new state ‘the Batavian Republic’, even if doubts about the accuracy of the Batavian ancestry had been constantly growing during the eighteenth century.<sup>5</sup> In the highly teleological image of the Dutch past promulgated by revolutionaries, the old Batavians nearly always formed the starting-point.<sup>6</sup> In the nineteenth century the Batavian myth, by then totally drained of its scientific credibility, was most of all maintained in the circles of the progressive and democratic bourgeoisie, who for example edited the weekly review *Le courrier batave* (1850–1). Even then, however, the Batavians seem to have, through art and literature, been kept alive in the collective memory of all Dutchmen, independent from their political or social allegiances.<sup>7</sup>

Yet, as a foundation myth, the Batavians lost their monopoly during the nineteenth century. While in the first half of the

century an increasingly evident emphasis on the Frisian element operated alongside the Batavian,<sup>8</sup> after 1850 the Batavians were gradually replaced as 'founders of the Dutch Nation' by these slightly later ancestors. During the first forty years of the twentieth century, Dutch schoolchildren were brought up with the idea that their ancestors had been not so much the Batavians as the 'Franks, the Frisians and the Saxons', the tribes which were believed to have occupied the Dutch territory during the Germanic invasions (fourth and fifth centuries AD): the Franks in the south (the later provinces of Limburg, Brabant, South Holland, Zeeland, Utrecht and partly Gueldria), the Frisians in the north and north-west (Frisia and a part of North Holland), the Saxons in the east and north-east (Groningen, Drenthe, Overijssel). Each of these groups was said to have had distinct qualities, which together constituted the typical character of the Dutch nation. The aim of this article will be to show why, when and how this replacement occurred.

### The Scientific Pioneers

The roots of the new national 'creed' went further back than 1850. In the studies of national 'characterology' which appeared in the wake of the new, 'unitarian' patriotic fervour engendered by the French Occupation, the Franks, the Frisians and the Saxons were sporadically presented as the ancestors of the Dutch people, and as the sources of the Dutch virtues.<sup>9</sup> For the time being, however, reference to those tribes remained within the borders of this specific genre, so that it could not as yet become a generally recognizable theme. Only during the second half of the nineteenth century would it become part of broader cultural discourse, and gradually of Dutch historical consciousness. This evolution took place in the late nineteenth-century atmosphere of national self-confidence, but it was not the result of an active governmental policy desirous of reinforcing national loyalty by shaping a strong foundation myth. Much more, it went hand in hand with the general process of scientification of historical thought. The theme seems to have re-appeared for the first time in 1852, in a publication on the historical geography of the medieval Netherlands. The author of that book, the lawyer L.Ph.C. van den Bergh (1805-87) — later to become the General

State Archivist of the Netherlands — tried to ‘satisfy a long-felt need’, i.e. to reconstruct, on the basis of historical evidence, ‘the former situation of the country’, more specifically that of the ‘Frankish’ period (from the seventh until the eleventh century AD). Van den Bergh’s first concerns in doing so were the purely geographical phenomena such as coasts, rivers, woodlands and moors, whereas to the population of the Roman and medieval Netherlands he dedicated just a small paragraph. In this paragraph, he asserted that ‘the population of the Netherlands, though sometimes ruled by one single monarch, belonged to several tribes, differing one from another so far as rights, manners and language are concerned: the Frisians, the Franks, and the Saxons’.<sup>10</sup> Each of these tribes occupied specific parts of the Dutch territory, which were meticulously indicated by Van den Bergh. However, they were not yet much more than a ‘neutral’ factor in a historical-geographical division of the Netherlands — a division which during the following years began to appear as such in historical atlases.<sup>11</sup>

A decade later the topic was appropriated by the young science of ethnology or anthropology, whose underlying approach at the time was closer to natural history than to the human sciences, and which drew much of its claim to scientific accuracy precisely from this apparent association with the ‘exact’ sciences.<sup>12</sup> It is significant that when the Frisian physician and well-reputed hygienist Douwe Lubach (1815–1902) in 1863 outlined his *Sketch of an Ethnology of the Fatherland*, it appeared in a series entitled ‘Natural History of the Netherlands’. Lubach agreed with Van den Bergh on the distribution of the Franks, Frisians and Saxons over the Dutch territory, but the three tribes appeared now as much more than the mere names of population groups occupying certain parts of the Dutch territories: they were *ethnic* groups, with distinctive features, not only in a cultural, but even more in a biological, sense. But as different as they may have been from one another, fundamentally they all belonged to the ‘fair-haired’ and ‘blue-eyed’ Germanic race. This race was, according to Lubach, still traceable in the present-day population of the Netherlands. Hence, Lubach’s version of the ‘three tribes’ theme was, unlike that of Van den Bergh, neither purely historical nor purely geographical, for he added to it a content that was both racial and contemporaneous.<sup>13</sup> In the light of these findings, the then almost generally accepted statement that the Batavians

were 'our ancestors' became absurd: this small tribe, so 'lucky' to have been the first to be conquered by the Romans, could not have formed the ethnic basis of the present-day Dutch people, which was a conglomerate of the three aforementioned tribes.

This attack on the Batavian origin of the Netherlands must have struck many of Lubach's Dutch readers as the purest blasphemy. And yet, Lubach's demand to get rid of the Batavian myth would be more or less realized during the following decades. Subject to a delay of less than twenty years, his ideas were amplified and carried beyond the borders of the small academic world by an article from the influential Frisian linguist Johan Winkler (1860–1914) in the liberal-Protestant cultural review *De Tijdspiegel* of 1880. The article appeared under the significant title 'Frisians, Franks and Saxons — our Ancestors. An Ethnological Study' ('Friezen, Franken en Saksen — Onze Voorouders. Eene ethnologische studie') and started off by repeating Lubach's denial of the Batavian parentage of the modern Dutch population. The expression 'The Batavians, our ancestors' was, according to Winkler, one of the many clichés 'that year in, year out, sometimes even century in, century out, are taken over thoughtlessly by one from another'. If the Batavians were to be mentioned at all, it should be as 'the ancestors of a small part of the Dutch people'; anyone who wanted to be really precise about the ancestry of the Dutch people in modern times ought to speak of 'our ancestors, Frisians, Saxons and Franks'. Along with Lubach, he positioned these tribes within the broader Germanic 'group of peoples', which 'as far as civilization, power and wealth are concerned, currently occupies the first rank among the peoples of the world' — hence implying a sense of teutonic superiority that was absent from Lubach's treatise. Within the large Germanic group, the Frisians, Franks and Saxons belonged to the 'Lower-German' sub-group.

Much more than Lubach, Winkler stressed the continuity between the early middle ages and the ethnic state of the present-day Netherlands. 'To this very day', he insisted, the three tribes continue to constitute the Dutch people. This idea of continuity made it easier for Winkler to demarcate what he assumed to have been the frontiers of the territories occupied by each of the three tribes, basing himself on the physical features of the modern populations occupying those regions. That the ethnic composi-

tion of that population had been changed by a great many mixtures and 'impurities' throughout the ages did not diminish Winkler's confidence in the validity of this method: 'For most people, a Dutchman is a Dutchman, but the ethnologist distinguishes between Frisians, Franks and Saxons as clearly as a botanist recognizes oak-trees, lime-trees and beech-trees.' The fact that Winkler founded his distinctions less on linguistic than on physical features is not astonishing; even though he gained his reputation as a linguist, he was — like Lubach — a physician by profession.<sup>14</sup> He contrasted the physiques of the Frisians with those of the Saxons, the latter being smaller, more thick-set and in possession of broader skulls. But the difference between these two tribes on the one hand and the Franks on the other, were more important than the internal differences between the Frisians and the Saxons, because the Franks, who had darker hair, browner eyes and duller skins, 'manifested less clearly the general lower German characteristics than did the Frisian and the Saxon'. The cultural (including not only linguistic but also religious) differences between the tribes were ascribed by Winkler to these physical dissimilarities: thus, the Saxons and Frisians were more inclined toward a rigid Protestantism than the Franks, who showed a marked tendency towards Roman Catholicism.<sup>15</sup> Implicitly, Winkler seemed to claim that the inhabitants of the northern provinces were 'Dutch' in the purest sense of the word, purer in any case — being more Germanic *and* more Protestant — than the Catholic inhabitants of the southern provinces, and even purer still than those of the economically and politically dominant central regions of the Netherlands.

In the decade that followed Winkler's article, the Batavian myth seems to have received a deadly blow. If Winkler himself had still felt the need to attack this myth aggressively, the ethnologist and geographer H. Blink, in his voluminous work on *The Netherlands and its Inhabitants (Nederland en zijne bewoners)* (1892), could content himself with the mere mention that the idea of a Batavian origin was outdated. He could state as his evidence that 'the main ethnographic elements from which the Dutchmen emanate, are the *Frisians, Franks and Saxons*'. His overview of the physical and moral characteristics of these tribes was overtly based upon the findings of Winkler.<sup>16</sup> The topos of the Franks, Frisians and Saxons had become an accepted axiom in the scientific discourse on the origins of the Netherlands.

In a period during which the historical profession abandoned the idea that only written texts could serve as trustworthy sources, it was no wonder that the three tribes — knowledge of whom was generally based on non-literary evidence — also made their appearance in Dutch historiography. In the same year as Blink's *Nederland en zijne bewoners*, there appeared the first volume of P.J. Blok's *magnum opus*, *De geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche Volk* (*The History of the Dutch People*) (1892–1908). The work of both Blink and Blok can be considered as preludes to the 'Epoch of Synthesis' — which is situated by E.H. Kossmann between 1895 and 1914<sup>17</sup> — but at the same time, they were scientific contributions to the pacification of the nation; by stressing the ethnic, geographical and historical unity of the Netherlands, scholars such as Blink and Blok hoped to calm the disputes between the political and religious parties, which by then were turning the Netherlands into a so-called 'pillarized' or 'vertically segmented' society.<sup>18</sup> Blok, who at the time was teaching national history at the University of Groningen, but who would in 1894 become the successor of Robert Fruin at the most prestigious university of the country, that of Leiden, was in 1892 already a reputed historian and *De Geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche Volk* became, in spite of its many failings, very influential from the very day of its appearance.<sup>19</sup> After a relatively short introduction (thirty-three pages) on the 'First inhabitants and the Roman rule' — in which the Batavians are mentioned as one of the many tribes, and the Batavian Revolt (AD 69) is described as an important, but not crucial, historical event — Blok consecrates a somewhat longer part (forty-four pages) to 'the Frankish era'. The first chapter of this second part (seventeen pages), entitled 'Franks, Saxons and Frisians', leaves no doubt that Blok believed those three tribes had been 'the main factors out of which the later Dutch population was born, though with at some places a nearly untraceable Celtic subsoil'. He found arguments for this thesis in linguistic, anthropological, juridical, folkloric and architectural differences between the different regions of the Netherlands. The fact that the Frankish element had been the leading one in Dutch history, especially politically speaking, did not prevent Blok from giving this chapter a caption focusing on the three tribes. This emphasis can certainly be related to his wish to replace the traditional political history with a new, social one, defined as 'the history of

the human society as a whole' and paying more attention to populations and less to political constellations.<sup>20</sup> Even more, Blok's stress on the three tribes seems to have been inspired by the then reigning predilection for 'racial' or at least ethnic explanations in the human sciences, as well as in the general thought about nationhood.<sup>21</sup>

Although academic historiography adopted, with Blok, the theme of the three tribes and thus lent a greater scientific respectability to it, it was through other academic disciplines that it became enriched, invested with new insights, and thereby strengthened. The findings of historical geographers and ethnologists were corroborated in the decades following 1890 by folklorists who asserted that the observably regional differences of farmhouse construction and of popular habits mirrored the 'tribal differences' within the Dutch population reaching back to the time of the Germanic migrations;<sup>22</sup> by linguists who associated the dialectical differences with that same biological and anthropological diversity;<sup>23</sup> and by archaeologists who did the same for stylistic differences in pottery and other artefacts.<sup>24</sup> Although the results of the research presented in most of these studies was far more complex than could be explained by a simple division into three tribal entities, they were time and again fitted into that scheme — with allowance, however, for several mixtures and for (marginal) external influences.

Whereas all those scholars based their statements on the study of *cultural* manifestations — thus implicitly confirming the close intertwinement of racial and cultural phenomena which had already been suggested by Winkler — physical anthropologists during the first decades of the twentieth century tried on the contrary to assert the relative independence of cultural from physical features and *vice versa*. The Amsterdam anatomist Louis Bolk (1866–1930) argued that the physical-anthropological composition of the Dutch population had to be studied for its own sake, using its own methods, independent from cultural premises. With this aim, he undertook a full-scale investigation into not only the colour of hair and eyes of schoolchildren, but also the skull-shape of adults. This research confirmed the thesis of the three tribes, although it entailed some slight changes to the accepted picture: the contribution of the pre-Germanic (Alpine) peoples was larger than expected, and moreover, it appeared to Bolk that the (brachycephalic or 'short-skulled') Saxons had been



of Celto-Slavonic rather than of Germanic origin. In spite of his own plea for an autonomous physical anthropology, Bolk could hardly withstand the temptation to lend a broader explanatory force to his findings, as is suggested by the direct connection he made between brachycephaly and Catholicism.<sup>25</sup> Bolk's position was undoubtedly typical of that of many racial thinkers in Europe at the start of the twentieth century: the high expectations that had been raised by racial theories during the second half of the nineteenth century had been frustrated by empirical research, so that racial thinkers had to abandon the ambition of uncovering all the mysteries of human culture and human society through the concept of race. A few, however, continued their quest for truth, thought by some to rival even that of the 'Knights of the Grail'.<sup>26</sup> Although he professed the contrary, deep down in Louis Bolk there seems to have lurked one of these Grail-knights.<sup>27</sup> Not surprisingly, his ideas on the Alpine element in the Dutch population largely corresponded with those uttered in 1896 by the American sociologist William Ripley, the most famous compiler and popularizer of racial thought at the turn of the century.<sup>28</sup>

That the theme of the three tribes had become rooted in scientific thought to such a degree that it had become an unquestionable axiom, immune to scientific refutation, was even apparent on the eve of the Second World War. At a meeting of the section of science of the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences on 30 December 1939, H.J.T. Bijlmer delivered a 'Contribution to the anthropology of the Netherlands', in the name of the Anthropological Committee of the Academy, inaugurated in 1926 by Louis Bolk.<sup>29</sup> Apart from the 'traditional' account on pigmentation, during which Bijlmer rejected some of Bolk's theses (the Saxons were of Germanic origin and the Alpine element in the Dutch population was negligible anyway!), the paper contained the results of a large-scale blood-group study, initiated by the famous biologist Marianne van Herwerden, who had died in 1934. Through a set of highly complicated calculations, giving the article a very scientific appearance, the author came to the disappointing conclusion 'that there is no correlation between blood group and the colour of hair or eyes' (135). Nevertheless, Bijlmer stressed the 'preponderance of Frisian blood in the north-west, Saxon blood in the north-east and Frankish blood in the south' (116). In a scientific article dealing primarily with blood-

*groups*, such a metaphorical and indeed casual use of the word 'blood' becomes ambivalent and somewhat ironical. The theme of the three tribes, while gaining academic acceptance, had managed to lull scientific vigilance to sleep.

### Penetration into the Collective Memory

Until around 1890, in most school manuals the Batavians were almost invariably presented not only as the most ancient inhabitants of the Netherlands but also as somewhat primitive, if not heroic, examples to be followed. Some authors were sharp enough to observe that from the fifth century onwards, the name of the Batavians disappeared. But, as the schoolteacher H. Hemkes remarked, 'History will never forget their names.' Aware, perhaps, of waning interest in the Batavian myth, he added: 'And you, children! You will remember this people with pleasure, won't you?'<sup>30</sup>

It was only around the turn of the century that the scientific findings on the historical and ethnic roots of the Dutch people began to find their way into school text-books. Although N.D. Doedes, author of a manual for secondary schools that first appeared in 1890 and became influential during the next two decades, judged the 'newest theories in the field of ethnology too uncertain for history education', he nevertheless strongly reduced the role of the Batavians in Dutch history. He stressed that they constituted only one of the many Germanic tribes populating the Netherlands at the arrival of the Romans and that since the early middle ages they had simply vanished from sight. From the seventh century onwards, he identified the Franks, Frisians and Saxons as the three main tribes of the Netherlands and the foundation of the medieval duchies. Although he did not label the three tribes explicitly as the founders of the Dutch people, stressing rather the growing political dominance of the Franks, the self-evident manner in which he used the formula 'Franks, Frisians, Saxons' betrays the depth of its penetration into Dutch historical consciousness.<sup>31</sup> Two years earlier, E. Drenth had offered the senior pupils of Dutch primary schools an almost identical image of that most ancient history, though without the same explicit reference to the evolutions in ethnology.<sup>32</sup>

Doedes's and Drenth's version of the earliest history of the

Netherlands was representative of what was generally taught to Dutch schoolchildren during the interwar period, with the Batavians' role becoming increasingly unimportant. In 1932, the Roman Catholic author Victor Claassen managed to tell the story of the Netherlands' early history without even mentioning the Batavians.<sup>33</sup> 'Franks, Frisians and Saxons' on the other hand became the ever-present title of chapters or paragraphs in all history text books. During the 1920s the theme also began to provide a background for another powerful inductor *and* conductor of historical consciousness, historical novels for the young.<sup>34</sup> In this respect, Protestants, Roman Catholics and free-thinkers told their children more or less the same story. Blok's aforementioned dream of a national pacification through history seemed at least partly to have become reality.

#### The Functional Advantages of the Theme

The theory of the Franks, Frisians and Saxons was certainly more appropriate for this conciliatory task than the Batavian myth. Whereas the latter was above all the myth of one province — Holland — the 'three tribes theory' offered the other regions and classes much more through identification with the Dutch nation. It is not surprising then that the two main advocates of the theory, Douwe Lubach and Johan Winkler, were both born in Frisia. But as was stated earlier, the Batavian myth had also become monopolized by one social class — the 'Regents' — with a clear-cut, Republican ideal. This was a product of Humanism and of the Enlightenment, and accordingly stressed above all an ideal of freedom which would have been cherished by the Batavians. In a country in which both orthodox Protestants and Catholics were achieving emancipation, such an 'enlightened' political myth was bound to lack the necessary unifying force that the 'Franks-Frisians-Saxons' formula, in itself 'unpolitical', *did* possess. It is therefore not surprising that this *topos* broke through at the very moment that the 'vertically pillarized' society came into being in the Netherlands. In that sense, the rise of the 'three tribes theory' in this period seems to strengthen the hypothesis, put forward by Niek van Sas, that 'the politico-religious tensions of the 1880s may well have contributed to a heightened sense of national awareness and even have served as

a catalyst for the integral nationalism of the nineties'.<sup>35</sup> One might add that, at the same time, this nationalism contributed to the pacification of these tensions.

Significantly, it was an eminent Catholic intellectual, the priest and philosopher Ferdinand Sassen (1894–1971) who on the eve of the Second World War passionately invoked the three tribes to reinforce the threatened Dutch nationality. The 'diversity in unity' which characterized Franks, Frisians and Saxons, was presented by Sassen as emblematic for Dutch nationality as such.<sup>36</sup> This was an image that certainly suited the author, as a Catholic priest from the Southern province of Brabant and a living proof of the quick emancipation of the Dutch Catholics, better than the Batavian myth with its Protestant and Hollandic connotations.

As a warrant for 'unity in diversity', the 'three tribes' formula could also be called, in a broader, cultural-historical sense, a product of Romanticism, as opposed to the 'enlightened' character of the Batavian myth.<sup>37</sup> The shift from the Batavian myth to the three-tribes theme can thus be considered a somewhat belated example of the more general European evolution which Martin Thom has convincingly situated between 1795 and 1848.<sup>38</sup> It is significant in this respect that the Batavian myth referred to Antiquity — and, as both Schöffner and Van der Woud pointed out, placed greater stress upon the fruitful collaboration between Batavians and Romans than upon their antagonism — while the Franks, Frisians and Saxons lived in the darkest of all the middle ages, for which Romanticism manifested such a distinct predilection. But not only did Romanticism and Enlightenment have different opinions as to which historical period deserved most concentration, they also explored history for very different reasons, although in both cases, these might be called 'pragmatic'. Whereas Enlightenment looked above all for moral or political *examples*, without bothering too much about factual continuity, Romanticism's primary concern was with *origins* and *descent*.<sup>39</sup> The romantic did not want to know *how to act* but *where he came from*. The flourishing of ethnic explanations in a broad range of often new scientific disciplines (archaeology, linguistics, folklore) was one aspect of this general state of mind.<sup>40</sup> In historical thought, this new, 'ethnic' paradigm partially replaced the older, philological paradigm: the texts lost their monopoly as historical sources in favour of artefacts and present-day place-names (toponymy), folk-tales (folklore), and physiolo-

gies (physical anthropology), all of which were considered to reflect the (racially or otherwise) 'given' characteristics of the people.<sup>41</sup> The other aspect of this paradigm shift was the rise of anti-statist, 'popular' or 'tribal' (*völkische*) nationalist movements. The theory of the Franks, Frisians, or Saxons was partially the product of this ethnic paradigm, but it functioned as a foundation, not of a popular nationalist movement, but of an actually existing national state. This somewhat paradoxical situation was probably its main weakness, and the most fundamental reason for its relatively short life.

### The Weaknesses of the Theme

The paradox manifested itself clearly — at least to those who have the advantage of hindsight — in 1930, when the first volume of Pieter Geyl's famous *History of the Dutch 'Stock'* (*Geschiedenis van de Nederlandsche Stam*) appeared.<sup>42</sup> This enterprise was essentially directed against Blok's 'Lesser Netherlandic' interpretation of Dutch history, which Geyl (1887–1966) reproached as finalistic, in the sense that it projected the present political situation onto a far-off past. He, on the contrary, wanted to understand *from within* the period he studied. Thus, Geyl believed that it was not the state but the language that formed the essence of a nation, an axiom upon which his Greater Netherlandic interpretation of the national past — i.e. the opinion that the Netherlands and the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium constituted a fundamental unity, at least culturally speaking — was fundamentally based.<sup>43</sup> But this point of view did not imply an abandonment of the ethnic interpretation of the earliest history of the Dutch people. The Dutch language, he argued, 'is in its origin the language of the Salian Franks and the oldest history of the Dutch 'stock' is therefore the history of that people, whose conquests first led to the alliance and later to the assimilation of the other important components out of which it is built — the Saxons and the Frisians.'<sup>44</sup> Further on, he repeated that the Frisians and the Saxons, together with the Franks, had 'furnished the resources for the Dutch stock', or 'contributed to the construction of the Dutch stock' — an affirmation he would almost literally repeat in 1939.<sup>45</sup> The premise that language was linked to ethnic parentage prevented Geyl's Greater Netherlandic

approach from leading to new insights into the earliest origins of the Dutch people.

In a way, the theory of the Franks, the Frisians and the Saxons was more in line with a Greater Netherlandic historiography than with Blok's historical plea for the Dutch state: the territories not only of the Franks but also of the Frisians and, to a lesser degree, of the Saxons were deemed to have stretched well into what was then Belgium — and even beyond. The first weakness of the 'Franks-Frisians-Saxons' theory as a foundation myth of the Netherlands lay in the fact that its external boundaries were not sufficiently defined — or worse, that these did not correspond to the boundaries of the present-day Netherlands. Therefore, it could not fulfil nationalism's 'necessity of the "other" against which to identify the national self, of the "foreigner" whose presence provided the symbolic catalyst for the discovery of a national identity'.<sup>46</sup>

On the other hand, however, the formula allowed too much for strong internal borders — and hence, it gave room to several centrifugal forces. When Johan Winkler in 1880 loudly proclaimed the Franks, Frisians and Saxons to be the ancestors of the Dutch people, he was eager to affirm that this did not in any way contradict that people's fundamental unity. On the contrary, mixtures throughout the ages had contributed to the creation of the typical 'Dutch type'. At the end of his long treatise, he felt the urge to express the wish

that thus the entire people of the Netherlands, though it emanates from three related, but in many respects distinct, tribes, though mixed with many, many foreigners from neighbouring regions and far-off countries, may nevertheless be one in the promotion of everything which can contribute to the multiplication of progress, development and wealth, to prosperity in business and industry, to the flourishing of science and art, and above all in the valorization and the maintenance of that sweet, golden freedom of our state institutions, which altogether has since long ago constituted the fame of the united Dutch provinces!<sup>47</sup>

Winkler's words, which share the ambiguities of the 'enlightened nationalism' of Ernest Renan<sup>48</sup>, could not prevent the idea of a threefold ethnic origin of the Netherlands from becoming the ammunition for some strongly anti-Hollandic nationalist movements in the peripheral zones of the Netherlands. Between the First and the Second World Wars, it was the Frisian

Movement in particular that underwent considerable radicalization, by way of a racially based nationalism gradually becoming the substitute for the more traditional, cultural nationalism.<sup>49</sup> That this radicalization felt the influence of the current ideas on the origins of the Dutch nation, is suggested by the creation in 1939 of a journal called *Saxo-Frisia*, edited by the Groningian professor of 'Old Germanic languages', J.M.N. Kapteyn (1870–1949), who was also a notorious Frisian Nationalist. The objective of the journal was to promote the knowledge of the history and culture of the Frisian and the Saxon regions of the Netherlands — and until its cessation in 1944 it remained indeed a mainly scientific journal. A society of the same name, which made its appearance in 1941 under the leadership of the selfsame Kapteyn, also presented itself as a cultural and folklorist circle and organized a great many cultural events, among which the frequent visits to typically Frisian or Saxon farms were clearly indebted to the scientific research carried out in that field from the late nineteenth century.<sup>50</sup> But much more than a cultural society, *Saxo-Frisia* was a political organization with a strong anti-Hollandic slant. In a secret memorandum of the society, the Frisians and the Saxons were considered not to belong to the Dutch people, even if they did belong to the Dutch state. 'As wherever two tribes confront each other', the author of the memorandum continued, 'here too the hatred of the Frisians against the Dutch is great. Every attempt by the Netherlands to create a unity among the people has failed because of the hatred of both the Frisians and the Saxons.'<sup>51</sup> If a certain anti-Hollandic tendency had not been absent from the Frisian movement, this antagonism between the Saxons and the Dutch seems to have been entirely new. References to the Saxon element, which during the nineteenth century had aroused no nationalist feelings whatsoever, now became an argument underpinning the anti-Hollandic feelings of certain fiercely anti-modern intellectuals from the eastern provinces. This was only possible because the theory of the Saxon origin of the eastern provinces had gained a broad scientific *and* popular support during the first decades of the twentieth century — as a part of the 'tribal Trinity' of Franks–Frisians–Saxons.

But *Saxo-Frisia* was not only an anti-Hollandic organization, it was also fiercely pro-German. In reality, it was a subdivision of the 'Volksche Werkgemeenschap' (Popular Labour Com-

munity), which served as the Dutch branch of the German organization *Ahnenerbe*, the scientific and cultural section of the SS (*Schutzstaffeln*).<sup>52</sup> As a Frankish, but equally anti-Hollandic counterpart of Saxo-Frisia, in 1944 the 'Frankische Werk-gemeenschap de Spade' (Frankish Labour Community the Shovel) was founded in the southern Dutch province of Limburg.<sup>53</sup> The third part of the *Volksche Werkgemeenschap* was formed by the organization 'De Lage Landen' (The Low Countries), which sought to gather together all the folkloric and *heimatkündige* societies of the central provinces of the Netherlands. The original plan of the SS-leaders had been to subdivide the *Werkgemeenschap* entirely along the lines allegedly dividing the Franks, the Frisians and the Saxons, but the existing traditions in the Dutch world of folkloric societies — and within Dutch society as a whole — prevented them from doing so.<sup>54</sup> This did not diminish, however, the axiomatic character of the three-tribes theory in the discourse of the *Volksche Werkgemeenschap*. In the introduction to the newly created journal of the *Werkgemeenschap*, *Hamer* (Hammer), its Leader, Johan Theunisz — a PhD in history who originated from the province of Overijssel and therefore regarded himself as a 'Saxon' — stated:

In opposition to a view, in which only state citizens are considered, subdivided according to their living-place into 11 sorts of provincials, De *Volksche Werkgemeenschap* observes the naturally given fact that our Low Countries are inhabited by Frisians, Saxons and Franks, whose settlement-regions are still clearly distinguishable.

Furthermore, he stressed that it was wrong to point at 'various unreal and real differences between us and the other Germanic stocks and peoples'.<sup>55</sup> This overtly pro-German position was echoed, though in a much more radical and anti-Dutch tone, by the Frisian memorandum quoted earlier. 'One has to know in Frisia,' this memorandum declared, 'that the interests of the Reich are more important than the interests of the small Frisia, and that Frisia has to be part of the Reich.' The author of this document appeared to be far removed from the nineteenth-century linguistic Frisian nationalists, for he wanted the official language in Frisia not to be Frisian, but German — as in the rest of the Netherlands. In this extreme case, the two main weaknesses of the Franks-Frisians-Saxons theory — the absence of



external borders and the too strong presence of internal borders — converged in a very self-destructive way: the theory, which at its birth had suited the reinforcement of Dutch national feelings, now contributed to both the potential implosion and the potential explosion of the Dutch nation.

Although the example of Saxo-Frisia is an extreme one, it is certainly not unique. On the contrary, the three-tribes theory had been harbouring this pro-German potential since its first manifestation. Douwe Lubach especially had reproached his fellow-countrymen for still treating the Germans as foreigners, ‘without considering that “Dutchman” means nothing else than “Lower-German” — and therefore “German” — and that the ancient Hollanders not seldom called their own language “German” [*Duitsch*] until the beginning of the last century’.<sup>56</sup> This pro-German bias can be explained by the fact that the aforementioned shift from a ‘philological’ to an ‘ethnic’ paradigm in the views on Dutch history was heavily indebted to the so-called *Germanenforschung*, which flourished in Germany from the late eighteenth century onwards. The ambivalence of this situation had been felt from the very beginning: on the one hand, the *Germanenforschung* satisfied the nation’s need for an ethnically founded identity, on the other, ‘the concept of the Germanic [read ‘German’] people had a very much embracing character, sometimes with tendencies also to swallow the Dutch people’. Someone like the literary historian B.H. Lulofs warned as early as 1815 of this danger. He wanted, through a careful study of all aspects of the Dutch language, to prove ‘that we, since the most ancient times, have been an original, autonomous people, entirely distinct from our neighbours through idiom and habits’.<sup>57</sup>

Lulofs, however, could not prevent the ambivalence from persisting — an ambivalence which was readily exploited by German thinkers with annexationist dreams. One of them was the Prussian historian Heinrich von Treitschke (1834–96), who already in 1869, in his treatise on the United Provinces of the Netherlands, attributed the alleged downfall of the Netherlands in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to the materialism and greed of the Hollandic ‘regents’, who had neglected the Saxon and Frisian provinces in the north-east.<sup>58</sup> Thus, even before the three-tribes theory had been fully elaborated, it had manifested its value for pan-German theoreticians.

Although the ‘reactionary modernism’ of National Socialism

differed in many ways from this imperialist and conservative pan-German ideology, it nevertheless strategically adopted some of the themes of this nineteenth-century discourse. So when, seventy years after Treitschke, National Socialism seemed to make the territorial dreams of Pan-Germanism come true, the three-tribes theory again made its appearance. In a letter to SS-leader Himmler, written one month after the German invasion of the Netherlands, the person responsible for 'the settlement of German nationality' [*die Festigung des deutschen Volkstums*] in the Netherlands, Ulrich Greifert, wrote: 'Although the Dutch have, politically speaking, for centuries lived separately from the rest of the German people, they are still the offspring of the Frisians, the Lower Saxons and the Lower Franks.' Even if the Dutch upper class had alienated itself from Germany, this racial affinity nevertheless still formed a perfect basis for the 'national-political recuperation' [*volkstumpolitische Wiedergewinnung*] of the Dutch lower classes.<sup>59</sup> And indeed, German cultural and educational policy in the Netherlands often made use of the three-tribes theory. When, in January 1943, a research plan was drawn for a *Germanisches Forschungsinstitut in den Niederlanden* (Germanic research institute in the Netherlands), whose task it would be 'to inquire into and publicize, from a Dutch viewpoint, the values and essential characteristics of the Germanic Man', the 'Frisians, Saxons and Franks' were mentioned as one of the topics that needed to be studied.<sup>60</sup> The initiative for the Institute originated from the German *Reichskommissar* Alfred Seyss-Inquart — who had already, to an Assembly of the Nazi Party in March 1941, represented the Dutch people, in terms very similar to those used by Greifert, as an amalgam of the three Germanic tribes<sup>61</sup> — but was supported by German and Dutch SS-organizations, and by the two collaborating Dutch ministries dealing with cultural affairs. One of the main men responsible for German cultural policy in the Netherlands, the Cologne prehistorian Walther von Stokar (1901–59), exhorted German schoolteachers in the Netherlands explicitly to situate 'the roots of the Dutch people in the three tribes'. Attacks which had recently been launched against this 'commonly held knowledge', asserting a strong Celtic component within the Frankish tribe — the author could have mentioned Louis Bolck at this point — were rejected by von Stokar as being non-scientific. He deemed German prehistorical research to have

demonstrated that 'there could be no question anymore of a Celtic population north of the Moselle and the Somme'.<sup>62</sup> More details, however, von Stokar did not provide.

In spite of von Stokar's appeal to science, the purpose of his talk was overtly political. Nevertheless, the three-tribes theory also appeared in German publications with a primarily scientific outlook. Most notable was the huge book *Die Niederlande und das deutsche Reich (The Netherlands and the German Empire)* by the young Berlin historian Werner Reese (1909–41). This was only the first volume of what was to have become a much larger work, shortly before the appearance of which the author died.<sup>63</sup> The work was the result of a huge amount of detailed historical research which Reese had undertaken during the 1930s, mostly in the Netherlands. It was an outstanding example of the then dominant current in German historiography, *Volksgeschichte*, which sought to work within (most often racially defined) 'ethnic' rather than political boundaries.<sup>64</sup> Automatically, this implied paying increased attention to the 'Germanic' peoples across the borders of the German state. According to whether this attention was focused on the eastern or the western borders of Germany, this 'volks-geschichtliches' project was stamped as either *Ostforschung* or *Westforschung*.

Fundamentally, Reese's central thesis was that of the *Westforschung*:<sup>65</sup> since the early middle ages, the Lower Rhine region — containing both north-western Germany and the whole of the Netherlands, Flanders and northern France — had formed, because of strong 'blood-ties', a natural unity within the larger Germanic whole. In the Introduction to this volume, Reese consecrated a separate paragraph to the 'Franks, Frisians, Saxons'. By the end of the Germanic migrations (for the Germans preferred to use this term rather than the more pejorative 'invasions') 'the large trinity [*Dreiheit*] within the "ethnic essence" [*Volkstum*] of the Lower Rhine-region had become visible in its contours': Franks in the south, Frisians in the north and Saxons in the north-east. In fact, Reese carried the theory of the three tribes to its extreme but logical consequences — much more than Geyl had done before him: if these tribes were to be considered the basic layer of an ethnicity later to be born, that ethnicity could be neither that of the actual Netherlands nor that of Geyl's Greater Netherlands; rather the whole of the lower-German sphere had to be involved in it. Hence, Reese had no difficulty integrating the

theory into his pan-German 'historical ideology'. According to him, it had only been 'in the larger space of the Germanic-German north-west and of the Frankish Empire' that 'the all-embracing ethnic [*völkische*] similarities had received their full effectiveness'. Within this unity, each of the tribes had been entrusted with one specific duty: the Frisians had to maintain relations with the region of the North Sea; the Saxons 'incarnated most strongly the ties with the Lower German "ethnic entity" [*Volkstum*]'; and the Franks had to be the main state-building force. This simple situation at the beginning of the middle ages had become 'endlessly tangled' by history, but the 'ethnic bases [*völkische Grundlagen*] of all that happens' manifested themselves time and time again.<sup>66</sup>

Whether Reese's monumental and drily academic study has been read by many remains doubtful. But the Berlin historian was not only an academic; not only did he function as a 'referent' for cultural affairs in the Belgian military administration, but because of his study visits to The Hague during the 1930s he was far from a complete unknown in the Netherlands. His ideas, therefore, may have had some impact not only on the German administration in the Netherlands, but also on Dutch collaborationists. In any event, to the collaborationist intellectuals within the Netherlands, such as the 'Saxo-Frisian' separatists, Reese's views on Dutch history offered a strong, scientifically founded, argument. In many products of Dutch National Socialist historiography, the Franks, Frisians and Saxons were reduced to three of the many Germanic tribes which had settled throughout Europe — fortuitously the ones at whose crossroads the Netherlands would arise later on. It was this version that was presented in a National Socialist manual for primary schools, which would have become the only 'official' history if Liberation had not cast asunder all National Socialist dreams.<sup>67</sup>

But not all advocates of collaboration with the Germans wanted the Dutch state to be swallowed by a Great Germanic Empire. On the contrary, within the collaborationist camp there existed a powerful current which employed patriotic arguments to legitimate its pro-German point of view. This was above all the case in circles of the 'Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging' (National Socialist Movement), the party founded by Anton Adriaan Mussert, who while propagating a statist fascism rather than a racist National Socialism nevertheless collaborated

eagerly with the Germans, vainly hoping to acquire political dominance in the Netherlands. In *Volk en Vaderland*, the daily paper of this movement, the philosopher Jacques Delsing wrote at the end of 1941 that National Socialism would bring about a tight 'ethnic community' (*volksgemeenschap*) in which 'in spite of our differences in origin, respectively from Frisians, Saxons and Franks, we know ourselves one through the bond of the Dutch blood'. The autonomist potential of this statement aroused the suspicion of the German Security Service.<sup>68</sup>

But even in milieux affiliated with the SS, Dutch patriotism was not absent. To traditionally patriotic Dutchmen who were converted to a radical form of National Socialism, the theory of the Franks, Frisians and the Saxons became a useful tool in their rope-dance between extreme annexationism and the Dutch patriotism. In March 1941, Jan de Vries, professor of Old Germanic languages at the University of Leiden, President of collaborating organizations such as the Algemeen Nederlandsch Verbond (*General Dutch Society*) and the Literature Guild of the 'Culture Chamber', and an SS-sympathizer,<sup>69</sup> wrote to his colleague Jan van Dam, professor of German literature at the University of Amsterdam and from November 1940 secretary-general of Education and Culture: 'I am also sceptical towards the three-tribes theory; I have even expressed as my opinion that these are — certainly in so far as Saxons and Franks are concerned — notions of political more than anthropological character. But this does not imply that the youth would not have to know about them.' Apparently, Van Dam — who approached the SS out of resentment towards the NSB<sup>70</sup> — had sent him a proposal of a new programme for primary-school history education. For De Vries, it was 'evident that the points mentioned by you do belong at both the primary and the secondary schools'. Apparently, it was not the fierce anti-Hollandism of Saxo-Frisia but a Dutch nationalist reflex which induced these Germanophile scholars to stick to the theme. The rest of the same letter, however, makes clear that even for De Vries the three tribes had lost their leading position on the ladder of important historical topics: 'It is of even greater importance,' he continued, 'to bring about the disappearance of the depreciation of the Old Germanic peoples; what is written about them in the school text-books is, in most cases, simply infamous.'<sup>71</sup> It was not some unique combination of the qualities of the three tribes, but more general

Germanic features, that had in De Vries's view to be considered the ethnic core of the Dutch people. In his book *Onze Voorouders* (Our ancestors), which appeared in 1941 and was compellingly recommended by Van Dam as a history manual for the primary schools,<sup>72</sup> no mention was made of the Frisians, the Franks and the Saxons.

### The Waning of the Theme

From this correspondence between Van Dam and De Vries — before the war both respected scientists — it is suggested that by the 1940s the three-tribes theory had lost much of its scientific credibility, in spite of the evident references that had been made to it in the Academy of Science up to 1939. This loss of credibility was in the first instance caused by factual refutations of parts of the theory. Thus, some archaeologists during the 1930s asserted, on the basis of new evidence taken from the so-called 'terpen' (artificial dwelling-mounds), that the 'Frisians' were in fact not Frisians at all, but Anglians. This hypothesis does not seem to have been long-lived, but even so, the Frisians from that moment on were not safe from scientific revisionism. In 1954, the classicist W.J. de Boone received his doctor's degree for a dissertation entitled 'The Franks: From their First Appearance until Childeric's Death'. From his evidence, which consisted not of archaeological remainders but of classical texts, he concluded that the Frisians at the moment of the Germanic migrations had been a part of the larger Frankish group of tribes, and that later on they had been subjected to the Saxon population of the north-east.<sup>73</sup>

In the light of De Vries's letter to Van Dam, this rejection of the ethnically Frisian character of the Frisians arouses some astonishment. Indeed, the Leiden philologist seemed to have doubts on precisely the two other tribes. His arguments for these doubts were expressed in an article he had written in 1931 for *Leiding*, the 'general two-monthly review' edited by, among others, Pieter Geyl.<sup>74</sup> In it, he rejected the three-tribes theory in a way very similar to that in which Johan Winkler had denounced the Batavian myth exactly fifty years earlier. De Vries described this formula as 'one of those characteristic school-manual sentences, with which no knowledge is being communicated, but

only ignorance is being cloaked'. The core of his argument was that Franks and Saxons were not so much ethnic entities as political amalgams of varieties of tribes. As far as the Saxon conglomerate was concerned, he admitted that the original Saxon tribe did play a part in it; in the case of the Franks however, he did not deem even this to have been ascertained. The ethnic differences of the Dutch population — especially those between the fair-haired north and the black-haired south — could not be accounted for by these Germanic tribes, not even by the difference between Teutons and Celts, which had been stressed by Bolk and by many after him. Their origins reached much further back in time, to the basic divergence between the Nordic race (to which all Germanic and Celtic tribes belonged) and the Alpine race.<sup>75</sup>

Five years later, De Vries's primarily linguistic theses were confirmed on an archaeological level by his Leiden University colleague the prehistorian A.W. Byvanck in a general overview of the ethnic origins of the Dutch people.<sup>76</sup> Both De Vries and Byvanck realized that this dismantling of the *topos* of the three tribes could have serious consequences for Dutch national identity, for it was much easier to identify with historically imaginable tribes than with the archaeological remainders of pre-historic populations. That was probably the reason why, during the war, De Vries wanted the theme to remain in the history manuals. Nevertheless, both he and Byvanck also sought for more fundamental solutions to the problem. The solutions they offered were sharply opposed to each other, even if they both urged for a broad, interdisciplinary investigation of the origins and character of the Dutch people. De Vries pleaded for a less historical definition of the Dutch people, in which 'that which is was not to be understood as the things that had come about, but on the contrary as the unchangeable essence'. The findings of psychology, archaeology, sociology, folklore and linguistics had to be combined to trace this stable Dutch essence. For Byvanck, on the contrary, the complexity of the question of ethnic origin was reason enough to ask humbly 'whether for the problem of the origins of a people, its culture and history are not of more importance than its ethnic composition'. Thus, whereas De Vries urged a strengthening of the 'ethnic paradigm', Byvanck dared to doubt it. Nevertheless, the answer Byvanck gave to the question was half-hearted: although he did assert that 'the nation is as much a

product of race as of culture and history', his own analyses still showed a marked predilection for ethnic explanations.

This and other hesitant steps in the direction of a scientific paradigm shift were strongly catalysed by political circumstances. During the German occupation, and outside the collaborationist milieu, National Socialist theories on 'blood and soil' threw a dark shadow on the 'ethnic paradigm' as a whole. Not surprisingly, it was not a scientist but a politician who indicated this road in the most explicit way. In his speech, delivered in September 1940 'to all who wanted to contemplate their being Dutch' (*hun Nederlanderschap*) the Law professor and head of the Dutch Liberal Party, B.M. Telders, (1903–45), admitted that 'the Franks, Frisians and Saxons, who are considered to have populated our country during and after the Roman period' — although he relativized this statement by referring to Byvanck — were counted among the Germanic tribes. This, however, he judged to be irrelevant, for 'factors entirely different from the ethnological origin of the majority of our people have exerted a considerably more drastic influence on Dutch culture'. He added an overview of eminently historical, cultural and religious features that he considered had imprinted 'an infinitely more obvious and essential stamp upon Dutch culture than the antiquarian fact of a Germanic origin'.<sup>77</sup> Later, Telders would be taught that these kinds of thought were far from congenial to the German occupier. Three months after this speech, he was imprisoned. He would die in Buchenwald one month before the end of the war.

The Liberation brought with it the possibility of dealing more openly with the fixation on the Germanic origin, and therefore the Germanic character, of the Dutch people. Indirectly, this was accomplished in the play *Vrij Volk* (Free People), which was performed at the Amsterdam City Theatre on 6 June 1945, during the official celebrations of the Liberation. It staged a sequence of heroic episodes taken from Dutch history, and began with a re-enactment of the Batavian uprising. That this come-back of the Batavian theme may well be considered an antidote to the former veneration of the Germanic past is illustrated by the exclamation of one of the actors: 'The Gauls fight for honour, the Teutons fight for power, but we Batavians fight for freedom!'<sup>78</sup> That Batavians were judged to be neither Gauls nor Teutons suggests that they were defined not in racial but in moral terms: the



Batavians were who they were *because* they fought for freedom. In other words, the Enlightenment potential of the Batavian myth was fully exploited.

A more extensive and academic refutation of the 'Teutophilia' dominant during the interwar period was offered by T.A. Rompelman, who had the painful honour of being appointed the first post-war Dutch Professor of Old Germanic Languages. In his inaugural address at the University of Groningen, Rompelman admitted that his discipline had been contaminated: 'The soil from which it drew its sap, and which made possible its tremendous growth and development, was intoxicated; the basis on which the proud building of the Old Germanic cultural history was constructed was unsound.' With this, he aimed first and foremost at the exaggerated 'racial pride' by which this science had been imbued, but indirectly he also relativized, more fundamentally, the claims of ethnic explanations as such. In particular he fiercely rejected the idea that the Germanic religion would have been 'exclusively a product of Germanic race and blood'.<sup>79</sup>

Thus, the Second World War contributed in two different ways to the undermining of a three-tribes theme that had already been tottering owing to detailed, internally scientific critiques. First, it showed the dysfunctionality of the theme as an identity-building force; secondly, it tore away the ethnic premises on which it rested. This was the context within which the young medievalist Bernard H. Slicher van Bath (born in 1911 and later to become one of the leading agrarian historians of Western Europe) was able to administer a (nearly) fatal blow to the belief in the three tribes as 'founding-fathers' of the Dutch nation. In his bulky doctoral dissertation on early medieval settlements in the eastern Netherlands, written during the war and appearing immediately after the Liberation, he combined archaeology, toponymy, juridical history and historical geography to arrive at an exhaustive overview of all aspects of social life in the early medieval eastern Netherlands. The discussion on the Saxon origin of those regions covered only a very small part of the work, but was undoubtedly the most influential part. Slicher van Bath's conclusions must indeed have been shocking for many of his readers: from his substantial and varied evidence, he judged 'that the Saxons have constituted no essential component of the eastern-Dutch population, and that there is no reason to call the actual popula-

tion Saxon'.<sup>80</sup> These findings were followed by an inexorable *démasqué* of the legend of the Saxons through a historiographical account starting from the legend's origins — as far back as the thirteenth century — and leading down to his own time. It had been Slicher's supervisor, the famous left-wing historian Jan Romein (1893–1962), who — because of his Marxist-inspired concern with the socially determined genesis of historical images — had urged him to fully elaborate this theme.<sup>81</sup> Romein had also asked Slicher to write the article on 'The Saxons' for the first volume of his new, prestigious enterprise, the *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* (General History of the Low Countries), in which both Belgium and the Netherlands were covered. The results of Slicher's research, however, convinced Romein and his co-editor J.F. Niermeyer so thoroughly of the unimportance of the Saxons in the Netherlands, that they allowed Slicher to change the title of his article into 'The Extension of the Population and the Development of Society in the East of the Netherlands, 700–1200'.<sup>82</sup>

This change of title was illustrative of the paradigm shift that was going on, and to which Slicher deliberately contributed. For his attack on the three-tribes theory went far beyond the removal of the Saxon element, consisting far more of a global attack on the 'ethnic paradigm' in archaeology and history. Already in his doctoral research he had noticed that 'the evidence can provide us with information on influences of civilization, on politics, but not on tribes'. The consequence of this finding was simple, but radical: there existed no direct link between tribe and culture, which implied that it would be vain to found verdicts regarding the ethnic origin of a region on the archaeological evidence.<sup>83</sup> In a lecture which he gave in 1947 for the Dialect Commission of the Dutch Royal Academy of Sciences — during a session entitled 'Frisians, Saxons, Franks' — and later in an article for the American medievalist review *Speculum*, Slicher transformed his rejection of the Saxon origin of the eastern Netherlands more and more into a total rejection of the search for ethnic origins. Instead, he pleaded for historical research into the cultural, religious and political forces that had influenced the constitution of the Dutch nation — and of the different spheres within it.<sup>84</sup>

Much more than De Vries's rejection of the Franks or De Boone's demystification of the Frisians, Slicher's reckoning with the Saxons, and with the three-tribes theme as a whole, found its

way to the Dutch historical consciousness. Unlike these predecessors, Slicher was not a lonesome forerunner, but someone who made explicit and catalysed a general change of paradigm. Particularly in archaeology, the shift from an 'ethnic' to a cultural paradigm took place in a clear and obvious manner.<sup>85</sup> In this discipline, pleas for renewed attention to be paid to the 'tribe' as frame of analysis would only be heard again in the 1980s; the advocates of this approach defended the view that changes of artefacts did not necessarily mean that the old inhabitants adopted new habits, but could also imply that new inhabitants had partially replaced old ones. But even then, the tribe should not be allowed to become the first explanatory moment, for 'new inhabitants are only of interest as carriers of new habits'.<sup>86</sup>

This change of paradigm which in archaeology took place in a very explicit fashion, found its way into historical publications silently, taking the form of the disappearance of the three-tribes theme.<sup>87</sup> The only *overt* rejection of the theme — apart from that of Slicher — was found in P.C. Boeren's contribution to the multi-volume *History of the Low Countries* which appeared during the late 1940s and early 1950s under the direction of the prominent Catholic historian L.G.J. Verberne. Boeren asserted that

various layers of population, wide-ranged as far as race and language are concerned, have been sliding one over the other during a history of thousands of years, until they finally integrated into the Dutch people as we know it today. It is, therefore, ridiculous to claim that our people would have been constructed out of three tribes: Franks, Frisians and Saxons.<sup>88</sup>

Is it surprising that the Limburg medievalist Boeren had been one of the other lecturers at the session of the Dialect Commission during which Slicher exposed his anti-ethnic view on the origins of the Netherlands?

But historians did not, on the whole, show the same theoretical consistency as the archaeologists. Although Franks, Frisians and Saxons never again played the same role in Dutch history as they had before the war, they nevertheless stubbornly persisted in historical discourse. Historians, certainly when they wrote for a broader audience, seemed reluctant to reject fully this long-cherished *topos*. This had already become apparent in 1942, when T. Gosliga, in his adaptation of an older history manual for primary schools, acknowledged his debt to recent research with

regard to his views on the earliest history of the Netherlands. And indeed, 'Franks-Frisians-Saxons' no longer occurred as the subtitle of a separate paragraph in the book. Nevertheless, Gosliga showed how difficult it was to abandon the established formula: throughout his account of the Netherlands' most ancient history the classical triptych appeared more than once.<sup>89</sup>

More surprisingly, when in 1951 there appeared the seventeenth edition of Hetteema's highly reputed historical atlas (with, on its first page, appraisals by the most eminent Dutch historians), the map of the early medieval Netherlands showed the clear boundaries between the regions of the three tribes, although, by indicating the boundaries of the bishopric of Utrecht, the authors simultaneously allowed for a more cultural approach to this history.<sup>90</sup>

When an exhibition was held in 1959 in the capital of the province of Frisia, Leeuwarden, on the history of the Netherlands during the migration era (AD 350-750), it was given the title *About Frisians, Franks and Saxons*. The catalogue of this exhibition, which in 1960 was transferred to The Hague, reveals strikingly to what extent this expression had become an empty formula, an atavism of an outdated notion. The Introduction to the catalogue offers a historical account of the migrations in which, after a general overview of the migrations in Europe, only the state-building efforts of the Franks are treated. The influence of some Anglo-Saxon elements is touched upon, but the extent of Anglo-Saxon settlements in Dutch history is put firmly into perspective. Briefly, this introduction, too, was a product of the new, cultural approach rather than of the older, ethnic one. No wonder, for prominent archaeologists such as A.E. van Giffen and J.H. Holwerda had contributed to it. Supposedly, the title was chosen for promotional reasons, exploiting the attraction the three tribes doubtless still exercised on many Dutchmen.<sup>91</sup>

Yet, two years earlier, the aforementioned De Boone had undertaken a direct attempt to ban the Franks-Frisians-Saxons theme from the Dutch collective memory, while popularizing his views on early medieval Dutch history in a small pamphlet which appeared in the series *Current Themes (Actuele Onderwerpen, generally abbreviated as 'AO')*. It was a series in which, once a week, there appeared a small booklet of sixteen pages. As the promotional text warned, 'AO is not for everyone . . . but the mothers of the busy family with growing-up children know that

they have to remain “up-to-date”. Both in order to help their children at their studies and in order to be able “to say a word” in the evenings in the company of friends.’ De Boone’s booklet appeared under the significant title *Friezen, Franken en Saksen . . . klopt dat?* (Frisians, Franks and Saxons . . . is that true?), implying that at that moment the formula was still alive in collective memory. Apart from his rejection of the Frisian origin of the North, he also put question-marks next to the Saxon origin of the East, for the Saxons were ‘through and through a people of the sea’. At the end of this fairly confused account, he concluded: ‘One thing, however, is certain: what we used to learn at school, and what is still at a premium, is not true! The story of the Frisians, the Franks and the Saxons happened in the way I just recounted, in that way . . . or another one!’<sup>92</sup>

But De Boone’s attempt appeared to be in vain. For even up to the present day, the theme of the Franks, the Frisians and the Saxons appears not to have entirely lost its emblematic, or iconic value. In the frequent re-editions of Jaap ter Haar’s immensely popular *Geschiedenis van de Lage Landen* (History of the Low Countries) the three tribes continue to appear in the caption of his chapter on early medieval history.<sup>93</sup> Even in the more ‘respectable’ and educative series *Nederlands verleden in vogelvlucht* (A bird’s-eye view of the past of the Netherlands), a chapter is consecrated to ‘The Franks, the Frisians, the Saxons and the Chamavi (500–900)’. On the whole, it gives a fairly traditional account of the early medieval settlements in the Dutch territories, with the three tribes playing a less than prominent role. The remarkable extension of the classical triptych seems to have been inspired by recent archaeological insights, according to which it was not so much the Saxons, but the ‘Chamavi’, another Germanic tribe, that appears to have been dominant in the eastern region of the great rivers. The Saxon influence on the population of the eastern Netherlands, on the other hand, was strongly questioned. Apparently, the replacement of the traditional formula by a new and maybe more precise one (i.e. ‘the Franks, Frisians and Chamavi’) was a step which even in the early 1990s was hard to take. An extension of it appeared to be more acceptable.<sup>94</sup>

### Historiography, Mythology, Collective Memory

The study that I have presented in this paper widely transgresses the borders of the history of historiography. I have tried to consider the academic view on the past within its broader scientific, educational *and* ideological surroundings. The theme of the Franks, the Frisians and the Saxons was not discovered by historians, but their support made it possible for the theme to gain popular support and to become much more than a historiographical one. In somewhat fashionable terms, one might argue that it became part of the collective memory of the Netherlands. If we follow Maurice Halbwachs's radical interpretation of the notion of 'collective memory', this would mean that the theme was a mere reflection of the needs of society, operating independently from the development of (historical) science.<sup>95</sup> That the evolution of the discourse on the 'three tribes' was indeed closely related to changing political needs may have become clear throughout this paper.

In a recent article, however, the Israeli scholars Noa Gedi and Yigal Elam have seriously questioned the accuracy and usefulness of the notion of 'collective memory', because it leaves no room for either personal memory or scientific historiography. According to them, "collective memory" is but a new term for the old familiar "myth" — and the term 'myth' has to be preferred because it does not make the same totalitarian claims as its more fashionable counterpart; unlike collective memory, myths are something that can be unveiled and deconstructed by 'real' historians.<sup>96</sup> So, could the theme of the Franks, Frisians and the Saxons be considered a national 'myth'? It would certainly not be uncommon to do so, since comparable themes have been labelled as 'myths' by historians for a long time now. In particular, accounts of the 'Germanic origins' of certain countries have been dealt with as 'foundation myths'.<sup>97</sup> Nevertheless, throughout this paper I have avoided writing about the 'myth of the Franks, Frisians and Saxons' — and this for various reasons. First of all, it seems to me that the concept of 'myth' is, no less than that of 'collective memory', 'a general and rather vague term', a vagueness that authors such as Gedi and Elam, MacDougall and Hall fail to recognize. Mircea Eliade has noticed a changing interpretation of myth during the last two centuries. Whereas nineteenth-century scholars understood myth 'in the usual meaning of that

word, that is, as “fable”, “invention”, “fiction”’, their successors in the twentieth century ‘accepted it as it was understood in the archaic societies, where, on the contrary, “myth” means a “true story” and beyond that is a most precious possession because it is sacred, exemplary, significant’.<sup>98</sup> This new approach has opened the way for a more positive dealing with myths, whereby they are presented as a ‘source of truth’ with at least as much importance as historical knowledge. Even more, the recognition of the ‘mythic dimension’ of every form of history has urged some scholars to summon academic historians to observe modesty in their claims over the truth.<sup>99</sup>

But historians, and above all political historians, have been rather unwilling to listen to this exhortation, which was uttered primarily by anthropologists, psychologists, literary historians and theologians. They continued to consider it their duty ‘simply to separate what is true from what is false’,<sup>100</sup> and thus to fight against the ‘falsifiers of the past’, the builders of myths.<sup>101</sup> The Groningian historian Coen Tamse was less self-assured when he admitted that the historian ‘can lay no claim to be an effective debunker of myths’ and that he can only ‘expose dead myths’. Even for him, however, ‘delivering state and society from the magical power of the political myth’ remained an ideal to be striven for. In other words, political myth and scientific truth remained even for him two entities to be clearly distinguished.<sup>102</sup>

Both interpretations of myth seem to have one thing in common: they treat the logic of the myth as something fundamentally different from scientific logic, even if both the Israeli scholars and Tamse admit that the two in reality often occur together. In the traditional view of the (political) historians, this mythical logic threatens scientific logic, whereas according to the more ‘modern’ and at the same time more ‘classical’ view — that of the anthropologists — it presents a truth which is as valuable as, but still different from, the scientific approach. It is precisely this epistemological cleavage that makes it so difficult to describe the theme of the three tribes as a ‘myth’. I hope to have demonstrated in this paper that this theme was not the direct outcome of a political programme, nor the scientific translation of popular folklore, but in the first place the result of a process of ‘scientification’. The later *success* of the theme was indeed largely due to the fact that it suited perfectly the needs of a Dutch society that was being transformed from a Holland-centred federation of

provinces into a fully fledged nation-state — and its perishing can also be partly ascribed to the fact that after (and partly due to) the Second World War, this nation-building process was more or less accomplished.<sup>103</sup> But even then, this merely political explanation seems to be rather reductionist. For at least equally striking is the simultaneity that can be noticed between the ‘life-course’ of the theme and developments in scientific thought — developments that were not specific to the Netherlands. The flourishing of the theme between 1880 and 1940 goes together not only with the ‘age of nationalism’, but also with the age of the ‘ethnic paradigm’ in many sciences. The question whether this ethnic paradigm in science was a spin-off from the national paradigm in politics, or whether on the contrary a scientific view engendered a political agenda, seems a chicken-and-egg question whose solution would be not only impossible but also undesirable, since it would neglect the fundamental intertwining of science and politics. Historians of nationalism in particular all too often forget this interwovenness when they reduce the representations of the national past in the nineteenth century solely to ‘national myths’ or ‘invented traditions’. This latter concept especially — a very useful explanatory tool when used in the right place — suggests very much a *creatio ex nihilo* of historical images by political forces.<sup>104</sup> In the case of the Franks, Frisians and Saxons, the scientific ‘weight’ of the theme was too considerable to stamp it as a mere ‘invention’ of policy-makers.

It therefore seems more enlightening to accept Michel Foucault’s view that knowledge is not merely a product, but also a generator of power. Patrik Hall has lucidly applied this view to the Swedish national ‘myth’, which led him to the conclusion that ‘the national and the historical [were] merged together by the powerful method of scientific truth’.<sup>105</sup> In the later nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, the Franks, the Frisians and the Saxons, too, became part of a ‘régime’ of truth, in which truth was ‘linked in circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it’.<sup>106</sup> To translate this into more concrete terms: the theme of the three tribes, which was first put forward in an environment that claimed to be ‘purely’ scientific, was recognized and picked up by a political system as being useful for its own needs. But in the same movement, this scientific statement contributed to the reinforcement of this political system,



which again gave a greater authority to its own claims to truth.

This view on the dynamics of truth comes very close to what Gedi and Elam consider as an interpretation of 'collective memory' which is more moderate than the extremely homogenizing one of Maurice Halbwachs.<sup>107</sup> According to this interpretation, society is not seen as an undividable 'social fact', making the individual absolutely subordinate, but rather as

an arena of contest between rival notions. Ideally the better notions should win and lead the field, if not immediately, then in the long run. In reality, though, social dynamics is at work by which, often enough, certain individuals or a group of individuals, powerful and presumptuous enough, take over and assign themselves as the spokesmen of this so-called society'.<sup>108</sup>

In a society defined as such, ideas and memories are only admitted to 'collective memory' when they have passed a 'test' defined by both scientific and political standards. In this interpretation, the danger of direct associations of 'collective memory' with the determinism of the subconscious is avoided, and room is left for the individual historian to interfere in the 'formation' of collective memory. In order to avoid conceptual misunderstandings regarding these matters, Amos Funkenstein has suggested — before Gedi and Elam — that we no longer speak of collective memory, but of 'historical consciousness'.<sup>109</sup> I have followed his advice in choosing a title for this article.

### Notes

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1. H.G. Backer, *Beknopte schets der Vaderlandsche Geschiedenis in vragen en antwoorden ten dienste van de lagere scholen* (Amersfoort 1848), 7.

2. Such is also the opinion of A. van der Woud, *De bataafse hut, verschuivingen in het beeld van de geschiedenis, 1750-1850* (Amsterdam 1991), 18-20.

3. For fairly recent research on the Batavians, see R. Urban, *Der Bataveraufstand und die Erhebung des Julius Classicus*, Trierer historische Forschungen, LXXXVIII (Trier 1985); and W.J.H. Willems, 'De Bataven, archeologisch onderzoek in het rivierengebied', *Hermeneus. Tijdschrift voor antieke cultuur*, LVIII (1986): 281-9.

4. See I. Schöffner, 'The Batavian Myth during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', in J.S. Bromley and E.H. Kossmann, eds, *Britain and the Netherlands, Volume V: Some Political Mythologies. Papers Delivered to the Fifth Anglo-Dutch Historical Conference* (The Hague 1975), 78–101; see also P. Verhoeven, 'Civilis en zijn Bataven: symbool van Hollands patriotisme', *Hermeneus. Tijdschrift voor antieke cultuur*, LVIII (1986): 32–40.

5. Van der Woud, op. cit., 21, notices the first doubts about the Batavian myth half-way through the eighteenth century; according to E.O.G. Haitsma Mulier, 'De Bataafse mythe opnieuw bekeken', *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, CXI (1996): 344–67, the Batavian myth was already subject to well-founded attacks from the very beginning of the seventeenth century onwards (357).

6. A. Terpstra, 'Historia pro patria. Vaderlandse geschiedenis en natievorming in de Bataafs-Franse tijd', *Skript. Historisch Tijdschrift*, XVIII (1996): 153–63; Haitsma Mulier, op.cit., 359–61.

7. Van der Woud, op. cit., 29–30, situates the deadly blow for the Batavian myth in 1813, when the new political context (a unified kingdom of the Netherlands, in which Holland lost its predominance) corroborated the scientific 'exhaustion' of the myth. Haitsma Mulier, op. cit., 367, emphasizes that the Batavians remained an object of art and literature. As we will see further on in this paper, the school manuals, too, suggest that the Batavians were more deeply rooted in the historical consciousness of the Dutch than van der Woud is ready to believe.

8. Van der Woud, op. cit., 18–20, notices an increasingly important role being assigned to the Frisians after 1813, and points especially to a text of c. 1850, in which the Utrecht church historian H.J. Royaards assigned a more important role to the Frisians than to the Batavians.

9. More specifically in: W.A. Ockerse, *Ontwerp tot eene Algemeene Characterkunde*, Volume 3: *Behelzende het nationaal character der Nederlanderen* (Amsterdam 1797), 5. On the characterological studies during the late eighteenth century, see: Rob van Ginkel, *Op zoek naar eigenheid. Denkbeelden en discussies over cultuur en identiteit in Nederland* (The Hague 1999), 11–12; and: P.B.M. Blaas, 'Het karakter van het vaderland. Vaderlandse geschiedenis van Wagenaar tot Fruin, 1780–1940' in: N.C.F. van Sas, ed, *Vaderland. Een geschiedenis vanaf de vijftiende eeuw tot heden* (Amsterdam 1999), 365–390.

10. L.Ph.C. van den Bergh, *Handboek der Middel-Nederlandsche geographie* (The Hague, 2nd edn, 1872), 110.

11. See *Historische en geographische atlas der algemeene en vaderlandsche geschiedenis* (The Hague 1858), map 31: 'The Netherlands in the time of Franks, Saxons and Frisians'. Remarkably, however, the distribution of the tribes over the Dutch territory did not correspond with that indicated by Van den Bergh: the Saxons were situated not in the east but in the west of the Netherlands (in present-day South Holland).

12. In Britain, 'Ethnology' existed long before 1860, but round about that time it moved from being a cultural interest in foreign societies to an enquiry into the racial bases of populations, whereby 'the balance of the weight of evidence shifted towards anatomical specimens and other material artifacts'. See M.T. Bravo, 'Ethnological Encounters', in N. Jardine, J.A. Secord and E.L. Spary, eds, *Cultures of Natural History* (Cambridge 1997), 338–57, esp. 356.

13. D. Lubach, *Nederland en zijn bewoners. Grondtrekken eener Vaderlandsche Ethnologie* (Haarlem 1863), 375–6 and 390–404.

14. On Winkler, see F. Debus, 'Aspekte zur Aldietschen Bewegung im Spiegel der Briefwechsel zwischen Johan Winkler und Klaus Groth', in J. Cajot et al., *Lingua Theodisca. Beiträge zur Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft. Jan Goossens zum 65. Geburtstag* (Münster 1995), 1185–98.

15. J. Winkler, 'Friezen, Franken, Saksen — Onze Voorouders. Eene ethnologische studie', *De Tijdspiegel*, III (1880): 1–25.

16. H. Blink, *Nederland en zijne bewoners. Handboek der Aardrijkskunde en Volkenkunde van Nederland*, Volume 3 (Amsterdam 1892), 125–40.

17. E.H. Kossmann, *De Lage Landen 1780–1980. Twee eeuwen Nederland en België*, vol. 1: *1780–1914* (Amsterdam 1986), 361–424.

18. For an English overview of this phenomenon of pillarization, see H. Post, *Pillarization: An Analysis of Dutch and Belgian Society* (Avebury 1989).

19. On Blok's *Geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche Volk* and its reception in the Dutch historical world, see J. Tollebeek, *De toga van Fruin. Denken over geschiedenis in Nederland sinds 1860* (Amsterdam 1991), 86–96.

20. That Blok himself was not able to fulfil his own programme of an integral social history has been argued by Tollebeek, *De toga van Fruin*, 94–5.

21. With regard to this growing predilection for racial explanations, see K. Malik, *The Meaning of Race: Race, History and Culture in Western Society* (London 1996), 128–48; I. Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Washington–Baltimore–London 1996), 325–68; P. de Rooy, 'De flessehals van de wetenschap. Opvattingen over "ras" rond de eeuwwisseling', *Feit en fictie. Tijdschrift voor de geschiedenis van de representatie*, II/4 (1996): 47–64.

22. J.H. Gallee, *Het boerenhuis in Nederland en zijne bewoners* (Utrecht 1908).

23. J. te Winkel, 'Korte karakteristiek der Noordnederlandsche tongvallen', Appendix II to J.H. Gallee, *Het boerenhuis in Nederland en zijne bewoners*, 109–23.

24. J.H. Holwerda, *Nederland's vroegste geschiedenis. Proeve van een archaeologisch systeem* (Leiden 1907), and *Nederland's vroegste beschaving* (Amsterdam 1918).

25. L. Bolk, 'De Bevolking van Nederland in hare anthropologische samenstelling', Appendix III to J.H. Gallee, *Het boerenhuis in Nederland en zijne bewoners*, 124–89.

26. This portrait of the racial theorists around the turn of the century has been drawn by De Rooy, 'De flessehals van de wetenschap', 61.

27. For Louis Bolk, see the obituary in *Jaarverslag der Maatschappij der Nederlandsche Letterkunde te Leiden* (1931): 103–12.

28. William Ripley, *The Races of Europe: A Sociological Study* (London 1899), 293–9.

29. H.J.T. Bijlmer, 'Contribution to the Anthropology of the Netherlands: Including the Further Elaboration of the Blood Group Research in Holland, Commenced in 1926 by the Late M.A. van Herwerden', *Koninklijke Nederlandsche Academie van Wetenschappen. Proceedings of the Section of Sciences*, LIII/1 (1940): 113–38.

30. H. Hemkes, Kz., *Vaderlandsche Geschiedenis, een Leer- en Leesboekje voor Kinderen* (Groningen, 7th edn, 1858 [1st edn 1838]), 15.

31. N.D. Doedes, *De Nederlanders. Schets onzer Vaderlandsche en koloniale geschiedenis* (Leeuwarden, 4th edn, 1908), 4–15.

32. E. Drenth, *Vaderlandsche Geschiedenis. Een leerboekje voor de hoogste klasse der lagere school en voor het herhalingsonderwijs* (Tiel 1888), 9–11.

33. Vict. Claassen, *Vaderlandsche Geschiedenis voor het vijfde leerjaar* (Tilburg 1932), 5–13.

34. See P. Visser, *Swinda en Hildegrim. historisch verhaal uit de 5de eeuw, toen de Friezen, Saksen en Franken ons land bewoonden* (Rotterdam 1924).

35. N.C.F. van Sas, 'Varieties of Dutchness', in A. Galema, B. Henkes and H. te Velde, eds, *Images of Dutchness, 1870–1940*, Amsterdam Studies on Cultural Identity, 2 (Amsterdam 1993), 5–13 (the quotation is on page 13).

36. F. Sassen, 'Nederland's volkskarakter, eigen cultuur en nationale roeping', *De Gids*, vol. 105 (1941): 173–90.

37. The association between the preoccupation with Franks, Frisians and Saxons and Romanticism has already been made by H.A. Heidinga, 'Midden-Nederland tussen Friezen, Franken en Saksen', *IPP-Publicaties*, CDXI (1986): 128–40, esp. 129.

38. Martin Thom, *Republics, Nations and Tribes* (London and New York 1995).

39. See P. Blaas, 'De verjongende barbaren. Enkele historische ficties van de romantiek', in J. Tollebeek, F. Ankersmit and W. Krul, eds, *Romantiek en Historische Cultuur* (Groningen 1996), 47–64.

40. As far as archaeology is concerned, Bruce Trigger relates this increasing concern with ethnicity since the 1880s to the 'growing social and economic problems in Western Europe', more specifically to the problems aroused by the Industrial Revolution and the waning power of the traditional middle classes. See B.G. Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought* (Cambridge 1989), 111 and 150.

41. This changing perspective on the past is elaborately treated by van der Woud, op. cit.

42. The translation of 'stam' by 'stock' is somewhat problematic. Another option would have been to translate it with 'tribe', but whereas the latter seems to suggest a drive towards smaller entities, Geyl's programme was one towards a more-encompassing unity than that of the existing states.

43. And which, as L. Wils, 'De zogenaamde Groot-Nederlandse geschiedschrijving', in Wils, *Vlaanderen, België, Groot-Nederland. Mythe en geschiedenis* (Leuven 1995), 381–428, has shown, was not free from finalism itself.

44. P. Geyl, *Geschiedenis van de Nederlandsche Stam*, vol. 1 (Amsterdam 1930), 6.

45. *Ibid.*, 13 and 45, and P. Geyl, 'Lotgevallen en karakter van de Nederlandse natie', *De Stem* (1940): 825–40 and 961–76. See page 826 on the Franks, Frisians and Saxons: 'Those three tribes, each of them with its proper language and law (evidently closely related one to another) would provide the matter for the Dutch language and nation.'

46. S.J. Woolf, 'Europe and the Nation-State'. Inaugural lecture of the European University Institute for the Session 1990–1991, delivered at the Badia Fiesolana, 20 February 1991. EUI Working Papers, 91/11 (Firenze 1991), 13.

47. Winkler, op. cit., 23

48. On these ambiguities, see Malik, op. cit., 128–48.

49. See G.R. Zondergeld, *De Friese Beweging in het tijdvak der beide wereldoorlogen* (Leeuwarden 1978).

50. The programmes of these manifestations can be seen in the archive of Saxo-

Frisia in Amsterdam, IOD [Dutch Institute for War Documentation], doc. II-718.

51. Transcription for the 'Plan voor de stichting van de "Frisia" binnen de Stichting Saxo-Frisia' [Plan for the founding of 'Frisia' within the foundation Saxo-Frisia], *ibid.*

52. See M.H. Kater, *Das 'Ahnenerbe' der SS 1933-1945. Ein Beitrag zur Kulturpolitik des Dritten Reiches* (München, 2nd edn, 1997 [1st edn 1966]). More specifically for the Dutch case, see: M. Beyen, *Een bewoorebare gescheideris. De omgengmet het nationale verleden in België en Nederland, 1938-1947* (Leuven, unpublished doctoral dissertation, 1999), 210-15.

53. Cf. IOD, doc. II, 243.

54. See the report of a meeting between Dutch SS-leader Feldmeijer and Kapteyn, 9 August 1943. RIOD, coll. 77-85 (RSSPF), map 378-b.

55. J. Theunisz, 'Ten Geleide', *Hamer*, I/1 (oktober 1940): 1; the article was approvingly paraphrased in the 'Meldungen aus den Niederlanden' (Reports from the Netherlands) of the SS, 1 October 1940. NIOD, coll. 77-85 (RSSPF), 29A.

56. Lubach, *op. cit.*, 379.

57. Quoted in van der Woud, *op. cit.*, 119-20.

58. H. von Treitschke, *Die Vereinigten Provinzen*, reprinted in *Historische und politische Aufsätze*, vol. 2: *Die Einheitsbestrebungen zertheilter Völker* (Leipzig, 7th edn, 1913), 513-38.

59. NIOD, Berlin Document Centre H217, 2230-2233. Also quoted in N.K.C.A. In 't Veld, *De SS en Nederland. Documenten uit SS-archieven, 1933-1945*, vol. 1 (The Hague, 1976), 493-4, and in K. Kwiet, *Reichskommissariat Niederlande. Versuch und Scheitern nationalsozialistischer Neuordnung* (Stuttgart 1968), 112.

60. Plutzar to Snijder, 19 January 1943, and 'Auszug aus der Satzungen' (Excerpts from the Statutes). NIOD, Collection Nederlandsche Kultuurraad, II 5: Germanisches Forschungsinstitut in den Niederlanden.

61. See 'Versammlung des Arbeitsbereiches des NSDAP', Amsterdam, 12 March 1941, in Reichsminister Seyss-Inquart, *Vier Jahre in den Niederlanden. Gesammelte Reden* (Amsterdam 1944), 39.

62. W. Von Stokar, 'Die Wurzeln des niederländischen Volkstums', *Vorträge aus der Tagung der Erzieher aller deutschen Schulen in den Niederlanden am 5. bis 7. Februar 1943*. Unpublished document, NIOD, coll. 32, map 2-g. The text of this article also appeared in the 'official' cultural weekly of the Reichskommissariat, *Westland*, 1 (1943): 18-20.

63. On Werner Reese, and more generally on the National-Socialist interpretations of the Dutch past, see I. Schöffner, *Het nationaal-socialistische beeld van de geschiedenis der Nederlanden. Een historiografische en bibliografische studie* (Arnhem and Amsterdam 1956), esp. 165-73.

64. See W. Oberkrome, *Volksgeschichte. Methodische Innovation und völkische Ideologisierung in der deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft, 1918-1945* (Göttingen 1995).

65. On this *Westforschung*, see P. Schöttler, 'Die historische "Westforschung" zwischen "Abwehrkampf und territorialer Offensive"' in Schöttler, *Geschichtsschreibung als Legitimationswissenschaft, 1918-1945* (Göttingen 1997), 204-61.

66. W. Reese, *Die Niederlande und das deutsche Reich*, vol. 1, *Die Niederlande im Reich von den Anfängen bis ins 14. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 2nd edn, 1942), 18-24.

67. M.O. Albers, 'Over Volk en Vaderland. Geschiedenis voor het Lager

Onderwijs', unpublished manuscript, 1944, in Amsterdam, IOD, file Department of Education, Arts and Sciences, collection 216, folder 115B.

68. 'Meldungen aus den Niederlanden', 2 December 1941. NIOD, coll. 077-085 (HSSPF), 35 A.

69. On Jan de Vries, see J.J. Kelder, *Schrijven voor de Nieuwe Orde. Literatuur en schrijverschap in De Schouw, tijdschrift van de Kultuurkamer* (Utrecht 1983), 9-10; and A. Venema, *Schrijvers, uitgevers en hun collaboratie*, vol. 2: *Het systeem* (Amsterdam 1988), 198-202.

70. See P.J. Knegtman, 'Onderwijspacificatie in de Nieuwe Orde. Jan van Dam (1896-1979)', in P.J. Knegtman, P. Schulten and J. Vogel, *Collaborateurs van niveau. Opkomst en val van de hoogleraren Schrieke, Snijder en Van Dam* (Amsterdam 1996), 223-308. Concerning van Dam's relations with the SS, see especially 265-6.

71. Jan de Vries to Jan van Dam, 12 March 1941; Amsterdam, IOD, file department of Education, Arts and Sciences, collection 216, folder 105 e.

72. See The Hague, General State Archive, 2.14.37, archive of the section Cabinet of the Department of Education, Science and Culture, 1940-1945. File no. 698.

73. W.J. de Boone, *De Franken. Van hun eerste optreden tot de dood van Childerik* (Amsterdam 1954), 15.

74. It is noteworthy that Geyl, as I showed earlier, stuck to the theme even after de Vries's article had appeared in 'his' journal.

75. J. de Vries, 'Over den oorsprong van het Nederlandsche Volk', *Leiding*, II/2 (1931): 217-33.

76. A.W. Byvanck, 'De oorsprong van het Nederlandsche volk en de archaeologie van Nederland', *Jaarboek der Maatschappij voor Nederlandse Letterkunde* (1935-6): 31-8.

77. B.M. Telders, 'De Nieuwe Tijd' in *Den Vaderlant Ghetrouwe* (Haarlem 1940), 31.

78. Quoted in Schöffers, 'The Batavian Myth', 78-9.

79. T.A. Rompelman, *Germanistiek en germanophilie. Rede uitgesproken bij de aanvaarding van het ambt van hoogleraar aan de Rijks-Universiteit te Groningen op 10 November 1945* (Groningen and Batavia 1945) (the quotations are on pages 5 and 16).

80. B.H. Slicher van Bath, *Mensch en land in de Middeleeuwen. Bijdrage tot een geschiedenis der Nederlanden in Oostelijk Nederland*, vol. 2: *Mensch en omgeving* (Assen 1944), 150.

81. Slicher even called Romein 'the Godfather' of this chapter. See B.H. Slicher van Bath to Romein, 20 May 1945, Amsterdam, International Institute for Social History (IISH), coll. Jan Romein, correspondence with Slicher van Bath.

82. Interview with B.H. Slicher van Bath, 11 March 1997. Also J.F. Niermeyer to Romein, 5 April 1944, IISH, coll. Jan Romein, correspondence with Niermeyer.

83. *Ibid.*, 147.

84. See B.H. Slicher van Bath, 'De Saksen' in *Friezen, Saksen, Franken. Lezingen, gehouden voor de Dialectencommissie van de Koninklijke Nederlandse Academie van Wetenschappen te Amsterdam*, *Bijdragen en mededelingen van de Dialectencommissie van de Koninklijke Nederlandse Academie van Wetenschappen te Amsterdam* (Amsterdam 1947), 37-45.

85. This was not a specifically Dutch phenomenon. Bruce Trigger described more or less the same phenomenon as typical of archaeological thought in Western societies, although he uses terms which are somewhat different from the ones I use, and therefore may seem confusing. He describes how a 'culture-historical' and 'diffusionist' approach after the Second World War was replaced by a functionalist and evolutionary approach. His definition of 'culture', however, is that of a static culture corresponding with existing nations, so in that sense, this culture-historical approach can be identified with what I have called the ethnic paradigm. The rapid decline of this relationship between 'archaeological interpretation and nationalism' after the Second World War, he associates not so much with the discrediting of racial explanations as with 'a growing political and economic co-operation and a generally improving standard of living'. See Trigger, *op. cit.*, 185.

86. Heidinga, *op. cit.*, 130.

87. Again, this was part of more general evolution. That racial explanations disappeared fairly suddenly from the historiography of Western Europe after the Second World War has also been asserted by P.M. Kennedy; 'The Decline of Nationalistic Historiography in the West, 1900-1970', in W. Laqueur and G.L. Mosse, ed. *Historians in Politics* (London 1974), 329-52, esp. 348.

88. P.C. Boeren, *Van Lotharingen naar Bourgondië*, vol. 1 of L.G.J. Verberne, ed., *Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* (Nijmegen and Kortrijk 1948), 61-3.

89. E. ten Broeke (revised by T. Gosliga), *Leerboekje van de vaderlandse geschiedenis voor voorbereidingsklassen en het uitgebreid lager onderwijs* (Groningen and Batavia 1942), 11-17.

90. H. Hetteema, *Grote historische atlas ten gebruike bij het onderwijs in de vaderlandse en algemene geschiedenis* (Zwolle, 17th edn, 1951).

91. 'Inleiding', in A. Wassenbergh and J.L.F. Wijsenbeek, eds, *Van Friezen, Franken en Saksen, 350-750* (Leeuwarden 1959 and Den Haag 1960), no page numbers.

92. W.J. de Boone, *Friezen, Franken en Saksen . . . klopt dat?*, AO, no. 678 (27 September 1957), 16.

93. J. ter Haar, *Geschiedenis van de Lage Landen*, vol. 1: *Prehistorie-Romeinse tijd- Middeleeuwen* (Haarlem, 9th edn, 1972), 165-74.

94. D.E.H. de Boer, M.H. Boone and W.A.M. Hessing, *Nederlands verleden in Vogelvlucht. Delta*, vol. 1: *De Middeleeuwen, 300-1500* (Leiden 1992).

95. M. Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective*, Bibliothèque de sociologie contemporaine (Paris 1950).

96. N. Gedi and Y. Elam, 'Collective Memory — What Is It?', *History and Memory*, VIII (1996): 30-50 (the quotation is on page 47).

97. See for example H.A. MacDougall, *Racial Myth in English History: Trojans, Teutons and Anglo-Saxons* (Montreal-Hanover-London 1982) (quotation on page 2); P. Hall, 'Nationalism and Historicity' (partially on the Gothic 'myth' as pillar of the Swedish national identity since the fifteenth century), *Nations and Nationalism*, III (1997): 3-23.

98. M. Eliade, *Myth and Reality: World Perspectives*, 21 (London 1963), 1.

99. Amongst others, see W. Taylor Stevenson, 'Myth and the Crisis of Historical Consciousness', in W. Taylor Stevenson and Lee W. Gibbs, eds, *Myth and the Crisis of Historical Consciousness: Essays from the Seminar Held during the Annual Meetings of the American Academy of Religion, 1972-1974* (Missoula 1975), 1-17.

100. [A. Morelli], 'Mythes anciens, mythes nouveaux et responsabilité de l'historien', introduction to A. Morelli, ed., *Les grands mythes de l'histoire de Belgique, de Flandre et de Wallonie* (Brussels 1995), 7–18 (the quotation is on page 15).

101. E. Hobsbawm, 'Faussaires du passé', *Monde des débats* (February 1994): 22–3.

102. C.A. Tamse, 'The Political Myth', in J.S. Bromley and E.H. Kossmann, eds, *Britain and the Netherlands*, vol. V: *Some Political Mythologies: Papers Delivered to the Fifth Anglo-Dutch Historical Conference* (The Hague 1975), 71–81 (the quotations are on page 81).

103. That until well into the twentieth century the Netherlands remained — in spite of its formal unification — an assembly of more or less local and regional societies, has been extensively argued by H. Knippenberg and B. De Pater, *De eenwording van Nederland. Schaalvergroting en integratie sinds 1800* (Nijmegen 1988).

104. Cf. E. Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions', in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, eds, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 13th edn, 1997), 1–14. In this text, Hobsbawm has carefully suggested that invention is not merely a creation out of the blue, but rather a process of selection and institutionalizing of a certain past. But this subtlety seems to have escaped many of his adepts.

105. Hall, op. cit., 12.

106. 'Truth and Power', interview of Michel Foucault by Alessandro Fontana and Pasquale Pasquino, printed in Colin Gordon, ed., *Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* (Brighton 1988), 109–33 (the quotation is on page 133).

107. Susan Crane has rightly suggested that Gedi and Elam exclusively took into account the older, more radical of Halbwachs's writings. See S. A. Crane, 'Writing the Individual back into Collective Memory', *American Historical Review* (December 1997): 1373–85.

108. Gedi and Elam, op. cit., 39.

109. Amos Funkenstein, 'Collective Memory and Historical Consciousness', *History and Memory*, I, 1 (1989): 5–21. Susan Crane, op. cit., has further developed the conceptualization of Funkenstein, without feeling his urge to part from Halbwachs's concept of 'collective memory'. A similar plea to those of Funkenstein and Crane can be found in J. Rüsen, 'Historismus als Wissenschaftsparadigma. Leistung und Grenzen eines strukturgeschichtlichen Ansatzes der Historiographieggeschichte', in O.G. Oexle and J. Rüsen, eds, *Historismus in den Kulturwissenschaften* (Cologne–Weimar–Vienna 1996), 119–37.

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