



Philippus Breuker, *Opkomst en bloei van het Friese nationalisme, 1740-1875* (Leeuwarden: Uitgeverij Wijdemeer, 2014, 472 pp., ISBN 978 949 205 204 9).

This voluminous book discusses the circumstances and developments that led to the emergence of Frisian cultural nationalism in the period between 1740 and 1875, an era that saw one of the most fundamental transformations in the Western world. It focuses on a region that has been considered ‘provincial’ from a Dutch perspective and that has remained largely unknown to the rest of the world. One of the reasons for this isolation was the lack of accessible literature on the culture and history of Friesland in any other language than Frisian, Dutch and perhaps, to a much more limited extent, German. Typically, the academic output on the topic has been produced by a small group of scholars who are ‘natives’ of the region. Recently an exception to this trend has been Joep Leerssen’s comparative and comprehensive engagement with cultural nationalism in English-language publications. While not focusing on the Frisian case specifically, these studies have demonstrated that the Frisian heritage also resonates within the context of European cultural history and can serve as an interesting case study to illuminate broader European discourses. Other works have been published in Frisian or Dutch and thus attracted a more limited audience, but they too sought to accommodate the Frisian case within theoretical debates on nationalism. In that context, Goffe Jensma’s work, including his book *Het rode tasje van Salverda. Burgelijk bewustzijn en Friese identiteit in de negentiende eeuw* (1998), demonstrated the relevance of the concept of the invention of tradition for Frisian culture.

Breuker’s book focuses on a period when Frisian nationalism started to blossom. Its introductory paragraphs explain that the Frisian heritage has an important place in European cultural and legal history, but its character has always been defined in contrast to Dutch culture – simple versus sophisticated, civilisation versus nature, these have been the omnipresent binary opposites. Thus, the tacit notion of backwardness has been a fundamental characteristic of European and Dutch cultural attitudes to Friesland. By contrast, the point of departure of this work is that the region followed a trajectory similar to that of other cultures in Western Europe, a vantage point that would require that its history is assessed not in isolation, but within a wider context, perhaps even in a comparative manner. The book is comprised of an introduction, 22 chapters and a conclusion and can be divided into two parts, the first of which is dedicated to political and cultural processes and to the description of the activities of institutions such as the

Franeker academy, the provincial archive and library and various publication outlets, including journals, almanacs and yearbooks. Further, the author briefly touches on the evolution of Frisian nationalism as an imagined community and goes on to show how literature became 'Frisianised', what changes that process triggered vis-à-vis Latin and Dutch and how the elite circles started to embrace the Frisian identity. Lastly, it dedicates some attention to the early phase of Frisian liberalism. The second, larger part of the book focuses mainly on the life and activities of significant individuals. The majority of these are shorter sketches, but some important figures such as Albertus Telting and Joost Halbertsma receive somewhat more attention, together with two important cultural products, *De Tescklaow* and the *Oera Linda* book. The discussion of these two works would present an opportunity to establish connections and comparisons with similar cultural products in nineteenth-century Europe.

There is no doubt that this lavishly illustrated, beautifully designed book covers an enormous field of knowledge with lots of interesting detail, accumulated in the course of a long academic career. Yet the 22 chapters are very heterogeneous in content and length. Moreover, the question arises as to who the author's intended audience was and one wonders if that audience could have been substantially larger if more attempt had been made at accommodating the emergence and flourishing of Frisian nationalism in the context of European cultural nationalism in this period. The chapters on *De Tesckalaw* and the *Oera Linda* book indeed contain some references to Percy, Ossian and Jacob Grimm, and also include a short discussion of the contacts and correspondence between Tydeman and Grimm. If the author had gone further along that road of exploring the international connections and influences, the reader could have been left with more clues about why Frisian culture matters for Europe and what makes it a typical or exceptional instance of small, 'minority' culture. Moreover, had the theoretical engagement gone beyond a few references to notions such as the 'invention of tradition', the interesting mini-case studies could have been used to illuminate problems that reach well beyond the realm of Frisian culture. All in all, while this book makes a significant contribution to the field on the basis of the information and knowledge it has amassed, ideally, it should be followed by further steps that could lead to opening up the 'gates' of Frisian culture, which to many people still resembles a self-contained universe.

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