Rural riches & royal rags?
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Editorial board

Mirjam Kars was introduced to the ins and outs of life, death and burial in the Merovingian period by Frans Theuws as supervisor of her PhD thesis. This created a solid base for her further explorations of this dynamic period. Frans and his Rural Riches team participate with Mirjam on her work on the medieval reference collection for the Portable Antiquities of the Netherlands project, which is much appreciated.

Roos van Oosten is an assistant professor of urban archaeology in Frans Theuws’ chairgroup at Leiden University. She also worked alongside Frans Theuws (and D. Tys) when he founded the peer-reviewed journal Medieval Modern Matters (MMM). In addition to undergraduate and graduate teaching responsibilities, Van Oosten is working on her NWO VENI-funded project entitled ‘Challenging the paradigm of filthy and unhealthy medieval towns’.

Marcus A. Roxburgh is currently at Leiden University working on his PhD research, entitled ‘Charlemagne’s Workshops’, which aims to better understand copper-alloy craft production in early medieval society. The idea for this PhD stemmed from his second MA degree in archaeology, completed at Leiden in 2013, which focused on the composition of early medieval copper-alloy finds from the terps of Frisia. His first MA in field archaeology was gained at the University of York in 2010.

Arno Verhoeven participated in many excavations in the Kempen region in the 1980s and 1990s. In Dommelen he met Frans Theuws, who induced him to study the ceramics of the Kempen region. After his PhD in 1996 he was engaged in the archaeology of the Betuwe freight railway and worked several years for a commercial unit before returning as an assistant professor to the University of Amsterdam in 2005. He was involved in research on proto-urban Tiel and early medieval Leiderdorp.
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for the Viking Age also sets the benchmark for traceable Viking activities, indicating Frisia is not a core area in terms of the Viking Age phenomenon either. In turn, this does not necessarily encourage further research. Moreover, the region does have very wealthy and well-researched pre-Viking archaeology. The result is that this early medieval period is the centre of attention in historical and archaeological research.

All in all, Frisia is an area that features in the continental written sources in the Viking Age, but as a marginal area, and the archaeological record is not rich in what we would call Viking finds. We have to look to other sources such as written sources from the Viking areas as well as from later periods, and metal-detected finds to learn about Frisia in the Viking Age. In other words, we start looking at Frisia not from the continental perspective, seen as the edge of Francia, but from the long-term North Sea perspective, in which it is a regional coastal area that forms one of the edges of the well-connected North Sea world. Whilst being in the periphery of the Frankish sphere, Frisia is equally located in the periphery of the Viking sphere, making it interesting to study within both frameworks. Unsurprisingly, as previously indicated by others, these written sources show how Vikings did not just visit Frisia, but Frisians equally ventured into the Viking world, particularly to the British Isles and Denmark. As unsurprising as this may be, we do not often take this into account, when studying for instance ‘the Viking Age in the Netherlands.’ Moreover, it makes us realise that a group of people like the Frisians, which are only marginally part of the continental sources we often focus on as we regard Frisia as Continental, actually become more visible as soon they sail outside the scope of our (national) history. Being visible only on the margins of the Frankish sphere, the references to Frisian and Frisians in the Viking sphere suggest that the region was well-known, and played an important part as an intermediary between both spheres.

Looking into the metal-detected find material from Frisia creates a comparable picture. On a national scale there are only limited numbers of “Viking finds”, sometimes even just one of a particular type, and thus present a really liminal phenomenon. On an international scale these finds belong to a larger body of Viking material culture. Focussing on this body of material reveals the scope of the spread of particular find types and the attached connotations. Since these finds are often well-studied elsewhere, we can use those insights to study the finds in Frisia in this wider context. They show how Frisia ties in with a wider Viking Age story, one of connectivity around the North Sea, and particularly how Frisia closely relates to Denmark and the British Isles. From that perspective, the single finds in Frisia suddenly become the latest examples of well-known Viking finds and put the visible frontier of the Viking sphere south of Frisia. In combination, this makes clear that Frisia, instead of being a no-man’s land between two centres, is actually an all-man’s land for the very same reason.

The case of Frisia in the Viking Age is just one example that links up with the example of Dorestad mentioned earlier. By using liminality as a connecting and dynamic framework that changes the central focus, we have the potential to re-examine many other regions, periods, phenomena and people. It may help us read between the lines of history and archaeology and think about what goes on in between major developments, cores and central events. Luckily, the liminal Middle Ages of the Netherlands and its relation to other periods and regions are already in focus in the research of scholars like Frans Theuws, and through that focus we learn increasingly more about the dynamics of this central period in our history.

1 Theuws 2003, 14-16.
2 Theuws 2003, 165. 137.
3 Personal comment.
4 As an exception to the rule, in Germany the laws on metal-detected finds are mainly based on the Bundesland-level.
5 This is based on the author’s recent PhD-thesis (2017) Central (now: Central: Frisia in a Viking Age North Sea World) and the case studies therein. See this thesis for a full study of Frisia in the Viking Age and the concept of centrality through liminality.
An extra-mural early Christian church is situated next to the Roman legionary fortress at Udhruh (southern Jordan). Several Maltese and Greek crosses were inscribed on the lintels of door openings in this church. During the 2017 field campaign a small, new inscription was discovered. This consisted of a religious formula with an intriguing cross, together forming a powerful symbolic relic from the early Christian times.

Background and research
The village of Udhruh, located 12 km east of Petra (South Jordan), had almost passed into archaeological oblivion until Fawzi Abudanah started large-scale surveys there in the early 2000s.1 Earlier exploration and subsequent excavations revealed that Udhruh housed an important settlement founded by the Nabataeans (the same people who built Petra), as well as a Roman legionary fortress.2 The current village of Udruh is still dominated by a Roman legionary fortress, which became a major centre in Byzantine and Arab times. An antique extramural church is situated at the southwest corner of the fortress. The Mamluks reoccupied the site and after their withdrawal it was frequently visited by the Bedouin as a campsite. Classical literary and archaeological sources point to a long-term development from Nabataean till Islamic times.3 The archaeological variety and the perfect preservation of the area surrounding Udhruh were, in combination with the intriguing site itself, the essential criteria for starting a joint international archaeological project in 2011. The Udhruh Archaeological Project started with GIS-related field surveys and small-scale excavations, with the aim to map and interpret the still visible and standing archaeological remains. This includes the reconstruction of the geomorphology of a 48 km² area surrounding the site at Udhruh. Five years of inventory field work (2011-2015) revealed an actively exploited region with impressive and ingenious investments in agro-hydrological intensification, including building material procurement, communication and security networks, military dominion, settlement development and religious transformations (see figure 1). The religious transformation was part of 2016-2017 research which was funded by the Van Moorsel and Rijnierse foundation.

Literary sources
Udhruh is mentioned under its local name in Greek in several antique literary references from Roman days to the early Islamic period.4 One of these—the 6th century Beersheva Tax Edict—states that Udhruh was assessed with 65 nomismata (golden coins), paying the highest tax of the 18 towns of the Byzantine province Palaestina Tertia. Udhruh was not only known under its local name, but also under the honorific name of Augustopolis.5 Augustopolis is mentioned in eleven of the 49 Petra papyri.6 Most of these 6th century Petra papyri are contracts relating to the transition of mainly agricultural property. They also provide information on crop cultivation, plot sizes, and water distribution. People owned holdings in and around Augustopolis, furthermore the Petra papyri also mentioned this town as an administrative centre where properties were registered, and which played a role in the collection of taxes.7 Besides being a prosperous town with a highly developed agricultural hinterland,8 Augustopolis also gained ecclesiastical status. The Petra papyri mention the Church of the Saint and Glorious Martyr Theodoros in Augustopolis.9 Two bishops—both named Johannes of Augustopolis—attended the Ecumenical Council in Ephesus in 431 CE, and the Synod in Jerusalem in 536 CE. Elias, diachonus en monachus Augusto-
politanus, signed off the decisions of the Synods in Jerusalem and Constantinople in 536 CE. The presence of Christian Arabs in Udhruh is one of the possible reasons for its peaceful surrender to Mohammed and his armies in 630 CE. Udhruh had a special position in those days: an important arbitration took place between competing Muslim parties in 657 CE at a hill just north of the town. This arbitration resulted in the establishment of the Umayyad state. A manuscript from the Sinai Peninsula written by an Egyptian monk for a priest from Udhruh shows that the town still housed a Christian community at the beginning of the 10th century.

Archaeological field work, selection and approach
The extramural church of Udhruh – still largely covered with the debris of centuries – was first explored archaeologically by the French Dominican monk Père Louis-Hugues Vincent in the last decade of the 19th century. In 1898 Vincent – who later became the head of Jerusalem’s École Biblique et Archéologique Française – describes entering the church as follows: “Pénétrant dans l’intérieur par les brèches du mur, nous avons été agréablement surprise d’y reconnaître une église orientée, dont l’abside principale, engage dans le mur du fond, est encore debout jusqu’à la naissance de la voûte sur quelques points.” Vincent made a drawing of the upper parts of the walls that were visible at that time, depicting only the nave and the narthex of the church. After that visit the church must have remained nearly untouched for another century, as can be seen on aerial pictures taken in 1939, 1953, 1980 and 1998. In 2005 major parts of the church were ‘cleared’ of rubble and walls were ‘restored’ by the local representative of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities. This was carried out in a program to make the archaeological heritage of Jordan more visible, attractive and accessible for potential visitors and tourists. The quality of this work was not what we – as archaeologists – would expect today, and has resulted in essential archaeological information having been lost. It proved however exemplary for Frans’ ‘crocodile tears’, as discoveries made during this ‘clearing’ placed the Udhruh extramural church in an extraordinary light. Several parts of the church interior walls were plastered with multi-layer stucco’s containing Christian charcoal graffiti and inscriptions in both Greek and Arabic. Four of the Arabic Christian inscriptions were quite complete and could be dated on the basis of handwriting to the 13th and early 14th centuries. Arabic-Christian communities were still living in Udhruh till the early days of the Mamluk Sultanate, and in these times complex and intriguing bonds were formed between the authorities and the different Christian groups. The last decades of the 13th century were used by the Mamluks to secure the defence of their eastern frontier against Mongol attacks, as can be observed by the reinforcements made at the north-western part of the Udhruh fortress.

Entering the partly ‘cleared’ and ‘restored’ Udhruh church in April 2011, Frans Theuws was – like Père Vincent a century before – pleasantly surprised, uttered some historic words and recognized immediately the potential for...
archaeological research. During our field campaigns in the following years, Frans was predominantly occupied with measuring walls and trying to get grip on the construction history of the church, resulting in a preliminary layout of the different phases (figure 2). Following these years of surveying and noticing the rapidly deteriorating quality of the monument, the result of children using it as a playground and continuous illicit digging, the time was ripe for more intensive research. Funding applications for this research were subsequently awarded by the Van Moorsel and Rijnierse Foundation. We therefore started this research by targeting aspects of religious continuity and transformation in one of the centres of the early Muslim world. This involved undertaking small-scale excavations, examining the ‘clearance’ spoil heaps, OSL and 14C dating, transcribing more inscriptions, and making 3D-reconstructions.

The Udhruh Crosses
The most recognizable aspects of Christian symbolism in this church are several crosses depicted on the walls and lintels above the door openings. One cross with flared arms (‘Maltese’ cross; croix pattée ailée) was painted in red on the northern extension wall of the apse (w5 in figure 2).20 Coquina limestone lintels with encircled crosses (with dimensions varying from 0.25 m to 0.43 m), formed of four equal slightly flared arms, were used for the door openings to the nave of the church (figure 2).21 Père Vincent made a drawing of a lintel with such a cross, flanked by two inscribed palm leaves. This lintel – no longer extant – was placed on top of two architrave end stones, and part of the main door (d1) leading from the narthex to the nave.22 At present one of these architrave ends is still in place, allowing the calculation of the original door height of 2.53 metres. This is the height measurement between the upper part of the architrave on which the lintel rested, and the top of the mosaic floor, as retrieved at several locations in the nave. The presence of a possible doorsill has not been taken into account for this height indication. Door opening 2 (d2 in figure 2) with a lintel bearing a similar engraved cross, was a western side entrance to the nave. It has been closed on a later date and had, when still open, a height of 2.00 m.23 A coquina limestone lintel decorated with a ‘Maltese’ cross leads from the nave to southern room (r11), with a door height of 1.76 metres. Door opening d16, with similar lintel and cross, is situated in the narthex and connects to a

![Fig. 2 Provisional building sequence of the extramural church of Udhruh, with the position of the different crosses. Red = phase 1; green = phase 2; brown = phase 3; blue = phase 4; black = last adjustments. Blue cross = ‘Maltese’ cross; red cross = Greek cross; green cross = Christian inscription and newly discovered cross.](image-url)
possibly later added room 9. A door height of just 1.35 metres has been calculated, taking account of the above assumptions. A low door opening forced people to bow when entering, this might have been a special room requiring such devotion. Corridor (r5) accesses to several small rooms of which all door openings were supplied with a coquina lintel plus engraved cross. The lintel to room 3 (d.h. d13 1.67m) had a simply incised Greek cross, while the door posts to rooms 2 and 6 (d.h. d12 1.69m; d14 1.53m) were decorated with encircled ‘Maltese’ crosses. The lintel of door 12 was not found in-situ anymore, and lays in front of the entrance to the small room 2.

The last cross – still in original context – was found during the 2017 campaign, when a small team was working on the 3D-scanning of the Church (figure 3). During the basic cleaning of the walls for the 3D-scanning a new cross came to our attention. We had been passing the lintel with a tiny inscription of only 8.8 x 7.1 cm for years without noticing it, and for Frans this will be a novelty as well. The limestone block situated towards the most north-western room (r1), allowed a door height of 1.62 metres, and was incised with an at first sight unusual cross together with a Greek inscription (figure 4). The text and cross are scratched with simple lines in the coquina limestone lintel. The inscription on the rear sides of the upper part of the cross is an abbreviation for Ι(ηςού)ς Χ(ριςτό)ς: Jesus Christ.

The cross is depicted as a double cross, a so-called crux gemina, with bi-furcated ends. At first sight it is not clear if this is meant to be a cross or a tree. At the foot of the cross/ tree, four lines fork out like streams flowing down a hill. Four rivers running from a cross fit very well with the symbolism of early Christian thought, more specifically representing the conflation of Eden with Golgotha. The cross of Christ was connected with the Edenic trees of knowledge and life, and the arbor vitae-association was very crucial in early Christian imagination. This goes back to the Garden of Eden where the tree of life was connected with the river that divided into four, watering the world. Christ is the prime river, leading – through his four evangelists and their gospels – the baptised faithful through to grace and salvation. These waters also represented the final destination in the afterlife, the garden of Paradise. Through the association with Eden, baptismal water received the beneficial powers of the tree of life – the cross of Christ. These rivers also stand for Christ’s blood flowing from both a victorious cross, triumphing over death, and a redeeming cross, revealing that the justice of God is redemptive in purpose and gracious in means.

A small personal legacy, possibly with a powerful symbolic meaning, was scratched on a doorpost of an Early Christian church. According to Prentice (1906) early Christian inscriptions on lintels were most probably intended as magic formulae with apotropaic powers.

This at first sight simple, tiny and almost invisible inscription is our present to our colleague and dear friend Frans. We hope you will accept our humble gift, and have all faith that you will come up with a more elaborate explanation of its use and meanings.

With God’s will, muttering “Deo volente” and “inshaAllah”, we will continue working on this intriguing church and the religious transformations that took place in this part of the ancient world, and we hope that Frans will accompany and advise us in this intriguing challenge for many, many years to come.

Fig. 3 3D-reconstruction of the Udhruh Church.
Acknowledgements
Our gratitude goes to Maarten Sepers for his loyal assistance, his wonderful work on the 3D-reconstructions of the Udhruh Church, and his photographic capacities and memory. We would like to thank Roeland Emaus for the beautiful maps, Jacques van der Vliet for his literature advice, Carol van Driel-Murray for critically reading the text, and Willem Willems (†) whose support was essential for the establishment and the international joint venture of the Udhruh Archaeological Project. This research project would not have been possible without the financial support of the Stichting Van Moorsel and Rijnierse (NWO). And last but not least we would like to thank Frans Theuws who at first sight immediately recognized the research potential of the Udhruh church.

1 Abudanh 2006.
2 The Nabataean period in this region dates traditionally from the 3rd -2nd BCE till 106 CE; the date of the establishment of the Roman Province of Arabia, although the material culture and layout of structures remain dominantly Nabataean through large parts of the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE. For earlier expeditions and research in Udhruh see e.g. Brünnow/von Domaszewski, 1904, 429-452; Glueck 1935, 76; Killick 1990, 249-250. Islamic times for this region start with the Ummayad period around 1516 CE.
4 Ptolemy Geographia (5,16); Stephan of Byzantium (Di Segni 2004, 151-152); Fiema 2002, 210; al-Salameen et al. 2011, 233-239.
5 It is generally accepted that Udhruh can be identified with the Byzantine Augustopolis, see e.g. Abel 1938; Koenen 1996, 188; Fiema 2002, 209; Nasarat et al 2012, 111.
6 Augustopolis is mentioned in the following papyri: 3, 7, 8, 9, 10 (Frösén et al. 2002), 19, 25, 30, 31, 32, 36 (Arjava et al. 2007).
7 see e.g. Petra papyri 19, 25, 30 and 31 (Arjava et al. 2007).
8 Driessen/Abudanh in press.
9 Frösén 2004, 142.
10 see Fiema 2002, 210, plus references.
11 al-Salameen et al. 2011, 233.
12 al-Tabari 1987, 10.
13 Fiema 2002, 211.
15 ibidem.
16 These were taken respectively by M. Aurel Stein, the Royal Air Force, the Royal Jordanian Geographic Centre and David Kennedy.
17 al-Salameen et al. 2011, 234-237.
18 see e.g. Pahlitzsch 2005, plus listed references.
19 Walker 2013, 184-185.
20 For the cross see e.g. Dinkler/Dinkler-Schubert 1995, 25-26.
21 For similar crosses on lentils see Dinkler/Dinkler-Schubert 1995, 92-98, plus listed references.
23 The walls next to the other western side door into the church (d7) collapsed, and no lintel has been retrieved yet.
24 The narthex will only be excavated during 2018 field campaign, so an adjustment in floor level is still possible. Such an adjustment will however be limited because of the subterranean space below the narthex and room 7, which connects to a plastered cistern (below r5 between w34-35).
25 At the collapsed entrance to room 4 no lintel has been found.
26 Three more blocks with crosses – two with partly readable Greek inscriptions – will not be treated here, because the original locations of these are unknown. These blocks were retrieved in spoil heaps outside the church, and will be part of another more detailed publication.
27 Regional parallels are retrieved in/around Petra, at the Church-Chapel on the Mountain of Aaron (Frösén/Sironen/Fiema 2008, 276), and near the track to ed-Deir in a cave above a water basin (Lindner 1983, 102). Several types of bread stamps have a cross framed by IC XC (NHKA) to mark bread for ecclesiastical use (Galavaris 1970).
28 see e.g. Dinkler/Dinkler-Schubert 1995, 92, 105, 121, 125, plus listed references; Jensen 2017, 87-88.
29 Young 2015, 44-57; Jensen 2017, 29-32.
30 Mackie 2003, 134; Young 2015, 57.
31 Dinkler/Dinkler-Schubert 1995, 121; Mackie 2003, 134.
32 Van Moorsel 1979, 414; Young 2015, 57.
33 Mackie 2003, 134.
34 Prentice 1906.


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