

Goffe Jensma, Leeuwarden

How to Deal with Holy Books in an Age of Emerging Science

The "Oera Linda Book" as a New Age Bible

Introduction

In the world history of literary forgeries, hoaxes and mystifications the nineteenth century *Oera Linda Book* is not a well-known case. Compared with *causes célèbres* like the Scottish poetry of Ossian, the French letters of Vrain-Denis Lucas, the German diary of Hitler or the American *Book of Mormon* – cases that attracted the attention of a global literary *beau monde* – this Dutch-Frisian hoax seems to be but a footnote in nineteenth century European literary history¹. The book has

¹ Though the *Oera Linda Book* has been studied and much debated on in pseudo-scientific or/and New Age circles throughout the world, it hardly has gotten any attention in scholarly circles outside the Netherlands and Germany. The most important studies, with at the time new points of view, in the Dutch-speaking region are: Anonymous [Vitringa, A.J.]: *Naar aanleiding van Thet Oera Linda Bok*. Deventer 1874; Beckering Vinckers, J.: *Wie heeft het Oera Linda-Boek geschreven?* Kampen 1876; id.: *De onechtheid van het Oera-Linda-Bôk, aangetoond uit de wartaal waarin het is geschreven*. Haarlem 1876; Boeles, P.C.J.A.: *Johan Winkler's nagelaten geschrift over het Oera-Linda-Bok*. In: *De Vrije Fries* 25 (1917) 32–53; de Jong, M.: *Het geheim van het Oera Linda-boek*. Bolsward 1927; Boeles, P.C.J.A.: *De auteur van het Oera-Linda-boek*. Leeuwarden 1928; de Jong, M.: *Smaadschrift, romantiek of wetenschappelijk bewijs?* Bolsward 1929; Boeles, P.C.J.A.: *De houding van Dr. Eelco Verwijs ten opzichte van het Oera-Linda-Boek en het Friesch Genootschap*. Leeuwarden 1931; de Jong, M.: *Het Oera-Linda-Boek in Duitschland en hier*. Bolsward 1939; Obbema, P.F.J.: *Halbertsma's kryptonem in het Oera-Linda-bok*. In: Joast Hiddes Halbertsma, 1789–1869. Brekker en bouwer. Stúdzjes fan ûnderskate skriuwers oer syn persoan, syn libben en syn wurk, utjown ta gelegenheit fan de betinking fan syn hûndertste stjerdei. eds. Hylke Halbertsma et al. Drachten 1968, 328–338; van der Meij, G.J.: *Kanttekeningen bij het Oera Linda boek. Een afspiegeling van de taalgeleerdheid, denkbeelden en schrijfstijl van J.H. Halbertsma, doopsgezind predikant in Deventer*. s.l. 1978; Ph.H. Breuker: *Kultuer en literatuer yn Fryslân yn it begjin fan de njoggentjinde ieu*. In: *It Beaken* 52,1 (1990) 18–33. More or less decent reviews are Gallée, J.A.: *Het Oera Linda Bôk*. In: *De Gids* 42,1 (1878) 1–24; Grootaers, Jan: *Maskerade der muze. Vervalsing, namaak en letterdiefstal in eigen en vreemde letterkunde*. Amsterdam 1954, 175–192; Huussen, A.H. jr.: *Het Oera Linda Boek: mystificatie of falsificatie?* In: Knoeien met het verleden. eds. Z.R. Dittrich et al. Utrecht-Antwerpen 1984. In the German-speaking region especially Hübner, Arthur: *Wirth und die Ura-Linda-Chronik*. Berlin/Leipzig 1934 deserves attention for its excellent analysis of the content of the book. A dissertation is Köhler, Heinz-Dieter: *Studien zur Ura Linda-Chronik*. Weimar 1936. The most recent German review is by Mulot, Sybille: *Wodin, Tunis und Inka. Die Ura-Linda-Chronik*. In: Corino, Karl (ed.): *Gefälscht! Betrug in Politik, Literatur, Wissenschaft, Kunst und Musik*. Hamburg

one quality though that makes it unique and that may explain why some scholars consider it precisely as one of the most interesting and intriguing cases of spurious literature², and that is the yawning gap between the auctorial intention and the eventual reception of the book. Though, as we are about to see, the book reveals itself to the observant reader as an obvious hoax, in the process of reception it changed into something totally different, namely into one of those semi-religious texts that took root in the grunge of pre-war Nazism and blossomed on the soil of the post-war New Age movement. The book apparently has a hidden quality that appeals to late-twentieth century religiosity. In this article, an elaboration of my thesis on the subject³, I will take on to specify exactly this quality and at the same time somewhat generalize from it.

The Oera Linda Book

In the spring of 1867 word got round that a certain Cornelis over de Linden (1811–74), a shipwright at the naval dockyard in the city of Den Helder, owned an enigmatic manuscript, written in a script that bore a certain likeness to runes

1992, 263–275. A bibliography was made in 1956 by Kalma, J.J.: *Bibliografie betreffende Thet Oera Linda Bók*. Leeuwarden 1956. It contained some 648 titles of monographies and articles, both of scholarly and non-scholarly nature. Luitse, N.: *Dossier Oera Linda Boek*. 's-Gravenhage 1990, though less exhaustive, gives some supplementary titles. Since 1872 the book has been edited a number of times. The most influential Dutch edition of the book is: *Thet Oera Linda Bok. Naar een handschrift uit de dertiende eeuw. Met vergunning van de eigenaar, den heer C. Over de Linden aan den Helder*. ed. J.G. Ottema. Leeuwarden 1872 (reprinted with a new preface in 1876); *Thát VVra Linda Bok*. ed. J.F. Overwijn. Egmond 1941 (reprinted in 1951) gives an at the time new transcription and translation. *Het Oera Linda-boek. Facsimile, Transcriptie, Vertaling*. ed. Goffe Jensma. Hilversum 2006 (cited as OLB, ed. Jensma) not only gives a new diplomatic transcription and translation but also facsimiles and critical apparatuses. The most important non-Dutch editions are: (in English): *The Oera Linda Book from a Manuscript of the Thirteenth Century, with the Permission of the Proprietor C. over de Linden, of The Helder*. ed. William R. Sandbach. London 1876; *Scrutton, R.J.: The Other Atlantis*. ed. K. Johnson. Jersey 1977; *Scrutton, Robert: Secrets of Lost Atland*. ed. K. Johnson. London 1979; *The Oera Linda Book*. ed. Ordo Anno Mundi. <http://www.angelfire.com/realm/oam/oera.htm> (last access June 30, 2007); *The Oera Linda Book*. ed. Anthony Radford. <http://www.earth-history.com/Europe/Oera/oera-intro.htm> (last access June 30, 2007); (in German): *Die Ura Linda Chronik. Übersetzt und mit einer einführenden geschichtlichen Untersuchung herausgegeben*. ed. Herman Wirth. Leipzig [1933]; (in French): *Sixma van Heemstra, F.S.: Le problème de l'VVra Linda Bok. Étude critique sur la formation de la chronique, suivie de la traduction du premier chapitre*. Meppel [1972]; *La plus célèbre mystification du XIXe siècle? Thet Oera Linda Bok (Le livre des Oera Linda). Fac-similés, texte frison, traduction française et notes par ... d'après la seconde édition bilingue (frison-néerlandais) du docteur J.G. Ottema parue à Leeuwarden chez H. Kuipers en 1876*. ed. Jacques Fermat. Bièrre 2005; (in Afrikaans): *Die Oera Linda Boek die verstommende verhaal van Atlantis waar Afrikaans 4000 jaar gelede sy ontstaan gehad het*. ed. Adriaan Snyman. Mosselbaai 1998; (in Italian): *Oera Linda il Libro*. ed. Antonio Soldani. http://www.misteromania.it/Oera_linda/libro.html (last access June 30, 2007).

² For instance Grootaers (above, note 1) 178.

³ Jensma, Goffe: *De gemaskerde god. François HaverSchmidt en het Oera Linda-boek*. Zutphen 2004.

and in a language that resembled Old Frisian. The piece, containing all in all some 190 pages, was written on old yellowed paper. Over de Linden himself stated that in 1848 he had inherited the manuscript from his late aunt Aafje Reuvers-Over de Linden (died in 1849) from the town of Enkhuizen. She had told him the piece originally had come from Friesland, in which Dutch province the family Over de Linden was known to have had its roots. The obvious conclusion was that the manuscript thus must have been handed down from father unto son since time immemorial.

Because Over de Linden himself was not able to read the rune-script (at least that is what he said), he attempted to find an expert who could do this for him. With the help of a friend he eventually came into contact with the Frisian journalist and schoolteacher Jan Frederik Jansen (1827–1907) who, in his turn, handed the piece over to the authority par excellence, Eelco Verwijs (1830–80), the provincial archivist and librarian of Friesland. As an expert on medieval Dutch literature who also had knowledge of Old Frisian, Verwijs was perfectly able to read and understand the text. He thought it to be interesting and suspect at the same time, but kept postponing a final judgment on its authenticity as well as on its potential significance for more than three years. In the meantime he brought the book up for discussion in the Fries Genootschap voor Geschied-, Oudheid en Taalkunde (the Frisian Society for the Study of History, Archeology and Linguistics), one of those respectable provincial learned societies that made themselves useful by collecting, editing and publishing old manuscripts. Here the book fell, more or less by coincidence, into the hands of Dr. Jan Gerhardus Ottema (1804–79), the deputy principal of the grammar school in Friesland's capital Leeuwarden. Unlike the ever-doubting Verwijs, this gentleman, who at the time already was of a rather advanced age, lost himself to the text completely. Within a weeks' time he had become a stern believer in its authenticity as well as in its historical truth. He entered into correspondence with the owner and almost immediately started preparing an edition of the book, which he himself would call after the family Over de Linden *Thet Oera Linda-bok* – 'Oera Linda' being Old Frisian for 'Over de Linden'.

Through this edition of the transcription and Dutch translation of the Old Frisian text in 1872, the public could form an opinion on the contents of the book. Though the greater part of the readers almost instantaneously considered it to be a forgery, Ottema, who managed to muster up a rather broad support, persisted in his opinion that it was a precious and true history of the Frisians or what is more: of all Europe. According to the book all of the white European civilization from at least 2200 BC had been of Frisian origin. This Frisian civilization stood out for its peculiar rules and regulations which, in propagating as much individual freedom and equality as possible, resembled nineteenth-century liberalism. It was a civilization that, as early as 2200 BC, had known an alphabet (see Figure 1) of which, much later in history, the Greek and the Phoenician scripts would have been derivations, or – to paraphrase the book itself – which the Phoenicians and Greeks would have corrupted to such a degree that it had become incomprehensible to their descendants, whilst the Frisians still were perfectly able to read the

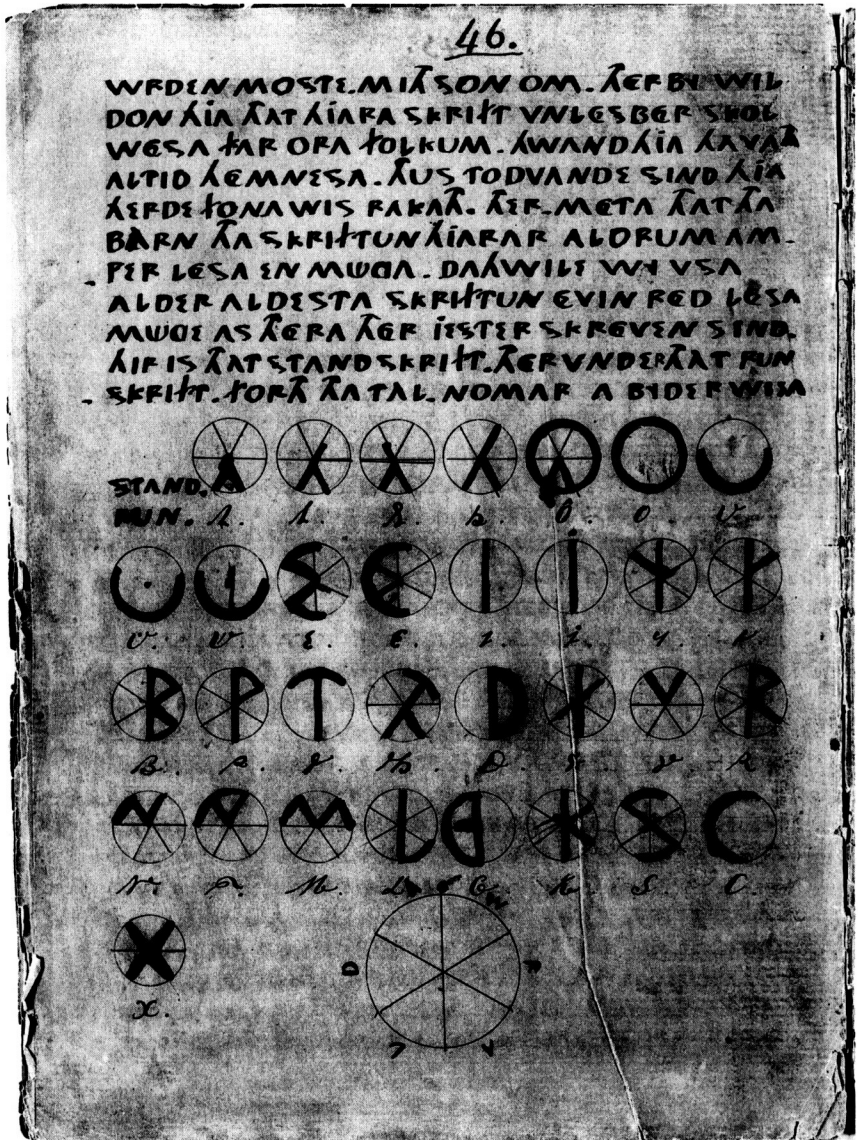


Fig. 1: Page 46 of the manuscript of the *Oera Linda Book*. The 'rune' characters used in the *Oera Linda Book* are formed in the mould of the 'JOL' which is represented as a wheel with six spokes. It symbolizes the wheel of time as well as the universality and omnipresence of the Supreme Being. Tresoar, Leeuwarden.

age-old but through its clear-cut form also ageless *Oera Linda Book* script⁴. Another noteworthy trait of the book is how the Frisians were led by women, so-called 'folkmothers' on a national level and 'borough-maidens' (BURCH.FÂM-NA) on a local scale. These women were the guardians of the typical form of Frisian spirituality, 'the Old Doctrine', a theology which very much resembled nineteenth-century theological modernism, as I will point out hereafter.

It is not easy for a reader to get to grips with the book as a whole. The characters – the tableau of the troupe consists of lots of Frisian seafarers, kings, borough-maidens, folkmothers, writers and so on – are psychologically as well as dramatically too shallow to identify oneself with. A further reason lies in the formal structure of the book, which is that of a patchy frame-story. It so happens that the folkmothers not only turn out to be the spiritual leaders of the Frisians but they also act as 'archivists' collecting documents and inscriptions dating back from before 2000 BC till 50 BC. For this reason the text as a whole becomes fragmented and at points even incomprehensible. Though there are some really appealing literary passages in it, the many tiresome, long drawn-out stories make the book labyrinthine and open to many interpretations.

The reader who can get up the courage though to find his way through this narrative labyrinth will eventually see that the plot of the book is sort of a 'decline and fall of the Frisian empire'. Ever since the flooding of Atlantis that – completely in accordance to the calendars that in the nineteenth century were published in popular almanacs⁵ – would have taken place in 2193 BC, from the south and the east, from Africa and Asia black and yellow peoples would have been advancing against the Frisians and gradually have taken over power. *En passant*, the word Atlantis is in the Old Frisian of the book being etymologized as 'the old land'. The end of the story is that the old civilization gets lost. The rule of the mothers comes to a tragic end, the last folkmother being heinously killed. In the remnants of this old civilization – about the territory of the contemporary Dutch province of Friesland – a dynasty of kings seized power. Their progenitor was a certain Friso who, according to the myths of origin from the fifteenth and sixteenth-century humanist apocryphal or fantastic historiography, had been a lieutenant of Alexander the Great and who allegedly had come to the still waste and void Friesland in 313 BC.

There is much more, even worse nonsense in the *Oera Linda Book*, varying from the character 'Neefteunis', who as a heros eponymos eventually ended up in Roman mythology as 'Neptune' but whose name literally would have meant no more than '(my) Nephew Tony'; the seafarer 'Inka', who with his boat went westwards to see if he could find remnants of the sunken-down Atlantis and from

⁴ OLB, ed. Jensma (above, note 1) 161–163.

⁵ In the nineteenth century these popular Dutch and Frisian almanacs still followed the traditional biblical chronology. One axiom of this auxiliary science of theology was that the world would, until then, no longer have existed than about 5800 years and that the biblical Deluge would have taken place in exactly the same year 2193 BC in which the *Oera Linda Book*'s Atlantis would have drowned. As a consequence of scientific geological discoveries this long-held axiom was brought up for discussion.

whom nobody has had word ever since; up to the occurrence of an originally Serbo-Croatian word as ‘vampire’ or a Malaysian word as ‘ampel’ (hardly). These are but a few examples out of several hundreds. A masterly last example is how – in order to explain how Friso could have come from India in 313 BC – the author of the *Oera Linda Book* introduces a group of Frisians who in 1500 BC would have emigrated from Friesland to India where they founded a Frisian colony under the supervision of the folksmother Gertje, daughter of Great Pier (a famous sixteenth-century Frisian rebel who himself would only be born 3000 years after his beloved daughter). These ‘men of Gert’ also known as the ‘Gertmannen’ lent their name to the Asian region of Carmania. Their descendants – still being real ‘Gertmannen’ – did function as important name-givers in Northern European ‘Germany’. All in all, these puns, popular etymologies and straightforward nonsense give ground not only to the conclusion that the book can of course not be authentic (in the sense of being what it pretends to be), but also that it is witty, resourceful and creative, at points very learned and in some ideas absolutely brilliant.

Unmasking the book

How long would it take an educated reader to expose this text as a forgery? Multatuli, a famous nineteenth-century Dutch writer with a sharp eye for literary forms and techniques, was fascinated by the book and repeatedly commented on it. He almost immediately recognized the book as a fake. He could not understand though how one and the same book could be so heterogeneous as to contain the most brilliant literary passages along with the dumbest and grossest “schoolboys etymologies”⁶. This question would become a core theme in further discussion. The debates on the possible identity of the unknown author always went along with the question of the book’s intention. Was the book a learned literary mystification written by a scholar or was it but a blunt forgery from the pen of a rather witless and clumsy autodidact?

The deputy principal Ottema saw no problems at all. He took the text completely literally – I will discuss his motivation hereafter. His interpretation of the text always was in favour of its authenticity and at points he did not even hesitate to commit a little *pia fraus*⁷. He may for instance really not have seen the daughter of Great Pier, who was reasonably well hidden behind a metathesis – GERT. PIRE.HIS.TOGADER⁸ –, but when a critic openly pointed at the suspect Serbo-

⁶ Letters by Multatuli to P.A. Tiele, Oct. 22, 1875 and Nov. 18, 1876; both published in: Multatuli: Volledige Werken 1–25. eds. G. Stuiveling/H. van den Bergh. Amsterdam 1950–95, here vol. 18, 58 and 507.

⁷ Jensma (above, note 3) 212f.

⁸ This particular metathesis implies that the word ‘GERT’ has to be read as Frisian ‘Grut’ (= great), ‘Pire’ = ‘Pier’ (a proper name), ‘His’ is derived from English ‘his’ and ‘TOGADER’ is derived not from Oldfrisian ‘Dochter’, but from Sanskrit or Greek TUGATER or tugater; see Jensma (above, note 3) 141.

Croatian vampire, the nonsense proved to be infectious. Ottema counterattacked with a splendid etymology of his own, namely that a ‘vampire’ was in fact nothing but an Old Frisian ‘wan-pier’, a misshapen worm⁹. One could sum up a long list of similar etymological exercises and nonsensical interpretations which all were to support Ottema’s conclusion at the end of his preface to the 1872 edition: “Hitherto we have believed that the historical records of our people reach no farther back than the arrival of Friso, the presumed founder of the Frisians; whereas here we are to become aware that these records mount up to more than 2000 years before Christ, surpassing the antiquity of Hellas and equaling that of Israël”¹⁰.

Until then, Ottema’s career had known a certain splendor. He had obtained his doctoral degree in classical linguistics *cum laude* and after his studies he had been teaching as a preceptor and a deputy principal on two Frisian grammar schools of good reputation. Besides that he had published dozens of articles and books on classical studies, on Frisian history, on biblical as well as pagan chronology and on theological problems. Though in some of these rather exotic themes were treated, in Friesland as well as nationwide Ottema cherished a solid reputation. To the *Oera Linda Book* Ottema became what a century earlier the Scottish critic Hugh Blair had been to *Ossian* and what one century after him the English historian Hugh Trevor Roper was to become to the forged diaries of Hitler. It is often forgotten that every mystification or forgery must be brought into the real world and it takes at least two individuals and one good story to do so. First of all, someone – an intermediary – has to tell that good story in order to smuggle the hoax from the realm of fiction into reality, whilst a second individual, preferably of immaculate reputation, is necessary to believe that story and to authenticate the forgery. There is every appearance that Over de Linden and Eelco Verwijs together played the part of the intermediary, but beyond all doubt Ottema played the role of the all-too credulous authenticator. How can one account for this awesome naïveté of such a learned well-reputed man? Historically speaking this is an awkward problem that I will try to tackle by taking a detour through the manuscript and the contents of the *Oera Linda Book*.

Let us first return to the question how long it would take a person to expose the manuscript as a forgery and let us rephrase this question to ‘How could or should a first reader have exposed it?’ The first orderly page of the manuscript¹¹ shows the alleged runes (see Figure 2). The reader who goes beyond this first impression

⁹ Ottema, J.G.: *Geschiedkundige aanteekeningen en ophelderingen bij Thet Oera Linda Bok*. Leeuwarden 1873, 12.

¹⁰ Quoted after Sandbach (above, note 1) xxv. Ottema (above, note 1) xxvi: “In onze voorstelling reikten de geschiedkundige herinneringen van ons volk niet hooger, dan tot de komst van Friso, den vermeenden stamvader der Friezen; doch hier ontwaren wij, dat die herinneringen opklommen tot meer dan twee duizend jaren voor Christus, en in hoo-gen ouderdom die van Hellas overtreffen en die van Israël evenaren ...”.

¹¹ In reality the provenance was much more complicated: Ottema received but three pages, not even of the ‘original’ codex itself but tracings after this original manuscript made by the owner Cornelis over de Linden on translucent paper. He only saw the original manuscript months after he had come to believe in the manuscript’s authenticity. Until then he used a copy in normal script that was made by an acquaintance of Eelco Verwijs, a student at Leiden University by the name of Frans Goslings.

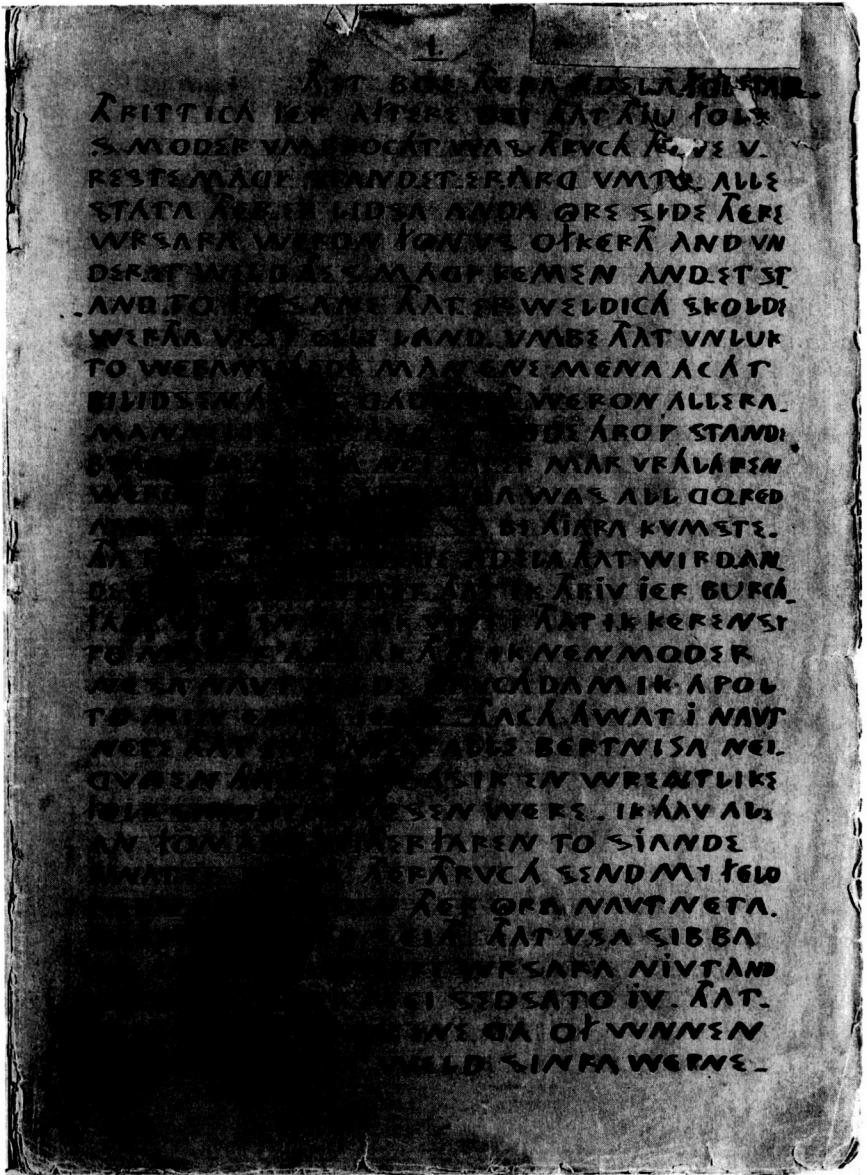


Fig. 2: The first page of the manuscript of the *Oera Linda Book*. Tresoar, Leeuwarden.

L.

1 DET BOK ðÉRA Á.DEL.A. FOLSTAR.
 ÐRITTIJH JÊR ÄFTERE ðÊI ðÄT ðJU FOLK
 .S MODER VMBROCHT WAS ðRVCH ðENE V.
 RESTE MÂGÍ STAND.ET.ER.ÄRG VM TO. ALLE
 5 STÂTA ðÊR.ER LIDSA ANDA ÔRE SÍDE ðÊRE
 WRSARA WÊRON FON VS OFKÊRÐ ÄND VN
 DER.ET WELD ðES MAGÍ KÊMEN ÄND.ET ST-
 -AND.TO FRÊSANE ðÄT ER WELDICH SKOLDE
 WERÐA VR.ET ÊLLE LÂND. VMBE ðÄT VNLUK
 10 TO WÊRANE HÊDE MÂN ÊNE MÊNA ÂCHT
 BILIDSEN HWÊR GÂDVRAÐ WÊRON ÂLLERA-
 MÄNNELIK ðÊR ANN.EN GODE HROP STANDE
 BY ÐA FÂMNA. ÐA NÊI ðÄT.ER MÂR VRHLÂPEN
 WÊRON AS ðRJV ETMELDA WAS ALL GO.RÊD
 15 ANDA TÍS ÄND AL.ÊN SA BY HJARA KVMSTE.
 ÐA TO ÐA LESTA FRÊGE ÂDELA ðÄT WIRD.ÄN
 DE KÊÐ. J ALLE WÊT.ET ðÄT IK ðRJV JÊR BURCH-
 FÂM WÊSEN SÍ. ÂK WÊT J ðÄT IK KÊREN SÍ
 TO MODER ÄND ÂK. ðÄT IK NÊN MODER
 20 NÊSA NAVT NILDE ðRVCHDAM IK ÂPOL
 TO MIN ÊNGÂ JÊRDE. ÐACH HWAT J NAVT
 NÊTE ðÄT IS ðÄT IK ALLE BÊRTNISA NÊI-
 GVNGEN HÄW. ÊVIN AS IK EN WRENTLIKE
 FOLK.SMODER WÊSEN WÊRE. IK HÄV AL-
 25 AN FON ÄND WIDERFÂREN TO SJANDE
 HWÄT-ER BÊRDE. ðÊRÐRVCH SEND MY FÊLO
 SÊKA BÂR WRDEN ðÊR ÔRA NAVT NÊTA.
 J HÄWED JESTER SÊIÐ. ðÄT VSA SIBBA
 AN ÐA ÔRE SÍD ðÊRE WRSARA NJVT ÄND
 30 LÄF WÊRE. ÐA IK MÊI SEDSA TO JV. ÐAT-
 ER MÂGÍ SE NÊN ÍNE GÂ OFWNNEN
 HED ðRVCH ðÄT WELD SINRA WÊPNE-

Fig. 3: Transcription of the first page of the *Oera Linda Book*. From *Het Oera Linda-boek* (as in note 1).

and tries to decipher the letters will not find it very difficult to recognize them as Roman majuscules instead of runes. Here and there a self-invented character has been added (for instance, the first character on this particular page, which represents the so-called Thorn-letter, the ‘Ð’: “ÐET BOK ÐERE ADELA’S FOLSTAR”). Once the reader has gained an understanding of this principle, he can read (though still not understand!) the text rather easily.

The same thing goes for the paper that has been used. Because of its brownish colour it may at first sight indeed look old, but when tearing it a little an inner whiteness shows up which proves that the colour has been applied artificially (by rubbing some kind of fluid into it). So the very first impression that the reader gets of the manuscript must on reflection be readjusted. This same principle not only applies to external features, but has been pushed much farther. Throughout the manuscript, in all its aspects, the reader is offered the opportunity to check if his first impression was correct. He is constantly challenged to examine if ‘real’ is really ‘real’¹². This principle is not only applicable to the material and formal aspects of the manuscript, but, as I will show now, also to the substantive parts of the book. In Figure 3 a transcription is given of the same first page¹³. At first sight the language, which in this transcription becomes fully visible, is a kind of Old Frisian. The frequent endings of words on ‘-a’ and ‘-um’, the omission of prefixes in past participles (like in line 3: ‘VMBROCHT’ [= killed]), forms of pronouns like ‘ÐET’ or ‘ÐERE’ (line 1), or a word like ‘FOLSTAR’ (= followers, helpers) (line 1) are real Old Frisian traits. However, in this case as well, the reader must immediately correct this first impression. Except for an occasional more obscure passage, the language used can all too easily be translated because the syntax of this artificial language proves to be completely in line with modern, read: nineteenth-century Dutch/Frisian (and out of line with ‘real’ medieval Old Frisian). The reader who tries to translate a few sentences will soon notice that not one single word has to be removed in order to make an understandable Dutch (or Frisian) sentence according to nineteenth-century syntactical standards. The meaning of unknown words can therefore easily be guessed from the context of the sentence in which they occur. The author must deliberately have intended to conceive a language which on the one hand would resemble an archaic form of Old Frisian, but that would at the same time be understandable to the public of his time. It certainly would have taken some perseverance and energy but with the help of a glossary¹⁴, the average well-educated nineteenth-century reader must have been

¹² Shortly after Ottema’s edition was published, the paper of the codex was examined by several experts who independently came to the same conclusion: the paper was fabricated after 1850, probably by the paper factory of Tielens en Schrammen in Maastricht; see Jensma (above, note 3) 29f.

¹³ In the manuscript this first orderly page is preceded by two prologues, which are obviously written after the manuscript was finished.

¹⁴ The two dictionaries available at the time, which both were most probably frequently used by the author were Hetteema, M.: *Proeve van een Friesch en Nederlandsch woordenboek bevattende de moeilijkste woorden der eerstgenoemde taal, met derzelver uitspraak, en aanwijzing der plaatsen, waar dezelve voorkomen; voorafgegaan door eene beknopte schets der Friesche taal*. Leeuwarden 1832; Richthofen, Karl von: *Altfriesi-*

able to translate the text if he wanted to. The pains of learning to read this language was to be rewarded with linguistic delicacies like the hundreds of puns, popular etymologies and funny words that were derived from almost every modern European language. When they were weary, the folksmothers for instance could retire to their 'BEDRVM' (bedroom)¹⁵.

The way in which the unknown author handles script, paper and language makes it of course very unlikely that he has originally intended the *Oera Linda Book* to be a straightforward forgery. Rather it must have been a sort of a hoax, meant to baffle the reader for a short period of time, or – in terms of nineteenth-century Romanticism¹⁶ – to create a temporary illusion of authenticity.

The reception of the Oera Linda Book

Although Dr. Ottema was more than just well-educated and consequently should have been perfectly capable to expose the text, he somehow refused to go beyond these intentionally applied illusions of authenticity. As a consequence, his transcription as well as his translation lacked depth and sensibility for the hidden qualities of the text. His *Thet Oera Linda Bok* in fact has more of an orthodox recreation of the book than of an adequate edition. The combination though of Ottema's own reputation as a classical erudite and on the other hand the fierce resistance he experienced, turned the *Oera Linda Book* into a well-known, much debated case, which made Ottema's edition a success. It became the starting point for a number of editions for which Ottema's translation was simply rendered into English, German, Italian, Afrikaans and French. In this way Ottema's naïveté has brought about the impressive worldwide reception of the *Oera Linda Book*¹⁷. Other than people are inclined to think, the peak of this fame was not reached in the nineteenth, but in the twentieth century and not in Friesland or in the Netherlands, but abroad, in interbellum Germany and from the 1970s onwards in the Anglo-Saxon world.

In Germany the book created furor thanks to Herman Wirth, who in 1933 published a German translation entitled *Die Ura Linda Chronik*. Wirth, a German university professor of Dutch descent, was a favourite of SS-Führer Heinrich Himmler who in 1934 appointed him as the first director of the cultural branch of the SS, the *Ahnenerbe* (Ancestral Heritage)¹⁸. For instance, in his pamphlet entitled *Was heißt Deutsch?*, Wirth employed the *Oera Linda Book* in an attempt to

sches Wörterbuch. Göttingen 1840; see Jensma (above, note 1) 58 and the apparatus "Mogelijke bronnen".

¹⁵ Jensma (above, note 1) 235.

¹⁶ Strohschneider-Kohrs, Ingrid: *Die romantische Ironie in Theorie und Gestaltung*. Tübingen (1960)²1977; Schnell, Ralf: *Die verkehrte Welt: Literarische Ironie im 19. Jahrhundert*. Stuttgart 1989; Behler, Ernst: *Ironie und literarische Moderne*. Paderborn 1997.

¹⁷ See note 1.

¹⁸ See Kater, Michael H.: *Das "Ahnenerbe" der SS, 1935–1945. Ein Beitrag zur Kulturpolitik des Dritten Reiches*. München 1997; Wiwiorra, Ingo: *Herman Wirth. Leben und Werk*. (Unpublished senior thesis, Freie Universität Berlin) Berlin 1988.

change German cultural policy. He proved to be especially attracted to the matriarchy in the book and wanted all Germans to make “einen Gang nach der Mutter”¹⁹.

In a public scholarly debate, held in 1934 in the auditorium of the University of Berlin, Wirth lost out to some learned opponents²⁰. Before that, however, he already had succeeded in making the book a favourite reader at German elementary schools, whilst afterwards, as late as during World War II, Himmler still had the book studied in order to prove its conceivable truth²¹. An important counterargument in the 1934 debate arose from the nonsensical character of the book. In the *Oera Linda Book*, Germans were not exactly depicted in a positive way: they were stupid, unable to write (which explains why they drew pictures of all kinds of animals on their shields – for instance eagles) and they were so lazy that they had their women toiling for them. “Die Deutsche Frühgeschichte ist uns ein viel zu heiliges Gebiet, um sie uns durch die Darstellungen der Ura-Linda-Fälschung entstellen zu lassen”, contended one of Wirth’s adversaries, Heinz-Dieter Köhler, who in 1936 graduated at Kiel university with a study on the *Oera Linda Book*²².

Already in 1876 William R. Sandbach had translated Ottema’s translation into English. In the 1970s this edition would be at the basis of a resurgence of interest in the *Oera Linda Book* in the Anglo-Saxon world. This revival commenced, as far as I can see, in 1977 with Robert Scrutton’s *The Other Atlantis*, a commented and partial re-edition of Sandbach’s book. The book was two years later reprinted as *Secrets of Lost Atlantis*. Another proof of this renewed interest is P.M. Hughes’ obscure, stencilled magazine *The New Atlantean. A Magazine for the Presentation and Discussion of Topics Related to Lost Continents, Cities and Civilizations*, which dedicated the greater part of its twenty issues (1986–93) to the *Oera Linda Book*. This stencilled obscurity turned into light with the rise of the Internet. A Google query on ‘Oera Linda’ in 2006 produced some 30,000 results²³. Among these are at least two sites with complete English editions of the book, one of which additionally offers the possibility of becoming a folkmother²⁴. The interbellum as well as the post-war reception are dominated by two themes: (1) Atlantis and the enormous catastrophe that would have led to the fall of this Golden Age civilization and (2) matriarchy. “We have learned how the Matriarchal Age was nothing to be feared by men, and we know today that a new matriarchal age is upon us in which both men and women are gaining in freedom and in expres-

¹⁹ Wirth, Herman: Was heißt deutsch? Jena 1931, 49; id.: Um den Ursinn des Menschseins. Die Werdung einer neuen Geisteswissenschaft. Vienna 1960, 76.

²⁰ Storm, Sönje: Die öffentliche Aussprache über Herman Wirths Ura-Linda-Chronik in Berlin (1934). In: Almgren, Birgitta (ed.): Bilder des Nordens in der Germanistik 1929–1945. Wissenschaftliche Integrität oder politische Anpassung. Huddinge 2002, 79–97.

²¹ Jensma (above, note 3) 186.

²² Köhler, Heinz-Dieter: Studien zur Ura Linda-Chronik. Weimar 1936.

²³ Google (collected June 6, 2006): the string “Oera Linda” produced 29,900 hits, whilst the German version “Ura Linda” scored 1,880 hits.

²⁴ e.g., SilverWitch, Sylvana: Just “Wiccatru” Folk. A Word with Prudence Priest. <http://www.widdershins.org/vol3iss6/y9702.htm> (collected June 6, 2006).

sion”, is how one of the Internet editors of the book, Anthony Radford, interpreted the book²⁵.

A Further Interpretation of the Text

The question now at hand is of course whether the author of the *Oera Linda Book* could in any way have foreseen, expected or even have wished for this reception. The answer must definitively be negative. The precondition for this ‘success’ was Ottema’s unexpected and in hindsight undreamed-of ignorance. After all, as I have indicated above, the original codex indisputably shows that the author simply cannot have had the aim to let the manuscript pass off for real. But what could then have been his real intention and who was he?

Further textual analysis suggests that the series of illusions of authenticity could be extended beyond the formal and material aspects of the book. Let us first list those that we came across so far. We noticed (contrary to Ottema who did not): (1) that the paper of the codex was brownish only on the outside but of a fresh white on the inside; (2) that the script was not written in runes but in Roman capitals (Ottema recognized an Arabic inscription on the Alhambra as cognate to Frisian runes instead)²⁶; (3) that the language used was not Old Frisian but a mixture of old and new elements that was to resemble Old Frisian but which at the same time had also to be understandable for the modern reader. Due to its deliberately ambiguous character, exactly this same artificial language gave the author the opportunity to extend the series of illusions of authenticity to the content of the book. The text contains – so to speak – two different stories, two layers of meaning springing from the ambiguous meaning of some names and keywords. Behind the nonsensical historical chronicle, a quite different and much more serious meaning is hidden. It is up to the reader to discover it.

As mentioned above, the Frisians are the main characters in the book. In the course of the story they are being surpassed and overrun by other peoples, first by the ‘Finna’ (the ‘Fins’), who march in from the East in 2001 BC. In the *Oera Linda Book* language the Frisians are called ‘FRYAS’, a word that evidently can be translated as ‘Frisian’. Linguistically speaking though it might just as well mean ‘free’ or even ‘free-thinking’²⁷. In the theology of these ‘FRYAS’ there are all sorts of elements to support such an interpretation (see below). As to the opponents of the FRYAS, the ‘FINNA’, the word ‘FIN’ can be read as ‘Fins’, but also as ‘the “fine” (people)’. In the nineteenth-century Netherlands and Friesland the word ‘fine’ was a current expression to denote the orthodox Reformed.

²⁵ Radford, Anthony: From Goddess to King. A History of Ancient Europe from the Oera Linda Book. <http://www.earth-history.com/Europe/God-king/radford-chapter-24.htm> (collected June 6, 2006).

²⁶ Jensa (above, note 3) 211.

²⁷ *ibid.*, 89. The FRYAS are named after their arch-mother FRYA and in some places are referred to as FRYA.S BERN (children of Frya). The Old Frisian word ‘fria’ means free.

Once the reader has learned to have an eye for ambiguities like these, the book opens up for an altogether different and more topical interpretation. The text appears to be pervaded with a religious undertone and cannot only be read as a funny, witty, punning, erudite and nonsensical historical chronicle, but also as an allegory of the nineteenth-century *richtingenstrijd*, the denominational struggle between orthodoxy and free-thinking modernism which broke out at the end of the 1850s inside the Dutch Reformed Church as well as in Dutch society as a whole.

The leader of these 'Fins/Fines', for instance, is the 'Magf', who is the commander of the Magyars, who in their turn are a people of priests reigning over the 'fine' 'Fins'. In the nineteenth century it was common knowledge (and still is up to date) that the Finnish and Hungarian (Magyar) languages are linguistically cognate, and so at first sight these names can be read historically. Similarly, one can read the name of the 'Magf' as an historical allusion to the well-known caste of Zoroastrian Persian priests. The combination of these names though is geographically as well as chronologically completely incoherent. Their interpretation as topical allusions to 'magic' and to the supra-naturalism of religious orthodoxy yields a much more consistent understanding that does away with much of the labyrinthine and incoherent character which imposes itself on a first reading. An elaborate bipolar structure emerges where the free-thinking Frisians are at odds with the 'fine' Fins. Folksmothers and borough-maidens, who both value their consciences as their most important religious faculty, are opposed to male 'Magyar'/'magic' machos who do magic tricks and use violence in order to keep their followers under their thumbs. In nineteenth-century reality the religious orthodox indeed fanatically held on to a supernatural interpretation of the biblical miracles and to the Divine authority of the Holy Bible. For them the Book remained the Word of God that should be taken literally and their subservient attitude towards their leaders was a consequence of this.

At closer examination, the theological opinions of the old free-thinking 'FRY-AS' appear to be exclusively influenced by theological modernism, the successful vanguard theology that in the late 1850s and early 1860s determined Dutch public debate in matters of religion and science. This modernism had its origin at Leiden University. Impressed by the huge scientific progress in those days and by the technological innovations that sprung from it, some Leiden theologians started to apply the empiricist method of natural sciences on theology. One of the logical consequences was that miracles as described in the Holy Bible had to be discarded as violations of the natural laws. The Bible, no longer considered to be the dictated word of God, but only as a work of human making, had to be interpreted symbolically instead. The modernists also introduced and propagated a more anthropological perspective on the phenomenon of religion²⁸. Knowledge of God

²⁸ The standard work on modernism still is Roessingh, K.H.: *De moderne theologie in Nederland. Hare voorbereiding en eerste periode*. Groningen 1914. On the history of modernism as a movement, see Herderschée, J.: *De Modern-Godsdienstige Richting in Nederland*. Amsterdam 1904. A more recent publication, treating a somewhat later period and a little more off-topic, too, is Molendijk, Arie L.: *The Emergence of the Science*

and the divine could only be gathered from three sources: nature, history and the religious inner self of man.

Comparison of some explicitly theological passages from the *Oera Linda Book* with the writings of these modernists makes it possible to describe this influence in greater detail. The *Oera Linda Book's* 'Old doctrine' – the FORMA LÈRE – rephrases in its own inimitable way the transcendental monistic variant of modernism that was developed and taught at Leiden University by Jan Hendrik Scholten (1811–85), professor in dogmatic theology²⁹. Scholten's influence can be traced in the *Oera Linda*-bookish theology itself, especially in what is put forward on the God figure. The 'FRYAS' appear to have confessed a clear monotheism. The god they worshipped was called 'WRALDA', a quasi-Old Frisian name which is a brilliant token of the ironic ambiguity that so deeply characterizes the book as a whole. The word has at least three different meanings which are equivalent and all three can be read as references to the image of God from Scholten's modernism. 'WRALDA' in real Old Frisian literally means 'world' and so God coincides in a monistic way with the world, i.e. with the compound of all natural laws. He is also the 'WR-ALDA' (cf. German 'Ur-alte') – the oldest one and the origin of all things. Finally the name can be read as WRAL-DA (cf. German 'Überall da') – present everywhere.

Scholten's ideas on the development of religion in history are also reflected in the *Oera Linda Book*. Man's development, Scholten contended, had known three clearly distinguishable stages. In a primitive first phase the religious life of natural man was determined by his imagination; man in his natural state knew only images, representations of the deity, and his religion was a form of superstition. The second phase was that of the 'law' (for instance the Mosaic law) and of a 'one-sided elevation of the human, in which man apotheosizes himself in worshipping a deity'³⁰. In a last stage, the perfection of history in an almost Hegelian sense, man had learned to follow his higher nature and his conscience in a proper mix of self-consciousness and dependency. The three *Oera Linda Book* peoples, with which I dealt above regarding criteria of race as the yellow, black and white peoples, can be classified with more precision and consistency according to these same modernist characteristics. In the creation myth at the beginning of the book these three peoples – the 'FRYAS', the 'LYDAS' and the 'FINDAS' – are represented as descendants of three primal mothers: FRYA, LYDA and FINDA. In their respective attitudes towards the 'law' these three ladies prove to be personifications of Scholten's phases of the development of religion. Finda – mother of the 'Fine Fins' and the 'Magic Magyars' – personifies the submission to law, whilst Frya follows the 'inner law' of her own conscience.

of Religion in the Netherlands. Leiden 2005.

²⁹ Jensma (above, note 1) 265–277; on Scholten see Kuenen, A.: *Levensbericht van Joannes Henricus Scholten*. In: *Jaarboek van de Maatschappij der Nederlandse Letterkunde* 1886, 1–59.

³⁰ Scholten, J.H.: *Geschiedenis der godsdienst en wijsbegeerte. Ten gebruik bij de academische lessen*. Leiden 1859: "de eenzijdige verheffing van het menschelijke, waarbij in de vereering eener godheid de mensch zich zelve apotheoseert".

The Author of the Book

This new interpretation still does not explain the bizarre later reception of the book. After all, literature on the subject shows that until now this allegorical structure has never been noticed before. The explanation, at least to a certain extent, might be that the leftist, progressive ideas of theological modernism did not hold public attention very long. After a short period of success in the late fifties and early sixties of the nineteenth century, they quickly vanished from collective memory. Nowadays they are therefore only recognizable to the historian who studies them.

This interpretation makes it possible, on the other hand, to decide on the identity of the author. I will not go into detail, but sum up the main results of my study of relevant primary sources³¹. Exactly the same, rather idiosyncratic characteristics of the codex of the *Oera Linda Book* – for instance, concerning interpunctuation or minor spelling mistakes, etc. – are found in the writings of the autodidactic shipwright from Den Helder, Cornelis over de Linden, the alleged heir of the codex. He, a real Sunday writer, was the person who drew the 158,526 characters of the book³². Over de Linden also assisted with the introduction of the book. Later on, when through Ottema's naïveté things got totally out of hand, he covered up for his two younger co-authors. The first of these was the librarian Verwijs, the expert whom, as said before, Over the Linden had consulted in 1867. Both gentlemen then had put up a correspondence which in fact was part of the hoax. Verwijs not only was the evil genius behind the insidious introduction of the book, he also exerted his skills and expertise in editing the final version of the text by inserting small corrections and marginalia³³. His involvement can be inferred from the enormous inconsistencies in his behaviour. For almost three years Verwijs, who at the time was incontestably one of the top linguists in the Netherlands, gave the book the benefit of doubt, where his expertise should have urged him to reject its authenticity within ten minutes' time. The explanation for this strange conduct is probably that an earlier scenario for introducing the book had failed. The above-mentioned journalist Jan Frederik Jansen, one of Verwijs' many enemies, had been the first intended victim of the hoax. However, instead of proudly publishing the story of this astonishing discovery in his own Frisian newspaper (*Friesche Courant*), Jansen unexpectedly handed over the manuscript to the major Frisian expert in these days: the very same Dr. Eelco Verwijs. What else, if the hoax was not to go wrong, could Verwijs now do but wait. And so he did: he waited for three long years, desperately trying to find another victim.

One could now of course suggest that Over de Linden and Verwijs must also have been the sole authors of the *Oera Linda Book*. It is an unsatisfactory solution though. As to Over de Linden, comparison of his own writings with the *Oera Lin-*

³¹ Jensma (above, note 3) 149–357.

³² *ibid.*, 28.

³³ Jensma (above, note 1) lists these corrections in an apparatus of “redacteurscorrecties” (editorial corrections).

da Book immediately shows that this autodidact completely lacked the writing skills and the erudition needed. The results of such a comparison with Verwijs' oeuvre and the *Oera Linda Book* are nil also. From the prefaces to his numerous editions of Middle Dutch literary texts as well as from his letters and essays, Verwijs stands out as a straightforward, mocking polemist who did not hesitate to call a spade a spade and who definitively was not as proficient in the literary hide-and-peek as the unknown author.

The ambiguous, ironic qualities of the book are, on the other hand, very much reflected in the poems, stories, sermons, and letters of a third man: François HaverSchmidt (1835–94). HaverSchmidt, born and raised in the Frisian capital of Leeuwarden, had studied theology in Leiden, after which he had returned to Friesland to become a vicar in the small parish of Foudgum (1859–62) and after that in the town of Den Helder (1862–64). There he had met the free-thinker Cornelis over de Linden who was one of his parishioners. In his college days HaverSchmidt had gained a solid reputation as a writer of student poetry which he wrote under the alias Piet Paaltjens. Till today he is famed for his *Snikken en Grimlachjes* (Gasps and sniggers), a classic volume of poetry in which he bundled his earlier poetry. He and Verwijs had been intimate friends from childhood on.

The *Oera Linda Book* fits organically in HaverSchmidt's work and biography. In the early 1860s, the time when the *Oera Linda Book* must have been composed, he for instance wrote another, very similar allegory of the *richtingenstrijd* – the denominational struggle between orthodoxy and free-thinkers. There are many other thematic and even literal similarities between his work and the *Oera Linda Book*. Certain characteristics and peculiarities of his authorship in general are also important: his knowledge of earlier humanist and fantastic Frisian historiography as well as his proven mastery of certain literary techniques. Like no other nineteenth-century Dutch author he excelled in telling complicated frame-stories (like the *Oera Linda Book* was one) as well as in disguising and mystifying himself. His poetical alias and spokesman Piet Paaltjens was not just an *alter ego* but one that succeeded in juggling and playing with the boundaries between reality and fiction to such an extent that in circles of Dutch students he became a 'real' person whom one could, for instance, write letters to. Paaltjens was so to say the impersonation of the ironic illusion of authenticity.

HaverSchmidt thus had the occasion and he had the means. Besides of course the pure joy of creating such an experimental literary hoax, his motive was religious. He was one of the first Dutch vicars schooled by the above-mentioned Leiden professor Scholten. Especially in his first parish, the small Frisian village of Foudgum, HaverSchmidt, a convinced modernist, had a hard time dealing with his mainly orthodox 'fine' parishioners who considered even a good laugh to be a sin. The *Oera Linda Book* was meant in the first place to teach these all too stern orthodox believers an experimental lesson in reading: don't take the Bible all too literally.

Though I am the first to have examined this solution systematically, I am not the first to suggest it. At the start of the twentieth century, when almost all of the persons directly involved in the affair had long since deceased, the Frisian physi-

cian and dialectologist Johan Winkler came up with a testimony, probably based on anonymous information by a family member of the Over de Linden family³⁴. Winkler stated how HaverSchmidt, tormented by the religious and social discord spread by the orthodox, wanted to anonymously launch a ‘mysterious writing’. People would discuss it and when in these debates the writing would finally be rejected as spurious, HaverSchmidt would have stepped up to declare that the case of his book did not differ from that of the Holy Bible: don’t believe what you read. This heroic fantasy, of course, was brusquely thwarted by Ottema’s naïveté.

A New Religion

Thus the *Oera Linda Book* was not meant to be a forgery at all. It was an experimental piece of literature, a hoax all too ready to be unmasked, and as such it was at the same time a leftist avant-garde book. In its reception it changed into something quite different, namely into an ultra-rightwing holy text, a book that created its own orthodox fine believers. What explanations could be given?

Firstly, there are similar, related texts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which may give a clue. The *Book of Mormon*, for instance, is not only a forgery but one of an ostensible sort. The difference between the *Oera Linda Book* and this book, though, is that the success of the latter was sought by its author, the ‘religious genius’ Joseph Smith. He gave his best to make the book sound as real as could be³⁵. Robert Graves’ *The White Goddess* is another example of a labyrinthine book that found its believers and that is also characterized by the issue of matriarchy, by numerous nonsensical etymologies (like the derivation of ‘geometry’ from ‘gea mater’ (Mother Earth), and by zany aficionados (like the Church of Aphrodite in New York)³⁶. The most remarkable difference between these two, however, is that Graves’ book was not intended as a hoax or a forgery at all, but instead presented as an authorized, be it somewhat uncommon scholarly book – a “historical grammar of poetic myth”. So, although examples like these show that forgeries and religion are easily intertwining and that a certain pattern may be discerned here, they still do not account for the peculiar ironic twist in the reception of the *Oera Linda Book*.

³⁴ For Winkler’s testimony, see Jensma (above, note 3) appendix 3, 380–385.

³⁵ Bushman, Claudia Lauper and Richard Lyman: *Building the Kingdom. A History of Mormons in America*. Oxford 2001, 6; Brodie, Fawn M.: *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet*. New York (1945) 1995. Mormonism and forgery also proved to be a fruitful combination in the fascinating case of Mark Hofman: see, e.g., Sillitoe, Linda/Roberts, Allen D.: *Salamander. The Story of the Mormon Forgery Murders*. Salt Lake City (1988) ²1999; Naifeh, Steven/White Smith, Gregory: *The Mormon Murders. A True Story of Greed, Forgery, Deceit and Death*. London ²1989.

³⁶ Graves, Robert: *The White Goddess. A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth*. London 1948; Seymour-Smith, M.G.: *Robert Graves, His Life and Work*. London 1995, 374–400, 419f.

A better clue for understanding this lies in the modernist content of the book. At first sight, the highly intellectual and rationalistic nineteenth-century theological modernism is totally at odds with the woolly, obscure doctrines of twentieth-century theosophy and ariosophy. At a closer look they have similar tenets in common, though. Compared to more traditional religious doctrines, theosophy as well as modernism prove to be secularized versions of religion that conceive God as an omnipresent, immutable being and abate the priority of Christianity in favour of other world religions. Both theosophy and modernism cherish a form of determinism, which in the *Oera Linda Book* as well as in theosophy finds expression in a cyclical concept of time. These 'hidden' theological qualities are indeed a precondition to the reception of the *Oera Linda Book*.

Without a doubt the appeal of the book is also the result of HaverSchmidt's authorship. The *Oera Linda Book* distinguishes itself first and foremost by the same attractive (and also very modern) mix of seriousness and irony which characterizes HaverSchmidt's 'Piet Paaltjens' poetry. The text is of a labyrinthine, rather incomprehensible structure, but whenever necessary – for instance in the passages on the so-called religion of the Old Frisians – it is on the contrary of an immediate and convincing simplicity which will hit the off-guard reader with a straight left.

Twentieth century reception finally shows how two aspects of the text especially exerted attraction: Atlantis and matriarchy. The *Oera Linda Book* brings up both themes remarkably early. Ignatius Donnelly's *The Antidiluvian World*, which marks the beginning of the popularization of the Atlantis theme in Western culture, dates from 1881³⁷. The same goes for matriarchy. The first scholar to exhaustively describe, or rather construct, this phenomenon – at about the time when the *Oera Linda Book* must have been conceived – was Johann Jakob Bachofen (1815–87). It is unlikely that HaverSchmidt was acquainted with Bachofen's well-known study *Das Mutterrecht* (1861)³⁸. The *Oera Linda Book* thus is not only an innovative and experimental book because of its form, but also because of this specific content. For the late-twentieth-century reader this eliminated suspicion, whilst – equally important of course – from a nineteenth-century perspective it allowed HaverSchmidt to experiment more freely. For his description of matriarchal conditions HaverSchmidt, rather than using specialized antiquarian literature, seems to have drawn on popular notions of the role of motherhood and femininity in religious education. Recent historical research has shown that in the dominant narrative structure of nineteenth-century devotional and theological

³⁷ Sprague de Camp, L.: *Lost Continents. The Atlantis Theme in History, Science, and Literature*. New York 1970.

³⁸ Heinrichs, Hans-Jürgen (ed.): *Materialien zu Bachofens 'Das Mutterrecht'*. Frankfurt am Main 1975; Borgeaud, Philippe/Durisch, Nicole/Kolde, Antje/Sommer, Grégoire: *La mythologie du matriarcat: L'atelier de Johann Jakob Bachofen*. Geneva 1999. I am preparing a further publication on matriarchy in nineteenth century literature.

writings the ‘mother’ became the pivotal person in religious life³⁹. This also goes for the Netherlands, in any case for the free-thinking circles frequented by HaverSchmidt. In his lectures and sermons he more than once equalled Christ and the ‘mother’.

In the *Oera Linda Book* HaverSchmidt succeeded in bringing together all these influences and ideas – hidden modernism, the Atlantis catastrophe, matriarchy – into an ancient history of Frisian free-thinkers. His abilities as an author thereupon made the book, at least for those who were sensitive and susceptible to it, so convincingly real and authentic that it could develop into a specimen of modern New Age mythology. One of these susceptible souls was poor Jan Gerhardus Ottema, who once at Leeuwarden grammar school – oh irony of ironies! – had taught HaverSchmidt classical history. Ottema’s writings show that it was not the historical, but the religious content of the book instead which won him over. He considered the *Oera Linda Book* to be the purest conceivable representation of religion, much purer than the Holy Bible itself.

It is a perfect irony that a book written to unmask the Holy Bible as a book of human making was to become a bible itself.

Abstract

François HaverSchmidt, Eelco Verwijs and Cornelis over de Linden intended their forgery of an Old Frisian manuscript, later known as the *Oera Linda Book*, to be a temporary hoax to fool some nationalist Frisians and orthodox Christians and as an experiential exemplary exercise in reading the Holy Bible in a non-fundamentalist, symbolical way. Despite several obvious clues that the text could not be genuine, it turned out otherwise: the learned Frisian J.G. Ottema took the book seriously as a chronicle of Frisian history, religion and mythology, and soon he published a text edition – followed by more editions and translations. At this time, nobody interpreted the *Oera Linda Book* as a text directed against the orthodox Reformed, and the jokers did not dare to speak up. Too many other features of the text appealed to nationalist Frisians as well as pre-war National Socialists and post-war New Age believers, for instance: the connection of the Frisians with Atlantis, their early use of a rune alphabet, their civilizing Western Europe, their pre-Christian monotheism and belief in an omnipresent being, their matriarchy with folkmothers and borough-maidens, and their freedom-loving mode of life. Instead of criticizing the orthodox Reformed way of believing, a new belief was unwittingly created with the *Oera Linda Book*.

³⁹ See, e.g., Lewis, Jan: *Mother’s Love: the Construction of an Emotion in Nineteenth-Century America*. In: Barnes, Andrew E./Stearns, Peter N. (eds.): *Social History and Issues in Human Consciousness*. New York/London 1989, 209–229; Brown, Callum G.: *The Death of Christian Britain. Understanding Secularisation 1800–2000*. London/New York 2001.

Résumé

François HaverSchmidt, Eelco Verwijs et Cornelis over de Linden avaient conçu leur faux manuscrit en frison ancien, connu plus tard sous le nom de *Livre Oera Linda*, comme un canular destiné d'une part à mystifier temporairement les Frisons nationalistes et d'autre part à proposer aux chrétiens orthodoxes un exercice de lecture hétérodoxe, allégorique de la Sainte Bible. En dépit de plusieurs indices flagrants, montrant que le texte ne pouvait pas être authentique, l'affaire a connu un revirement imprévu. Le savant frison J.G. Ottema a pris l'ouvrage au sérieux, persuadé qu'il s'agissait d'une chronique traitant de l'histoire, de la religion et de la mythologie de la Frise. Très vite, il en publia une édition, suivie par plusieurs autres et par des traductions. À l'époque, personne ne considérait l'ouvrage comme une attaque contre l'orthodoxie, et les auteurs de la mystification n'osaient donc plus avouer leur supercherie. D'autres éléments du texte semblaient au contraire plaire aux Frisons nationalistes et aux nationaux-socialistes d'avant-guerre ainsi qu'aux adeptes du New Age d'après-guerre, comme par exemple le rapport des Frisons avec l'Atlantide, leur utilisation précoce d'un alphabet runique, leur monothéisme préchrétien et leur croyance en une créature omniprésente, leur matriarcat avec des mères originelles et des vierges de bourg ainsi que leur amour de la liberté. Ainsi, au lieu d'être une critique de l'orthodoxie, le *Livre Oera Linda* a créé involontairement une nouvelle croyance.

Zusammenfassung

Für François HaverSchmidt, Eelco Verwijs und Cornelis over de Linden war ihre Fälschung einer altfriesischen Handschrift, die später als die *Oera-Linda-Chronik* bekannt wurde, ein Scherz, mit dem nationalistischen Friesen ein Schnippchen geschlagen werden sollte. Gleichzeitig sollte orthodoxen Christen eine Möglichkeit geboten werden, die Bibel auf unorthodoxe, sinnbildliche Art und Weise zu lesen. Trotz mehrerer deutlicher Hinweise darauf, daß der Text nicht echt sein konnte, kam die Sache anders. Der friesische Gelehrte J.G. Ottema nahm das Buch ernst und hielt es für eine Chronik der friesischen Geschichte, Religion und Mythologie. Schon bald edierte er eine Textausgabe, auf die weitere Auflagen und Übersetzungen folgten. Damals betrachtete niemand das Werk als antiorthodox, und die Urheber des Scherzes wagten nicht mehr, dafür einzustehen. Andere Hypothesen, die sich aus dem Text ergaben, erwiesen sich als geradezu reizvoll für nationalistische Friesen ebenso wie für Nationalsozialisten der Vorkriegszeit und New Age-Anhänger der Nachkriegszeit. Beispiele hierfür sind die Verbindung der Friesen mit Atlantis, ihr früher Besitz eines Runenalphabets, ihr vorchristlicher Monotheismus und ihr Glaube an ein allgegenwärtiges Wesen, ihr Matriarchat mit Volksmüttern und Burgmädchen sowie ihre freiheitsliebende Lebensweise. Anstelle einer Kritik des Fundamentalismus ist so mit der *Oera-Linda-Chronik* unabsichtlich ein neuer Glaube geschaffen worden.