



PROJECT MUSE®

---

Wilibrord

Published by

Slings, Hubert and Frits van Oostrom.

A Key to Dutch History: The Cultural Canon of the Netherlands.

Amsterdam University Press, 2007.

Project MUSE. <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/76693>.



➔ For additional information about this book

<https://muse.jhu.edu/book/76693>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

[136.0.111.243] Project MUSE (2025-01-18 20:25 GMT)



658 AD - 739 AD

## Willibrord

### The spread of Christianity

In 690 AD, Willibrord, an English monk from Northumbria, landed at the then mouth of the Rhine where the town of Katwijk is now situated. Together with a group of colleagues he wished to spread Christianity throughout the land of the Frisians. The Frisians lived in the coastal region stretching from the Westerschelde to near Dokkum. Their territory bordered on that of the Frankish kings, who had converted to the Christian faith a century earlier. The port town of Dorestad aan de Rijn and the settlement of Utrecht were situated on the border. This was not a

permanent border, because battles regularly broke out and the border would shift as the Frisians moved slightly to the south or the Franks to the north. During a period of success, in 630 AD a Frankish king had built the first church in Utrecht at the place where the Dom now stands. Shortly afterwards, however, the church had been destroyed by the Frisians.

Willibrord's predecessors had experienced that converting the heathen Frisians would be no easy task. For this reason, Willibrord first sought support. He paid several visits to

the Frankish king and the Pope in Rome. The latter appointed Willibrord Archbishop of the Frisians. In 696 AD, Willibrord settled in Utrecht. He rebuilt the church destroyed earlier by the Frisians and commissioned the building of a new church dedicated to San Salvator, or, in other words, Jesus Christ.

Subsequently, missionaries left Utrecht for the lands of the Frisians. They were successful and by the end of Willibrord's life

– he died in 739 AD – the new faith had the upper hand in the coastal region. In the rest of Frisian territory, however, resistance to the new faith was strong. The local nobility regarded the missionaries as accomplices of the Franks and they clung to the old ways and their gods like Wodan and Donar. It was only at the end of the eighth century AD that Frankish weapons finally crushed the Frisian resistance.



123

## Sub-topics

### Primary education sector

The life and death of Boniface  
Ancient Friesland  
The history of Dorestad

### Secondary education sector

The early development of the town of Utrecht  
The religion of the Frisians  
The English missionaries  
The Pope, Bishop of Rome  
The early spread of Christianity

### Past and Present

Religious missionary work across the world,  
for different religions, then and now

### In the Treasure Chest

A crucifix

## References

### Places to Go

Utrecht: Catharijneconvent  
Utrecht: Cross of churches  
Dokkum: Boniface's well

### Books for young people

Akky van der Veer, *Bonifatius en zijn tijd*

### Background literature

Joris van Eijnatten and Fred van Lieburg,  
*Nederlandse religiegeschiedenis*, Hilversum 2005.

### Websites

[www.collectieutrecht.nl/view.asp?type=thema&id=33](http://www.collectieutrecht.nl/view.asp?type=thema&id=33)