

In the Middle Ages Friesland has been home to many religious communities

In 1132 Benedictine monks first settled on Frisian soil. Soon followed the Augustinians, Cistercians, Premonstratensians and Dominicans. In the 13th Century Knights communities came, so the Knights Templar and St. John (Johanniter) moved to Friesland.

The monasteries were the center of all spiritual life. The monks and nuns prayed for the souls of the Frisians. What is more, the monasteries were essential for the local political life. The monks copied the Frisian legal texts and kept deeds and contracts in archive behind the monastery walls.

During the Reformation and Secularization in Friesland, almost all the monastic buildings were destroyed. Yet the small chapel at Bokelesch survived because it belonged to the territory of the Bishop of Munster. It is one of the last architectural testimonies of the former convent, which was as diversified as the Frisian landscape.

Thus, Saterland is not only famous for its Sater Frisian dialect

It is also home to a historic and cultural monument of extraordinary value. The Saterland community takes this as an opportunity to realize, together with the dutch stichting (Foundation) "Vrienden van de Nieuwe Schans", a cross-border project for the creation of regional information centers.

"Oude Remise" ("Old Coach House"), the archaeological information center of the dutch partner in Bad Nieuweschans, informs the history of this german-dutch-Dollard area. Another information center will be built next to the monastery chapel In the community of Saterland Bokelesch. It offers Information not only about the chapel, the landscape, but also the history of the Johanniterorden in medieval Friesland.

The Order of Saint John was exceptionally widely represented in the Frisian region

24 Parishes in the Middle Ages stretched over an area that far exceeded the European borders of today. In the days of St John, they formed a very prominent exception. Together, they were determined to live and work on own their ideas by initiating double monasteries where monks and nuns lived together, while illiterate lay brothers and lay sisters assembling in droves in their religious houses.

They devoted their lives to God, which meant the hard farm work in the rough Frisian land. No wonder then, that an ordinary knight brother - has never set foot in Frisian land - as he belonged

to the Order of Saint John.

and Bokelesch?

In the idyllic Saterland you´ll find a monastery chapel, which was once the spiritual center of a small religious community of nuns and monks of St. John. The archaeological excavations in and around the chapel have reconstructed its history. Metal, leather, textile, bone and pottery provide clues about the lives of the former residents.

Their life has not been easy: in 1472 a lay brother was kidnapped by two envoys of the Bishop of Munster to extort money from him. Eighty years later the head of convent (Ordensvorsteher) in Bokelesch wrote: "We are all poor and servants of all poor "

Finally in 1587, all brothers and sisters were gone. The last commander of Bokelesch leased the land of the monastery to two Dutch men, putting an end to the nearly-300-year history of the religious house.

The bokelescher land remained in the hands of the Order till the 19th Century.