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3

FROM ONE SEA TO ANOTHER
TRADING PLACES IN THE EUROPEAN
AND MEDITERRANEAN EARLY MIDDLE AGES

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Markets, towns and currencies
in Scandinavia ca. AD 200-1000

Categorisation is a constant preoccupation of humans, scholars in particular. The uncategorised world is a chaotic mess of individual phenomena and unique events. We cannot possibly cope with the world without simplifying the chaos by grouping the endless number of phenomena into fewer categories¹.

Categorisation, although a necessity, still creates huge problems. Since there is no single, correct way of categorising and understanding the world, it could always be categorised differently. Grouping complex phenomena inevitably ignores some differences between those put into the same box and some similarities with those in other. These differences and similarities just might be essential for establishing a certain way of understanding a particular phenomenon. Therefore, categorisation is a tool for understanding the world as well as an obstacle for developing new ways of understanding it.

This conflict built into one of the basic procedures in scholarly work is, as I see it, irresolvable. We can try to work around the problem by using categories with 'fuzzy boundaries' rather than 'closed boxes' and we can discuss endlessly how to categorise a certain group of phenomena, but the basic problem will always exist: categories are an absolute necessity, as well as a curse. Every categorisation is based on a specific understanding of the phenomenon in question, but there is always a different way of perceiving this phenomenon and, consequently, there is always a different way of categorising it.

This is especially true in the human and social sciences, as both work with phenomena involving the lives of human beings. Humans are notoriously messy. We have mixed motives, perform ambiguous actions and develop complex relationships with the world, with other humans, and with ourselves. Humans are truly *mysterious* in the original meaning of the word, that is: we can always be understood better, but never fully.

¹ K. Hastrup, *Det antropologiske projekt. Om forbløffelse*, Copenhagen, 1992, p. 14-19.

My ambition in this paper is to establish some categories which help make sense of the Scandinavian specialised sites for trade and craft of the 3rd-11th centuries and identify the currencies used in that trade. Rather than focusing on the categories themselves, I will start with basic assumptions concerning economy and society, followed by the criteria for the categorisation, and finish with the categories themselves – first the sites, then the currencies.

Economy and society

My categorisation of sites with substantial traces of trade and craft production springs from my motive for focussing on them. I am interested in these sites as arenas for social and economic dynamics. My categorisation of currencies has the same motif; currency is an indication of the changing mentalities of the parties participating in trade and of the economic and social reality in which they are a part.

The sites themselves are the primary contexts in which social and economic dynamics unfold. If my primary interests were for instance the techniques and products of craft production, I would look at every site with remains of such activities and group them accordingly (e.g. by the occurrence of different crafts). Indeed, many colleagues with these interests have grouped sites in such ways, ending up with rather different categories from what I will now put forward.

I will be looking at the sites which people travelled to for trade purposes – I suggest calling them *specialised sites for trade and craft-production*. These were sites at which sellers and buyers met to trade. Among the sellers were craftsmen who produced items for sale on the site. Traces of trade and craft are also found in another type of sites: on manors and magnate farms. But on such sites production was aimed at the residents of these farms. The buyers did not travel there and therefore these sites do not fall within my category – they were not *specialised sites*.

The justification for this division between specialised and non-specialised sites has to do with the types of relationships between tradesmen and craftsmen on the one side and their buyers on the other. When people travel to a site for trade purposes other types of dynamics are activated than those which occur in the one-to-one relationship of a singular transaction in a non-specialised site. In the specialised sites, the buyer chooses from various suppliers, and the suppliers are faced with numerous potential buyers. A singular transaction at a non-specialised site has more room for power, the buyer is often the more powerful party, but the multiple relationships existing in specialised sites mean that sellers and buyers meet on more equal terms.

The specialised sites have the potential of developing economic mechanisms normally associated with the *market*. For those who – like me – were bred as scholars within the substantivist paradigm developed by Karl Polanyi, George Dalton and others, ‘the market’ is a concept which has an awkward feel to it². According to the substantivists, every transaction in pre-modern society is embedded in social relationships and therefore should be regarded as a social phenomenon, not an economic one. The substantivists argue that the *social relationship* between the buyer and the seller – not their economic motives, mentalities or the economic reality of the transaction – is the key to understanding a transaction.

Many insights have been gained through the substantivists’ approach, for instance in understanding the significance of gifts and gift-giving. In spite of its great achievements, substantivism has some inherent problems. In my view, the largest problem is the fundamental contrast between modern and pre-modern economies promoted by Polanyi. He contrasts the embeddedness of the economy within a pre-modern society to the economy’s relative independence in the modern world. Polanyi claims that this divorce of economy and society in the modern world has turned the economy into an enemy of humanity and a destructive force in society.

Recent developments in economic and social theory demonstrate that Polanyi’s assumption concerning the independence of economy is based on a flaw in the economic theory of his time rather than the actual character of the economy in modern society. It is now widely acknowledged that economic agency in modern society is not based on a purely economic rationality, as most economists argued in the early and mid-20th century. If there was no social component in economic agency, Japanese and American capitalism would be identical, but every head of a multi-national company will testify that they are not. Differences in culture, mentality and history create vast differences in how the economy works, and consequently, the economy is also socially embedded in the modern world.

With such a basic flaw in the substantivist theory, their other basic assumption – that humans in pre-modern times acted according to a social rather than an economic rationality – also collapses. The substantivist view is too polarised. Human transactions in modern as well as in pre-modern

² E.g. K. Polanyi, *The great transformation*, New York, 1944. K. Polanyi, *Primitive, Archaic and Modern Economies. Essays of Karl Polanyi*, Boston, 1968. E.g. G. Dalton, «Karl Polanyi’s Analysis of long-distance Trade and his wider Paradigm», in *Ancient Civilization and Trade*, eds J. A. Sabloff, C. C. Lamberg-Karlovsky, Albuquerque, 1975, p. 63-132; G. Dalton, «Aboriginal economies in stateless societies», in *Exchange systems in prehistory*, eds T.K. Earle, J.E. Ericson, New York, 1977, p. 191-212.

societies have *both* economic and social motives, but the mentality of the two parties, as well as the context and circumstances of the transaction will limit their opportunities to display economic motives openly³.

It is within the compass of human possibility to produce and exchange goods as both an economic and a social agent at the same time. Production and exchange have a dominant economic character under some circumstances and a dominant social character under others, but they will always have both. Social conditions present people with the opportunities to act within the space marked out between economic gain and social obligations and ambitions. Pierre Bourdieu writes that economic agency is situated in the area between a “man of good faith” who bases all exchange on trust and generosity and “the shady dealer”, who always allows “interested calculation” to govern his business⁴.

It follows that each society’s economic history has to be examined empirically. The market is not an ahistorical entity: markets should be regarded as “historically variable social organisations constituted by traders”⁵. Investigations of individual markets must map out their specific social parameters, and explore the economic agency acted out within those social parameters. In this way, ancient markets do not appear as theoretical abstractions based upon assumptions about the profit-maximising tendencies of humankind – what classic economists call ‘the invisible hand of the market’. Rather, markets appear as concrete, historical formations with real actors who exploit opportunities for economic and social gain with reference to cultural norms, social relationships, social conflicts, structures of power, and laws. As the sociologist John Lie puts it: “Rather than *assuming* the invisible hand, we should *investigate* the concrete social relations of those who buy and sell; the visible hand of the market”⁶. I will try and sketch the outlines of such an analysis below.

Three criteria, four types of sites

One essential factor for sorting through specialised sites of trade and craft is tracing where the people who travelled to these sites came from. Did they come from within the same region, from neighbouring regions, or

³ D. Skre, «Post-Substantivist Towns and Trade AD 600-1000», in *Means of Exchange. Dealing with Silver in the Viking Age*, ed. D. Skre, Århus, 2008, p. 327-341, p. 333-335.

⁴ P. Bourdieu, *The logic of practice*, Oxford, 1990, p. 113-116.

⁵ J. Lie, «Embedding Polanyi’s Market Society», *Sociological Perspectives*, 34 (1991), p. 219-235, 227.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 230, my italics.

were they long-distance travellers? Bourdieu shows why distance is an important criterion by highlighting the differences between *dense* and *loose* social networks. When trade partners are connected in intimate and long-term relationships they have little scope for economic agency⁷. On the other hand, trade with outsiders has an element of mistrust and conflict which lies not in the demonstration of restraint and generosity, but rather in coming out of the transaction with an advantage⁸. You don't cheat your neighbour, but you merrily cheat the stranger, and your friends will honour you for it. Therefore my *first criterion*: Did interregional, intraregional or long-distance trade take place on the site?

The density of a network is not just dependent on geographical distance. Relatives may live far from each other but still hold more social obligations to each other than neighbours. Normally, such long-distance close relationships occur in higher social levels; it is what Colin Renfrew and John Cherry called "peer polity interaction"⁹. The type of trade relationship discussed in this paper took place primarily within lower social levels. The economic aspect of peer polity interaction will be discussed briefly later.

My second criterion has to do with the social environment of craftsmen and tradesmen. If they travelled from a seasonal market to a magnate farm and then on to a third kind of place, they engaged in a variety of social contexts and economic environments, most of the time in dense networks. If they, however, lived permanently in a specialised site for craft and trade, most of their social and economic network would be categorised as loose. The survival of craftsmen and tradesmen in such sites is based on several daily transactions taking place in an environment of numerous potential buyers and suppliers. Therefore a permanent community of traders and craftsmen will develop a different economic reality and mentality than a community with only seasonal sites. Therefore, my *second criterion* distinguishes between specialised sites of trade and craft that were seasonal and those that were permanently settled.

The third criterion recognises that economy is not only entangled in social relations but also in political structures. Kings established towns, magnates founded markets, and these types of context influence the eco-

⁷ P. Bourdieu, *The logic of practice*, p. 115.

⁸ I. Gustin, *Mellan gåva och marknad. Handel, tillit och materiell kultur under vikingatid*, Lund, 2004, p. 166-174. D. Skre, «Towns and Markets, Kings and Central Places in South-western Scandinavia c. AD 800–950», in *Kaupang in Skiringssal*, ed. D. Skre, Århus, 2007, p. 445-469, p. 450-452.

⁹ C. Renfrew, J. Cherry, *Peer polity interaction and socio-political change*, Cambridge, 1986.

conomic life, as shown below. The political context of a site is therefore my *third criterion*.

Central-place markets

Prior to c.700 all specialised sites of trade and craft in Scandinavia were located in high-ranking central-places. Examples include Gudme/Lundeborg at Fyn, Uppåkra in Skåne, Tissø in Sjælland, Sorte Muld at Bornholm, Helgö at the mouth of Lake Mälaren and Old Uppsala in Uppland (figs. 1 and 2). The earliest of these specialised sites occurred c.AD 200 (e.g. Gudme/Lundeborg and Helgö). Around 550-600 several of these sites were abandoned (e.g. Gudme/Lundeborg) and new ones occurred (e.g. Tissø and Old Uppsala). All of them were finally abandoned c.1000 (fig. 2).

Among the many functions of the central-place – e.g. legal, cultic, social and political – all of the mentioned sites also had seasonal markets. The markets coincided with sacrificial feasts and legal assemblies, which met at the central-place. On some of these sites, like Uppåkra and Helgö, there are numerous high-status artefacts. They probably arrived there through peer polity interaction, that is, mostly as gifts, not as a result of trade. Most of the artefacts are not aimed at the higher social levels but at the common man. Judged from the evidence found at the market site, trade was mainly inter-regional and to a small extent also intra-regional. I call these market sites *central-place markets*.

Callmer interprets the finds from Southern Sweden to suggest that craftsmen in this area prior to c.700 produced mainly unique items, presumably to specifications given directly by the buyer¹⁰. Craftsmen were primarily confined to their respective regions, and within the parameters of dense social networks.

Since production was made to order, both production and trading of the products would have established a relationship between the producer and the customer. This relationship would have lasted from the first contact concerning what was to be produced, through the stages of specification and manufacture, and on to delivery and payment, that is, through several days, while a simple purchase of a pre-produced item would last only a few minutes. The duration of the relationship between producers of unique items and their customers would create a denser relationship between them

¹⁰ J. Callmer, «Hantverksproduktion, samhällsförändringar och bebyggelse. Iakttagelser från östra Sydsandinavien ca. 600-1100 e.Kr.», in *Produksjon og samfunn. Om erverv, spesialisering og bosetning i Norden i 1. årtusen e.Kr.*, ed. H.G. Resi, Oslo, 1995, p. 39-72, 65-66.

which probably involved some element of power, and this left the two parties little scope for economic agency¹¹.

As is well documented for later periods, trade prices in dense networks were strongly controlled by traditional valuations¹². This stability of commodity value was not a result of an external power sanctioning breaches of the norm, nor was it dependent on whether the relationships between trading partners were hierarchical. The reason for the price stability was that excessive pricing was heavily sanctioned by the community – the man who showed himself to be greedy was no longer considered to be a man of honour. Both parties were obliged to respect social norms. They had to place “honour before profit”, as Helgi Þorláksson has put it¹³.

Still, the high numbers of traders and craftsmen present at the central-place markets must have put these conventions under pressure. This pressure does not materialise significantly in the archaeological material, except for some evidence indicating that early mass production among metal casters appear on such sites.

Local and nodal markets

From c. 700, seasonal market sites were established in a different context; they appear to have had no connections to central-places. Some examples include Löddeköpinge in Skåne, Sebbesund in Jutland and Fröjel in Gotland (figs. 1 and 2).

Johan Callmer concludes that goods produced at these sites had a mainly regional distribution¹⁴. Søren Sindbæk's analysis of the artefactual evidence from such sites concludes that there are very few traces of long-distance trade¹⁵. The craft production conducted there, such as combmaking and iron-working, was based upon local raw materials. I call these sites *local markets*.

¹¹ P. Bourdieu, *The logic of practice*, p. 115; D. Skre, «Post-Substantivist».

¹² A. Steinnes, «Mål, vekt og verderekning i Noreg i millomalderen og ei tid etter», in *Maal og Vægt*, Stockholm, 1936, p. 84-154. K. Lunden, *Økonomi og samfunn. Synspunkt på økonomisk historie*, Oslo, 1972. H.P. Naumann, «Warenpreise und Wertverhältnisse im alten Norden», in *Untersuchungen zu Handel und Verkehr der vor- und frühgeschichtlichen Zeit im Mittel- und Nordeuropa. Teil IV: Der Handel der Karolinger- und Wikingerzeit*, eds, K. Düwel, H. Jankuhn, H. Siems, D. Timpe, Göttingen, 1987, p. 374-389.

¹³ H. Þorláksson, «Social ideals and the concept of profit in thirteenth century Iceland», in *From sagas to society. Comparative approaches to Early Iceland*, ed. G. Pálsson, Enfield Lock, 1992, p. 231-245, 233, 242.

¹⁴ J. Callmer, «Hantverksproduktion».

¹⁵ S. M. Sindbæk, *Ruter og rutinisering. Vikingetidens fjernhandel i Nordeuropa*, København, 2005.

Two seasonal sites that emerged in the early 8th century had a different character. At Åhus in Skåne and Ribe in Western Jutland, there is a high



1. The various types of specialized sites for trade and craft in Scandinavia c. 600-1000 AD. Only some well documented examples of central-place markets and local markets are shown, while all the known nodal markets and towns are displayed.

proportion of long-distance goods, as well as numerous traces of crafts based on raw materials brought in through long-distance trade, like large-scale glass-bead production and metal casting. Ribe is well suited for long-distance trade, located in the border-zone between the Danes and Frisians. Åhus had a similar, liminal location, in the border-zone between southwestern Scandinavia, possibly within an early Danish kingdom, and the Baltic zone, comprised of Slavs, Swedes and other potential

trading partners¹⁶. I call these seasonal border sites with long-distance trade *nodal markets*.

The presence of long-distance tradesmen at nodal markets meant that the networks which connected producer, seller and buyer were much looser than at local markets and central-place markets. Consequently, the scope for economic agency at nodal markets must have been much greater. This opportunity for economic agency emerged primarily in transactions between Scandinavians and foreign traders, probably Frisians and Slavs. However, the public revelation of the economic character of these transactions would have had consequences for the remaining trade and production that took place at nodal markets.

The most evident consequence is the change from the production of one-off items to the mass production of various kinds of goods. The first substantial evidence of the mass production of identical items and the standardisation of specific types is found at Ribe and Åhus in the 8th century. This was a style of production in which the consumer, rather than specifying a personal order and awaiting manufacture was faced with finished goods which he or she was invited to buy.

The earliest evidence of this shift is indicated in the production of glass-beads and copper-alloy jewellery, both examples of production for which the craftsman had to obtain raw materials from long-distance traders¹⁷. Mass production would be motivated by a wish to reduce production costs, and its emergence is therefore an indication of a different economic mentality with a more open display of economic agency. This mentality probably originated in these craftsmen's dealings with long-distance traders from whom they obtained their raw materials. One may therefore say that these craftsmen literally embodied the change in economic mentality that took place at the nodal markets.

Towns

Around 800, four specialised, permanently settled trade and craft sites were established – Hedeby, Birka, Ribe and Kaupang (figs. 1 and 2). These sites are similar in regards to plot division, house types, layout etc. I have chosen to call them *towns*.

¹⁶ D. Skre, «Post-Substantivist», p. 339.

¹⁷ J. Callmer, «Hantverksproduktion», p. 53-57. C. Feveile, S. Jensen, «Ribe in the 8th and 9th Century. A Contribution to the Archaeological Chronology of North Western Europe», *Acta Archaeologica*, 71 (2000), p. 9-24, 17, 22.

	Permanence	Trade	Context	Site, Date	1000	900	800	700	600
1. Central-place markets	Seasonal	Inter- / intraregional	Central place	Old Uppsala	[Bar chart showing activity from ~550 to 1000]				
				Tissø	[Bar chart showing activity from ~550 to 1000]				
2. Local markets	Seasonal	Intraregional	Independent	Uppåkra	[Bar chart showing activity from ~550 to 1000]				
				Helgö	[Bar chart showing activity from ~550 to 1000]				
3. Nodal markets	Seasonal	Long distance, inter- / intraregional	Border area	Sorte Muld	[Bar chart showing activity from ~550 to 1000]				
				Lundeborg	[Bar chart showing activity from ~550 to 1000]				
4. Towns	Permanent	Long distance, inter- / intraregional	Border area	Löddeköpinge	[Bar chart showing activity from ~550 to 1000]				
				Sebbersund	[Bar chart showing activity from ~550 to 1000]				
				Fröjel	[Bar chart showing activity from ~550 to 1000]				
				Ribe I	[Bar chart showing activity from ~550 to 1000]				
				Åhus I-II	[Bar chart showing activity from ~550 to 1000]				
				Ribe II	[Bar chart showing activity from ~550 to 1000]				
				Hedeby	[Bar chart showing activity from ~550 to 1000]				
				Kaupang	[Bar chart showing activity from ~550 to 1000]				
				Birka	[Bar chart showing activity from ~550 to 1000]				

2. The chronological distribution of the four types of specialized sites for trade and craft in Scandinavia.

I agree with Sindbæk that these four sites in Scandinavia are the only sites that show a significant and lasting connection with long-distance trade systems before the 11th century¹⁸. This long-distance connection is represented by the large quantities of goods imported from outside Scandinavia. In addition, these four sites have a broad range of craftwork made from imported raw materials, like metal-casting and glass-bead production. Furthermore, the quantity of balances, weights and coins, and evidence that silver was used as currency, occur earlier and much more substantially at these four sites than at the seasonal sites.

I have analysed the three towns in south-western Scandinavia in the border zone of the Danish kingdom, all of which seem to have been founded within one decade on either side of the year 800¹⁹. At this time, the kingdom was firmly established by King Sigfred and his son, Godfred. It appears that first, Ribe was converted from a seasonal site to a permanently settled site in the 790s. Thereafter, Kaupang was established around 800 and Hedeby was founded in 808. Ribe borders the territory of the Frisians, Kaupang lies on the northern fringe of what was then the kingdom of the Danes, on the border with the Northmen, and Hedeby lies on the border with the Western Slavs. The border locations of these three towns follow a pattern of earlier town foundations from the English kingdoms and Carolingian empire. It seems that Sigfred and Godfred have attempted to build a kingdom modelled along those foundations.

The foundation of towns meant that craftsmen were not confined to aristocratic residences²⁰. Thus, production became more independent of the elite and the power-relations between craftsmen and lords disappeared. This independence came with a price: craftsmen became dependent upon their own productivity and sales in order to support themselves.

As the inhabitants of the towns did not produce their own food – apart from keeping a pig or two and occasionally hunting or fishing – they depended upon farms in the agrarian hinterland. Less aristocratic dominance and a recent dependence on buying food for sustenance must be the two reasons for a further surge in the standardised mass production that began at the earlier nodal markets. Greater dependence on the marketing of their products will have led to greater display of economic agency amongst the permanently settled craftsmen.

¹⁸ S. M. Sindbæk, *Ruter*.

¹⁹ D. Skre, «Towns and Markets»; D. Skre, «Post-Substantivist».

²⁰ See E. Hjärthner-Holdar, K. Lamm, B. Magnus, «Metalworking and Central Places», in *Central Places in the Migration and Merovingian Periods. Papers from the 52nd Sachsensymposium Lund, August 2001*, eds B. Hårdh, L. Larsson, Lund, 2002, p. 159-183.

Because of this newfound dependence on selling and buying, townsfolk performed a large number of transactions. This alone would have increased awareness of the economic rather than the social aspect of the deals. Nevertheless, the situation could hardly have been one of purely an economic enterprise. Even within the town, the exercise of economic agency had to be balanced against social norms for relationships with other townsfolk, with the town authorities, with the suppliers of agricultural produce in the hinterland, and with customers and suppliers from further afield. Still, the many transactions of town-life, and the activity of the residents within loose networks, must have put those conventions under pressure, and they must have changed quite significantly during the 9th and 10th centuries as a result. This is mirrored in the changes in currency during this period.

Trade and currency

As is evident from the above, specialised sites for trade and craft have existed in Scandinavia since c.AD 200 and onwards. There are some major leaps in the development of such sites – the first occurred c.700, when the first independent seasonal markets were established and long-distance trade independent of peer polity interaction was introduced. The second leap was c.800 when the first towns were established. There is a third leap, which I have touched upon only in passing – around 1000: all four of the early towns were abandoned, as were the old high-ranking central-places, and numerous towns of a new type were established. Unlike the four early towns, these new towns were administrative centres for the king and the Church in addition to being centres for trade and craft production²¹.

In scholarly literature, the concept of money is often confused with the concept of coinage. In many societies coinage was the most important type of money, but that is not necessarily the case everywhere; other media could also serve as money. To be called money, a medium must have two functions, that of being a *means of payment* and that of being a *unit for measuring the value* of other media. Coinage has both those functions and so does weighed silver, but many other media might also have them. Most such media differ from coinage and weighed silver in that they also have a *utilitarian value*. Such money, like coco beans and pigs, are normally called *commodity money*. Coinage has no utilitarian value and that of silver is limited to the needs of the silver smith.

²¹ D. Skre, «Centrality and places. The central place Skiringssal in Vestfold, Norway», *Studien zur Sachsenforschung* 1, p. 220-231.

A system of commodity money is well-known from Norway in the High Middle Ages. Written evidence from that period testifies that the value of every type of commodity was fixed in relation to a rather small number of commodities, normally cloth, grain or cattle. Therefore, in addition to being commodities, cloth, grain and cattle were also units of value. In this period, coinage and weighed silver were also used as money. Systems of commodity money are well known from societies with developed coinage (e.g. the Carolingian Empire), as well as from numerous coin-less societies²².

Coinage and weighed silver began to be used alongside commodity money in the Viking Period. There are interesting connections between the development in types of money and the development in specialised sites for trade and craft. Those parallels illustrate what kind of circumstances triggered the use of the non-commodity types of money.

Scales, weights, and weight-adjusted-arm and neck-rings dated to the beginning of the First Millennium leave no doubt that precious metals were valued according to weight. But they do not seem to have been a frequently used means of payment. If they had been, cut-up gold and silver would be a common find in contexts where trade took place, as well as among personal belongings (e.g. in furnished burials)²³. Few such pieces have been found in these contexts, so the use of such means of payment seems to have been very limited.

Perhaps surprisingly, it was not weighed bullion, but coinage, which was the first non-commodity type of money to be extensively used in Scandinavia, although only within small communities of a specific type. In the early 8th century the first Scandinavian coins, *sceatta*, were struck in Ribe; and minting continued there until the town was abandoned in the mid-9th century. By that time, minting had started in Hedeby, where it continued into the 11th century despite some pauses. Throughout this period, from the early 8th century until around 1000, the use of coinage as currency rather than pieces of silver was confined to Ribe and Hedeby – it did not penetrate into seasonal markets or rural areas²⁴.

²² E.g. K. Lunden, «Money Economy in Medieval Norway», *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 24 (1999), p. 245-265. C. Kilger, «Wholeness and Holiness. Counting, Weighing and Valuing Silver in the Early Viking Period», in *Means of Exchange. Dealing with Silver in the Viking Age*, ed. D. Skre, Århus, 2008, p. 253-325, 270-271.

²³ D. Skre, «Commodity money, silver and coinage in Viking-Age Scandinavia», in *Silver Economies, Monetisation and Society in Scandinavia 800-1100*, eds S. M. Sindbæk, J. Graham-Campbell, G. Williams, Århus, in prep.

²⁴ C. Feveile, «Mønterne fra det ældste Ribe», in *Det ældste Ribe. Udgravninger på nord-siden af Ribe Å 1984-2000*, ed. C. Feveile, Højbjerg, 2006, p. 279-312. B. Malmer, «South Scandinavian Coinage in the Ninth Century», in *Silver economy in the Viking age*, eds J. Graham-Campbell, G. Williams, Walnut Creek, CA, 2007, p. 13-27.

The use of cut silver as money has a parallel history, although it takes place somewhat later than in Ribe and Hedeby and elsewhere. The first clear signs of cut silver as means of payment in market transactions occurred a century after the first coining in Ribe. The earliest pieces of cut silver in the town Kaupang, as well as the first weights necessary for weighing the silver, were found in layers dating from the second quarter of the 9th century²⁵. The use of weighed silver as means of payment in Kaupang increased in volume in the second half of the 9th century²⁶.

In the same period that weighed silver was first used as means of payment in Kaupang, weighed silver in the shape of Islamic coins was also deposited in hoards in a totally rural context on the shores of the southern Baltic Sea. Around 825, hoarding of Islamic silver coins started on the Baltic island of Gotland, which was a hub in Baltic trade. This silver arrived via the Russian rivers, where trade with the Caliphate had opened up in this period. In the following decades, such hoarding spread to most coasts of the southern Baltic Sea²⁷.

As can be seen, the use of coinage and weighed silver as payment was taken up in regions and on sites which were connected to long-distance trade areas with a well developed coin economy. In the 8th century, Ribe was connected into the Frisian trade where silver coinage was the accepted means of payment. In the early 9th century, Hedeby and Kaupang were connected into the same network, and it is evident that Frisian traders visited and settled in Kaupang during that period²⁸. Trade between the southern

²⁵ U. Pedersen, «Weights and balances», in *Means of Exchange. Dealing with Silver in the Viking Age*, ed. D. Skre, Århus, 2008, p. 119–195, 130, 162. In Birka both weights and pieces of silver are found from the late 8th century onwards, but the pre-850 finds stem from a metal workshop and might be related to metalwork, not payment, see I. Gustin, «Means of Payment and the Use of coins in the Viking Age town of Birka in Sweden. Preliminary Results», *Current Swedish Archaeology*, 6 (1998), p. 73–83, 78.

²⁶ M. Blackburn, «The Coin-finds», in *Means of Exchange. Dealing with Silver in the Viking Period*, ed. D. Skre, Århus, 2008, p. 29–74. B. Hårdh, «Hacksilver and Ingots», in *Means of Exchange. Dealing with Silver in the Viking Age*, ed. D. Skre, Århus, 2008, p. 95–118. U. Pedersen, «Weights and balances».

²⁷ C. Kilger, «Kaupang from Afar. Aspects of the Interpretation of Dirham Finds in Northern and Eastern Europe between the Late 8th and Early 10th Centuries», in *Means of Exchange. Dealing with Silver in the Viking Age*, ed. D. Skre, Århus, 2008, p. 199–252, 214–229.

²⁸ D. Skre, «The Inhabitants: Activities», in *Things from the Town. Artefacts and Inhabitants in Viking-age Kaupang*, ed. D. Skre, Århus, 2011, p. 397–415. D. Skre, «The Inhabitants: Origins and Trading Connections», in *Things from the Town. Artefacts and Inhabitants in Viking-age Kaupang*, ed. D. Skre, Århus, 2011, p. 417–441.

Baltic and the Islamic coin economy was taken up at the same time that silver hoards emerged.

It seems rather obvious why the long-distance connection to Frisian and Islamic trade spurred the minting and use of coins in both Ribe and Hedeby, as well as the use of cut silver as payment in Kaupang and the hoarding of silver in the southern Baltic. When travelling long distances, commodities are not very convenient to bring as means of payment – silver is much handier. In addition, foreign traders would demand silver as payment for their goods, it was the means of payment needed when they returned to Frisian or Islamic areas.

But there must be more to it, because coinage and weighed silver played a different role in Scandinavian towns than they did in the southern Baltic countryside. Most Gotlandic hoards contain large quantities of coins and should be understood as the working capital of long-distance tradesmen who collected this currency in their dealings along the Russian rivers. They stored their coins beneath the floors of their houses in Gotland until it was time to venture on a new trade expedition. There is little sign that Islamic silver was used as means of payment in intra- and interregional markets in the Baltic before the last quarter of the 9th century. At that time, the introduction of a more precise type of standardised weights and increased hoarding, demonstrate that silver had become a routine means of payment in Baltic trade.

This is rather different from the development in towns, where the use of silver appeared in the second quarter of the 9th century, not only in long-distance transactions, but also as a means of payment between town residents. Small pieces of silver jewellery, ingots and coins would have been used in small-scale day-to-day transactions and transactions with Frisian traders would involve higher values and therefore, larger pieces of silver. The cutting-up of silver into small pieces is primarily observed in Kaupang and somewhat later in the seasonal local markets and central-place markets in the Baltic.

The reason for this development in towns is twofold. First, as discussed above, craftsmen changed their production to suit the context of the market. They therefore became less dependent on protection from an aristocratic benefactor and more dependent on selling and buying for their day-to-day survival. The same is the case for other town residents. Because of the frequency of transactions in everyday life, craftsmen and townsfolk had a great need for currency which all participating parties would be willing to accept and for a common measure of value to which various forms of craftwork and other goods could be priced. Silver in Kaupang

and coinage in Ribe and Hedeby seems to have become the common currencies and they remained so throughout the towns' existence.

In the 9th century currency development seems to have been confined to seasonal markets and towns. The hoards found elsewhere are few and rather large, and they are probably the savings of traders who took part in long-distance trade – some of these hoards may have been the loot of raiders. But in the 10th century, silver hoards turn up in larger numbers in rural areas and they contain small pieces of cut-up silver²⁹, indicating that weighed silver also had become an accepted means of payment in rural areas. But life in rural areas continued to be very different from that in towns. The vast majority of people were directly or indirectly engaged in food-production, which meant that they performed few transactions in their daily lives. Their need for silver currency was therefore much lower than the townsfolk's. This is the main reason why, with the exception of High Medieval towns, commodities continued to be the dominant type of money throughout the Middle Ages in many parts of Scandinavia.

Concluding remarks

Although specialised sites for trade and craft had existed since c.200, it was not until the 8th century that substantial changes in economic agency occurred. How should this change be explained?

Until c.700, trade and craft production in central-place markets and in aristocratic manors took place in dense social networks where existing power relations and other social factors restrained the display of economic agency. Also, long-distance goods, which had arrived in Scandinavia in rather large quantities for centuries, were acquired in dense networks through peer polity interaction, mostly as gifts. Such exchange, mainly of high-status items, continued in aristocratic circles for many centuries after 700.

The primary new development from the 8th century onwards was that low-cost goods like textiles, glass-beads, ornaments in amber, jet, and gemstones arrived from distant areas through regular trade. Thereby, long-distance trade goods became accessible and affordable for a wide range of the population. This trade took place beginning in c.700 in nodal markets, from c.800 in towns. Increased supply of raw material from long-distance tradesmen to glass-bead makers and metal casters, as well as the mass-production strategies these producers adopted, made their products obtainable for the common man and woman.

²⁹ B. Hårdh, *Silver in the Viking Age. A regional-economic Study*, Lund, 1996.

It was the loose social connections between buyers and sellers in this new long-distance trade that allowed a more open display of economic agency. Rather rapidly, the economic mentality resulting from that trade affected transactions between people from the region, production strategies of craftsmen and the establishment of local markets for inter-regional trade. The 10th century saw the spread of this economic mentality from specialised sites into the rural countryside. In markets and towns, the traditional value standard came under pressure, but seems to have been maintained in rural areas for centuries, especially in trade involving subsistence goods.

It is worth noting that the use of coinage or weighed silver as money was never a prerequisite for trade to happen, but was spurred by specific circumstances. First, and most importantly, trade with areas that already had a developed coinage or silver economy, since these foreign tradesmen would demand silver or coins as payment. Second, the multiple transactions needed for a non food-producing population to survive in the urban setting stimulated the use of a single, convenient and handy type of money accepted by all. In most other, non-urban settings the frequency of transactions was much lower and the spectre of goods exchanged was much narrower and more predictable, and so commodities were a far more accessible and practical type of currency. Therefore, the presence or absence of coinage and weighed silver is typically indicative of those two circumstances – long-distance trade in an urban setting – not of the presence or frequency of trade or other types of economic activity.

The rather narrow focus of this paper on the activity in specialised sites and the types of money used there only catches certain aspects of the economic dynamics of this period. This is not a comprehensive study of the economic expansion of the 8th-10th centuries in Scandinavia. The fuller story requires discussion not only of craft-production and trade, but also of the production of subsistence goods as well as the conditions for that production. A surplus of food-production was a necessity for all non food-producing activities – like those of tradesmen, craftsmen, miners, iron extractors, warriors and poets – to take place.

The story of food-production is a story of property relations, land management strategies and agricultural techniques. These are more stable structures and conditions than the ones relating to craft and trade. Nevertheless, the agrarian sector is where one must search for some of the basic conditions for the changes that took place in trade and craft production on seasonal markets in the 8th century, as well as the subsequent emergence and development of towns. The increased proportion of the population engaged in non food-producing activities as well as the wider population's ability to purchase ornaments and other non-subsistence goods must have been based on increased surplus-production of subsistence goods.