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Textually Invisible? *Emporia* on the Southern Shore of the Baltic in Scandinavian Medieval Sources

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Introduction

Exchange, hostile conflicts, but also hospitality have connected the populations of the Southern Baltic region since prehistoric times. For the early medieval period (c. 400–1000), the most evocative elements of these processes are no doubt the trading places along the Slavic Baltic coast in today's territories of Schleswig, Mecklenburg, and Pomerania of which, at present, sixteen have been identified.¹ Starting with Janów Pomorski as the easternmost point and ending with Hedeby in the west, these places specialising in craft production and trade were being founded from the early eighth century onwards.²

Whereas such archaeologically well-researched Viking-Age trading sites as Kołobrzeg, Groß Strömkendorf or Wolin form an excellent source for the presence of Scandinavians on the southern shore of the Baltic and their material culture, the sparse

1 These are, starting in the east, Janów Pomorski (Truso), Gdańsk, Puck, Bardy-Świelubie, Kołobrzeg, Kamień Pomorski, Wolin, Szczecin, Usedom, Menzlin, Ralswiek, Rostock-Dierkow, Groß Strömkendorf, Alt Lübeck and Starigard/Oldenburger. In addition to the classification by Hauke Jöns and Sebastian Messal, I am including Hedeny/Schleswig as a vital *emporium* in the Slavic territory. See: Hauke Jöns and Sebastian Messal, "Neue Forschungen zur Struktur mittelalterlicher Hafenanlagen an der südwestlichen Ostseeküste," in: *Economies, Monetisation and Society in the West Slavic Lands 800–1200 AD*, eds. Mateusz Bogucki, Marian Rębkowski (Szczecin: Muzeum Narodowe w Szczecinie, 2013), 26; as well as Hauke Jöns and Anna Kowalska, "Scandinavians on the Southern Baltic Coast," in: *Vikings Across Boundaries. Viking-Age Transformations*, vol. 2, eds. Hanne Lovise Aannestad et al. (London/New York: Routledge, 2021), 47.

2 Jöns and Kowalska, "Scandinavians," 43.

contemporary textual sources on Slavic-Nordic relations in the region provide only a few mosaic stones that at first can hardly be assembled into a more illuminating picture. Therefore, it is no surprise that in the latest volume on Scandinavian cultural elements in medieval Poland, textual sources do not feature prominently.³ If the southern Baltic shore is at all studied from the viewpoint of mobility, the focus is rather on the eastern colonisation by German settlers in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and to the concomitant processes of acculturation and assimilation of the Slavic populations.⁴ Those processes, in turn, accelerated the emergence of a peculiar intercultural sphere known as *Germanica Slavica*, a term coined by the historian Wolfgang H. Fritze in the 1950s, that recently has found a counterpart in the concept of *Slavia Germanica* introduced by Polish research.⁵ Whereas the latter term refers to modern history and is preoccupied with the analysis of archival evidence in the field of cultural studies, *Germania Slavica* serves as a backdrop to investigate the Middle Ages between the rivers Elbe and Saale, and the area's material, onomastic, and textual sources.⁶ The latter evidence suggests a strong Scandinavian agency for territorial claims and hegemony, visible, for instance, in the report of the *Royal Frankish Annals* under the year 808. The source reports on how the Danish king Gudfred (Gøtrik) destroyed the Abodrite emporium Reric (i.e., Groß Strömkendorf near Wismar) and resettled its merchants to Sliesthorp/Hedeby in his own sphere of influence.⁷ However, Scandinavian groups were only one of the many players within the social and trading networks of the early medieval Baltic. From the Anglo-Saxon traveller Wulfstan, who sailed the shores of the southern Baltic for seven days and nights around the year 880, we learn the Old English name for that area: *Weonoðland*, a term reminiscent of the later *Vinðland* ("land of the Wends", i.e., Western Slavs) of the Old Norse accounts from medieval Iceland and Norway. What remains puzzling is that Hedeby (in southern Jutland) and Truso (in the Slavic-Prussian borderland, commonly placed in today's Janów Pomorski near

3 See: Sławomir Moździoch, Błażej Stanisławski, Przemysław Wiszewski, eds. *Scandinavian Culture in Medieval Poland* (Wrocław: Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, 2013).

4 See: Immanuel Ness, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Global Human Migration* (Chichester; Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

5 On the terminology, see: Christian Lübke, "Östliches Europa (Kolonisationen)," in: *Migrationen im Mittelalter: Ein Handbuch*, ed., Michael Borgolte (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 181–192.

6 Jörg Hackmann, "From Germania Slavica to Slavia Germanica?," *Studia Slavica et Balcanica Petropolitana* 2 (2017) 22: 132.

7 Einhard, "Annales regni Francorum," in: *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum Scholarum* 6, ed. Friedrich Kurze (Hannover: Hahn 1895), 126; Christian Lübke, "Die Beziehungen zwischen Elb- und Ostseeslawen und Dänen vom 9. bis zum 12. Jahrhundert: Eine andere Option elbslawischer Geschichte?," in: *Zwischen Reric und Bornhöved. Die Beziehungen zwischen den Dänen und ihren slawischen Nachbarn vom 9. bis ins 13. Jh.*, eds. Ole Harck, Christian Lübke (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2001), 24–25.

Elbląg) are the only trading settlements mentioned by Wulfstan on his journey. The same problem arises when studying the Old Norse source corpus: these narratives, too, name only two trading settlements in the Slavic lands, again Hedeby (ON *Heiðabýr/Heiðabœr/Slésvík*) and Wolin (ON *Jóm/Jómsborg*) at the bank of the Oder River.

Why, then, one might ask, both Wulfstan and the medieval writers of the North omitted the other numerous *emporia* identified by the archaeologists? The aim of this article is thus, first, to review the extant textual sources on the *emporia* Hedeby and Wolin and to contrast them, in a second step, with archaeological data.⁸ A third task consists in a more thorough analysis of the abundant Old Norse literary material on Slavic-Scandinavian encounters at the southern shore of the Baltic during the early medieval period. Considering the existence of Western *emporia* such as Dorestad or Quentovic,⁹ further questions arise regarding the economic relevance that can be attributed to the Scandinavian settlements along the Southern Baltic and what additional information we can deduce to that respect from the written sources. In attempting this, it will first be necessary to put a new focus on the Baltic, and second, to overcome the division of sources by combining the rich literary material from the high medieval North with latest archaeological insights, especially the inflow in silver and the trade in slaves.

What were the *emporia*?

In order to answer the above-outlined questions, it is necessary to discuss the characteristics of the *emporia* within the early medieval trading networks, and to link them to a broader picture of Scandinavian activities. The Latin *emporium* and its plural *emporia* stem from the Ancient Greek *τὸ ἐμπόριον*, a trading place, especially for maritime trade, and thus a term used already by Herodotus and Thucydides. From the first millennium BC, we know, for instance, of Tartessus on the southern coast of the Iberian Peninsula which flourished on the trade in metal with the Carthaginians and Phoenicians until being destroyed by the former around 550 BC.

For the discussion of *emporia*, and here specifically the sites along the Southern Baltic coast, it appears to be vital to provide a concrete definition of the term which remains, however, to be problematic. Thus, eventually, there is no consensus about what

8 See: e.g., Mateusz Bogucki, "On Wulfstan's Right Hand – the Viking Age Emporia in West Slav Lands," in: *From One Sea to Another. Trading Places in the European and Mediterranean Early Middle Ages: Proceedings of the International Conference, Comacchio, 27th–29th March 2009*, eds. Sauro Gelichi, Richard Hodges (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 81–109.

9 For coastal settlements on the British Isles and the continent, see: Christopher Loveluck, *Northwest Europe in the Early Middle Ages, c. AD 600–1150* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 302–360.

archaeological features a place should fulfil to be labelled as an *emporium*. Following a recent definition by the archaeologist Richard Hodges, an *emporium* (or *wic*, as the Western sites were called) was a monopolistic trading centre where merchants and local craftworkers produced and sold their artefacts.¹⁰ Furthermore, they were often located in naturally protected places at the mouths of rivers, or on the border of a political or cultural community.¹¹ The artefactual evidence of burials and cemeteries points towards culturally hybrid communities that were shaped by new religious and economic practices.¹² Nodal points characterised by a particularly lively economic activity, such as Hedeby and Wolin, served as centres for the accumulation and distribution of goods, and concentrated an extraordinary number of links within a network of long-distance raiding and trading.¹³ Those hubs, as has been stressed recently by Søren M. Sindbæk, eventually made the large world of the Viking Age “small.”¹⁴

A new focus on the Baltic

The contemporary perceptions of the those seafaring Scandinavians labelled as “Vikings” are primarily shaped by Anglo-Saxon texts such as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* or the works of the English cleric Alcuin (735–804), who bemoaned in 797 the terror of a pagan people laying waste to the British shores.¹⁵ Based on these accounts, modern scholarship, in particular written in English, determined two pivotal dates framing a period of profound cultural, socio-political, and economic transformation known as the Viking Age, namely the year 793, when Scandinavian pirates assaulted the Northumbrian monastery on the island of Lindisfarne, and the year 1066, the date of the battle of Stamford Bridge between the Norwegian king Haraldr harðráði (“Hard-Ruler”, 1015–1066) and the Earl of Wessex, Harold Godwinsson (1022–1066), both claiming to be the legitimate heirs to the English throne.

10 Richard Hodges, *Dark Age Economics. The Origins of Towns and Trade, AD 600–1000* (London: Duckworth, 1982), 6.

11 Bogucki, “Wulfstan,” 82, 87.

12 Ulf Näsman, “Exchange and Politics: The Eighth–Early Ninth Century in Denmark,” in: *The Long Eighth Century: Production, Distribution and Demand*, eds. Chris Wickham, Inge Lyse Hansen (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2000), 35–68.

13 Søren M. Sindbæk, “Urbanism and Exchange in the North Atlantic/Baltic, 600–1000CE,” in: *The Routledge Handbook of Archaeology and Globalization*, ed. Tamar Hodos (New York/London: Routledge, 2017), 556–557.

14 Søren M. Sindbæk, “The Small World of the Vikings: Networks in Early Medieval Communication and Exchange,” *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 40 (2007): 59–74.

15 “[...] et numquam talis terror prius apparuit in Brittannia ueluti modo a pagana gente perpassi sumus.” See: Colin Chase, ed. *Two Alcuin Letter-books*. Toronto Medieval Latin Texts 5, (Toronto: The Centre for Medieval Studies by the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1975), 53.

But where were the seafaring Vikings before the spring of 793? The latest archaeological research has proposed an important corrective to the Anglocentric timeframe of the Viking Age. It instead puts a new focus on the Baltic area and, more precisely, on the coastal village of Salme on the Estonian island of Saaremaa. From 2008 to 2012, rescue excavations led by Jüri Peets of Tallinn University revealed two boat burials which became the final resting place for 41 warriors.¹⁶ The richly decorated grave goods complemented by isotopic data suggest that the crew originated in the central Swedish region around lake Mälaren and met a sudden death when exploring the Estonian shores around 750. This unique find leads to nuance the narrative of a Viking Age initiated by Norse pirates raiding the British shores for material wealth and social power. Thus, as richly decorated weapons and two hawks – perhaps diplomatic gifts – suggest, Swedish elite warriors operated in the Eastern Baltic at least half a century prior to the unduly famous Lindisfarne incident. However, to merely shift the beginning of the Viking Age to the mid-eighth century would be “as arbitrary as the plunder of the monastery at Lindisfarne.”¹⁷ Thus, it remains to be explained to what extent the intensive interactions of the ninth century were based on pre-existing trading and raiding networks in the Baltic during the Vendel period (c. 600–800) that involved not only Scandinavian and Slavic but also Baltic and Finno-Ugric actors.¹⁸

As reflected in several recent publications, the finds from Salme sparked a new interest in the Baltic,¹⁹ an area that had played only a subordinate role in the scientific discourse of the past decades. This neglect – which might be explained by linguistic and political barriers in the context of the Cold War²⁰ – conflicts with the fact that the southern Baltic coast attracted for centuries mobility of various kinds. It, thus, offers an excellent background for the study of migration phenomena in general²¹ and the mobilities of early medieval Scandinavians in particular. Differently from the violent Viking incursions against the British Isles and the Frankish Empire, the rich archaeological evidence as well as a few contemporary textual sources testify to lasting cultural contacts

16 T. Douglas Price, Jüri Peets, Raili Allmäe, Liina Maldre, and Ester Oras. “Isotopic Provenancing of the Salme Ship Burials in Pre-Viking Age Estonia,” *Antiquity* 90 (2016), 352: 1022–1037. DOI: 10.15184/aqy.2016.106.

17 Julie Lund, and Søren Michael Sindbæk, “Crossing the Maelstrom: New Departures in Viking Archaeology,” *Journal of Archaeological Research* 30 (2022), 173. DOI: 10.1007/s10814-021-09163-3.

18 See: Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson, “Entering the Viking Age,” in: *Relations and Runes: The Baltic Islands and their Interactions during the Late Iron Age and Early Middle Ages*, eds. Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson, Laila Kitzler Åhfeldt, Per Widerström, Ben Raffield (Visby: Riksantikvarieämbetet, 2020), 19–20.

19 See: e.g., Moździoch et al., *Scandinavian culture*.

20 Sarah Croix, “The Vikings, Victims of their Own Success? A Selective View on Viking Research and its Dissemination,” *Danish Journal of Archaeology* 4 (2015), 1: 82–96. DOI: 10.1080/21662282.2015.1133944.

21 Oliver Auge, “Ostseeraum,” in: *Migrations im Mittelalter: Ein Handbuch*, ed. Michael Borgolte (Berlin/München/Boston: De Gruyter, 2014), 193.

between the populations interacting in the southern Baltic Sea region.²² Archaeological finds from Mecklenburg and Pomorze dated to the seventh century indicate that Scandinavians explored the sparsely inhabited southern shore of the Baltic even before Slavic groups migrated to these regions. The earliest landing sites, prefiguring the later *emporía*, may have served as bases for fur hunting and, thus, as an economic pull-factor, although the coastal areas of the southern Baltic must have constituted a constant sphere of interest for seafarers from the North.²³

Silver flows to the North

The emergence of the *emporía* in the Baltic is associated with an intensified wave of migration from Scandinavia in the second quarter of the eighth century, with recent studies suggesting a long-lasting Scandinavian presence in the polyethnic Viking-Age trading centres of Groß Strömkendorf (Reric), Menzlin, Ralswiek on Rügen, Usedom, and Bardy/Świelubie. The economic flows that are characteristic to all *emporía*, are expressed in the numerous finds of silver dirhams that reached northern Europe in enormous quantities in the ninth and tenth centuries, according to Marek Jankowiak up to tens of millions.²⁴ Hoarded as coins, but also recast into necklaces, bracelets and ingots, silver from the Islamic world formed an important economic basis in early medieval northern Europe.²⁵

Emporia: Hubs for the slave trade?

However, both archaeological sources such as silver dirhams, iron chains and bones as well as written evidence as Rimbert's *Vita Anskarii* (c. 865–876), attest to a darker side of intercultural and economic interactions, namely the trade in slaves that has been

22 See: Leszek Gardela, "Vikings in Poland. A Critical Overview," in: *Viking Worlds: Things, Spaces and Movement*, eds. Marianne Hem Eriksen et al. (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2015), 213–234.

23 Felix Biermann, "Zentralisierungsprozesse bei den nördlichen Elbslawen," in: *Zentralisierungsprozesse und Herrschaftsbildung im frühmittelalterlichen Ostmitteleuropa. Studien zur Archäologie Europas 23*, ed. Przemysław Sikora (Bonn: Habelt, 2014), 162.

24 See: Marek Jankowiak, "The Flows of Dirhams to North-eastern Europe and the Rhythms of the Slave Trade with the Islamic world," in: *Viking-Age Trade: Silver, Slaves and Gotland*, eds. Jacek Gruszczyński, Jonathan Shepard, Marek Jankowiak (London/New York: Routledge, 2021), 105.

25 However, the influx of Islamic silver to the North came to an abrupt end in the mid-tenth century, that according to Marek Jankowiak led to a reorientation of the Central-European slave trade to the markets of the Iberian Peninsula, particular al-Andalus. See: Marek Jankowiak, "Two systems of trade in the Western Slavic lands in the 10th century," in: *Economies, Monetisation and Society in the West Slavic Lands*, eds. Mateusz Bogucki, Marian Rębkowski, 143–144.

used by Marek Jankowiak as the main framework to explain the massive inflow of dirhams to the Southern Baltic shores. As has been earlier evidenced by Jankowiak, this is particularly visible in the form of the Khazar dirham imitations that illustrate the slave trade between Kyivan Rus' and the Islamic world.²⁶

Abducted individuals thus provided a major object of exchange, and again, it is the *emporia* with their harbours, specialised markets, and hinterlands that served as potential hubs for the early medieval slave trade. However, silver coins were also found outside of the coastal trading sites, particularly in the large Feldberg type strongholds built in East Holstein, Mecklenburg, as well as in northern parts of Wielkopolska and Brandenburg in the ninth century. Their distribution deep within the Slavic settlement area indicates that Slavs themselves were important actors in the hunt for and trade in slaves. As Felix Biermann suggested, the threat of being captured, enslaved, and sold might also have contributed to processes of economic centralisation and social stabilisation among the Slavs in the south-western Baltic regions.²⁷ Thus, the massive fortifications appear precisely in those regions where written sources, e.g., the *Annales Regni Francorum*, indicate a political development with more complex structures, such as among the Abodrites and Wilzi in Mecklenburg and Pomerania.²⁸ In addition to the centres' peculiar economic dynamics, another characteristic is their ethnic diversity resulting from processes of exchange and cultural transfer between populations of different origins. Decisive are here mainly Nordic dress components and jewellery, but also boat burials (Groß Strömkendorf and Ralswiek) and ship-shaped Viking graves (Menzlin). Comprehensive anthropological studies on the latter revealed the stone settings as Scandinavian female graves containing numerous burial goods like Slavic pottery and Scandinavian jewellery which suggests that Slavic and Scandinavian populations practiced a peaceful "convivencia" in the Slavic settlement areas.²⁹

Taking this general outline on the characteristics of the Baltic *emporia* as a starting point, the following discussion will look more precisely into the literary and textual evidence on the cultural and economic importance of the emporium Hedeby, in order to provide a background for data gleaned from the Old Norse sources.

26 Ibidem, 140.

27 Felix Biermann, "Archaeological Evidence for Slavery Among the Early Medieval North-Western Slavs," in: *The Archaeology of Slavery in Early Medieval Northern Europe: The Invisible Commodity*, eds. Felix Biermann, Marek Jankowiak (Cham: Springer, 2021), 154.

28 Einhard, "Annales regni Francorum."

29 Magdalena Naum, "Convivencia in a Borderland: the Danish-Slavic Border in the Middle Ages," *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* 28 (2013), 1: 75–93.

The emporium *Heiðabýr* in literary sources

Due to its convenient location on the inner Schlei firth, about 40 km from the Baltic Sea, Hedeby played a prominent role in the early medieval trade in the North Sea and the Baltic. At the latter's southern shores, we encounter Polabian tribes such as the Abodrites who bordered with Saxons and Franks in the south and with Frisians in the west. Constant exchange and trade determined the apparently mostly peaceful relations between Slavs and Scandinavians. Nonetheless, armed conflicts repeatedly erupted, such as in the case of the earlier mentioned destruction of Reric by the Danish petty king Gudfred which stands as a symptomatic event for the conflicts of interest in the southern Baltic region between the early ninth and the twelfth centuries.³⁰ Benefitting from the settlement of the abducted merchants from Reric, Hedeby/Schleswig quickly developed into one of the most vital trading centres in Northern Europe where goods of different kinds were exchanged, as reported already by Rimbert in his *Vita Anskarii* sometime before the year 876: "[...] in portu [...] Sliaswich vocato, ubi ex omni parte conventus fiebat negotiatorum."³¹ In the northern world, in turn, Icelandic poets, so-called skalds, and writers remembered the importance of the trading centre by applying two different names, namely *Heiðabýr* and *Heiðabær*, interchangeably. These toponyms modified the North Germanic name of the settlement **Haiþa-būwiz* ("heath-settlement") and adapted it to its own West Norse placenames with the endings *-býr*, *-bær* ("settlement"). Less commonly used is the name *Slésvík*, that – being of West Germanic origin – goes back to the toponym *Sliaswich* ("bay at the Schlei")³² and thus a name already attested in Adam of Bremen's *Gesta* that circulated in medieval Iceland.³³ However, when investigating the Old Norse source material, it often remains unclear whether *Heiðabýr* and *Slésvík* are designating the same settlement on the southern bank of the river Schlei. Thus, high medieval accounts often amalgamate the emporium *Heiðabýr* with the later *civitas* Schleswig that was built after an attack by the Norwegian king Haraldr harðráði, and the destruction by the Abodrites in 1066.³⁴

30 See: Lübke, "Beziehungen," 24.

31 "Rimberti Vita Anskarii," ch. 24, in: *Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum*, vol. 55, ed. Georg Waitz (Hannover: Hahn, 1884). Hedeby's attraction was only intensified when in 873 the Danish kings Sigfred and Halfdan guaranteed peaceful exchange of goods in between the bordering region between Denmark and Saxony.

32 See: Wolfgang Laur, "Sprachen, Schriften, 'Nationalitäten' in Haithabu und Schleswig," in: *Von Thorsberg nach Schleswig: Sprache und Schriftlichkeit eines Grenzgebietes im Wandel eines Jahrtausends*, eds. Klaus Düwel, Edith Marold, Christiane Zimmermann (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2001), 61–76.

33 See: "Hamborgar históría," in: *Flateyjarbók: En Samling af norske Konge-Sagaer med indskudte mindre Fortællinger om Begivenheder i og udenfor Norge samt Annaler I*, eds. Guðbrandur Vigfússon, C. R. Unger (Oslo: P.T. Mallings, 1860).

34 See: Volker Hilberg, "Auf der Suche nach dem Niedergang eines Handelsplatzes: Haithabu in der jüngeren Wikingerzeit," in: *Geophysik und Ausgrabung; Einsatz und Auswertung zerstörungsfreier*

The itinerary of the Icelandic abbot Nikulás Bergsson, the so-called *Leiðarvísir*, is one of the earliest testimonies of Hedeby in Old Norse literature. This work, the title of which translates as “the guide”, describes Nikulás’ pilgrimage to Rome and the Holy Land between 1149 and 1154. It briefly names the individual stations on his path in their Old Norse form, but also lists places of legendary historical importance.³⁵ In that respect, the guide gives the following information about Hedeby:

From Norway, one must first travel to Ålborg, Denmark. So the Rome-pilgrims say that from Ålborg it is a two-day’s journey to Viborg, then it is a week’s journey to Hedeby, then it is a short journey to Schleswig, then a day’s journey to the mouth of the river Eider.³⁶

According to this directive, pilgrims coming from Scandinavia would have had to travel to the south via Hedeby, in order to arrive again in the northern civitas of Schleswig. This detour might be explained by the fact that the Icelandic abbot does not necessarily report from his own experience but refers to the *romferlar* (“Rome-pilgrims”) as his oral informants.³⁷ This brief mention illustrates the variety of routes to Rome known to Nikulás and other pilgrims, but also shows that Hedeby and Schleswig were just two stations among many, with seemingly no particular importance attached to them. *Gísla saga*, dating to the middle of the twelfth century, confirms that Hedeby was a station on the pilgrimage route to Rome. In this context, it relates that Auðr, the wife of the protagonist Gíslí, travelled from Iceland via Norway to Hedeby, where she and her sister-in-law Gunnhildr accepted the Christian faith (ch. 38). Then their paths led them south (*suðr* = to Rome), from where they never returned to the North.³⁸ Besides of its religious function, Hedeby’s political significance is stressed in *Njáls saga*, the perhaps best-known and most complex *Íslendingasaga* (“saga of Icelanders”), written down around 1280. During a Viking voyage eastwards from the Swedish region of Gautland,

Prospektion in der Archäologie, eds. Martin Posselt, Benno Zickgraf, Claus Dobiak (Rahden: Leidorf, 2007), 189.

- 35 See: “Leiðarvísir,” in: *Lexikon der altnordischen Literatur*, eds. Rudolf Simek, Hermann Pálsson (Stuttgart: Kröner 2007), 246.
- 36 After the translation by Edith Marold, “Haithabu in der altisländischen Literatur,” in: *Von Thorsberg nach Schleswig: Sprache und Schriftlichkeit eines Grenzgebietes im Wandel eines Jahrtausends*, eds. Klaus Düwel, Edith Marold, Christiane Zimmermann (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2001), 77–100. *Landafraedi* (Alfraedi íslensk. Íslandsk encyklopædisk litteratur. 1. Cod. MBR AM 194,8vo), in: *Samfund til Udgivelse af Gammel Nordisk Literatur* 37, ed. Kristian Kålund (København: Møller, 1908), 13: “Úr Noregi er fyrst a[t] fara i Ála-borg. Sva telia Romferlar, ath or Ála-borg se II dag[a] [f]or til Vebiarga, þa er viku for til Heida-bejar, þa er skamt til Sles-vikr, þa dag- for til Ægis-dyr[a].”
- 37 See: Dominik Waßenhoven, *Skandinavien unterwegs in Europa (1000–1250). Untersuchungen zu Mobilität und Kulturtransfer auf prosopographischer Grundlage* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag 2006), 79.
- 38 Björn K. Þórolfsson, Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Íslensk fornrit 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1943), 118: “Þær Auðr ok Gunnhildr fara til Danmerkr í Heiðaboe, tóku þær við trú ok gengu suðr ok kómu eigi aprt.”

the protagonist Gunnarr á Hlíðarenda and his fellow travellers encounter a man named Tófi who, according to his own statement, was a Dane (*danskur maður*) and wished to return to his relatives.³⁹ When Gunnarr enquires why Tófi was *í Austurvegi* (“on the Eastern way”), the latter replies that he had been captured by Vikings, who landed him here in Eysýsla (the Old Norse name for the Baltic island of Saaremaa/Ösel), where he had remained since then.⁴⁰ Equipped with ten ships, the Viking Gunnarr eventually sails to “Hedeby in Denmark” (*Heiðabœjar í Danmörk*), where he is well received by King Haraldr Gormsson (Harald Bluetooth, c. 911–987). Following his invitation, Gunnarr spends half a month at his court, is offered an attractive marriage and influence in the country. However, Gunnarr turns down the king’s generosity and explains that he first wants to return to his friends and relatives in Iceland. We can assume from this episode that the author of the *Gísla saga* was aware of Hedeby’s central economic position between Rus’, the Baltic, and Scandinavia in the tenth century. This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that the narrative moves the court of the Danish king from its presumed location in Jelling to Hedeby, perhaps in relation with the incorporation of the *emporium* into the Danish dominion by Haraldr’s father, Gormr, in 945. This followed the conquest of the settlement by the East Frankish King Henry I who in 934 had forced the Danish King Gnúpa/Knut to pay tribute and accept Christianity.⁴¹ After these events, the Danes were able to defend their rule over the trading centre on the Schlei for almost thirty years, until Emperor Otto II (r. 973–983) initiated an offensive against Hedeby in 974.⁴² The description of Otto’s victory over Haraldr Gormsson in Thietmar of Merseburg’s *Chronicon*⁴³ has frequently been interpreted as an account of the conquest of the settlement and of the annexation of the south of Jutland. However, as a recent interpretation by Laura Gazzoli suggests, this reading

39 Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Njáls saga*, Íslenzk fornrit 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1954), ch. 30.

40 Eysýsla designates both in the Old Norse language and in modern Icelandic the Baltic island of Saaremaa/Ösel. It is mentioned several times in the medieval writings of the North, for example in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, ch. 90. The episode tells how after a five-year expedition in *Gardaríki* (Rus’), the Norwegian jarl Eiríkr Hákonarson devastates Aðalsýsla (presumably the Estonian mainland off the island) as well as Eysýsla, captures four Viking ships from the Danes, and slays all the men on board. See: Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla* I, eds. Alison Finlay, Anthony Faulkes (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2016), 212.

41 Another indication of royal presence in Hedeby, as indicated in *Gísla saga*, are two rune stones (DR 2 and DR 4) in the immediate vicinity of the settlement, which King Gnúpa’s wife Ásfríðr had erected in memory of her son Sigtrygg.

42 Christian Radtke, Wolfgang Laur, Ralf Wiechmann, “Haiðaby,” in: *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* 13, second fully revised and greatly enlarged edition, eds. Beck, Heinrich, Dieter Geuenich, Heiko Steuer (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 1999), 367.

43 Holtzmann, Robert, ed. “Thietmari Merseburgensis episcopi chronicon,” in: *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores rerum Germanicarum*. Nova series. Vol. 9 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1935), 103–104.

probably attributes too much importance to Otto's expedition that "sounds more like a border-skirmish than anything else."⁴⁴ Furthermore, new insights obtained from numismatic material support the hypotheses of Hedeby being the centre for the minting of Danish coins⁴⁵ which excludes a "German domination" of the site.⁴⁶ However, Otto II's victory over Haraldr Gormsson did not end the military conflicts in this area until nine years after his expedition when the Danish king Haraldr and the Abodrite prince Mistivoi successfully raised against the Ottonian rule. This conflict is perhaps evidenced by the so-called Skarþi runestone (DR 3) from the vicinity of Hedeby, thought to have been erected immediately after the events of the year 983. Unusually, the monument names a king (Sveinn) as commissioner of the stone in memory of his retainer (*heimþega*) Skarþi, a high-ranked warrior who had set out west, to England or Normandy, but met a premature end in Hedeby:

King Sveinn placed the stone in memory of Skarði, his retainer, who travelled to the west, but who then died at Hedeby.

For a long time, it was controversial which king Sveinn is mentioned on the stone: Sveinn tjúguskegg ("Forkbeard", c. 960–1014) or Sveinn Ástriðarson (c. 1019–1076). Both played a vital role in the Danish attacks on Anglo-Saxon England in 1016 and 1070 respectively. Recent runological dating to the 980s supports a connection with the conquest of the settlement by the former,⁴⁷ who revolted against his father Haraldr Gormsson and relapsed into pagan beliefs. Sveinn Ástriðarson, in turn, was a supporter of the "true faith" among the Polabian Slavs, and collaborated closely with his son-in-law Gottschalk, the prince of the Abodrites. Seeking to establish a unified Polabian-Slavic state legitimised by the Church, Gottschalk was determined to follow the successful example of the Piast state whose northern territories along the southwestern Baltic coast will be analysed in the following regarding their literary evidence in Old Norse sources.

44 Laura Amalasuunta Gazzoli, "Cnut, his Dynasty, and the Elbe-Slavs," in: *Anglo-Danish Empire. A Companion to the Reign of King Cnut the Great*, eds. Richard North, Erin Goeres, Alison Finlay (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2022), 399–417.

45 See: King Harold's Cross Coinage: Christian Coins for the Merchants of Haithabu and the King's Soldiers, eds. Jens Christian Moesgaard et al. *Studies in Archaeology and History* 20.2 (Copenhagen: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2015), 50.

46 Paul Gazzoli, "Review of King Harold's Cross Coinage, edited by Jens Christian Moesgaard, Maria Filomena Guerra, Gitta Tarnow Ingvarðson, Peter Ilisch, Peter Pentz and Hans Skov," *Revue Belge de Numismatique* 163 (2017): 471.

47 See: Sven Kalming, *Der Hafen von Haithabu* (Wachholtz: Neumünster, 2010), 48; Judith Jesch, *Ships and Men in the Late Viking Age. The Vocabulary of Runic Inscriptions and Skaldic Verse* (Woodbridge 2001: Boydell & Brewer), 109.

The burning of Jónsborg

Within the Old Norse text corpus, Hedeby is not alone to serve as a setting for encounters in the Baltic: this role is also taken by the Scandinavian stronghold of Jónsborg, usually located on the site of the Polish town Wolin. One of the most prominent Viking-Age poems featuring the settlement is *Hrynhenda*, composed around the year 1046/47 by the Icelandic skald Arnórr jarlaskáld Þórðarson. The poem praises the deeds of the Norwegian King Magnús góði who traversed in 1043 *Salt it Eystra* (“the Eastern Sea” = the Baltic) with warships equipped with *girzku reiði* (“with Greek [= Byzantine] tackle” = sails). The encomium is clearly biased by Magnús’ role as son and successor of Saint Óláfr Haraldsson which explains why his military ventures are translated into divine deeds. Further background is provided by *Morkinskinna* (“the rotten parchment”), written around 1220, where it turns out that Magnús góði’s military campaign targeted Jónsborg. Both sources state how discord between Wends and Danes dominated the relations in the Jutland border region.⁴⁸ The following spring, King Magnús embarks on his war fleet to Jóm (= Wolin), where he devastates both settlements and people:

It is farthest from the Norwegian realm and closest to the Wends and Saxons, who have always waged war on the Danes. [...] Then he sailed across to Wendland and arrived with his army at Jóm. There they landed, harrying and burning both settlements and people.⁴⁹

The main source for this military campaign is Snorri Sturlusson’s *Óláfs saga helga in sérstaka* (*The Separate Saga of St Óláfr*, ch. 264), with additional information in *Magnús saga góða* (ch. 24) in his *Heimskringla*. Earlier historiographical records on the destruction of Jónsborg are once more provided in Adam’s *Gesta* and its contemporary scholia, both authored around 1075. They confirm the events in the *civitas Sclavorum Iumne* for the year 1043:

Attended by a large Danish fleet, King Magnus laid siege to Jumne, the richest city of the Slavs. The losses were the same. Magnus terrified all the Slavs and, being a young man holy and blameless of life, God for that reason granted him victory in every enterprise.⁵⁰

48 *Fagrskinna* (ch. 19) reports of long-standing hostilities (*ufriðr lengi*) in the Danish-Slavic border area and mutual raids in the time of Haraldr Gormsson in the 10th century: “oc var þa ufriðr lengi millum Vinnda oc Dana. oc hæriaðu hvarertvæggju i annarra lonnd.” See: Finnur Jónsson, ed. *Fagrskinna*. Nóregis konunga tal (København: Møller, 1902–1903).

49 “Þat [Jotland] er first Noregs rike en næst Vindum og Soxum er mikenn ofrid veittu Daunum jafnan. [...] Sidan sigldi hann med flotanum yfir til Vindlandz og kom med herinn vt ath Jomne (Jomune). geingu þeir æ land vpp og heriödu og brendu þar bædi bygdir og menn.”

50 “Magnus rex classe magna Danorum stipatus opulentissimam civitatem Sclavorum Iumnem obsedit. Clades par fuit. Magnus terruit omnes Sclavos, iuvenis sanctus et vitæ innocentis. Ideoque victoriam dedit illi Deus in omnibus.” See: Bernhard Schmeidler, ed. “Magistri Adam Bremensis Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum,” in: *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores rerum*

Even though both Adam's *Gesta* from the eleventh century and the Icelandic *Annales regii* treat King Magnús' military expedition against Jónsborg/Iumne as a historical event, the legendary tradition around this violent Scandinavian-Slavic encounter swiftly developed its own momentum.⁵¹ As most impressive example for this process stands, besides the praise poem *Hrynhenda*, another poem by Arnórr jarlaskáld Þórðarson, titled *Magnússdrápa*. Magnús' actions against the pagan people (*heiðit folk*) of Pomeranian Slavs *sunnr at Jómi* ("in the south at Jóm")⁵² are here embedded in a broader context of Scandinavian military mobility in the Baltic region, which served as a demonstration of power against Jarl Sveinn Ástríðarson as a competitor for the Danish royal throne. In addition, the poem's agenda promoted the necessity to ward off westward raids by the Abodrites as Sveinn's allies.⁵³

Conclusion

We can conclude that Hedeby was an important, although not unique, station for commercially, militarily, and religiously motivated journeys within the *Austrvegr* network. This "Eastern Way" led Scandinavian warrior-traders into the vastness of the Rus' with Hedeby and Jónsborg/Wolin in the Oder estuary representing frequent stations on the route that had to be traversed. From the Old Norse literary record as well as archaeological evidence, we obtain a diverse picture of the functions of Hedeby in the long-distance networks of the Viking Age: as trading place for silver, slaves, and not least, as religious centre in the high Middle Ages. This picture is complemented by the evidence of several military conflicts that initiated the decline of the southern settlement starting in the mid-eleventh century and that forced the relocation to the northern successor settlement Schleswig. Further emphasis needs to be put on the fact that the destruction of the early medieval *emporia* along the Baltic did not disrupt the region's economic dynamism, but, on the contrary, contributed to its acceleration. Even though,

Germanicarum in usum scholarum (Hannover: Hahn, 1917), Book II, schol. 56. For the translation, see: Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, trans. Francis J. Tschan, *Records of Civilisation. Sources and Studies* (New York: Columbia University Press, [1959], 2002), 109.

51 Jakub Morawiec, "Slavs and Their Lands," in: *Scandinavian Culture in Medieval Poland*, eds. Sławomir Moździoch, Błażej Stanisławski, Przemysław Wiszewski (Wrocław: Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, 2013), 58.

52 Diana Whaley, "Arnórr jarlaskáld Þórðarson, Hrynhenda, Magnússdrápa 12," in: *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas 2: From c. 1035 to c. 1300. Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages*, vol. 2, ed., Kari Ellen Gade (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 197–198.

53 In her etymological study of the toponym Jumne/Jónsborg, Alexandra Petrulevich likewise emphasises the peaceful mutual contacts between Scandinavians and Slavs that preceded Magnús' expedition. See: Alexandra Petrulevich, "On the etymology of at Jómi, Jumne and Jónsborg," *Namn och bygd* 97 (2009): 82.

by definition, the proto-urban coastal settlements of the Viking Age did not yet fulfil the essential functions of a medieval city, they formed the basis for the emergence of the later trading centres of the Hanseatic League, that dominated the maritime world of the Baltic throughout the late Middle Ages. What the literary sources from the high-medieval North eventually attest to is their literary memory of the Baltic that is, however, restricted to the tenth to twelfth centuries, and clearly attached to royal power, particularly Danish hegemony. Earlier Scandinavian-influenced *emporium* in turn, like Ralswiek or Menzlin, remain unknown. As the archaeological record shows, this stands in contrast to their economic and social importance in the trading networks of the early medieval world in which they have to be considered as equal nodes despite the lack of written evidence on them.

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English version: Mark Atkinson

SUMMARY

The present study focuses on early medieval trading places, so-called *emporía*, along the southern Baltic coast in today's territories of Schleswig, Mecklenburg, and Pomorze, and their prominence in Old Norse literature. Intriguingly, from the archaeologically identified sixteen places, only two are attested in the high-medieval textual sources from Iceland, namely Hedeby (ON *Heiðabýr*/*Heiðabœr*) and Wolin (ON *Jómsborg*). A close text-based analysis on the former highlights Hedeby as a crucial station for commercially, militarily and religiously motivated expeditions along the *Austrvegr* ("the Eastern way") – albeit not unique in its importance for mobile Scandinavians among numerous other places in the Viking world. The textual sources also suggest that the literary memory of the Baltic is restricted to the tenth to twelfth centuries. Hence, we can assume that writing and memory was attached to the emerging Danish royal power as is evidenced in the numerous narratives on Haraldr Gormsson and his son Sveinn tjúguskegg and their presence in the two trading places. Eventually, the article serves as a case study for the functions of the numerous *emporía* that are archaeologically, but not textually visible.

Czy emporia południowego brzegu Bałtyku są widoczne w średniowiecznych źródłach skandynawskich?

Słowa kluczowe: emporia, handel wczesnośredniowieczny, epoka wikingów, literatura staronordycka, niewolnictwo

STRESZCZENIE

Niniejszy artykuł jest poświęcony wczesnośredniowiecznym rynkom, tak zwanym emporiom, położonym na południowym brzegu Bałtyku na obecnych terytoriach Szlezewiku, Meklemburgii i Pomorza, oraz ich obecności w źródłach skandynawskich. Jest intrygujące, że spośród szesnastu zidentyfikowanych archeologicznie emporiów tylko dwa są poświadczone w średniowiecznych tekstach z Islandii: Hedeby (st. nord. Heiðabýr/Heiðabær) i Wolin (st. nord. Jómsborg). Analiza tych tekstów pokazuje, że Hedeby było ważnym przystankiem na *Austrvegr* ("wschodniej drodze") dla kupców, wojowników czy pielgrzymów – nawet jeżeli jego znaczenie nie było wyjątkowe w skali świata skandynawskiego. Źródła pisane również wskazują, że literacka pamięć o Bałtyku była ograniczona do X–XII w. Możemy zatem podejrzewać, że pamięć i tradycje pisane o Bałtyku są związane z formującym się królestwem Danii, jak na to wskazują liczne przekazy o Haraldzie Gormssonie i jego synu Swenie Widłobrodym, i o ich obecności w obu wspomnianych emporiach. Końcowa część artykułu poświęcona jest funkcjom także tych emporiów, które są poświadczone archeologicznie, ale są nieobecne w źródłach pisanych.

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