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Across the western Baltic

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The Late Iron Age and Early Medieval Period in the Western Baltic

Abstract

During the Late Iron Age and early Medieval Period (c. 375-1200 AD) the Western Baltic went through difficult times of state formation, religious change, wars of conquest and crusades. Though influenced by the Romans, the region had never been part of their Empire, and as Western Europe became Christian, the North witnessed the first signs of petty pagan kingdoms during the early centuries of the Late Iron Age. The arrival of Slavic tribes in north-eastern Germany and Poland in the late 7th and 8th century, and the northbound advance of the Carolingians during the 8th century changed the history of the area. Political and diplomatic contacts between the Danes and the Carolingians, as well as the Slavs and the Carolingians, are attested to in written sources from the 8th century, and interaction across the

boundaries of ethnic groups, tribes and kingdoms is also detectable through the archaeological record. A major issue of discussion has been “who were where, when?” For example, did remnants of the Germanic population exist in Mecklenburg from the 6th to the 8th century, or was the area depopulated throughout this period until the arrival of the Slavs? Also, when did the Slavic tribes reach the coastal plain of the Baltic - was it during the 7th century, or not before the 8th? Did the Danes control the Baltic coast from the Schlei to the Oder estuary during the Viking Age? And so on. Taking place-name evidence and material culture into consideration, the Slavic influence on both the Danish and Saxon areas is evident, but did the Slavs actually emigrate to the North and West?



Location of research area.

Archaeological research

The Western Baltic region is characterised by natural borders along coastlines consequently tied together by waterways. This topographical setting offers good opportunities to detect differences in material culture on each side of a boundary as well as to perceive the evidence of interaction across the same boundaries. This goes for the past as well as for modern archaeological tradition, methods and perspectives.

In many ways the archaeological research in the Western Baltic region has followed the same main roads. The archaeological, historical and political approaches have not been identical though, and as a result the interpretations and conclusions differ in certain areas of research even though the material appears the same.

Before, during and shortly after World War II archaeological material was dominated by graves and hoards, while settlement archaeology focused on towns, trading places or fortified sites. It is characteristic that the first Viking Age long houses revealed in Denmark were found within the ring fortress of Trelleborg in 1934 (Nørlund 1948). As late as the 1960s, farmhouses dating from the 6th to the 11th century were almost unknown, and it seemed obscure whether the rather few and scattered finds of jewellery from this period represented settlement sites or destroyed cemeteries.

This situation has indeed changed. During the last three or four decades the archaeology of rural settlements has gained a prominent position due to technological improvements. The introduction of the motorised excavator was a revolution in the 1950s and 1960s, making it possible to remove large areas of overburden and clearing large-scale archaeological features such as farm units or even villages. Another technical improvement has been the metal detector. In particular, Danish Iron Age archaeology has gained on behalf of this valuable instrument (fig. 1). Up until the 1970s the Vendel Period in Denmark was very poor in archaeological artefacts - grave finds were rare, and hoards and settlements almost non-existent. This picture has altered dramatically thanks to the metal detector. The amount of archaeologically located metal artefacts has increased enormously since 1980, and the metal detector remains the primary tool for surveying settlement sites of the Late Iron Age and Early Medieval Period.

The motorised excavator made way for new initiatives. The West German settlement excavations in the coastal landscape of the North Sea have been inspiring to a whole generation of Danish archaeologists (Haarnagel 1951 and 1979; Kossack, Behre & Schmidt 1984; Zimmermann 1992). Pioneering projects have



Fig. 1. The influence of the metal detector illustrated by the distribution of metal objects dating from the Vendel Period and Viking Age found in the area south of Roskilde. Dots indicate artefacts found with the use of metal detector and crosses artefacts found 'by chance'.

been followed by larger or smaller efforts concerning the study of Prehistoric and Early Medieval settlement structure. Among these initiatives is the important inter-disciplinary study of Hebeby/Haithabu and its hinterland (Jankuhn, Schietzel & Reichstein 1984; Dörffler 1990; Müller-Wille 1994/95; Willroth 1990).

In the former German Democratic Republic, Late Iron Age and Early Medieval archaeology focused on the Slavic tribes, and there has been a long tradition for excavating their fortified sites (Donat 1984 and 1995; Herrmann 1985; Schmidt 1989; Schuldt 1967). Since 1990 the scientific approach has changed, illustrated by the research programme 'Germania-Slavica', which offers a more pluralistic entry focusing on the process of interaction rather than defining borders (Lübke 1998).

In Sweden the so-called 'Ystad Project', initiated in 1982, was an ambitious attempt to describe the development of the cultural landscape from the Stone Age to the end of the Viking Age in a limited area around the town of Ystad in Skåne. Many sites were surveyed and trial excavations carried out, with the results published in 1992 (Larsson, Callmer & Stjernquist 1992).

In Denmark, the State-funded 'Settlement Research Committee' was established in 1968 and during the 1970s initiated a series of excavations of settlement sites and cemeteries from the Bronze and Iron Ages in Jylland (Becker 1980). During the 1990s Danish

archaeology was also enriched by two major State-funded initiatives: the Maritime Research Centre, concentrating on Viking Age and Medieval ships and shipping (Crumlin-Pedersen 1994) and the 'Settlement and the Cultural Landscape' project, focusing on agrarian society throughout Prehistory (Fabech et al. 1999). In addition to this is the inter-disciplinary research project "Land-Use History and Plant Diversity" focusing archaeologically on Iron Age settlement patterns on Sjælland (Rindel 2002), and - in particular - an important new publication concerning the numerous excavations of Iron Age and Medieval settlements carried out in southern Jylland and Schleswig-Holstein (Ethelberg et al. 2003).

Of the Danish projects mentioned, the one initiated by the 'Settlement Research Committee' in 1968 has had the most comprehensive impact on Danish archaeology, and some of the results of this initiative are still dominating settlement archaeology in Denmark. The excavations of an Iron Age settlement complex at Vorbasse in central Jylland has had an extraordinarily strong influence in regard to the chronology of house types and the perception of farm and village development during the first millennium AD (Hvass 1980). However, generalisation on the basis of results deduced from a single site is not without its problems. When more and more settlements were excavated during the 1980s and 1990s it became clear that the development of house types and settlement structure were not necessarily identical from west to east in southern Scandinavia. Vorbasse, a settlement situated on rather poor soil on the fringes of a heath, has other preconditions than settlements on the heavier and more fertile soils on Fyn, Sjælland and in Skåne (Porsmose 1994). In other words, settlement structure is likely to vary due to variations in basic economic strategies. Comparison of the excavation results in Denmark and Skåne certainly indicates discrepancies between west and east regarding the dating of certain house types, the layout of farms and most significantly the village type of the Late Iron Age (Sørensen 1994; Tornbjerg 1985 and 1991; Tesch 1992, 310-344). Clearly there is still much work to be done in this field of research.

Development in the Western Baltic area

Using Scandinavian terminology, the Late Iron Age is the period from the end of the 4th to the second part of the 11th century, while the Early Medieval Period covers the late 11th and 12th centuries. In the context of Prehistory, this is indeed a limited period. Yet it was an era when at least some parts of the Western Baltic developed from tribal societies into states (in the medieval sense of the word) and witnessed religious change leading to clashes as well as more peaceful contacts between the different parties involved

It was also a period when the literate and classically educated Western Europe re-discovered the barbarians of the North. As contacts were increasing between the Christian world and the pagan peoples of the North and East, firstly Saxon and Danish, then in due course the Slavic leaders of these areas appeared in the letters and chronicles of Western Europe. However, their images were painted with the brush of prejudice, misunderstanding, a lack of knowledge and deliberate political motives. The written sources provide us with names of some of the tribes, chieftains, petty kings and members of the nobility, while information on their lands, estates and their societies is scarce – if it exists at all. Archaeological investigation, however, is just the opposite, providing the opportunity to look into the rubbish pits, postholes and graves of both rich, poor and those in between.

C. 375-700 AD

The beginning of the Migration Period (c. 375 AD) is the traditional Scandinavian division between the Early and Late Iron Age. The dawn of development that characterises the Late Iron Age in Denmark had already begun in the 2nd and 3rd century AD – this was a period when new house types and a new farm layout appeared. The pit-house was also introduced as well as the hay store and each farm had its own fenced plot of land surrounding the buildings (Hvass 1988). Arable areas became more intensively exploited by means of manuring, and some new technological improvements came into use – amongst others the rotation quern and the slag-pit furnace for iron production. It was during this phase that the Gudme settlement area in south-eastern Fyn developed into a centre-like site with extraordinarily rich finds, workshops, gold and silver deposits as well as longhouses of special construction, apparently introducing the concept of the ‘hall’ (Sørensen 1994, Thrane 1992). Gudme had – in its time - an as-yet unparalleled specialised landing-place with workshop activities on the coast at Lundeborg, some 5 km away (Thomsen 1994). The nature of trading and shipping in this period is still debated, but there is evidence of close contacts across the Baltic Sea, most significantly in grave furnishings and burial rites.

“Booty sacrifices” had their hey-day during the Late Roman Iron Age, primarily in the eastern part of Jylland and on Fyn, while there are less excessive examples on Sjælland and in Skåne, as well as on the islands of Lolland and Bornholm. With regard to grave rituals, the custom of cremating the dead was gradually superseded by inhumation graves during the Roman Iron Age. We must bear in mind, though, that the change in rituals was more significant in some areas than in others, both north and south of the Baltic Sea. All in all, developments during the Late Roman Iron Age are of such importance, it is argued that the earliest central powers - in the sense of kingdoms - were estab-

lished during the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD (Hedeager 1990, 204; Ethelberg 2003, 272ff). Kings or no kings – this is just a matter of definition. But if we are to believe the ancient historians, entering the Migration Period these kings could very soon be lords with no followers.

According to various written sources, the 5th century AD was a period of migration in Europe. The Angles, Saxons and Jutes went west, whereas other tribes went south and roamed large parts of Europe for several centuries making an irretrievable impact on the areas they passed or settled in.

The landscapes of northern Germany do seem to provide archaeological and pollen data supporting records of depopulation to some extent (Bantelmann e.a. 1984, 51ff, Dörfler 1990, 41), and evidence of Germanic culture in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern is scarce during the Late Roman Iron Age and the Migration Period. As substantial excavations of settlement sites from this period are still anticipated in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, it is the grave finds that dominate the archaeological evidence. East of the River Warnow, Germanic burial sites appear to be few in number and small in size as early as the 3rd and 4th centuries, while the burial site of Pritzler in West Mecklenburg comprised c. 2000 cremation graves dating from the 3rd to the 5th century (Keiling 1984, 11ff). However, scattered finds of Byzantine gold *solidi* dating from the 6th century and a few gold bracteates from Scandinavia are difficult to explain if the area is supposed to be depopulated (Jöns 2002, 234). Pollen data from Rügen seems to substantiate the presence of settlements in this particular area during the 6th and 7th centuries (Herrmann 1998, 151f) and lately it has been argued that a general settlement gap has to be considered improbable (Brather 2001, 61).

With regard to Denmark, pollen data from both Jylland and Sjælland suggest the continual use of arable land, and even though the forested areas on Sjælland seem to have increased around 500 AD, the evidence of agriculture is pronounced (Aaby 1992). This observation is supported by archaeological results (Ethelberg 2003; Tornbjerg 1985), as settlements continue with no alarming breakaway. Nevertheless, the archaeological records of southern Scandinavia demonstrate changes in material culture and religious behaviour during the 5th century. New types of brooches and the introduction of the ornamental animal and entrelac styles on mounts, spear stakes and jewellery marked a change not only in fashion but probably in religion as well. Deposits of gold rings, precious jewellery and gold bracteates replaced the lavishly furnished graves of the Late Roman Iron Age, and the *pars pro toto* ritual depositing of swords, scabbard mounts and other insignia of slain leaders succeeded the abundant booty sacrifices. The gold bracteates, for example, represent per se the

change in religious expression, depicting elements of Germanic mythology (Andrén 1991; Hauck 1992).

By the mid 6th century the age of gold deposits had ended and the shape and style of adornments changed radically in Scandinavia. During the following centuries brooches of cast bronze were produced in larger numbers in a variety of types. Among these, the zoomorphic brooches are significant, probably symbolizing mythological beings.

Cemeteries are well known in Skåne, Halland, Blekinge and Bornholm (Isendahl 1997; Jørgensen 1990; Jørgensen & Nørgård Jørgensen 1997; Nagmér 1982; Strömberg 1968), while only few have survived the intense ploughing in other parts of Denmark (Jönsson 1992; Madsen 1994; Ramskou 1976). The variation of burial rituals is both interesting and puzzling. Cremation and inhumation were practised, and the dead could be buried beneath a mound or within a stone setting formed as a circle, an oval, a triangle, a square or ship shaped. Secondary use of Bronze Age mounds is also known (Ørsnes 1966).

The records from excavated settlements show that while some sites disappeared during the 5th century in Jylland, others grew larger (Ethelberg 2003, 254f). In eastern Denmark, a number of farms appear to have been established or moved during the 6th and 7th centuries. Indeed the former reflects a special class of settlement site often described as “central places” in archaeological literature. They are characterised by buildings of large proportions, often with distinguished construction details. These “main buildings” were surrounded by other houses of varying sizes, some of which had special functions.

Additionally, an extraordinary collection of artefacts, both in quantity and quality has been retrieved from most of these sites during excavation - in particular through intensive metal detecting, stressing the fact that the settlements held an extraordinary function in society. Lejre (T. Christensen 1993), Tissø (Jørgensen 1998), Strøby-Toftegård on Sjælland (Tornbjerg 1998) and Järrestad in Skåne (Söderberg 2002) were established in the late 6th or during the 7th century. Uppåkra in Skåne appears to be slightly different. Its thick occupation layer is unusual, containing houses and finds from the Late Pre-Roman Iron Age to the end of the Viking Age (Larsson 2002). In this respect Uppåkra has a close parallel in Gudme. Nevertheless, the artefacts emphasise that Uppåkra climaxed during the Vendel Period and the Viking Age, just like its sister sites on Sjælland.

New features in the Vendel Period were specialised landing places emerging along the seashores of sheltered, inner-Danish waters, as well as appearing on the more exposed shoreline on the

south coast of Skåne (Callmer 1994; Ulriksen 1998). While the vast majority of agrarian settlements are situated at least 1-2 km from the coast, the landing places were established very close to the shoreline on well-drained areas, such as beach ridges or areas of sand or gravel. They are generally characterised by the absence of farm units, and if there were buildings, then pit-houses dominated, sometimes supplemented by minor three-aisled buildings. There were also workshops, where iron working, bronze casting, production of textiles and comb making were common. As a comparison, rural settlements contain refuse from a limited range of handicrafts clearly dominated by textile production, followed by iron working (Ulriksen 2002).

700-1200 AD

During the 7th and 8th centuries, a new ethnic group was about to put its marker on the region south of the Baltic Sea. Their influence remained for the next 500 years.

The migration of Slavic tribes had begun in present day Ukraine and Byelorussia around 400 AD. Reaching the Carpathian, they advanced northwards, forming the Prager group in Slovakia, Bohemia and Moravia, and from here they scattered further on into Poland and south-eastern Germany (Struve 1991; Brather 2001, 51ff).

The precise time of arrival of the Slavic groups as far north as Mecklenburg-Vorpommern is still debated among German archaeologists. For some years it has been suggested that they settled as early as the end of the 6th century, or during the 7th century (Mangelsdorf 1992, 89). This assumption has partly been based on stratigraphic evidence from excavations in forts and the discovery of a Vendel Period brooch together with Sukow-type pottery in a rubbish pit at the settlement of Benzin (Gralow & Parschau 1984; Wietrzichowski 1990, 78). A few finds of Scandinavian brooches in Menzlin and Rostock-Dierkow dating from the 7th – 8th century have been put forward to substantiate this assumption (Kempke 2001, 12; Warnke 1987). Dendro-dating carried out in recent years, though, emphasise that the Slavs arrived in the 8th century (Biermann et al. 1999; Herrman & Heusner 1991, 261ff). There is, however, no substantial evidence of any direct contact between the newcomers and what could be secluded residual Germanic groups in the region. Random finds of Late Roman or Migration Period Germanic and Early Slavic material at the same location is more likely to be the result of the same preference in settlement location (Stange 1994). The distribution of Sukow ware, the earliest Slavic pottery type in the Mecklenburg area, indicates that the first wave of settlers preferred the light soils near streams, rivers or lakes of the interior. Settlements closer than 20-40 km to the coast are concentrated

along the major rivers flowing into the Baltic (Wietrzichowski 1990, Brather 1996).

Forts are a characteristic feature of this Slavic society, and have been the focus of archaeological research for many years. Over 700 are known between the Elbe and Oder-Neisse rivers (Müller-Wille 1991), and research on these forts has provided the basis for a pottery chronology for the Slavic Period. This is divided into three main phases: the Early Slavic Period (c. 600-800), the Middle Slavic Period (c. 800-1000) and the Late Slavic Period (c. 1000-1200). The forts appeared during the 8th century, but were not necessarily established during the phase of Slavic consolidation (Brather 2001, 122). Non-fortified agrarian settlements are characterised by rubbish pits and so-called settlement pits ('Siedlungsgruben') (Matthey 1991; Segschneider 2001), the latter often interpreted as being the remnants of log houses (Donat 1980, 46; Salkovsky 1998, 209).

Slavic cemeteries were generally small and few in number compared to c. 4000 settlement sites, and during the early phases cremation was the dominating practice - the bones being buried in an urn or pit, either within a small mound or beneath the grave-field surface (Warnke 1975). Inhumation was introduced later, generally in shallow graves, sometimes in the same cemetery as cremation graves (Schmidt 1992 and 1996).

Reaching the coastal region, the Slavs came into contact with Saxons and Danes. The relations between the Saxons in Holstein and the Slavs are obscure, but the building of forts in the area during the 8th century is seen as a consequence of strong disagreement (Müller-Wille 1991). The distribution of Slavic forts and place-name evidence show a quite distinct western borderline from Kiel in the north to Boizenburg at the River Elb in the south, some 50 km east of Hamburg. This is known as a part of the Limes Saxoniae - the eastern border of the Carolingian Empire from the late 8th century (Kempke 1998). The lack of Slavic objects in the Saxon area (and vice versa) has been interpreted as a sign of a lack of contact across the uninhabited border zone, the reason being never-ending skirmishes and language differences (Müller-Wille 1991).

Contact across the Baltic Sea, however, seems to be of a different character. Reaching the coast, the Slavs must have considered the sea as unfamiliar territory, while the Swedes and Danes may have seen the Baltic as their "Mare Nostrum" - their back yard, so to speak. The focal points of contact were ports of trade on the coast or along rivers. Sites like Ralswiek (Herrmann 1997), Menzlin (Schoknecht 1977), Gross Strömkendorf (Jöns 1998a & 1998b; Wietrzichowski 1993) and Rostock-Dierkow (Warnke 1992) emerged during the first half of the 8th

century, and in some cases Scandinavian presence is evident, in others interaction can at least be established, as finds of jewellery and utensils of typical Scandinavian character are well known. In Ralswiek, a cemetery with hundreds of small burial mounds contained persons of Scandinavian origin (Herrman 1998), and the ship-shaped stone settings of Menzlin point in the same direction (Schoknecht 1977). Gross Strömkendorf, with its pit-houses, c. 350 urn graves and six Scandinavian boat graves is most likely to be the famous Reric of the Frankish Chronicle. This assumption is backed by dendro-datings of the settlement, providing dates between c. 720 and 811 (Jöns 1998b). Another important site, Hedeby, was established during the 8th century, and during this early phase the pit-houses of its so-called “Süd-siedlung” are comparable with other coastal landing places in the Western Baltic. These sites formed stepping-stones on the Baltic trading route, along with Åhus in Skåne (Callmer 1984). Revealing a trace of this trading network are the so-called wasp-glass beads, produced in Ribe in the second half of the 8th century (Fevle & Jensen 2000, 22f). It is a bead type found at most of these trading sites, but rarely in the hinterland.

While the coastal landing sites and trading places in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern might have been controlled or inhabited by Scandinavians, there is no evidence of their presence in the hinterland during the Vendel Period or the Viking Age. Objects of Scandinavian origin found in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern are few in number and concentrated in a c.50 km wide coastal zone, and there are no place-names suggesting settlers from the North (fig. 2). The incident in 804 mentioned in the Frankish Chronicle, when the Danish king had the merchants of Reric moved to Hedeby by force, underlines the presumption of a lack of control over the area at this point in time.

Turning our attention northwards, excavations in Jylland suggest in the early 8th century that houses, farms and villages were



Fig. 2. The distribution of Scandinavian artefacts and graves from the Vendel Period and Viking Age in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. Dot: jewellery, triangle: arrow head, cross: graves.

changed and re-organized (Hvass 1988). Zoomorphic brooches disappeared, being replaced by jewellery types that are typical for the Viking Age.

In the 8th century, western Denmark also witnessed major construction works during 726-750, such as the tree-lined canal through the island of Samsø (K. Christensen 1995), the reinforcement of the defence-works at Danevirke (Andersen, Madsen & Voss 1976; Andersen 1998) and the erection of a substantial tree-built bridge across the Varde River in western Jylland, dating from the second part of the 8th century (Frandsen 1999). The port of trade at Ribe was also established around 710 with defined workshop lots and the minting of sceattas, obviously connected with the North Sea trading system (Feveile 1994; Feveile & Jensen 2000; Frandsen & Jensen 1988). It is evident that a new order had been established, at least in western Denmark.

To the south, the Saxons faced hard times of crusade and conquest initiated by Charlemagne in the 770s. They were finally defeated – and to some extent deported into Frankia – in 804. From then on the Carolingians and their later successors, the German Ottonians, were the leading power in the area.

This leading position of power was disputed by the Danish kings of the 8th and 9th centuries, who apparently claimed supremacy over Saxony, Frisia and also the West Slavic tribes.

The 9th century was also a period of several incidents between Danes and Carolingians as the main protagonists, both using different Slavic tribes - as well as Saxons - as their allies. The Slavic tribes themselves rebelled against their Carolingian overlords on a number of occasions.

During the later 9th and the 10th century, the division of the Carolingian Realm gave birth to the German Empire with a number of strong kings and emperors. Neither Danes nor Slavs could quite match the challenge this brought, and in hindsight the score was soon settled.

In the 10th century the political, religious and military ambitions of the Germans in the Baltic region increased the pressure on the pagan Danes and Slavs. This might be the reason why contacts across the Baltic Sea seem to get closer. Marriage alliances between the nobility are witnessed in written sources, and in everyday life the Slavic influence on pottery north of the Baltic is evident. Middle Slavic pottery of Fresendorf and Menkendorf types are found in settlements on the Danish islands as well as in Skåne, and before the end of the first millennium Slavic pottery – especially Late Slavic types like Vipperow and Teterow - were produced north of the Baltic in large numbers.

During his reign in the mid 10th century, Harald Bluetooth left a significant mark on his lands. In his own words on the Jelling monument, he “christened and united Denmark”. He had ring fortresses constructed at strategically important locations in Jylland, on Fyn, on Sjælland and in Skåne. Paradoxically, these forts seem to be more famous today than in the Viking Age. In spite of their alien and monumental nature they did not make their way into the written history of the time, and they seem to have lost their importance almost as soon as they were built. Of more long-term significance were Harald’s efforts regarding religious and political matters.

Harald Bluetooth claimed to be the unifier of Denmark; a statement leading to the obvious question: How large an area did the so-called ‘Danish’ kings rule in the 8th and 9th centuries? In the edited issue of Orosius’ World History, compiled at the court of Alfred the Great of Wessex around 890, it is written that Denmark consisted of – at least – the coast of Bohuslen, Halland and Skåne as well as “numerous islands” to the east of the Jylland peninsula. Jylland and ‘Sillende’ – the southern part of the peninsula – are not specifically related to Denmark, while Hedeby belongs to the Danes. Additionally, Bornholm is said to be an independent kingdom.

It might be the case that the Danish lands had already been united and separated several times during the 8th, 9th and 10th centuries, as had happened in the 12th century. As late as the 12th and 13th century Denmark had different coin weights in Jylland and on Sjælland, and during the Medieval Period the kingdom had three different law codes - one for Skåne, one for Sjælland and one for Jylland/Fyn. Unity had its limits after all.

There is no evidence, however, neither in the written sources nor in archaeology, that Christianisation split the Danes. The Christianisation of Denmark seems to have happened more or less peacefully, but it might have taken a considerable amount of time before the majority of the population considered themselves Christian. Harald Bluetooth took the credit, but contacts between Danes and the Christian world had been close for more than 100 years at that time. Danes settling in England and Normandy were assimilated into Christian societies through marriage and baptism, but they maintained contact with their kin in their pagan homeland. Christianity was not something completely new for the Danes in the mid 10th century, and it is clear that the number of indisputable pagan graves decrease rapidly in the second half of the 10th century.

There exists, however, some written sources mentioning a pagan reaction from the ‘gruesome’ King Sven Forkbeard during his reign (c. 985-1014), but this information compares badly with

the king as a church-builder, and the fact that he was buried in York Minster and later transferred to a church in Denmark that he had founded himself. It is important to bear in mind, though, that Sven's reactionary reputation was put forward by persons connected with the German church, which was annoyed by the fact that both Sven Forkbeard and his son, Knud the Great, favoured the English church, not the German.

In the pagan areas south of the Baltic, the missionary efforts of the Germans seem to have followed the same line as the Carolingians against the Saxons in the late 8th century. There was an on-going rivalry between the Slavic tribes, particularly the Abodrits and the Wagrians, and the Germans used this disunity to subdue the West Slavic tribes in 929. They forced Christianity upon the Abodrit leader in 931 and rebellion broke out. From this point in time the religious picture of the Slavic Baltic area is somewhat blurred. The leading Abodrit family can to a certain degree be considered Christian, including among others Mistivoi, the father-in-law of Harald Bluetooth. The Wagrians could be considered heathens until the mid 12th century, and it is interesting that a bishopric was established within their stronghold in Oldenburg. In 983 there was a Slavic uprising by the Abodrits and Wilzians against the Germans and their henchmen, continuing for almost 40 years with numerous incidents of attacks and retaliations.

It was only during the mid 11th century that the Abodrit leader Gottschalk, son-in-law of the Danish king Sven Estridsen, put Christianisation back on track again, but after his murder in 1066 a fierce pagan reaction proved a severe setback to the missionaries. The heathen Kruto was leader of the Slavic tribes until 1093, when Heinrich, son of Gottschalk, re-conquered Oldenburg with the help of Danish and Slavic ships.

By the turn of the millennium, Denmark can be considered a Christian kingdom, and took her place alongside the West European countries in their effort to please the Pope and the Lord. In the 10th century, a new feature of urbanisation supplemented the nucleated and fortified trading places, such as Hedeby and Århus. The towns of Viborg, Roskilde and Lund were of a very different design, covering much larger areas and functioning as the bases of the new axis of power: the King and the Church. At the same time manorial sites like Tissø, Lejre and Uppåkra lost their importance.

During the 11th century in Denmark, the numerous specialised coastal landing places with pit-houses and workshops either closed down, or were transformed into farms. This might be a consequence of the emerging towns, which attracted craftsmen of all kinds.

On the southern side of the Baltic, Gross Strömkendorf had already disappeared by the 9th century, whilst other trading sites gradually lost their importance during the later Viking Age. Menzlin shut down in the mid 10th century, and Ralswiek faced a re-organisation from a prosperous trading station to a farm in the 11th century.

The speculative presence of a substantial Slavic population in parts of Denmark in the late Viking Age and Early Medieval Period has been discussed for many years (see Grindler-Hansen 2001 and 2002). While the motives and reliability of contemporary written sources have been questioned, place-name evidence has been much in focus, with place-names of Slavic origin found on the islands of Lolland, Falster and Møn (Housted 2002). In figures, there are less than 40 distributed in four main clusters: the western part of Lolland, the southern and north-eastern part of Falster and the easternmost part of Møn. Added to this are a handful of place-names comprising the Danish word for Wends as a prefix (for instance Vinde-by, Vinde-rup, Vinde-bode), which are found on the islands of Tåsinge, Ærø, Langeland, Lolland and Sjælland (B. Jørgensen 2001). In Skåne and on Bornholm no place-names of this character are known (pers. comm. Göran Hallberg and Finn Ole Nielsen). The occurrence of place-names in one area, and their absence in another, as well as the distribution of their different categories is both interesting and significant.

There is no reason to doubt that settlements on the Danish islands could be established and owned by persons of Slavic origin. The question is when and how this settlement took place, and whether or not the archaeological evidence can support the idea of a substantial migration of Slavic groups into Denmark. Looking at the excavated settlements in Denmark from the 9th to the 13th century, the houses are of local tradition. There are no Slavic-type forts, and no identified “settlement pits” or other traces of log houses north of the Baltic Sea. In a Late Viking Age context there are examples of a relatively large rectangular type of pit-house with roof-supporting posts at each gable, posts in the corners and an oven, from a number of excavations in Denmark and Skåne. This type is larger and more regular than the average Viking Age pit-house. It is often suggested that it is a sign of Slavic influence, even though the Slavic rectangular or square shaped pit-houses with a hearth or an oven are rare in Mecklenburg and Vorpommern. Examples dating from the 9th and 10th century are known from Holstein and Niedersachsen, but generally Slavic pit-houses belong in Central Europe (Donat 1980; Brather 2001). In Denmark pit-houses are known from the Late Roman Iron Age, and are seen as an adoption of building methods from northwest Germany. From the 2nd to the 5th century pit-houses are few in number and only found at a very limited number of sites, mostly in southern Jylland and in three

cases on Fyn. In Skåne, though, there are examples of pit-houses that have been dated to the Pre-Roman Iron Age (Tesch 1992, 186 and 204). This is very early compared to Sjælland or other parts of Denmark, and how they are to be placed into the overall picture of settlement development in southern Scandinavia is unclear. On Sjælland, pit-houses do not appear until the 6th century with the exception of one or two examples, and generally the pit-house is a phenomenon of the Vendel Period and Viking Age.

Thus there is no constructional evidence of Slavic settlements north of the Baltic Sea. As a contrast, the Slavic pottery style is present in settlement sites and towns in many parts of Denmark in the 10th to 12th century, suggesting a massive presence of Slavs (fig. 3). However, it is generally accepted that Baltic ware was adapted and produced by the Danes rather than being the result of large scale migration. Rim shapes and - in particular - decoration north of the Baltic are not as varied as in Mecklenburg and Pommern, indicating that potters in Denmark copied a style rather than being an integral part of the original manufacturing tradition. Characteristic Slavic metal objects dating from this period such as 'Schläfenringe' and 'Gürtelhaken' are rare in the otherwise plentiful material found with metal detectors in Danish settlement sites. However, knife-sheath mounts (thin sheets of copper alloy) are frequently found (M. Andersen 1988), and hacksilver deposits from the turn of the millennium contain bits and pieces of both Scandinavian and Slavic origin (Hårdh 1998).

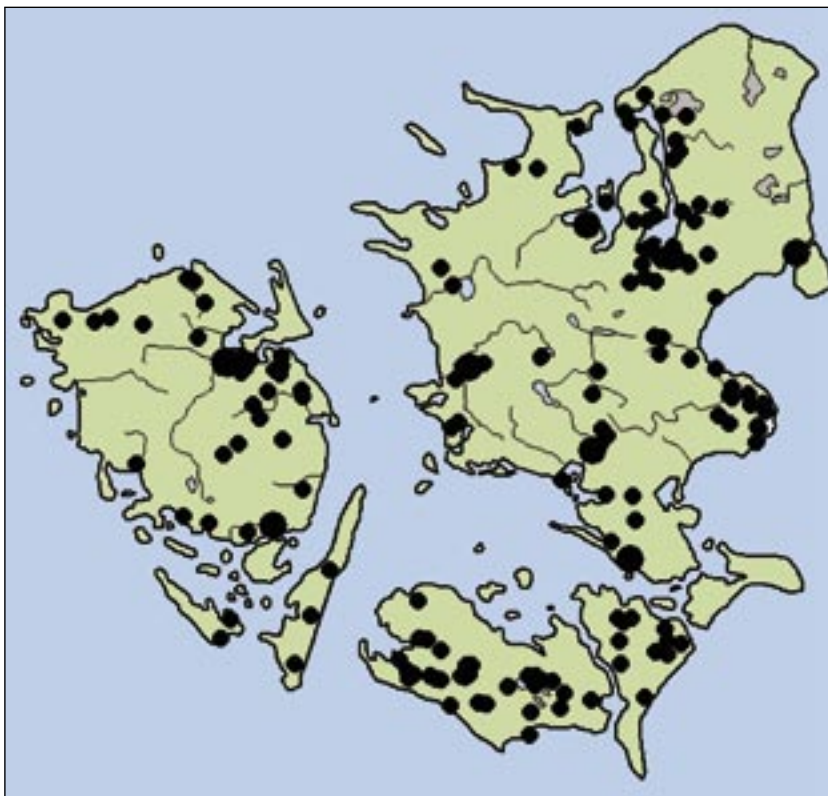


Fig. 3. Viking Age and Early Medieval Period sites on Fyn, Sjælland and neighbouring islands which have produced Baltic Ware. Large dots indicate towns.

Excavations in the harbour area of Roskilde (which in the 13th century was called 'Vindeboder' - "the booths of the Wends") revealed a silver earring and a bone awl that can be identified as typically Slavic, but are extremely rare in Danish settlements. The bone awl is most unlikely to be considered as an import in its own right, which indicates the presence of Slavic traders, craftsmen or the like in 11th century Roskilde (Ulriksen 2000).

On Bornholm, an interesting 11th century cemetery near Grødby was excavated during the 1990s. It has been interpreted as a Christian graveyard due to the presence of children's graves and the separation of male and female graves (Wagnkilde 1999 and 2001). However, neither church nor chapel were found, and it is rather peculiar that many of the graves were more elaborately furnished with goods than the 10th century pagan graves (among other things Baltic Ware, wet stones, knives, coins and typical Slavic jewellery such as 'Schläfenringe' and 'Gürtelhaken'). Christian or not, this might be a population of Slavic people.

This could also apply to the 11th century settlement site of Mölleholmen near Ystad in Skåne, located on a tiny islet in a lake, which revealed Baltic Ware (Kelm & Larsson 1995; Kelm 2000). The site's topographical situation is very much akin to the location of many Slavic settlements in Mecklenburg; for instance Dümmer near Schwerin (Wietrzichowski 1991).

Thus, there is evidence of Slavic presence north of the Baltic Sea during the 11th century, but how substantial this presence was is unclear. From what period the Slavic place-names originate is also unknown. Are they from the 11th century, perhaps connected with the relations between the Danish kings Knud the Great and Sven Estridsen on the one side, and the Abrodrit leaders Gottschalk and his son Heinrich on the other - the latter living at the Danish court for a period of time? Saxo Grammaticus, the Danish chronicler of the late 12th century, mentions that Skjalm Hvide (the earl of Sjælland around 1100) also had Rügen under his command. Saxo also describes a Slavic dominance in the Danish islands of Lolland and Falster during the mid 12th century, and some of the personal names mentioned clearly contain both Danish and Slavic elements. This name evidence in particular suggests Slavic settlers in Danish territory. After the inclusion of Rügen in the diocese of Roskilde in the late 12th century, the contacts across the Baltic were institutionalised.

Archaeology may illuminate parts of the answers to these questions, and it is clear that the next step ought to be excavations at sites in Denmark with place names like Vindeby, Gorke or Kramnitze.

By the beginning of the 12th century a phase of reorganisation

swept through Denmark. In the rural settlements generally, smaller houses with straight walls succeeded the traditional Viking Age longhouses with their curved walls. The last of the Viking Age ornamental styles, the Urnes style, was replaced by Romanesque decoration both in buildings and jewellery. The migrating farms and villages of the Iron Age were now fixed, the country was divided into parishes and stone churches were erected in large numbers. The royal mint, which began in the early 11th century, had grown into a genuine coin economy, and new towns were established all over the land based on local trading. The 11th century flirtation with the English church had ended, and the archbishopric of Scandinavia was founded in Lund in 1104. During the 12th century the Danish kingdom went from civil war and disintegration to reunion under a victorious king, Valdemar I the Great, who successfully fulfilled the vow of crusading against his neighbours in Mecklenburg.

Though under pressure from both Germans and Danes, the rivalry between the Abodrites and the Wagrians continued during the 12th century. The abridged version of the story is that the Germans once again subdued the Slavic tribes and urged Saxons, Frisians and Dutch to settle in the area. The Slavs kept the coastal zone, and it was during this period that they engaged in plundering the Danish shores, in their own words to be able to pay tribute to their German overlords. The independence of the Slavic tribes had ended, and during the 1150s and 1160s the Christian missionaries got the upper hand through Danish and German military campaigns.

In contrast to the German politics in the Slavic areas, the Danes did not use migration as a conquering tool. The Danish king suppressed the Slavic leaders, then had them reinstated, forcing them to pay tribute. The Danish Church established clerical institutions as well, but there was no substantial presence of native Danes in the subdued areas. During the reign of Valdemar II the Victorious (1202-1241), Danish influence extended in the Baltic region to its maximum, but the king also witnessed the collapse of his supremacy after the battle of Bornhöved in 1227.

Even though the political landscape could change, the German expansion east into Mecklenburg and Pommern during the 12th and 13th centuries was almost undisturbed and highly significant. Through the founding of towns along the coast of the Baltic Sea and navigable rivers, German merchants came to play an important economic and cultural part in the regions they settled. In the rural areas monasteries introduced new agricultural methods and technology, and during this period larger villages with houses and stables of German building tradition replaced the traditional Slavic settlements. Gradually, the Slavic people were assimilated into German culture. Even though Slavic pottery can

be traced as late as the 13th century (Dworaczyk 2003; Mangelsdorf 1998) and persons with Slavic names were present in the town of Rostock in the 14th century, the ethnicity of the Slavs nevertheless faded away in the Western Baltic area during the Medieval Period.

Conclusion

There is a large and intriguing potential in the history and archaeology of the Western Baltic region. It is both interesting and puzzling that the traces of the migrations of the 5th and 6th century seem to differ on either side of the modern border between Germany and Denmark in Schleswig. A similar difference of opinion following a present-day state-line is the dating of three-aisled long houses with slightly curved walls of the Early Iron Age, and the date of the introduction of the pit-house in Denmark and Sweden.

Regarding the assumed evacuation of the Germanic tribes from north-eastern Germany after the Roman Iron Age, many scholars have brought into focus single finds of Germanic origin, found in the area in question and dating from the 5th and 6th centuries. Along with the on-going debate of the time of the Slavic arrival in the coastal zone of Germany, we could renew the discussion of Germanic presence in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern during the 5th to the 8th century.

Taking the period from 700 to 1200 AD into consideration, it is interesting that the Slavic tribes of north-eastern Germany did not form a state, as did their neighbours in Denmark and Poland. It is also worth noting that neither the Frankish and German Empires, nor the Danish kings invested much effort in conquering the territory in question during the Viking Age. As for the Danish Vikings there is not much evidence of attacks on the shores of Slavic north-eastern Germany. This does not mean that they did not ransack the Slavic settlements, but they might have preferred Western Europe with easy-to-find 'banks' of riches in monasteries and towns.

During the 10th to 12th centuries the contact between the Slavic tribes and Denmark got closer – for better or worse. The dynastic relations are important as a marker of the political situation of the period, but whether or not there was substantial migration of Slavic people to the southern Danish islands is still debatable. Indeed, this question has some of the same characteristics as the discussion concerning the magnitude of presence of Scandinavian Vikings in England during the 9th and 10th centuries.

Archaeology is a science that cannot and must not consider mo-

modern state formations, where borders often separate areas of cultural uniformity. Unfortunate circumstances of the past have meant that Skåne and Schleswig-Holstein are no longer part of the kingdom of Denmark. However, this cannot change the fact that during the Late Iron Age and Medieval Period these areas were part of the same cultural and socio-political habitat. Nevertheless, it is typical that archaeologists confine themselves and their research within the borders of these modern states.

This is not the path towards greater understanding of the interaction and development in the region. Yet, it must be the concern of the individual archaeologist to change this behaviour, by making research accessible to foreigners.

Coming this far, there is clearly a language problem to overcome - not across the Øresund of course, but across the Baltic Sea. Some German colleagues have most impressively learnt a Scandinavian language, thus are they able to read the publications and study the original excavation data. While the latter will be kept in their local lingo, the publications are another matter.

Archaeology in Denmark is decentralised. This goes for both excavations and for research. The problem is that many results are primarily printed only in Danish in yearbooks of local museums and never become fully published. If monographs are released, their lack of promotion prevents important information becoming widely distributed. Only one major Danish periodical is actually released on an annual basis, while the two periodicals in English drag on in a languishing existence.

It is imperative that Scandinavian archaeologists publish important results of excavations and research in English or German, making the material accessible. However, the heavy cost of translating a text means it is difficult to raise the money. Perhaps there is an account in the EU to help strange and peripheral dialects of the Indo-European language.

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