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## **Bridging two worlds. Tracing merchants from the Holy Roman Empire in High Medieval Sigtuna.**

Roslund, Mats

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# Zwischen Fjorden und Steppe

FESTSCHRIFT

FÜR

JOHAN CALLMER

ZUM 65. GEBURTSTAG

INTERNATIONALE ARCHÄOLOGIE  
*Studia honoraria - Band 31*

Begründet von  
Claus Dobiati und Klaus Leidorf

Herausgegeben von  
Claus Dobiati, Peter Ettel und Friederike Fless

# Zwischen Fjorden und Steppe

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Claudia Theune, Felix Biermann,  
Ruth Struwe und Gerson H. Jeute



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*Johann Lahti*



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## **Bridging Two Worlds**

### **Tracing merchants from the Holy Roman Empire in High Medieval Sigtuna**

Mats Roslund  
Lund

#### *On the Frisian coast*

Even if a scholar does not want to accept the formative role she or he is taking in relation to students, the character of teaching will be important for future interests. When Johan Callmer invited us, third semester students, on a trip along the coast of the North Sea in 1981, he opened up a European perspective in archaeology. After a week in Wilhelmshaven, Groningen and on several Terpen and Langwurten in the lowlands, Europe's common histories were revealed to us. This is very typical of Johan, to invite you on a trip through space and time. Along the way, whether on the road or in a comfortable couch he shares his knowledge and is always ready to learn something new. It is with this trip to the North Sea coast and his work on interregional contacts between East and West I want to begin my contribution. Johan's work stands out as pan-European, embracing Western, Eastern and Central Europe. This trait is very unusual, as most scholars have their tradition in either geographical "camp". As an answer to his demand that we must include the whole of Europe in our work, I will focus on 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century Sigtuna in Sweden, a node in the network between East and West.

Inspired by Johan Callmer's article "Archaeological sources for the presence of Frisian agents of trade in Northern Europe ca. AD 700–900", I will try to extend the chronological and theoretical perspective into the High Middle Ages (Callmer 1998). In his article, he thoroughly investigates the possibility that Frisians lived in Scandinavian centres of exchange. Archaeologically, personal belongings such as combs are the strongest evidence for this. Being a phenomenon of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Frisians seem to vanish from the Scandinavian scene with the waning of Birka. From this point onwards, the German speaking Continental contacts are hard to discern in the material culture. One group of artefacts is indeed a sign of interaction. From the middle of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, a stream of minted silver from rich Ottonian mines sieved into Scandinavia. However, the problem with goods of wealth is that it is difficult to assess to which degree it defines personal presence. To find out if, and to what extent, visitors from the Holy Roman Empire managed to travel to Sigtuna in the 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, more sources and a theoretical approach on social identities expressed in the material culture are needed.

My aim with this article is to enhance the study of Western visitors in a town strongly influenced by Rus' politics and culture. The eastern route passed through the Gulf of Finland already from the late 8<sup>th</sup> century. Sigtuna continued this tradition as we can see in the

everyday life in town after its establishment ca. 980 (Roslund 1997; 2007). A large amount and diversity of artefacts from Rus' are present already in the second phase of the town's existence from the year 1000 and onwards. These connections were strong until growing conflicts between the Svear and Novgorod strained the relations from the late 12<sup>th</sup> century. Even if Rus' dominated the political and economic structure until the mid 13<sup>th</sup> century, we also must try to study the re-emerging interests from the Holy Roman Empire and the West of the Baltic Sea. This is important if we shall be able to get a better understanding about these contacts when they increase in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century.

From the point of view of the Roman Catholic Church, the Lake Mälaren region was not drawn into a European cultural sphere until the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century (Blomkvist 2005). It was a land of opportunities for gaining lost souls and rich tributes, seen through the eyes of the bishops of Bremen. As we shall see in this article, visitors and politically induced economic relations started much earlier, after a hiatus following after Birkas decline in the 960's. I would like to argue that the archaeological sources give us evidence for the presence of north-western Continental guests shortly after the year 1000. Individuals or small groups arrived in Sigtuna. The main carriers seem to have been Scandinavians around the year 1100, but assessing the evidence critically, they found Continental partners. The actors during this time cannot be considered as a "Kaufmannhanse", in a pre-hanseatic sense. In the debate on German influence in the Baltic Sea before the Hansa, an emphasis has been laid on the organisation of German speaking visitors. Considering the way exchange was performed in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, temporary agreements between individuals and minor groups was a common way of solving the overshadowing problem of risk and trust (Müller-Boysen 1990). Even without written evidence, I would like to suggest that such arrangements between Svear and merchants from the Holy Roman Empire led to their presence in Sigtuna, as seen in the material culture.

The issues raised are as follows. When did guests from the Holy Roman Empire come to Sigtuna? What kind of material culture did they bring with them? What effect does the interpretation of the artefacts have on a historical level?

#### *The Frisian guild*

Two rune stones in Sigtuna seem to stand as evidence for a Western presence since they tell us about a Frisian guild in Sigtuna with men named Torkel, Torbjörn,

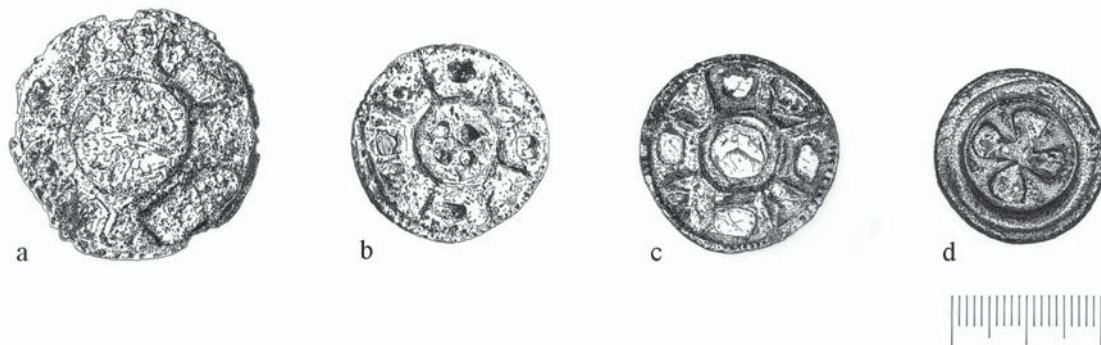


Fig. 1. Enamelled cross brooches. a – Sf nr 2656, unknown context, according to continental datings ca 950 to 1050; b – Professorn I nr 12360, 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century; c – Professorn I nr 12409, 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of the 11<sup>th</sup> century; d – Sigtuna 99 nr 10263, unknown context, according to continental datings ca 950 to 1050. Scale 1:1. Drawings by Jacques Vincent.

Slode and Albod as followers.<sup>1</sup> However, we must take into consideration what “Frisian” meant in this temporal context, as the definition of the ethnic term “Frisian” is no longer clear when we reach the 11<sup>th</sup> century (Callmer 1998, 470; Lebecq 1998, 71). They could be residents in any town along the Rhine, since Frisians traded and lived in diasporas from the North Sea coast up to Strasbourg and Basel. They were also well-known residents in English towns as well as in Danish Schleswig. This implies that the guilds’ members, if they were Frisians, could come from other parts of the Holy Roman Empire or towns outside it. What makes the interpretation even more difficult is the uncertainty if the name Albod is Frisian. A Saxon, Franconian as well as Scandinavian provenance has been suggested.<sup>2</sup> “Frisian” has also been used as a synonym for a merchant dealing in long-distance trade.

A renewed interest for the dating of the stones Torbjörn carved is of importance. On linguistic grounds, they have earlier been dated to the late 11<sup>th</sup> century. In a thorough stylistic re-interpretation, Ann-Sofie Gräslund has certified that they belong to the period ca 1010 to 1050.<sup>3</sup> How shall we understand the social relations expressed in the guild? In the emerging 11<sup>th</sup> century, guilds were social constructs outside the bonds of bloodlines to support individual actors when higher authorities did not manage to do it. Wrapped in a Christian package, merchants organised themselves to protect their lives and property on perilous voyages, as the well-known example from Tiel in 1020 indicates (Oexle 1989). Torbjörn, Torkel and Slode were guild brothers, but Albod could be their *félag*, a partner in trade, outside the group and not living in Sigtuna. Christian Radtke

states that the Frisian guild in Sigtuna should be seen as a common interest group among the Svear (Radtke 2002, 391 footnote 25). Their aim could have been the Frisian coast, but they could also have travelled to Schleswig to meet their partner. The stones in Sigtuna antedate two others, one in Södermanland (Sö 16) and one in Uppland (U 1048) from the second half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, mentioning “Haithabu” as port of call.<sup>4</sup> Obviously, it was a well known place for people around Lake Mälaren by then. If Albod was a man from Saxony or Franconia, he joined the northerners there, where a Saxons community lived since the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

#### *Minor objects and personal presence*

After this deconstruction of a Frisian presence one could ask if there are any material signs of German speaking visitors in Sigtuna. It is the portable material culture from this part of Europe we now are about to study. To answer the question how intense the contacts were and who maintained them, we have to turn to a wider scope of material sources. By adding a diverse set of artefacts in Sigtuna coming from our area under study, a better basis for the next step of interpretation can be taken; what the presence signify historically.<sup>5</sup> The artefacts are few, but varied. In this survey, I have not included the coins of German origin found in Sigtuna. The reason is that the last decades’ findings have not yet been properly assembled in a corpus, and that former collections already are well known through other texts.<sup>6</sup> Minted silver is also circulated among many

<sup>1</sup> Identity number U 379 and U 391.

<sup>2</sup> Ahlsson 1988, 11 f.; Düwel 1987, 338; Lebecq 1983, 259; Radtke 2002, 391.

<sup>3</sup> Von Friesen 1913; Gräslund 2006, 128; classed in her typology as Pr 1–Pr 2.

<sup>4</sup> The name “Haithabu” is used instead of “Schleswig” in Scandinavian sources from the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. In *Knytlinga saga*, “Haithabu” is used well into the 12<sup>th</sup> century after it was abandoned in favour of the new town on the Schlei (*Knytlinge Saga* 1977, 37, 51 f., 112, 118, 120 f., 126, 133, 142 f., 162, 167).

<sup>5</sup> It is not possible to give a full description of the artefacts in the present format of a short article. A brief description of each item follows the illustrations. For western glass, see Henricson 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Hatz 1974; Jonsson 1990; 2002; Radtke 2002, 381 ff.



Fig. 2. Enamelled cross brooch. Humlegården nr 992 from unknown context. According to continental datings ca 950 to 1050. Scale 2:1. Photo by the author.

people in the Baltic during the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, it would be difficult to argue that Ottonian and Salian coins indicate personal presence. Coins from rich silver mines in the Harz Mountains boosted long distance trade as means of exchange, but cannot solely be taken as remains of merchants. For that, other simpler things can be much better.

Artefacts ended up outside their original place of production by social reasons. People used artefacts to stress and emphasise their social identities. By doing so, they recreated the image of themselves and communicated it to others. Therefore, we have to consider the meanings of things when using “imports” as signs of foreign presence and influence. Pottery has a different functional and symbolic place in the world than jewellery. This must be paid attention to when interpreting the artefacts from the Holy Roman Empire.

#### *Ceramic vessels*

Pottery is often the most common group of artefact used to indicate trade and exchange. In Sigtuna, Pingsdorf ware is as usual found in late 12<sup>th</sup> and early 13<sup>th</sup> century deposits. However, some sherds from red painted beakers occur already from the last quarter of the 11<sup>th</sup> century (Roslund 1995, 8 Fig. 8). This very early presence from a production area close to Cologne coincides with similar consumption patterns in London, Bergen and Schleswig.<sup>7</sup> Wine trading merchants were common visitors there, and for the case of London we know that

Cologne merchants had their anchorage at Dowgate. It is possible that consumption of wine from the Empire was an urban phenomenon also in late 11<sup>th</sup> century Sigtuna, where also Byzantine wine was imported in amphorae through Rus’ (Roslund 1997).

To ascertain evidence for personal presence in urban centres during the High Middle Ages, pottery for cooking is better than exotic table wares. The main argument is that regional traditions are confirmed in the everyday use of known forms.<sup>8</sup> Potters are inclined to stick to a format, picked up from their parents or master since childhood, becoming a part of their cultural identity. In Sigtuna, the local tradition was the simple late Viking Age domestic forms, supplemented by local Baltic ware and imported Slavic vessels from Rus’. We find few sherds of “weiche Grauware” in the form of globular cooking vessels around 1100 (Roslund 2007, 406 ff.).<sup>9</sup> “Kugeltöpfe” were produced in a clearly defined area in Frisia and Saxony. The tradition stretched out between east of the Rhine to Elbe in a southwest-northeast direction and between the Frisian coastline and down to a line drawn between Mainz and Erfurt in the south, of course with regional variations (Reich Salier 1992, 20 Kt. 1). It was also maintained in Schleswig with surrounding landscape in Schleswig-Holstein. After the German expansion to Lübeck in mid-12<sup>th</sup> century, it spread further east along the Baltic coast.

There are few German cooking-pots before the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century in Sigtuna. In the third quarter of that century, however, we see an increase of “harte Grauware” in great amounts (Roslund 1995, 2 Fig. 1). It was brought in together with a typical set of vessels of the period ca 1180 to 1250. Pingsdorf, Paffrath, Andenne, early stoneware, Flemish jugs, Splashed ware and London ware accompanied the simpler hard fired “Kugeltöpfe”.

#### *Brooches*

Few artefacts can be said to have a distinct social and ethnic connection. Urban centres like Sigtuna were often inhabited by a blend of foreign visitors. Even the local population was keen on taking up foreign influences, and thus creating an urban life style, different from the surrounding agrarian settlements. Nevertheless, there are certain regional traits that indicate social visualisation of the Self in everyday life. Scandinavians more often wore penannular brooches to fasten their cloaks and shirts during the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, the Ottonian and Salian brooches found in Sigtuna from that period are newcomers, set in a new social context. Whether they were used by Scandinavians or not is dif-

<sup>7</sup> Vince 1988, 242; Lüdtkke 1985, 61; Meyer 1996, 191; Huffman 1998, 12 ff.

<sup>8</sup> It is not possible to discuss the vast literature on cultural identities here. Arguments for a correspondence between cultural identity and pottery, see Roslund 2007, 139 ff.

<sup>9</sup> Among 10 594 sherds of low-fired cooking pots, only 13 were “weiche Grauware” found in 11th century contexts with a slight focus in the decades around the year 1100.

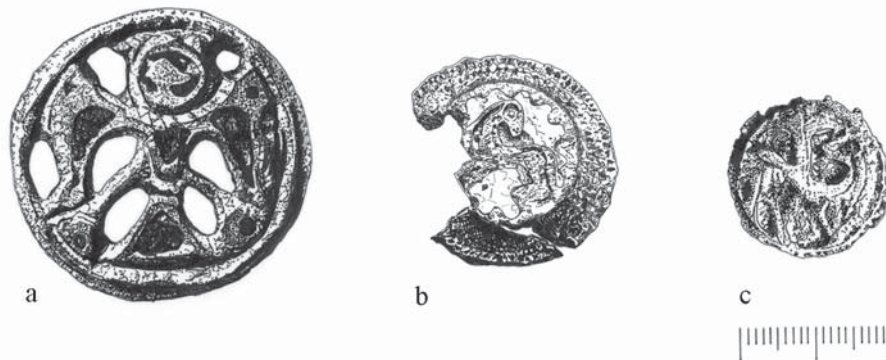


Fig. 3. Enamelled brooches with animal decoration. a – Professorn 1 nr 12200, 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of the 11<sup>th</sup> century; b – Fjärrvärmegrävningen 1991–1992 nr 19 from unknown context, according to continental datings ca 950 to 1050; c – Trädgårdsmästaren 9 and 10 nr 8624, 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Scale 1:1. Drawings by Jacques Vincent.

difficult to assess, but their origin is undisputed. In Sigtuna, there is a rising figure of fibulas of different design, in bronze, brass or pewter. Those enamelled are made in *champlevé*/"Grubenemail" technique. Firstly, five round "Kreuzemailscheibenfibeln", in Germany dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century shall be mentioned (Fig. 1, Fig. 2). Those found in dated contexts in Sigtuna are from the 11<sup>th</sup> century. At least four of them can be of the "Frauenhof"- or "Gardelshausen" type and one is of a small 11<sup>th</sup> century variety. Secondly, we have three "Emailscheidenfibeln mit Tierornamentik" (Fig. 3). One with an eagle, "Adlerfibel", was found in a context dated to the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Two others carry four-footed animals looking backwards. One is still undated; the other has an *Agnus Dei* motive with a distinct cross in the background, dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Thirdly, there are two "Buckelfibeln" among the brooches (Fig 4). One is a very simple type of thin sheet metal, also found in Lund, with rounded centre and radiating punched lines. In Sigtuna, it is dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The other is more elaborate, moulded and designed with two beaded rows around the convex centre where a thin enamelled cross can be seen. It is the earliest dated fibula of all, from a context deposited in the 1<sup>st</sup> decade of the century. The fourth group of fibulas has a more uncertain provenance (Fig. 5, Fig. 6). No direct analogies have been found in publications, but the style and technique indicate a German origin. All three of them are round and have set glass beads. The first is very corroded, probably made in pewter or other white metal with one central bead. The two others are in bronze alloy, one with a central bead, the other with one in the middle surrounded by four additional beads. All three are found in early 12<sup>th</sup> century contexts.

Enamelled brooches have been studied by scholars in

Germany since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup> Until the last three decades they have been thought to come from the south-eastern part of the Empire. This was however caused by their mode of deposition (Giesler 1989, 231). The information was drawn from grave finds in Slovenia and Austria, where they were found in greater numbers. With several discoveries made after the 1960's, this has been altered.<sup>11</sup> Today it is obvious that the spread is definitely within the whole of the Empire as a material expression of political and cultural dominion. During the period when the Sigtuna objects were lost in the ground, a concentration is clearly seen in Friesland, Saxony and Franconia. Mainz has been pointed out as one possible place for production, the town being positioned at the cross roads between the southern and northern distribution pattern (Schulze-Dörrlamm 1992, 108 f.).

The social attribution of the Sigtuna finds is of quality level 3 according to Spiong.<sup>12</sup> This is the most frequent group in late 10<sup>th</sup>- early 11<sup>th</sup> century Germany, indicating that the visitors came from the middle level of society.

#### *Rock crystal brooches*

A brooch with an elliptical rock crystal cabochon can be seen in the permanent exhibition in Sigtuna (Fig. 7). The crystal itself is 24 mm long and has a ridge along the centre.<sup>13</sup> It is set in silver and encircled by a row of square beads. On top of the setting can be seen three

<sup>10</sup> Giesler 1978; 1989; Frick 1992/93; Wamers 1994; Spiong 2000; Krabath 2001.

<sup>11</sup> Spiong 2000, 110 ff.; see also distribution according to contexts pp. 290 ff. Kt. 11–15.

<sup>12</sup> Spiong 2000, 119: "Qualitätvollere Serienproduktion".

<sup>13</sup> Several other rock crystal gems polished the same way found in Sigtuna may have had the same function. For instance Professorn 4 nr 1356 and nr 5724.

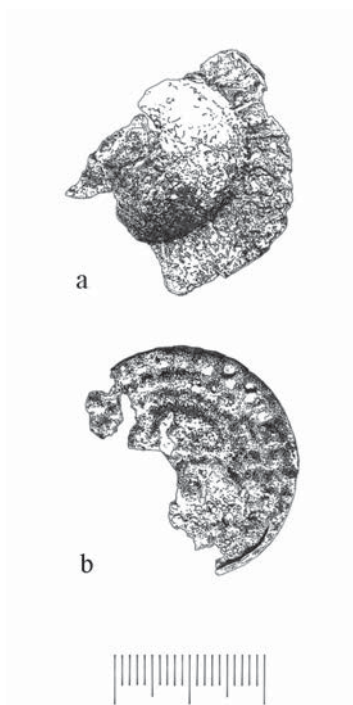


Fig. 4. Brooches with raised centre. a – Trädgårdsmästaren square A1:5b, 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of the 11<sup>th</sup> century; b – Professorn 1 nr 14620, 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Compare with Wamers 1994, 117 Abb. 73, 213. Scale 1:1. Drawings by Jacques Vince

small round moulded beads on top of each other. On the lower part is a mounted ring, used to attach a chain. This was most probably fastened to a similar brooch on the other shoulder of the wearer. The object is undated, but analogies can be found in the vicinity.

A similar brooch was found in an inhumation grave in Valsta, 10 kilometers southeast of Sigtuna. It was buried together with the deceased around the year 1100, but was brought out of context when robbers dug into the mound at a later occasion (Andersson 1997, 366; 367 fig. 5b). It is unusual to find foreign artefacts outside Sigtuna during the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, so the individual in the mound must have been close to royal power or had contacts of his own on the Continent. When he died around the year 1100, he may be displayed a personal relationship with individuals from the Empire. His use of foreign jewellery shows the problem with simple ethnic affiliations to such artefacts.

Three other examples for dating shall be mentioned (Reich Salier 1992, 151 f.). One is from Dörby, Öland in Sweden. It was found in a hoard dated to ca 1100. The other two are of greater interest as they too come from graves. They were found in Masku, Humikkala, Finland in female inhumation graves dated to the late 11<sup>th</sup> and early 12<sup>th</sup> century. These rock crystal brooches have probably been brought in from the Empire in the



Fig. 5. Brooches with set glass beads. a – Trädgårdsmästaren 9 and 10 nr 27500, 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of the 12<sup>th</sup> century; b – Trädgårdsmästaren 9 and 10 nr 24182, 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of the 12<sup>th</sup> C. Scale 1:1. Drawings by Jacques Vincent.

end of the 11<sup>th</sup>- and beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, including those found in Sigtuna.

#### *Gold finger ring*

One gold finger ring has been discovered in deposits from the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. It is a “Steigbügelring” adorned with a small amethyst or sapphire (Fig. 8). These rings are claimed to be found in bishops’ graves (Schulze-Dörrlamm 1992, 84). One very similar to the Sigtuna example was found with Archbishop Bezelin Alebrand in Bremen cathedral, buried before 1043. However, the type has a chronological centre of gravity in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The ring in Sigtuna had probably been preserved and in use for some time before it was lost.

#### *Gold and cloisonné enamel stud*

A very small stud, or “button”, found in contexts dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of the 12<sup>th</sup> century is a piece of exquisite goldsmith production. It is only 8 mm in width, made of gold and enamel in cloisonné technique (Fig. 9). The main body is in dark green, with a four-petalled flower or cross in the centre. The cross is diametrically positioned with arms in white/red and sky-blue enamel. On the reverse, a small oblique hole is visible, probably remains of a construction to keep it in its place. This is a high-class piece of workmanship,



Fig. 6. Brooch with five set glass beads. Trädgårdsmästaren 6725, 1st to 3rd quarter of the 12th century. Not to scale. Photo by the author.

similar to studs found on the Towneley brooch at the British Museum or the eagle-peacock brooch from empress Agnes treasure in Mainz (ibid., 12 Taf. 4,1; 117 Taf. 9,1). Singular studs can also be seen fitted in rings (Reich Salier 1992, 443 Vitrine 8,17; 8,18).

The Sigtuna cloisonné piece could be used on secular as well as ecclesiastical objects, such as rings, brooches or objects of devotion. For the arguments in this text, it is the provenance that is important. For the large eagle-peacock brooch in the treasure of empress Agnes, a Byzantine or Italian workshop has been suggested (Schulze-Dörrlamm 1992, 107). It is most likely a Mediterranean large brooch or finger ring that has come through the Empire with a visitor for private use or to adorn a local Sigtuna woman.

#### *Alsengems*

Two other unusual artefacts of blue glass paste have been uncovered during the last years in Sigtuna (Fig. 10; Roslund 2009). These alsengems can be said to underline a connection towards the Lower Rhine and Frisian coast. They are both of Schulze-Dörrlamm's Type II, showing two individuals holding hands, found in deposits dated to the years just around 1100 (Schulze-Dörrlamm 1990).

One-figured alsengems of Type I can be seen on ecclesiastical objects of devotion between the Lower Rhine and Elbe. However, Type II with two individuals are also found in secular contexts, outside the main area. Type III displays three human figures, being Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar, and was sold as pilgrim badges. They became very popular after the acquisition of the relics of the Magi from Milan 1164, and were widely distributed in Saxony, Frisia and Denmark.

Type II preceded the pilgrim badges and could have functioned as similar signs for protection. They may have been worn by merchants from the region between



Fig. 7. Rock crystal brooch. Kyrkolunden 8 nr 171 from unknown context. Probably late 11<sup>th</sup> to early 12<sup>th</sup> century. Drawing by Jacques Vincent.

the Lower Rhine and Elbe, displaying their affiliation to a guild and religious piety (ibid., 220; Roslund 2009).

#### *Porphyry tiles for portable altars*

A group of seven tiles of green porphyry and one of serpentine can definitely be placed within the realm of the Church (Tesch 2007a). Their function is evidently as covers for holy relics in altars and as magnificent stones for portable altars of the High Middle Ages. In Sigtuna they are used from ca 1050 to 1200 and found in secular contexts close to hall buildings where people gathered on social occasions. It has therefore been suggested that portable altars were in use with families, before the churches were built. Green porphyry was quarried in Greece, but those found in Sigtuna came from robber trenches in the vicinity of Cologne or Aachen. In the ruins of the Roman or Carolingian period, people rescued, refined and sold these attractive stones for religious use. Some of them reached the halls in Sigtuna.

#### *Knife sheath decorations*

The ethnic interpretation of knife sheath mountings is a much discussed topic in German archaeology.<sup>14</sup> The main contradiction has been if there are specific "German" and "West Slav" types. Even if the ethnic affiliation for some types cannot be ascertained, there are technical differences that also can be seen in two types found in Sigtuna. Firstly, we have thin copper alloy mountings with embossed decoration, punched from the backside. They are quadrants in a variety of forms. This type has its greatest extension in the West Slav regions east of the Elbe and will not be discussed here (Krabath 2001, 79 Kt. 16 Var. 2, 3, 4).

<sup>14</sup> See Krabath 2001, 68 ff. for a survey on the discussion.



Fig. 8. Gold finger ring with set amethyst or sapphire.  
Professorn 1 nr 807, 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.  
Drawing by Jacques Vincent.

The other type is made of bronze, moulded and with punched, incised or filed decoration (Fig. 11). The items found are designed as reclining animals with their heads turned towards their rear or simple rectangles with narrow width. They are all found in contexts dated from the mid 12<sup>th</sup> to mid 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. This corresponds well with the suggested chronology in Germany. The two types have somewhat different distribution in the core area (Krabath 2001, 75 Kt. 15 Var. 1; 81 Kt. 18 Var. 22). Rectangular, narrow mountings are scattered between the Rhine and Oder. Animals, looking back towards their rear, seem to accumulate in Thuringia and south Lower Saxony.

#### *Knife shaft with runes*

As a last example of contacts with the Empire I would draw attention to an antler knife shaft with a runic inscription, unfortunately from undated deposits.<sup>15</sup> One simple sentence is carved into it, “Liku a knif”, i. e. “Likko owns the knife” (Gustavson et al. 1990, 39 ff. Fig. 12). According to Scandinavian tradition, individuals often put her or his name on their few personal belongings. In this case, the owner could have a Frisian origin, since the name is suggested to be of West Germanic origin.

Starting with a deconstruction of a Frisian guild and ending with a Frisian visitor, this survey only gives a hint of the artefacts hidden in the museum warehouse in Sigtuna. Even if the objects described above are certainly from the Holy Roman Empire, it is not simple to understand the reasons for their appearance outside the core area. There are many possibilities, including lost belongings of foreign guests or remains of their traded commodities. It could as well be Scandinavians acquiring the objects when visiting the Continent. However, if we accept the hypothesis that socially structured behaviour and sense of belonging was expressed in the material culture, the jewellery and everyday pottery

can be signs of personal presence. Especially simple and common things like the knife sheath decorations have a distinct regional character. Luxury items are more difficult to consider as ethnic idioms. Before I draw any conclusions from the archaeological record, a short survey on German influence in the Baltic Sea basin must be presented.

#### *“Germans” in the Baltic Sea – new fuel for an old debate*

In historical syntheses about towns evolving after the Viking Age, Sigtuna still has to find its place. International surveys traditionally refer to Gotland and Rus’ in the 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, but to understand the complex Baltic network it is essential to consider the findings in mainland Sweden. Sigtuna is one of few sites that offer the possibility to re-write the history of the early High Middle Ages. This is due to well preserved deposits and a large amount of identifiable structures and artefacts. Through archaeology, it is possible to sketch a nuanced picture formerly based solely on written sources. With a background in the artefactual evidence we can answer the first two questions asked in the beginning of this text. It is clear that artefacts from the Holy Roman Empire end up in Sigtuna just after the turn of the Millennium. Personal belongings, as well as religious artefacts, stand out in variety, if not in quantity. Why are these artefacts important? Returning to my last question I will shortly discuss what effect the objects have on a historical level.

In the debate about German influence in the Baltic Sea during the High Middle Ages, an assessment of the written sources has created a view of a very late interference by merchants of the Empire.<sup>16</sup> Hugo Yrwing argued that German-speaking visitors did not travel to Gotland and into the Baltic Sea on a regular basis until the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century (Yrwing 1940, 111 ff.; 138 ff.; 1989). Before that, trade was conducted by merchants from Schleswig, acting as intermediaries for partners from Westfalia, Lower Saxony and Frisia. According to him, individuals from these regions were not properly present until the first founding of Lübeck by Adolf of Schauenburg in 1143 and the succeeding expansion by Henry the Lion in 1158. However, Gotlandic traders signed a treaty with emperor Lothar III in 1134, granting them access to towns in Saxony. Such agreements could have been mutual and guarantee Saxon merchants rights on Gotland (Kattinger 1999, 45 f.; Blomkvist 2005, 437 footnote 147). Steps towards closer interaction were taken with the Artlenburg Privilege in 1161 and the presence of a German “gilda communis” in Visby, founding a church 1190. A last and vital change took place when German speaking residents in Visby acquired rights to St Mary and used it as their parish church from 1225.

<sup>15</sup> The block Trädgårdsmästaren 9 and 10, finds nr 3627.

<sup>16</sup> Yrwing 1940; 1989; Blomkvist 2005, 415 ff. for a presentation of the debate.

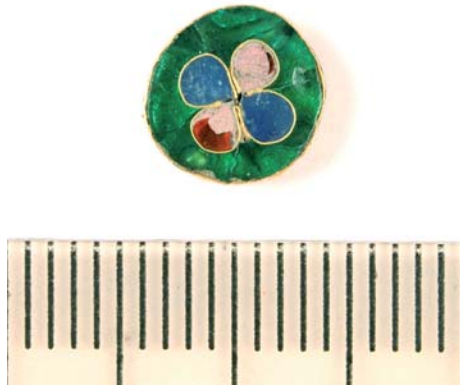


Fig. 9. Gold and cloisonné stud. Trädgårdsmästaren 9 and 10 nr 3035, 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Not to scale. Photo by the author.



Fig. 10. Alsengems. a – Professorn 1 nr 4168, ca 1100; b – Professorn 1 nr 4334, ca 1100. Not to scale. Photo by the author.

Yrwing concentrated on Gotlandic and German interaction based on texts. If we on the other hand use written records to study economic transactions between the Svear and visitors from the Empire, we only have one source (Kattinger 1999, 109 ff.). The first expression of common interests was between Knut Eriksson and Henry the Lion in a treaty signed sometimes in the interval 1167 to 1180, referred to in a later trade treaty between Lübeck and Birger Jarl in 1252. In the time-span between the rune stones ordered by the Svea guild brothers and the late 12<sup>th</sup> century, there is silence. Can the hiatus be filled in by archaeology?

If the coins from the Empire are taken into consideration, we find strong evidence for transactions between the regions. Through Gert Hatz work on 85 000 German coins found in Sweden, ca 60 000 give information about their provenance. His analysis show that 21 000 came from Saxony, 18 200 from Lower Lorraine, 9500 from Franconia, 3100 from Upper Lorraine, 2400 from Swabia and 1800 from Bavaria (Hatz 1974; 1987, 89). More than 70 % of the minted silver came from the regions Saxony and Lower Lorraine. Regional differences can be seen over time. In the massive import of German coins from ca 990, half of them are Otto-Adelheid-Pfennige struck in Lower Saxony. Another major group is from east Frisia. Entering the 11<sup>th</sup> century, Saxony and mints along the Rhine dominate the import with a Frisian element. This division has been certified in studies succeeding Hatz' work (Jonsson 2002; Radtke 2002, 381 ff. with ref.).

Such a pattern, emerging from Sweden as a whole, can be verified locally through a treasure found in Sigtuna in the year 2000 (Jonsson 2004). In a house, dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of the 11<sup>th</sup> century (the treasure has a t. p. q. 1027), 156 coins were found together. This treasure is interesting as it contains a mix of several issues from the Empire. German coins dominate ex-

tremely well with 95 %. Among them, Goslar (Otto-Adelheid-Pfennige) stands out with 40 %, but mints in Cologne, Mainz, Worms and Strassbourg are also represented. The remaining content is six English, one Bohemian and one Italian coin. The conclusions drawn from this treasure are many, but the issue here is to point out the mixture of issues. The coins seem to be brought together from different mints, thus implying several transactions. If the treasure was collected on one occasion and with partners from a specific town in Germany, it would have been less diverse. Instead, the content could have been collected along the way, in a place where traders met.

The hypothesis is strengthened by several archaeological and written records, analysed by Christian Radtke. His study on the coins and scale-weights found in Schleswig fits in well with the observations in Sigtuna. He convincingly argues for Schleswig's position as a "Klammer" in the crossroad between one system based on minted silver and a Baltic system based on weight (Radtke 2002, 415). It was in such a place merchants negotiated both commodities with silver and identities with jewellery, ceramics and other things. However, Radtke based his hypothesis on written evidence when he states that: "Bis auf einige Sachsen in Roskilde and Lund in der ersten Hälfte der 1130er Jahre fehlen alle gesicherten Nachweise für die Anwesenheit von Deutschen in der Ostsee vor etwa 1160" (ibid. 413). In my opinion, based on archaeological sources, there are traces of such a presence to be seen.

The bulk of artefacts found in Sigtuna could originate from Schleswig, the pivotal point of trade between the East and West, but others besides Danes, Gotlanders or Svear could have brought them there. When Adam of Bremen wrote about Saxons in Schleswig in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, he observed a 100-year-old community. We also might suggest a more active role

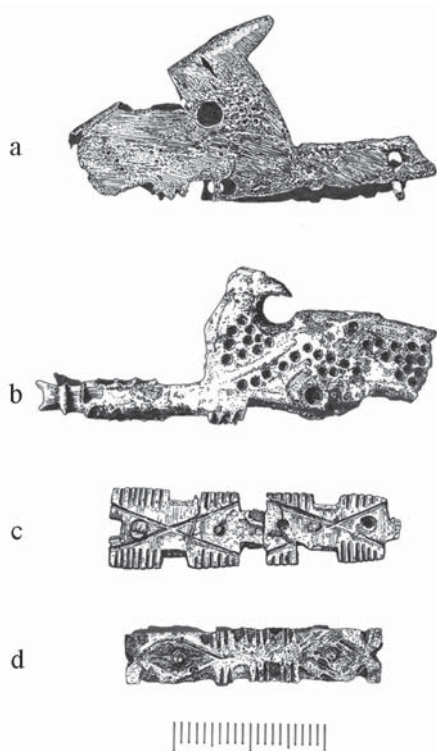


Fig. 11. Knife sheath mountings.

a – Professorn 1 nr 3738, 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of the 12<sup>th</sup> century; b – Trädgårdsmästaren 9 and 10 nr 2340, 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of the 12<sup>th</sup> century; c – Trädgårdsmästaren 9 and 10 nr 16380, 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of the 13<sup>th</sup> century; d – Trädgårdsmästaren 9 and 10 nr 16946, 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Scale 1:1. Drawings by Jacques Vincent.

of the inland Continental traders in Alt-Lübeck and Wolin. By then, Saxon communities are present in these towns (Leciejewicz 1987, 76). Somewhat later in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of the 12<sup>th</sup> century we find Saxon artisan and traders in the Danish towns of Roskilde and Lund (Radtke 2002, 392). Based on the reciprocal content of treaties in the Middle Ages, there may have been Saxons visiting Gotland already by 1134. These few and flimsy sources can indicate that Frisians and Saxons organised temporary trade agreements with Scandinavians even before the “Kaufmannhanse” sailed north. An unambiguous positive response to the question if Saxons and Frisians came to Sigtuna or not cannot be given. Among scholars studying Continental trade on Sweden we can find advocates for both opinions. From a numismatic point of view, Kenneth Jonsson can see Frisian traders on the shores of Lake Mälaren already in the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> century (Jonsson 2002). On the other hand, a statement with a negative conclusion is heard from Christian Radtke (2002), who writes that “[n]ach dem Quelleneindruck haben Schleswiger Seelute – nicht Sachsen, nicht Westfalen und sogar nicht Ostfalen, und, wie ich meine, auch nicht die Leute von Rhein, die Kölner und die Friesen aus Utrecht und

Tiel – auch die konnten ihre eigenen Schiffe ja nicht mitbringen, gingen sie nicht auf Umlandsfahrt, hatten jedoch immerhin Seefahrtserfahrung – zusammen mit denen von Gotland den Zwischenhandel besorgt”. With the new findings from Sigtuna we can enter this discussion and try to formulate a new hypothesis.

#### *On the bridge between worlds*

To sum up the artefactual evidence of visitors from the Holy Roman Empire, it is possible to suggest as follows. In the first decades of the 11<sup>th</sup> century and after ca 20 years of its existence, Sigtuna had regained a network worthy its predecessor Birka. It was primarily based on Rus’ contacts, but the town also had western visitors. The first dated object is a round buckle fibula with a thin enamelled cross from the first quarter of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Several round fibulas dated to the first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century are the first signs of these relations. Two of them were even found together inside a house dated to 1010–1020.<sup>17</sup> Enamelled brooches were worn mainly in the core of the Empire, and when found outside it the new tradition signalled Otonian and Salian dominion. They are of simple quality, worn by people of ordinary social status.

Portable altars must be seen as remains of an early Christianisation in Sigtuna. Altars were used for saying Mass, so we must deduce from their presence that priests stayed in Sigtuna periodically at least from the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Some of them must have been from the bishopric of Bremen, as the Church established a diocese in Sigtuna by 1060. Clerics travelled with servants, of no interest to the chronicle writers. By the end of the century, a stone church filled the needs of the young congregation (Tesch 2007b, 101 ff.). If this is correct, stonemasons and professional builders must have lived in town regularly. An Agnus Dei brooch dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of the century carries a Christian message and a simple copper buckle is also dated to this period.

The most common artefact being used as a sign of personal presence is the pottery. A taste for wine brought from Byzantium over Rus’ was equalled by vintages from the Rhine, drunk in Pingsdorf beakers in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of the 11<sup>th</sup> century and into the next. A small amount of everyday pottery, i. e. low fired “Kugeltöpfe”, indicate foreign guests in the same period. The bulk of cooking vessels retrieved from deposits are Slavic inspired Baltic ware, as well as local Scandinavian types and proper Rus’ imports. I interpret the few low fired “Kugeltöpfe” as a sign of a very socially limited group of visitors from the West, in contrast to the diverse Scandinavian and Rus’ population in Sigtuna, which contained all levels in society.

From the very beginning based on clerics and a few merchants, the presence increases just around the year 1100. A group of brooches with set glass beads are

<sup>17</sup> Professorn 1, finds nr 12200 and 12409.

from the beginning of the century.

A rock crystal brooch is dated to around 1100 by similar finds from the vicinity as well as from Finland. The alsengems can be the first sign of organised traders from the Empire. Men carried the badges for comfort on perilous voyages. They could also express their social identity as merchants organised in a guild with transport of wine to Sigtuna as one of their assignments.

A qualitative as well as quantitative change occurred in the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The mutual agreement between Henry the Lion on one side and Knut Eriksson on the other started an influx of better organised newcomers. After the trade relations were settled, visitors brought with them lead glazed pitchers of Andenne type, Paffrath bowls and cups, Pingsdorf cups and pitchers and “Kugeltöpfe” (“harte Grauware”) in greater amounts. There are also knife sheath decorations of German and West Slavic tradition found in deposits from the late 12<sup>th</sup> to early 13<sup>th</sup> century. A golden finger ring was lost in the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, similar to others in German bishops’ graves.

The distribution of the artefacts under study, show that they were used in an area covered by the Lower Rhine, Saxony and Frisian between the estuaries of Maas and Elbe. Since towns were havens for merchants from many regions, they could have come from Cologne, Soest, Deventer, Tiel, Lüneburg, Bardowiek, and Bremen. For instance, Frisians are mentioned in Hildesheim, Braunschweig, Magdeburg, Goslar and Erfurt in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, far away from the coast (Lebecq 1983, 232 f. Fig. 51). If we turn to the important crossroads where the Continental traders met the Baltic Sea, towns are much rarer. The only urban centres that existed before Lübeck were Schleswig and Alt-Lübeck. So, either the merchants travelled in félag with Scandinavians, or used people in Schleswig and Alt-Lübeck as intermediaries. If the treaty between emperor Lothar III and the Gotlanders from 1134 was reciprocal, it is possible to suggest that Saxons and Frisians engaged in trading in the Baltic Sea with Scandinavian partners. Even if the visitors were not organised in a “Kaufmannhanse”, it is difficult to accept Baltic Sea trade so water tight that no Saxon or Frisian went in félag with Scandinavians to Sigtuna, just because there are no written records saying so.

The origin of some of the artefacts has been interpreted in another way than in this article. Since enamelled brooches also are known from Danish contexts, they have been used as a proof of Danish political influence over Sigtuna in the 11<sup>th</sup> century (Duzcko 1995, 648). The Danish finds are widely dispersed and in my opinion say more about foreign visitors than royal supremacy. Schleswig was certainly a Danish town in the Middle Ages, but held a special relation vis-à-vis the Danish kings. Legislation and protection was negotiated between peers, but the merchants themselves took everyday action. The amount and diversity of finds in-

dicate that Sigtuna had contacts with Continental actors without royal Danish interference through the two centuries under study.

The artefacts from the Lower Rhine, Frisian coast and South West Baltic most probably came with clerics and merchants to Sigtuna. They were dependent guests accepted by local powerful families because their skills and commodities were needed to enhance the status of the local nobility. Silver was brought in from the beginning and made exchange simpler. Thus, even if Sigtuna was rooted in a royal initiative it quickly became an important place for transactions also outside the circles of the king and wealthy landowners. To level oneself above others in society was an important incitement to acquire exotic and sumptuous commodities. Merchants organised themselves in guilds and created bonds on their own social level to make the annual contacts fluid and predictable. Stability and trust being the most important assets in trading, local friends were sought and gained without direct royal interference.

The German speaking visitors persisted to go on their northbound trips in the centuries to come. Their well documented influence in Stockholm during the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries shows that the City Council had to regulate the amount of German members to secure a local majority. Their precursors had since long fathomed the waters of the archipelago of lake Mälaren where they found a haven in Sigtuna. This town was a node in a wider network, bridging two worlds of East and West, just as Johan always have done.

#### *Abstract*

The last decades of the 10<sup>th</sup> century saw an upheaval in interregional contacts that shattered old arrangements. Some of the nodes in the network were abandoned. Sigtuna seems to be established in the wake of Birka’s demise, but it took two or three decades before foreign guests found their way on a regular basis. With the structural pre-millennium re-arrangement, negotiations with both Continental northwestern Europe and the West Slavs seem to be put aside. Instead, the contacts with Rus’ were strengthened as the fur trade gained more attention. As many syntheses have been based solely on written sources or numismatic evidence, the interpretations have been biased. In a theoretical and methodological perspective, focus on individual sources can lead to contradictory interpretations. Taking several different artefacts into the analysis, it is possible to discuss anew when the Continental visitors themselves came into the Baltic Sea basin. Scandinavians sailing to Schleswig and Alt-Lübeck maintained regular trade contacts. An investigation on secular jewellery and sacred objects however indicate that individual actors from northwestern Continental Europe visited Sigtuna from the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Signs of German speaking visitors on a larger scale cannot be seen until the transition into the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

### Zusammenfassung

Die letzten Jahrzehnte des 10. Jhs. erlebten Umwälzungen in den interregionalen Kontakten, die die alten Verhältnisse erschütterten. Einige Verknüpfungen im Netzwerk wurden gelöst. Sigtuna hat sich etabliert – wohl ausgelöst von Birkas Untergang; aber es hat zwei bis drei Jahrzehnte gedauert, bevor fremde Gäste auf regulärer Basis damit zurechtkamen. Mit der strukturellen Neuordnung in der Zeit vor der Jahrtausendwende verloren anscheinend Beziehungen sowohl mit dem kontinentalen Nordwesteuropa als auch mit den Westslawen an Bedeutung. Stattdessen wurden die Kontakte mit der Rus verstärkt, da der Pelzhandel mehr an Aufmerksamkeit gewann. Da viele Synthesen allein auf schriftlichen Quellen oder numismatischen

Belegen fußen, sind die Interpretationen nicht überzeugend. Aus theoretischer und methodischer Sicht führt das Heranziehen einer einzigen Quelle zu sich widersprechenden Deutungen. Wenn mehrere unterschiedliche Belege in eine Analyse einbezogen werden, kann es zu einer erneuten Diskussion darüber führen, wann die kontinentalen Besucher in den Ostseeraum kamen. Nach Schleswig und Alt-Lübeck segelnde Skandinavier hielten reguläre Handelskontakte aufrecht. Eine Untersuchung des säkularen Schmucks und geheiligter Objekte zeigen jedoch, dass individuelle Akteure vom nordwestlichen Kontinentaleuropa Sigtuna vom ersten Viertel des 11. Jhs. an aufsuchten. Anzeichen für deutschsprachige Besucher im größeren Umfang sind erst nach dem Übergang ins 12. Jh. erkennbar.

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