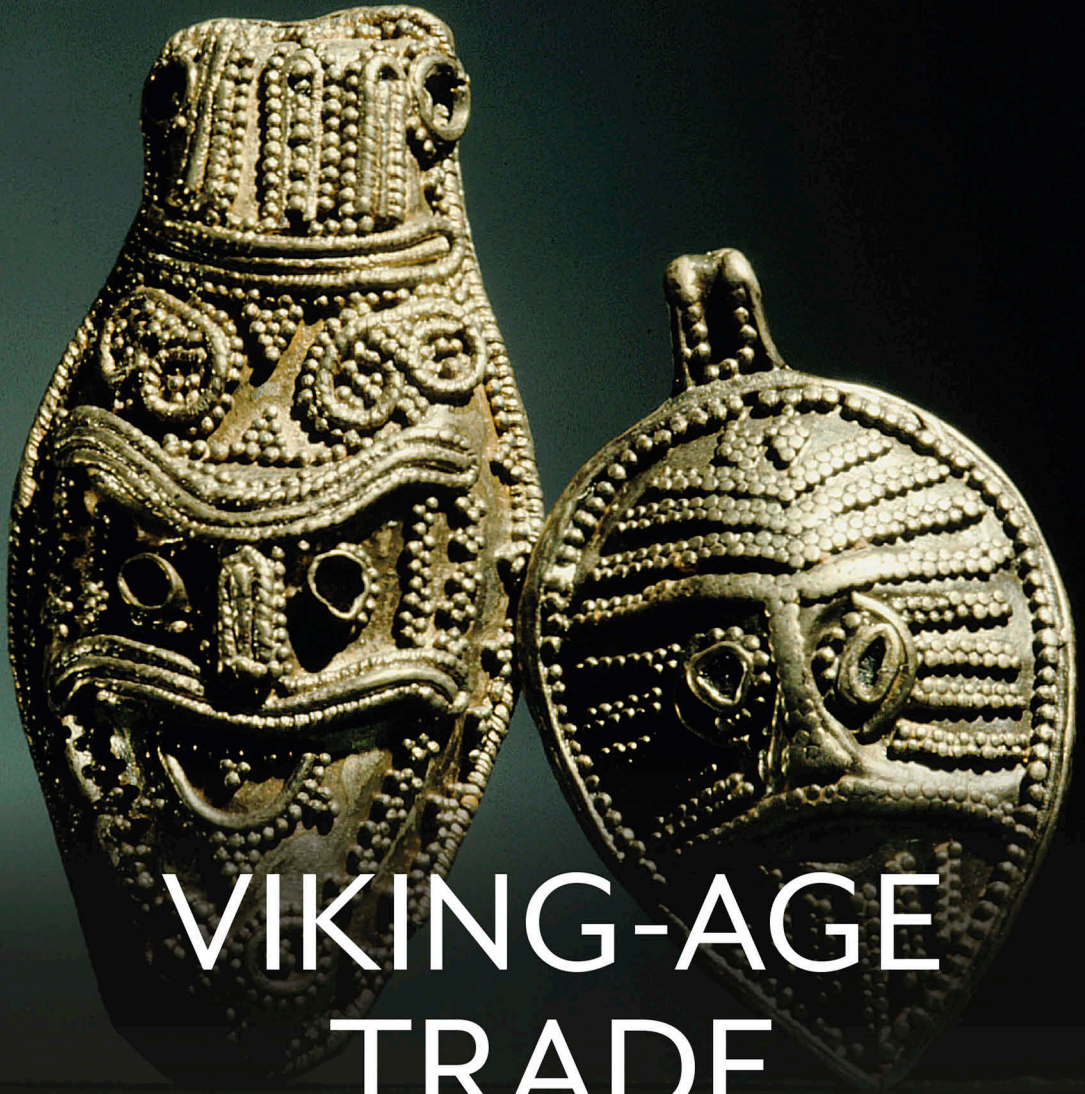


ROUTLEDGE ARCHAEOLOGIES OF THE  
VIKING WORLD



# VIKING-AGE TRADE

SILVER, SLAVES AND GOTLAND

EDITED BY JACEK GRUSZCZYŃSKI,  
MAREK JANKOWIAK AND JONATHAN SHEPARD

# Viking-Age Trade

That there was an influx of silver dirhams from the Muslim world into eastern and northern Europe in the ninth and tenth centuries is well known, as is the fact that the largest concentration of hoards is on the Baltic island of Gotland. Recent discoveries have shown that dirhams were reaching the British Isles, too. What brought the dirhams to northern Europe in such large numbers? The fur trade has been proposed as one driver for transactions, but the slave trade offers another – complementary – explanation.

This volume does not offer a comprehensive delineation of the hoard finds, or a full answer to the question of what brought the silver north. But it highlights the trade in slaves as driving exchanges on a trans-continental scale. By their very nature, the nexuses were complex, mutable and unclear even to contemporaries, and they have eluded modern scholarship. Contributions to this volume shed light on processes and key places: the mints of Central Asia; the chronology of the inflows of dirhams to Rus and northern Europe; the reasons why silver was deposited in the ground and why so much ended up on Gotland; the functioning of networks – perhaps comparable to the twenty-first-century drug trade; slave-trading in the British Isles; and the stimulus and additional networks that the Vikings brought into play.

This combination of general surveys, presentations of fresh evidence and regional case studies sets Gotland and the early medieval slave trade in a firmer framework than has been available before.

**Jacek Gruszczyński** was a Research Associate at the Khalili Research Centre, University of Oxford and now works as an archaeology and heritage consultant.

**Marek Jankowiak** is Associate Professor of Byzantine History at the University of Oxford.

**Jonathan Shepard** was University Lecturer in Russian History at the University of Cambridge.

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# **Viking-Age Trade**

Silver, Slaves and Gotland

**Edited by Jacek Gruszczyński,  
Marek Jankowiak and Jonathan  
Shepard**

First published 2021  
by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge  
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

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*British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Names: Gruszczyński, Jacek, 1980- editor. | Jankowiak, Marek, editor. | Shepard, Jonathan, editor.

Title: Viking-age trade : silver, slaves and Gotland / edited by Jacek Gruszczyński, Marek Jankowiak and Jonathan Shepard.

Description: Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY : Routledge, 2021. |

Series: Routledge archaeologies of the Viking world | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020017582 (print) | LCCN 2020017583 (ebook) |

ISBN 9781138293946 (hardback) | ISBN 9781315231808 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Scandinavia--Commerce--History--To 1500. | Gotland (Sweden)--

Commerce--History--To 1500. | Slavery--Scandinavia--History--To 1500. |

Slavery--Sweden--Gotland--History--To 1500. | Silver--Scandinavia--History--To

1500. | Silver--Sweden--Gotland--History--To 1500.

Classification: LCC HF3640 .V55 2021 (print) | LCC HF3640 (ebook) |

DDC 382/.440948--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020017582>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020017583>

ISBN: 978-1-138-29394-6 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-23180-8 (ebk)

Typeset in Bembo  
by River Editorial Ltd, Devon, UK

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# Preface and acknowledgements

This volume is one of the outcomes of the *Dirhams for Slaves* research project that was funded by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council between 2013 and 2017. As Dagfinn Skre notes in his concluding remarks, the challenges in investigating the trade system that connected northern Europe and the Islamic world in the ninth and tenth centuries were considerable. Specialists from a number of disciplines were necessary, including numismatists, archaeologists and historians specialising in the British Isles and Scandinavia to Russia and the Islamic world, and all points in between. The project's basic research proposition – that the hundreds of thousands of dirhams found in hoards strewn across northern Europe were the residue of large-scale trade in which slaves played a key role – was challenging in a number of ways; indeed, the seminar series where some of the papers in this volume were first aired was entitled 'The Dark Ages' "dirty secret"?

The questions the finds of dirhams pose are enumerated further in the introductory chapter to the volume. But on a more practical level, such interdisciplinary work poses its own editorial challenges. How can archaeological or numismatic materials be made accessible to the non-specialist without oversimplifying? Should quotations be transliterated or given in the original language? And how best to style Scandinavian and Arabic names to make them digestible to the lay reader? The answers to such questions are never easy and our solutions are open to the charge of being overly broad-brush. But we have tried to make this volume clear and accessible primarily to English-speaking non-specialists, notably in adopting consistent and recognisable forms of proper names and technical terms. Most northern European place names are untouched. We have adopted conventional versions of Arabic place names (Baghdad instead of *Madinat al-Salam*, for example), although for Arabic mints we have generally retained the original names or offered both them and the modern ones. In Chapter 8, there is a short table of these variants and an outline of the dynasties issuing them (Appendices 8.2 and 8.1).

One fundamental area where standardisation has been attempted – with some difficulty – is that of periodisation. For example, the term 'Viking Age' means different things even to scholars within Sweden, running to around 1050 for most but until 1150 in Gotland; the 'Migration Period' in Swedish

scholarship runs from 400 to 600 AD, while for Polish scholars it means 375 to 500 AD. We have adopted a simplified scheme in this volume detailed in Table 0.1 (although it should be noted that some of our contributors preferred to retain their own periodisation or categories and notes to this effect are given in their chapters).

*Table 0.1* Periodisation used in this volume

<i>Dates (AD)</i>	<i>Description</i>			
1–400	Roman Iron Age			
400–600	Migration Period			
600–800	Vendel Period	}	early	} middle ages
800–1050	Viking Age <sup>1</sup>			
1050–1300			late	
1300–1500				
1500–	early modern			

Note

1 Continuing until 1150 on Gotland.

Quotations are generally in English and translations made by our authors, unless otherwise stated in the Notes. There is a short Glossary at the end of the volume, although where possible technical terms or foreign words are explained in the text, along with an Appendix itemising the Gotlandic structures and other objects offering scope for radiocarbon datings discussed in our chapters, notably those of Östergren, Carlsson, Gustafsson and Widerström. There are maps at the beginning of most sections to help locate a number of the key places and areas mentioned by our authors, with more detailed, technical maps within some chapters. Readers may find some inconsistencies, with modern place names alongside older ones, and all boundaries are approximate and sometimes either speculative or controversial.

Unless otherwise stated, all maps, tables and graphs have been prepared by the author. Authors' maps were revised by Jacek Gruszczyński; David Cox prepared the general maps and some of the chapter-specific ones. We owe them both an immense debt of gratitude.

We would like to thank the following people and institutions, and to acknowledge their help in seeing this volume into print: Dr Luke Treadwell, Principal Investigator of the *Dirhams for Slaves* project, for his unfailing patience and strong support; our two anonymous reviewers, whose comments were immensely helpful in framing the volume – and particularly for ensuring we included the Irish perspective; and Nicola Sigsworth, for her truly invaluable editorial help. Publication would not have been possible without the initial encouragement of Dr John Smedley of Ashgate; the support and patience of Michael Greenwood and Stewart Beale of Routledge, who saw us almost

to the finish, and Matthew Gibbons who then took over; the series editors of Routledge Archaeologies of the Viking World, Neil Price, Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson and Ben Raffield, for agreeing to take us under their wing; Sally Evans-Darby for her expert copyediting; and Colin Morgan and Julie Willis at River Editorial for seeing us through to the world of print.

Finally, we would also like to thank those colleagues who participated in the following events organised under the aegis of the *Dirhams for Slaves* project, but whose papers were published elsewhere: the workshop held in the Institute of Archaeology at the University of Oxford in March 2015 on ‘Silver Landscapes in Viking-Age Gotland: From Hoards to Settlements’; the sessions at the Leeds International Medieval Congress in July 2015; and the above-mentioned Oxford Trinity Term 2015 seminar series. Above all, we would like to thank our authors for their enthusiastic participation in the project, for their good humour in dealing with our many queries and, above all, for their patience.

*Jacek Gruszczyński, Marek Jankowiak, Jonathan Shepard*

# Abbreviations and notes on bibliography

Where appropriate, our chapters' bibliographies are divided into primary sources and secondary literature. The letters Å, Ä and Ö have been alphabetised under A and O (*pace* our Scandinavian colleagues). In the endnotes, short titles are used for primary sources and the name–date system for secondary literature. Where a primary source appears frequently in only one chapter, this has been abbreviated within that chapter's bibliography (for example, DR for *Danmarks runeindskrifter* in Chapter 16). Primary sources and secondary works cited by several of our authors are abbreviated in the endnotes with full details given below. This list also contains the titles of some journals and other abbreviations. Further details on entries in this list marked with an asterisk (\*) can be found in the Glossary.

AdGH	Adam of Bremen, <i>Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum</i> , ed. W. Trillmich and R. Buchner, in <i>Quellen des 9. und 11. Jahrhunderts zur Geschichte der Hamburgischen Kirche und des Reiches</i> , Darmstadt (1961), pp. 137–499
ASC <sup>1</sup>	'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', tr. D. Whitelock, in <i>EHD</i> , pp. 148–259
ASC <sup>2</sup>	<i>The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles</i> , rev. ed. and tr. M. Swanton, London (2000)
ATA	Antikvarisk–topografiska arkivet (The Antiquarian–Topographical Archives), Stockholm
BAR BS	<i>British Archaeological Reports British Series</i>
BAR IS	<i>British Archaeological Reports International Series</i>
BGA	<i>Bibliotheca geographorum arabicorum</i> , ed. M. J. de Goeje, 8 vols, Leiden (1870–94)
BNJ	<i>British Numismatic Journal</i>
BVW	F. Androschuk <i>et al.</i> (eds), <i>Byzantium and the Viking World</i> , Uppsala (2016)
CFHB	<i>Corpus fontium historiae byzantinae</i>
CH	J. Graham-Campbell <i>et al.</i> , <i>The Cuerdale Hoard and Related Viking-Age Silver and Gold from Britain and Ireland in the British Museum</i> , London (2011)

- CIS *Corpus iuris sueo-gotorum antiqui (Samling af Sweriges gamla lagar)*, ed. H. S. Collin and C. J. Schlyter, 13 vols, Stockholm (1827–77)
- CNS *Corpus nummorum saeculorum IX–XI qui in Suecia reperti sunt (Catalogue of Coins from the Viking Age Found in Sweden)*, 9 vols, Stockholm (1975–2010); volumes are now published in pdf only via [archaeology.su.se/english/stockholm-numismatic-institute/publications-nfg/cns](http://archaeology.su.se/english/stockholm-numismatic-institute/publications-nfg/cns) (accessed 17 December 2019)
- CNS n.s. *Commentationes de nummis saeculorum IX–XI in Suecia repertis. Nova series*
- Co. County (Ireland)
- DAI Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, ed. G. Moravcsik, tr. R. J. H. Jenkins, 2nd edn, *CFHB* 1, Washington, DC (1967)
- DfS ‘Dirhams for Slaves’, an AHRC-funded project based at the Khalili Research Centre, University of Oxford (2013–17), [krc.web.ox.ac.uk/article/dirhams-slaves](http://krc.web.ox.ac.uk/article/dirhams-slaves) (accessed 27 July 2020)
- DG *Drevneishie gosudarstva na territorii SSSR/Vostochnoi Evropy* [from 1991]
- DKV P. Lundström, *De kommo vida . . . vikingars hamn vid Paviken på Gotland*, Stockholm (1981)
- dnr diarienummer
- EHD *English Historical Documents, c. 500–1042*, tr. D. Whitelock, 2nd edn, London (1979)
- FMIS RAÄ Archaeological Sites Information System\*
- FMP 3 M. Bogucki *et al.*, *Frühmittelalterliche Münzfunde aus Polen. Inventar*, vol. 3: *Masowien, Podlachien, Mittelpolen*, Warsaw (2016)
- FMP 4 M. Bogucki *et al.*, *Frühmittelalterliche Münzfunde aus Polen. Inventar*, vol. 4: *Kleinpolen und Schlesien*, Warsaw (2013)
- Fv *Fornvännen*
- G *Gotlands runinskrifter*, vol. 1, ed. B. F. Jansson and E. Wessén, SR 11, Stockholm (1962); vol. 2, ed. E. Svärdström, SR 12, Stockholm (1978); vol. 3, ed. H. Gustavson and T. Snædal (forthcoming; draft available from [raa.se/kulturarvet/arknologi-fornlamningar-och-fynd/runstenar/digitala-sveriges-runinskrifter/gotlands-runinskrifter-3](http://raa.se/kulturarvet/arknologi-fornlamningar-och-fynd/runstenar/digitala-sveriges-runinskrifter/gotlands-runinskrifter-3)) (accessed 17 December 2019)
- GA *Gotländskt Arkiv*
- GIS Geographic Information System\*
- GL *Guta Lag: The Law of the Gotlanders*, ed. and tr. C. Peel, London (2009)
- GoV I. Jansson (ed.), *Gutar och vikingar*, Stockholm (1983)

- GS *Guta Saga: The History of the Gotlanders*, ed. and tr. C. Peel, London (1999; repr. 2010)
- Hkr<sup>1</sup> Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 3 vols, ÍF 26–8, Reykjavik (1941–51)
- Hkr<sup>2</sup> Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, tr. L. M. Hollander, *History of the Kings of Norway*, Austin, TX (1964)
- Hkr<sup>3</sup> Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, tr. A. Finlay and A. Faulkes, rev. edn, 3 vols, London (2014–16)
- HV G. Hatz, *Handel und Verkehr zwischen dem Deutschen Reich und Schweden in der späten Wikingerzeit: die deutschen Münzen des 10. und 11. Jahrhunderts in Schweden*, Lund (1974)
- IbnF<sup>1</sup> Ibn Fadlan, *Mission to the Volga*, ed. and tr. J. E. Montgomery, in *Two Arabic Travel Books: Accounts of China and India*, New York (2014), pp. 165–297
- IbnF<sup>2</sup> Ibn Fadlan, *The Book of Ahmad Ibn Fadlan*, tr. P. Lunde and C. Stone, in *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness: Arab Travellers in the Far North*, London (2012), pp. 3–58
- IC F. Biermann and M. Jankowiak (eds), *The Invisible Commodity: The Archaeology of Slavery in Early Medieval Northern Europe*, Cham (2021 forthcoming)
- ÍF *Íslenzk fornrit*
- IFD J. Callmer et al. (eds), *Identity Formation and Diversity in the Early Medieval Baltic and Beyond*, Leiden (2017)
- KLNM *Kulturhistoriskt lexikon för nordisk medeltid från vikingatid till reformationstid*, ed. I. Andersson, J. Granlund et al., 22 vols, Malmö (1956–78)
- LD G. Svedjemo, *Landscape Dynamics: Spatial Analyses of Villages and Farms on Gotland AD 200–1700*, Uppsala (2014)
- ME D. Skre (ed.), *Means of Exchange: Dealing with Silver in the Viking Age*, tr. J. Hines, Aarhus (2008)
- MGH *Monumenta Germaniae historica*
- MGH SRG *MGH Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum*
- MIA *Materialy i issledovaniia po arkheologii SSSR*
- MSoS M. Östergren, *Mellan stengrund och stenhus: Gotlands vikingatida silverskatter som boplatsindikation*, Stockholm (1989)
- NMI National Museum of Ireland, Dublin
- NNÅ *Nordisk Numismatisk Årsskrift*
- NoB *Namn och bygd: tidskrift för nordisk ortnamnsforskning*
- ON Old Norse
- PAS Portable Antiquities Scheme, [finds.org.uk](http://finds.org.uk) (accessed 17 December 2019)
- PVL *Povest' vremennykh let*, ed. V. P. Adrianova-Peretts and D. S. Likhachev, 2nd edn rev. M. B. Sverdlov, St Petersburg (1996)

RAÄ	Riksantikvarieämbetet (The Swedish National Heritage Board)*
RAGU	Riksantikvarieämbetets Gotlandsundersökningar (The Gotland Branch of the Central Board and Museum of National Antiquities)
RGA	<i>Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde</i> , ed. J. Hoops, H. Beck <i>et al.</i> , 2nd edn, 35 vols and 2 indices, Berlin (1973–2008)
RimbVA	Rimbirt, <i>Vita Anskarii</i> , ed. G. Waitz, rev. ed. and tr. W. Trillmich and R. Buchner, in <i>Quellen des 9. und 11. Jahrhunderts zur Geschichte der Hamburgischen Kirche und des Reiches</i> , Darmstadt (1961), pp. 3–133
RPC	<i>Russian Primary Chronicle</i> , tr. S. H. Cross and O. P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, Cambridge, MA (1953)
SEMSS	J. Graham-Campbell <i>et al.</i> (eds), <i>Silver Economies, Monetisation and Society in Scandinavia, AD 800–1100</i> , Aarhus (2011)
SEVA	J. Graham-Campbell and G. Williams (eds), <i>Silver Economy in the Viking Age</i> , Walnut Creek, CA (2007)
SGW	M. Stenberger, <i>Die Schatzfunde Gotlands der Wikingerzeit</i> , 2 vols, Lund (1947–58) [vol. 1: <i>Text</i> (1958); vol. 2: <i>Fundbeschreibung und Tafeln</i> (1947)]
SH	A.-M. Pettersson (ed.), <i>The Spillings Hoard: Gotland's Role in Viking Age World Trade</i> , Visby (2009)
SHM	Statens historiska museet (The Museum of National Antiquities), Stockholm – now Historiska museet (The Swedish History Museum)
SL	<i>Svenska landskapslagar: tolkade och förklarade för nutidens svenskar</i> , ed. Å. Holmbäck and E. Wessén, 5 vols, Stockholm (1933–46; repr. 1979) [vol. 1: <i>Ostgötalagen och Upplandslagen</i> (1933); vol. 2: <i>Dalalagen och Västmannalagen</i> (1936); vol. 3: <i>Södermanalagen och Hälsingelagen</i> (1940); vol. 4: <i>Skånelagen och Gutalagen</i> (1943); vol. 5: <i>Äldre Västgötalagen, Yngre Västgötalagen, Smålandslagens kyrkobalk och Bjärköarätten</i> (1946)]
Sö	<i>Södermanlands runinskrifter</i> , ed. E. Brate and E. Wessén, SR 3, Stockholm (1924–36)
SoB	M. Östergren, with K. Jonsson and B. Sigvallius, <i>Silverskatter och boningshus: skattfyndprojektet 1; en studie av gården Gannarve i Hall sn, Gotland</i> (RAGU Rapport 1986:1), Visby (1986)
SP	K. Jonsson and B. Malmer (eds), <i>Sigtuna Papers: Proceedings of the Sigtuna Symposium on Viking-Age Coinage, 1–4 June 1989</i> , CNS n.s. 6, Stockholm (1990)
SR	Sveriges runinskrifter
SSA	Stockholm Studies in Archaeology
tpq	<i>terminus post quem</i> *

- U *Upplands runinskrifter*, ed. E. Wessén and S. B. F. Jansson, 3 vols, SR 6–9, Stockholm (1940–58)
- UNESCO The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
- VACNL M. Blackburn and D. M. Metcalf (eds), *Viking-Age Coinage in the Northern Lands*, BAR IS 122, 2 vols, Oxford (1981)
- VCC M. Blackburn, *Viking Coinage and Currency in the British Isles*, London (2011)
- VF *Vita Findani* [The *Life* of St Findan the Confessor], ed. O. Holder-Egger, in *MGH Scriptores* 15.1, Hanover (1887), pp. 502–6; tr. C. J. Omand, in R. J. Berry and H. N. Firth (eds), *The People of Orkney*, Kirkwall (1986), pp. 284–7; tr. A. A. Somerville, in A. A. Somerville and R. A. McDonald, *The Viking Age: A Reader*, 2nd edn, North York, Ontario (2014), pp. 195–8
- VIB H. B. Clarke and R. Johnson (eds), *The Vikings in Ireland and Beyond: Before and after the Battle of Clontarf*, Dublin (2015)
- VW S. Brink and N. Price (eds), *The Viking World*, Abingdon (2008)
- WKG L. Thunmark-Nylén, *Die Wikingerzeit Gotlands*, 4 vols, Stockholm (1995–2006) [vol. 1: *Abbildungen der Grabfunde* (1995); vol. 2: *Typentafeln* (1998); vol. 3 in 2 pts: *Text* (2006); vol. 4 in 3 pts: *Katalog* (2000)]

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# 1 Why Gotland?

*Jonathan Shepard*

The single largest concentration of silver hoards known to man is on Gotland. Some 180,000 coins have been found. Around two-fifths of these are Arab dirhams or dirham fragments, with the remaining silver pieces struck in German, English and other mints.<sup>1</sup> Many hoards also contain quantities of hack-silver, and/or silver ornament, which had almost certainly arrived on the island in the form of dirhams. One also has to reckon with stray finds of one or two coins. The phenomenon invites a range of questions. At one end of the spectrum, there are such questions as whether similar concentrations of dirhams once existed elsewhere in northern or eastern Europe, but were subsequently melted down or unearthed and dispersed without coming to the notice of the authorities or receiving scholarly attention; whether dirhams were hoarded in comparable numbers in the Islamic societies where they were struck; and, quite simply, what exactly is a 'hoard'.<sup>2</sup> Then, somewhere along the spectrum, sit issues of numismatics and archaeology: determining the dirhams' silver contents, and taking advantage of the dates and mint locations provided on most coins to try and chart ups and downs in the inflow from the Islamic world. Such efforts have to take into account the archaeological contexts of hoards, alongside the problem of dating: the latest – 'youngest' – coin in a hoard gives a clue, but if the hoard is incomplete, calculations based on this may be misleading. Debate anyway goes on about the likely interval between the date of the youngest piece and when the hoard was deposited, as over how long a coin took to reach northern Europe. These questions segue into economic history and anthropology: what was the ratio of silver found in the hoards to the amount of silver circulating at any one time in the ninth and tenth centuries, the period when most of the dirhams reached Gotland? And what was the point of hoarding: does a single explanation fit all, or should one allow for a variety of reasons, including symbolic and ritual ones? Finally, at the straightforwardly historical end of the spectrum are the questions: what brought so much silver to the island, who were the carriers, where were they taking it and whence? Did the silver on Gotland serve as bullion, currency or

raw material for craftsmen to rework? And, if all three roles were in play, did any one of them predominate?

In the background lurks the question of whether all this silver necessarily registers commerce: might not some, at least, be the outcome of plundering, tribute demands or gift exchange? And if acquired through trading, what commodities were offered in exchange? Had they been grown or manufactured on Gotland? Were the Gotlanders processing items of foreign origin for re-export? Or was the island essentially a clearinghouse for transit trade? These questions raise the problem of 'exceptionalism': was Gotland's economy and society a case apart, functioning differently from those on other Baltic shores, including the Swedish mainland? Was the island significantly richer in silver? And, if so, why?

To begin to answer such questions one has to scan distant horizons: not only eastwards and south-east to Rus and the Eurasian steppes (across which most of the dirhams had travelled), but also to the North Sea and the Atlantic. Evidence of the trafficking there may provide points of comparison with Gotlandic goings-on, for all the variations in societies and economies within the British Isles themselves. Moreover, one must allow for the fact that trading networks stretched far to the west as well as eastwards, and the possibility that Gotland itself amounted to a kind of mega-emporium for high-value commodities shipped from afar.<sup>3</sup> Taking a turn to the west brings another advantage: the archaeological and literary materials from Ireland and Anglo-Saxon England do something to make up for a serious gap in the Gotlandic evidence. Our earliest writings from the island, a law code (*Guta Lag*) and a saga (*Guta Saga*), date from well after the Viking Age, while the handful of runestones bearing brief inscriptions do not fill the void.<sup>4</sup>

And here is the nub. The extraordinary wealth of Gotland – 'silver island' – has long been inferred, and gains corroboration from the studies below. But the dearth of indigenous written sources means that even less is known for sure about Gotland's socio-political structure and economic history than about, say, central Sweden, of which foreign churchmen offer a few descriptions.<sup>5</sup> A growing body of archaeological evidence, sometimes congruent with literary works, concerning Scandinavian arrivals and invaders in the British Isles, particularly their handling of silver and monetary competence, may shed light on the finds from Gotland, too. It may even help us begin answering the questions posed above. 'Begin' is the operative word, though, and few definitive answers are given. What is on offer is neither synthesis nor panorama, but a series of soundings and sightings carried out from and around the platform that Gotland constitutes. If much of Gotland's history remains enshrouded in uncertainty, this book may at least set out the 'known unknowns' and some legitimate grounds for contention, whilst making positive contributions to knowledge. The soundings sometimes go down unlikely – even sordid – channels, but they are suggestive about the dynamics of slave-trading, an activity bearing closely on dirhams and Gotland.

As in the Baltic, so in this book, Gotland sits in the middle of things, with our section on 'Gotland' taking up a third of the chapters. A recurring theme is the need for further excavations of the archaeological contexts of hoards. To fit the hoards into Gotlandic society, one needs to know the lie of the land – literally so, and in terms of their connection with settlements and individual buildings. The rolling countryside lends itself to easy cycle-riding in the twenty-first century, with few wholly inaccessible parts and nowhere more than 85m above sea level. The terrain is – and in the middle ages was – no less propitious for agriculture. However, the amount of cultivable land is finite and there are extensive tracts of ancient forest sometimes reaching down as far as the sea. Sandy beaches encircle long stretches of the island, although its rivers are not abundant and should more properly be termed brooks.<sup>6</sup>

Thorough reassessment of the settlements and of social structures is provided by Gustaf Svedjemo. Drawing on later seventeenth- and eighteenth-century maps, he argues in favour of the underlying stability of settlement patterns on Gotland, of both villages and solitary farmsteads. The former were often quite small, consisting of two or three farmsteads. These farms could, however, shift around within the bounds of a village. A certain trend towards sandy soils on higher ground from moraine soils is discernible in the Viking Age. Awareness of the agricultural potential of different soils was quite compatible with the amassing of silver through trade. Svedjemo envisages an elite engaging readily in commerce, whilst subject to and upholding legal constraints on the sale and reallocation of land, and he notes that although silver hoards mostly occur quite near settlement sites, only around half seem to have been deposited actually inside buildings.<sup>7</sup> Here he parts company with some of the other contributors to this volume, including the pioneering work of Majvor Östergren. The truly minute number of settlements to have undergone even small-scale excavation is emphasised by Per Widerström. His gazetteer of these settlements and their houses and other structures suggests not only a fair degree of prosperity, but also greater recourse to stone foundations than on the Swedish mainland; sometimes stone walls, too. That a great deal *can* be inferred emerges from Ny Björn Gustafsson's chapter. He emphasises the concern of Gotlanders for very high standards of silver. The artefacts they produced themselves seem to have been 'affirmation' of high quality, and the particular styles of Gotlandic jewellery may have been designed to stand out from other marks of silverware. In favour of this suggestion is the evidence from Fröjel of sophisticated non-ferrous metalworking: baser metals were removed from silver objects by means of cupellation. Many of the hoards may well have been assemblages for the purpose of such metalworking. Östergren highlights clear examples, including the famous Spillings hoard. In support of this, she argues for a close association between hoards and buildings, especially dwelling-houses. She points out the hazardousness of negative arguments from silence, given the very limited number of settlements excavated so far.

The opportunities for inhabitants of villages and individual farmsteads to trade overseas emerge from Dan Carlsson's study. Noting how many hoards consist wholly of hack-silver, clearly intended for manufacturing purposes, he points to the existence of some sixty places showing signs of Viking-Age activities along the coast. Here, too, generalisations have to be speculative, given the paucity of sites excavated. Carlsson is, however, able to give an authoritative survey of a variety of landing places. Many will have been small-scale, serving individual farmsteads or villages. But some are likely to have been ports, catering for a larger area and accommodating craftsmen and foreign traders. One such was Fröjel, where excavations under Carlsson's direction have borne fruit, although only a small fraction of its surface-area has undergone investigation. Several of Fröjel's crafts were reliant on imports, and manufacture was clearly for the market rather than the needs of the household or local neighbourhood. Besides cupellation – attested only rarely elsewhere in Scandinavia – there is plentiful evidence of the manufacture of combs from the antlers of red deer and elk, beasts not found on Gotland. Other products include glass-beads, produced en masse, and lenses made from rock crystal which was imported. Gotland seems to have been the earliest Scandinavian centre of manufacturing rock crystal lenses, and more are found there than in all other Scandinavian find-sites combined. Although exported across Scandinavia, the lenses have silver mountings reminiscent of jewellery found in Slav sites to the south and east. An original eastern derivation is suggested by their occurrence mainly in silver hoards. Women favoured them as ornaments or magnifying glasses, judging by their preponderance in female graves. A particular connection between women and silver hoards is drawn by Christoph Kilger. He discusses the elaborate provisions for bride price in *Guta Lag*, and its assumption that a bride's property was a 'pledge', reclaimable by her father's family in the event of her bloodline dying out. These possessions could have included silver given as bride price in addition to landed property and, Kilger suggests, the silver could have been kept in the ground for this reason. Conceding that to regard silver hoards as dowries is only one possible interpretation, he notes *Guta Lag*'s preoccupation with maintaining family farmsteads intact, especially its injunction that younger brothers should seek their fortune with scrip and scales, going in for trading.

The implications of this are followed through in Jacek Gruszczyński's survey of the social context of hoards. Highlighting the constraints imposed by the island's size and terrain, along with the desire of families to keep their landholdings intact, he proposes a connection with the deposition of hoards in marginal – generally sandier – soils: through burying silver on land newly acquired and newly cultivated, a man might symbolically bond with it and hope to retain it for himself and his heirs. Gruszczyński agrees with other investigators on the essentially 'egalitarian mentality' of Gotlanders. A substantial elite – an oligarchy of sorts – took pains to maintain its landholdings; but land, resources and power were not amassed by any one family, and (after the early Viking Age) weapons are notable largely by their

absence from graves and settlements. And a broad cross-section of society seems to have had uniform access to silver.

How, though, was such silver acquired; how does Gotland's economy and society compare with other polities and peoples around the Baltic Rim; and what were its relations with them? Chapters in adjoining sections of this book go some way towards answering these questions. Ingmar Jansson sets Gotland within its Baltic context. The evidence of Gotland as a land under the king of the Svear does not go beyond some sort of deferential relationship involving tribute. What is clearer is the difference between 'the general richness of Gotlandic graves' and central Sweden, where a king reigned and the numerous boat- and chamber-graves are manifestations of wealthy and well-armed elite families. From his knowledge of burial grounds and designs of ornaments, Jansson argues for greater similarities between Gotland and east Baltic and Finnish societies. Cemeteries on, for example, the island of Saaremaa in modern Estonia show a fair degree of affluence, but without the obvious marks of social hierarchy or a warrior elite. And a sizeable assortment of Gotlandic artefacts have been unearthed on the south-east Baltic coast. However, the Gotlanders do not seem to have exported inanimate goods further east, to Rus, or to have left behind their ornaments and suchlike items of personal use. Yet they exported or re-exported vast amounts of dirhams to Scandinavia. The dynamics of Gotland's economy along with its distinctive culture set it apart from islands of the western Baltic such as Bornholm. Here, too, the settlement pattern was diffuse, and hoards were amassed and deposited for a variety of purposes. And yet, as Gitte Tarnow Ingvardson's pioneering study makes clear, Bornholm's silver hoards were smaller and they appear markedly later, registering the general upswing in commerce around 1000, when western coins were flowing into the Baltic Rim. Samanid silver from the east was not insignificant, though, some of it retaining the form of dirhams at the time of deposition, while a fair amount may have been melted down: there are strong hints of silversmithing on Bornholm.

The political and social setup to the south of the Baltic was also different from that of Gotland, whether at the emporia on the coast or further inland, as Dariusz Adamczyk shows. There, in the tenth century, large amounts of silver came into the hands of warlords, and huge hoards have been found in the heart of what became the Piast realm, in Wielkopolska.<sup>8</sup> Explaining what sort of activities could have generated such wealth is inevitably speculative, but Adamczyk points to slave-taking and slave-trading as powerful drivers. This accords with other contributions to this volume, notably that of Marek Jankowiak, who takes in not only the territories that make up the modern states of Sweden, Denmark and Estonia, but also the regions that came under the dominion of the Piasts and the rulers of Rus. The strong hints of disruption and depopulation, along with the distribution pattern of strongholds attested by archaeology, chime in with the findings of a recent study of early Slavonic place names in the fertile borderlands between the

river San and the Middle Bug. Speculating about the reasons for large-scale depopulation of the region, the investigator notes what riches ruthless warlords could amass from the long-distance slave trade.<sup>9</sup> The fluctuations in the quantities of silver arriving from the east and marked variations in the routes it took over time are key themes to emerge from Jankowiak's wide-ranging survey of the chronology discernible from close study of more than 830 hoards. Supervision of the commercial exchanges responsible for the hoards could, he shows, give rise to durable political structures and reinforce existing powers, but all were vulnerable to shifts in the silver supply chain. Viacheslav S. Kuleshov traces the inflow back to the medley of mints and polities responsible for striking the dirhams. As all these chapters reaffirm, a critical change takes place in the composition of surviving hoards around the beginning of the tenth century, when dirhams struck in Central Asia by the Samanids began to stream westwards, only for the influx to slow down and then fall away rapidly from the 960s and 970s onwards. Kuleshov detects a fairly frantic attempt to find substitutes for their issues around the turn of the tenth and eleventh centuries, with a smattering of dirhams from minor dynasties reaching Rus and the Baltic Rim. But to no avail: by the second quarter of the eleventh century the stream had run dry.

Slaves were not the only commodity to be exchanged for dirhams, although individually they probably fetched higher prices than any other item on the market. Foremost among the other items were furs, although wax, honey and, from the far north, walrus tusks were in demand, too; one should also note that manufactured goods from the Latin West, 'Frankish swords', were already being brought by Rus traders to the markets of Baghdad in the mid-ninth century, and this particular commodity chain probably continued well into the tenth century. Furs also feature in the report of Ibn Khurradadhbih concerning their route, whereas he makes no mention of slaves for sale.<sup>10</sup> Being at once lightweight, durable and of proven value, furs came to provide a steady pulse of exchanges and, as James Howard-Johnston shows, it is no accident that the flaunting of furs became the winter style at the caliphal court around the time of the signs of the first Islamic silver arriving in the north; the fashion percolated down the Abbasid socio-political hierarchy. If, rather like modern drug traffickers, slave-dealers and their commodities have left few obvious material traces,<sup>11</sup> trafficking in furs has left a trail of archaeological 'footprints' and it drew in vast numbers of participants, without need of means of coercion. The fur trade's beginnings predated the period of intensive, long-haul slave-trading and it carried on long afterwards.<sup>12</sup> And yet for all this, one may doubt whether the sheer volume of the silver reaching eastern and northern Europe in the Viking Age can be explained by furs alone. Several chapters in this book signal a certain correlation between clusters of hoards and emergent centres of power, a pattern more suggestive of intensive slave-raiding and -trading than of dealings in furs. Moreover, if furs had been the commodity primarily responsible for the import of Islamic silver, one would not expect much of

the silver to have made its way west to the British Isles, or to have done so rapidly. Yet there is intriguing evidence that this was happening: not just the finds and indications of silversmithing on Bornholm and at other Scandinavian settlements and workshops, but also the data coming to light from the Viking camp pitched at Torksey for the winter of 872/3.

As Andrew R. Woods' study indicates, dirhams are the second commonest type of coin to be found at Torksey. They are all in fragments, often very small and occurring as single finds, scattered across the campsite. They were probably intended for use as bullion in quite small-scale economic transactions alongside ingots and hack-silver, a pattern also seen at Kaupang in Norway and Uppåkra in southern Sweden. In 865 the Great Army brought stocks of dirhams (amongst much else) and someone, at least, saw fit to acquire pieces that had been struck in the Abbasid caliphate around the time of, or even after, the Army's arrival in England.<sup>13</sup> The latest of these took six or seven years at most to reach eastern England and, judging by all the weights and balances found at Torksey, the warriors envisaged dealings in both bullion and currency, equipping themselves with dies and other apparatus for metalworking, and probably issuing some imitative coinage. This is testimony to the newcomers' versatility, and their aptitude for catering for societies long familiar with monetary transactions. But it raises the question of what sort of commodity can have been desirable enough for the Vikings to bring silver to the British Isles for purposes of exchange. They can scarcely have come for the furs.<sup>14</sup> This is not to underrate either the stimulus given by the Vikings to a host of short- and medium-distance enterprises or the complexity of the interactions. Their multiplicity, together with the difficulties in evaluating them, are made clear by Elina Screen's survey of coins as indicators of communications between Scandinavia and the British Isles. Clearly, there were regional variations and fluctuations over time. Few Anglo-Saxon or Frankish coins are found in Scandinavia for the later ninth and early tenth century, while 'parcels' of coins of Æthelred II found in Scandinavia probably register his tribute-payments to Cnut. At the same time, Scandinavian settlement in eastern England seems to have done much to develop waterborne trading in wool, extending from the Lincolnshire Wolds to Northumbria and beyond, and also south to London and Flanders.<sup>15</sup>

That exchanges involving silver were underway in Ireland, too, not long after the Vikings' arrival there is suggested by John Sheehan's study of the hack-silver known from hoards and what appear to be single finds, set against the general background of the Islamic coins found in hoards. He also draws attention to recent investigations of the *longphort* at Woodstown, Co. Waterford, where finds of crucibles and of cupels for the assaying of silver attest intensive metalworking reminiscent of, respectively, Torksey and the workshop at Fröjel discussed by Gustafsson. This makes it all the more intriguing that the types and design of the arm-rings and similar items comprising the hack-silver have analogies in finds in the Baltic region, particularly on Gotland. The fragments of between two and four spiral rings

found in Ireland are (as their nickname of ‘Permian rings’ suggests) pointers towards communications with the Baltic and lands still further to the east.<sup>16</sup> The pattern of finds of such hack-silver and dirhams includes Woodstown and other locations in eastern Ireland together with north-west England, southern Scandinavia and Gotland. There was a strong Scandinavian presence in Lancashire and Cheshire and yet, as Sheehan observes, ‘four times as many coin-only hoards with an Islamic element [are known] in the Dublin region than in north-west England’. There may, he suggests, have been close, even direct, connections between that region and southern Scandinavia and the Baltic. Moreover, a sizeable proportion of the silver ended up within the purview of the foremost Irish clans and kings, and this points to their enrichment through active dealings in silver.

There are, then, several reasons for drawing north-west Europe within the same picture as the Baltic Rim and lands further east. Firstly, the evidence coming from Torksey, in particular, highlights Scandinavians’ *savoir faire* in matters of currency and raises the question of whether they would not have been equally quick learners when it came to dealing with Islamic coins, far to the east of the Baltic. This fits well with the traces of cupellation and other hints of keen concern with the quality of silver apparent at Woodstown as well as Fröjel. This suggests a certain commonality in outlook and technical skills in markedly differing contexts, ranging from established emporia to the winter camps of large armies. This kind of get-rich-quick mentality went with awareness of what amassing of silver could do to enhance one’s existing power, as witness some Irish rulers and those in charge at Torksey. Moreover, silver seems to have played an important role in the formation of new political nodes, among the Poles and the Rus as well as the Hiberno-Norse astride the Irish Sea and Western Isles. Direct or conclusive evidence may be lacking, but the dynamics and fortunes of modern drug trafficking provide points of comparison that are, at the very least, suggestive. The chapter by Andrew P. Roach and Alex Marshall highlights the drastic fluctuations in wealth, the role of ostentatiousness and violence, and the political dividends that might accrue to a suitably talented and ambitious operator.

Viewed against this background, there is nothing very surprising about the movement – sometimes very swift – of boats, persons and things between the Middle East or Central Asia and the Baltic and North Atlantic. The chronology of the Torksey dirhams – a fair proportion datable to around the mid-ninth century – exemplifies this circulation. So, too, do the similarities between the types of non-numismatic silver objects found in Ireland and on Gotland. An assortment of commodities might have given rise to such frenetic journeying and bartering across vast distances: furs, or the textiles, cattle and leather in which Ireland abounded.<sup>17</sup> Doubt, however, lingers as to whether these items can have had quite the allure or sheer marketability to account for the arrival of so much Islamic silver in the Baltic and numerous points further west. As noted above, one activity that leaves fewer

archaeological ‘footprints’ than fur-trading is slave-trading. It may be no coincidence that raw materials for the latter trade were quite easy to come by, living as they often did in relatively dense clusters in the lowlands of Britain and also on the island of Ireland, and mostly within thirty miles or so of a navigable river or the sea. Conveyance by water was, after all, by far the most expedient and economical means of transporting goods: from this perspective, the British Isles were unusually well placed to provide readily conveyable commodities which showed promise of being, almost literally, worth their weight in silver. This would accord with Janel Fontaine’s detection of a shift in the practices of the Vikings and others from around the mid-ninth century onwards: towards large-scale and multistage slave-raiding and -dealing around the British Isles, fuelled by networks of suppliers and sellers.<sup>18</sup> That men and women of high status could prosper from these activities is clear from the better-documented late Anglo-Saxon era. The wife of Earl Godwine of Wessex was accused by the twelfth-century writer William of Malmesbury of engaging in the purchase of many slaves in England, especially beautiful girls, for export to her native Denmark, ‘so that by this hideous traffic she could accumulate vast wealth’.<sup>19</sup> The Godwine family, one may note, had estates strung across southern England, some of them (including ones belonging to Godwine’s wife) looking towards the English Channel or that ‘veritable “Viking lake”’, the Irish Sea.<sup>20</sup>

These general considerations and bits of information fall short of answering all the questions raised at the outset. Given the shortcomings and imbalances of our data – the dirhams constituting a very particular type of evidence yet, through their sheer numbers, being difficult to catalogue and analyse – many problems defy neat resolution and, as will be clear from the lines taken in some of our chapters, different answers to key questions remain in play.<sup>21</sup> But what follows should set a number of points in sharper focus while opening up new channels for further exploration. And, it is hoped, the overall effect is to justify our treatment of silver, slaves and Gotland as being intertwined, important components in the workings of what has aptly been termed the Viking diaspora.<sup>22</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Jonsson (2015); Jansson in this volume.
- 2 For a bibliographical discussion, see Gruszczynski in this volume. A minimum of five coins for the purposes of analysing hoard contents is the working method of, for example, Kilger (2008), p. 209.
- 3 On the likely interrelationship between a few far-flung emporia, see Sindbæk (2007), pp. 126–9; Sindbæk (2017).
- 4 On *GL* and *GS*, see Wyatt and Gruszczynski in this volume. One runestone does, however, mention the fur trade: see Svedjemo in this volume. See also Snædal (n.d.).
- 5 See Jansson in this volume.
- 6 On this, see Paal and Rajandu (2014).

- 7 See Svedjemo in this volume.
- 8 Regrettably, it did not prove possible to include in this volume a chapter on the dirham hoards from present-day Estonia and Finland. See Talvio (2017); Talvio (2002); Leimus (2007); Mägi (2018).
- 9 Zschieschang (2017), p. 183. See also Hardt (2008), pp. 746–8.
- 10 Ibn Khurradadhbih, *Kitab al-masalik*, ed. de Goeje, pp. 115–16; ed. Lewicki, pp. 76–7. Carolingian legislative measures to ban the export of swords and other weaponry are reviewed, along with a survey of blades with the name Ulfberht inscribed and other Frankish traits, by Stalsberg (2017), esp. pp. 262–8, 270.
- 11 They have not, however, escaped detection altogether: *IC*. See also Fontaine (2017b); Raffield (2019).
- 12 The longstanding nature of fur-trading nexuses spanning the Baltic and the Volga and Kama river basins is emphasised by Callmer (2017), pp. 137, 139, 153–5.
- 13 The latest examples are two fragments struck respectively at Merv in 864/5 and at an uncertain mint, perhaps Merv or al-Shash [Tashkent], between 866 and 868: Blackburn (2011), p. 230 and appendix 2, nos 92, 93, p. 258.
- 14 The principal investigators have remarked on the clear indications of ‘intensive trade and exchange in goods and probably in slaves’, as also on the predominantly Anglo-Saxon types of dress accessory and jewellery found there, presumably the belongings of their original wearers: Hadley *et al.* (2016), pp. 62, 57. The involuntary presence of large numbers of local persons could well have something to do with the remarkable size of the camps at Torksey and Aldwark, some 55ha and 31ha respectively, dwarfing such emporia as Birka and Kaupang (*ibid.*, p. 58). See now also Hadley and Richards (2018).
- 15 Faith (2012), pp. 683–9, 696–7. Unfortunately, the various relevant contributions in Kershaw *et al.* (eds) (2019) appeared too late to be taken full account of in this volume, and likewise with the contributions in Callmer *et al.* (eds) (2017). The same goes more generally for the works of Mägi (2018) and Korpela (2019).
- 16 See also Abrams (2012), pp. 31–4, 38.
- 17 Edwards (2008), pp. 264–6, 279, 281–3, 300; Ó Corráin (2008), pp. 568–75; Wallace (2008), pp. 833–4.
- 18 Fontaine (2017a), ch. 5. See also Holm (1986), esp. pp. 330–1, 333–40.
- 19 William of Malmesbury, *Gesta*, vol. 2, pp. 362–3. The slave dealer is identified with Godwine’s first wife, Thyra, by Wyatt (n. 105) and Roach and Marshall (n. 15) in this volume.
- 20 Baxter (2007), appendix 4, pp. 316–17; plate 2, facing p. 143. For the characterisation of the Irish Sea, see Wallace (2008), p. 839.
- 21 See Wyatt, Brink and Skre in this volume.
- 22 Abrams (2012). What Abrams terms (*ibid.*, p. 32) ‘the diversity of patterns of interaction between the overseas settlements and locations in the homelands’ is consistent with the distribution-pattern and variegated uses of the dirhams, silver ornaments and other artefacts found between points on the Irish Sea and in the Baltic Rim and the lands still further east.

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**Part I**

# **Cogs and drivers**







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## 2 Reading between the lines

### Tracking slaves and slavery in the early middle ages

*David Wyatt*

#### **Tracking slaveholding behaviours**

Pre-history endured far longer in Scandinavia and the Baltic than in much of the rest of Europe. Although we have a few fragmented accounts of Viking raids in the region from the ninth century on, most of our textual evidence for slaves and slaving comes from twelfth- and thirteenth-century sources – ironically a period that many believe heralded the disappearance of slavery from northern Europe.<sup>1</sup> For much of the Viking Age, our only evidence for the enslavement and trading of people in the Baltic region is archaeological, yet the problems of detecting such evidence for slavery are manifold.<sup>2</sup> Numismatic, osteological, artefactual and archaeological site analysis can reveal information about slave-trading routes, transportation, diet, living conditions, possible occupations, levels of violence and even ritual sacrifice. Yet the complexities and contradictions in human behaviour inherent in slavery are far harder to unpick and the historical sources are equally fraught with interpretative problems and speculation.

In the west we tend to see slavery as historically distant, banished by the combined forces of economic progress, rational modernity and Christian morality.<sup>3</sup> Such perceptions colour our views of slaveholding in medieval British and Irish societies, and historiography in other regions shows similar impulses:<sup>4</sup> much of the discourse on medieval Scandinavian slavery, for example, tries to explain how and why it disappeared,<sup>5</sup> a key assumption being that by the mid-thirteenth century slavery was in significant decline and that in certain places, such as Iceland, it had vanished altogether.<sup>6</sup> Slavery is seen as predominantly a Viking-Age phenomenon, whose decline was inevitable in the face of various social, economic and religious factors that paved the way to a freer, less brutal era.<sup>7</sup>

Yet there are probably more slaves in the world today than ever before:<sup>8</sup> around 21 million individuals worldwide are estimated to be in some form of slavery,<sup>9</sup> with over 55% of them women and girls and one in four sexually exploited.<sup>10</sup> The prevalence of domestic servitude, sexual exploitation and a high proportion of enslaved women and children resonates with our evidence for medieval slaving.<sup>11</sup> In communities across northern Europe, the

enslavement of both men and women was an important symbolic attribute of young male warriors, and slave-raiding one way to emphasise warrior prowess and virility.<sup>12</sup> Slaving was often synonymous with sexual violence and, more broadly, with patriarchal social structures: a range of medieval sources associate slaveholding and slave-taking with expressions of power, hierarchy and gender norms.<sup>13</sup> The slave trade certainly generated great wealth and nurtured exchange networks, yet far deeper human drives fuelled and sustained this trade.

While the nature of the sources and cultural contexts are very different, Steven Epstein's approach to Italian slaveholders can be applied to a range of medieval Nordic sources.<sup>14</sup> These sources were predominantly created by those who owned, raided and traded people, and it is their behaviours which have left a mark on the historical record.<sup>15</sup> But many others who did not own, raid or trade slaves were socialised into slaveholding communities; they participated in the formal legal systems and shared the less formal attitudes that reinforced and perpetuated slavery: their voices are also heard in our sources.<sup>16</sup>

The enslaved themselves, whether female or male, are most likely to be glimpsed in our sources during traumatic or liminal moments in their lives: when others sought to control them, justify their enslavement, stereotype or stigmatise them.<sup>17</sup> They are most visible when being enslaved, captured, transported, sold and accommodated, or when resisting, escaping or being manumitted, and at birth and death.<sup>18</sup> We therefore need to recognise and analyse our sources' evidence for the experiences of the enslaved in relation to violence, sexual and reproductive exploitation, social exclusion and attempts, however contradictory, to dehumanise them. We should also search for more circumstantial evidence of communal slaveholding behaviours, including strict codes of insult, honour and shame; placing great value on warrior raiding; practising sexual hospitality, concubinage and male guardianship of women; the stigmatisation and differentiation of outsiders; and geographical proximity to known slaving activities. Indeed, it was not only slaves – and by extension slaveholders – who risked being stigmatised and stereotyped, but also all those who saw themselves as belonging to the same social group; a sense of belonging cemented by networks of kinship and community.

We will begin by exploring *Guta Lag* (Figure 2.1), a legal text in which the stigma associated with slave status is particularly visible, before exploring contextual evidence from various sources – sagas, poetry, hagiographical texts, chronicles, annals and histories – to highlight the vibrancy and interconnectedness of slave-raiding and -trading networks and supply routes in northern Europe from the ninth to thirteenth centuries.

### **Tracking slaves and slavery in law codes**

Gotland is our departure point for tracking slaves and slavery in northern Europe. Besides a short legendary history and a handful of runic inscriptions, *Guta Lag* is one of the island's earliest extant sources.<sup>19</sup> Composed in vernacular Gutnish, these law codes were later translated into Danish, Middle



High German and Middle Low German.<sup>20</sup> Eight manuscripts remain, although their dating and transmission is problematic. The earliest vellum manuscript (*Holm B 64*) is mid-fourteenth century and thought to be a copy of an original compiled in around 1300. A late sixteenth-century paper manuscript (*AM 54 4to*) contains a copy of the laws compiled in 1470, but is thought to derive from a version datable to *c.* 1260.<sup>21</sup> Interestingly, dating both manuscripts centres on their legal provisions for slavery.

Christine Peel argues that while *Holm B 64* is earlier, it actually contains a later version of the law codes and was probably compiled at a time of legal transition, since it omits the clauses dealing with the sale of, and punishments for theft by, slaves.<sup>22</sup> The later *AM 54 4to* contains these slave provisions, leading Peel to conclude that it must represent an earlier version of the laws.<sup>23</sup> She assumes that slavery had virtually disappeared from Gotlandic society by 1300,<sup>24</sup> and argues that because the slave provisions were no longer relevant to the redacting scribe of *Holm B 64*, he simply omitted them.<sup>25</sup> This conclusion is not without its problems: all the later *Guta Lag* manuscripts, including those in Danish and German, retain the slave provisions; and *Holm B 64* itself makes reference to them, albeit in an appended contents page of later, unknown date.<sup>26</sup> So how significant was the omission of the slave provisions from this single manuscript version of the laws? As Peel acknowledges, they also omit a number of other issues of relevance to Gotlandic society, including church law and, perhaps even more surprisingly given the island's trading traditions, commercial and maritime law.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, one slave provision *was* retained by the redactor of *Holm B 64* in the original manuscript: detailed rules for how fights between free men and slaves should be conducted and compensated, suggesting that this particular aspect of slaveholding behaviour continued to have relevance at least.<sup>28</sup>

Given that we have no way of knowing when slavery on Gotland ended, other than by speculating about the omission of the slave provisions in *Holm B 64*, Peel's argument is somewhat circular. As noted, it rests on the widespread assumption that slavery had all but disappeared from Gotland and Scandinavia in general by the end of the thirteenth century.<sup>29</sup> Yet while the date of *Guta Lag*'s compilation is relatively certain, when slavery ended is less so. The original thirteenth-century compiler clearly lived in a medieval slaveholding society and the laws were primarily a product of that society. Although Peel argues that *Guta Lag* may well contain pre-Christian elements,<sup>30</sup> its laws were mainly shaped by the concerns and conceptions of their thirteenth-century compiler.<sup>31</sup> It was a working guide to legal principle and process, rather than a repository of ancient custom and orally transmitted tradition,<sup>32</sup> yet the text neither simply transmits slaveholding traditions from a distant Viking Age, nor accurately represents thirteenth-century realities.<sup>33</sup> Rather, the laws represent a world of ideas. They provide us with a vision of how Gotlandic society was ordered and understood by its elite landowners,<sup>34</sup> and the fact that they were copied and translated suggests that they were still

of relevance both on the island and further afield.<sup>35</sup> They also reveal some of the Gotlanders' underlying assumptions about enslaved people. By scrutinising the stigmas, stereotypes, punishments and conduct that masters attempted either to encourage or to prevent, we may be able to shed further light on the slaveholding behaviours of this island community.

Enslaved people are visible in *Guta Lag* at point of sale, procreation, resistance, escape, punishment and death. Its detailed provisions on slave purchase suggest an active slave-trading market, with buyers allowed to test out new slaves for up to six days before returning them, or paying for them, on the seventh. Anticipating possible tensions, with a vendor reluctant to accept 'returns', the buyer had to substantiate why they were unhappy with the slave's performance, although vendors remained liable to compensate the new owner for up to a year after purchase if one of three faults was later discovered: epilepsy, bed-wetting or leg impairment. The provisions also state that if a recently purchased slave were claimed by another slaveholder, the new owner had some redress and could 'call to the vendor and lead him [i.e. the slave] to him; he [i.e. the vendor] is then to defend your right to the man, or give you back as much as you previously paid for him'.<sup>36</sup> The legislation thus anticipates slaves being abducted and resold through some form of black market on the island, and this is an issue that we will return to later.

*Guta Lag's* depiction of enslavement has one unusual feature: it appears to have been fixed term. Ruth Karras suggests that this may refer to debt slavery,<sup>37</sup> and Christine Peel goes further, citing the earlier Danish translator Lis Jacobsen who argued that it indicated slavery 'was in the process of dissolving' on the island.<sup>38</sup> Yet *Guta Lag's* many other slave provisions, including those regarding purchase, suggest otherwise. Indeed, the process of manumission has long been recognised as an integral, often essential, element of slaveholding systems, rather than a sign of their dissolution.<sup>39</sup> The promise of manumission, whether after a fixed period or not, encouraged obedience and accommodation, and there is often a striking correlation between manumission rates and a ready external supply of the recently enslaved to replace those freed.<sup>40</sup> Evidence from the *Legendary Saga of St Olaf*, probably compiled in the thirteenth century, may attest this elsewhere in Scandinavia. The saga offers a fictional account of the Norwegian noble Erling Skjalgsson (d. 1028), who is said to have granted his male slaves permission to work during their evening rest periods so that they might earn enough money to buy their freedom. Those who eventually attained manumission by these means continued to labour in Erling's service as freedmen, while he simply reinvested their redemption fees and 'bought other men'.<sup>41</sup> Close trading contacts with the slaving centre of Novgorod and the slave-raiding territories of the eastern Baltic during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries suggest that Gotlandic merchants continued to have access to markets where they could buy slaves.<sup>42</sup> And slavery appears to have been hereditary on the island, supplementing external influxes.<sup>43</sup> It therefore seems likely that the fixed-

term slavery seen in *Guta Lag* is indicative of slaveholding behaviour rather than of its dissolution. The law codes also clearly indicate that masters had the power to extend the period of enslavement to punish misdemeanours,<sup>44</sup> and such inherent uncertainty over honouring a fixed term would undoubtedly have facilitated exploitation of and control over the enslaved.<sup>45</sup>

*Guta Lag* suggests that violence pervaded the lives of the island's enslaved. A small fine was levied for punching, manhandling or grabbing another's slave by the hair, payable only if blood were drawn,<sup>46</sup> but no similar prohibitions seem to have applied for masters who beat their own slaves. An enslaved person accused of theft could be bound, led away and tortured by the injured party without the need to pay compensation to their master.<sup>47</sup> The potential for slave resistance and agency is evident from the brutal provisions for retributive violence on the masters' part. *Guta Lag* legislates against enslaved people running away, fighting back, stealing (both individually and in gangs), killing people, raping free women and committing infanticide on children fathered by a master or some other man.<sup>48</sup> Such provisions recognise that slaves had choices, albeit often desperate and limited ones. There is a common misconception that enslaved people in medieval Scandinavia were on a par with cattle.<sup>49</sup> I would argue that this assumption is based on a rather un-nuanced reading of aspects of the law codes. The compiler of *Guta Lag* clearly acknowledged the humanity of the enslaved, and this was fundamentally significant for facilitating not only their physical exploitation but also their broader cultural symbolic value as base 'others'. Like other medieval Scandinavian law codes, *Guta Lag* reflects a violent, hierarchical and intensely patriarchal society that revolved around notions of honour, shame, lineage and networks of kinship and affiliation. Identity and belonging were central to this vision of Gotlandic society: legal privileges and higher compensation payments for offences clearly favoured Gotlanders over the large number of free foreigners living there,<sup>50</sup> yet the marginality of those enslaved reinforced collective identity and morality for all legally free individuals, Gotlanders and non-Gotlanders alike.<sup>51</sup> The exclusion of slaves from the field of honour is clear from a provision on inflicting wounds, which states that 'no one pays fines for insults to a slave and similarly a slave does not pay fines for insult to anyone'.<sup>52</sup> Through such ingroup-outgroup constructions, the compiler of *Guta Lag* characterised slaves as liminal individuals who, through their exclusion from most legal processes, reinforced a sense of group identity, cohesion and belonging amongst slaveholders and non-slaveholders alike.

This is perhaps most apparent in the laws that relate both directly and indirectly to enslaved women. For example, a provision regarding physical assault states that a non-Gotlandic woman who suffered the dishonour of being manhandled, disrobed or groped by an assailant should receive only half the compensation due to a Gotlandic woman for a similar offence; but this was granted only if the foreigner were 'a free and freeborn woman'.<sup>53</sup> By implication, enslaved women were fair game with no honour to impugn –

provided they were not raped, since this would have clearly constituted an affront to their masters' honour.<sup>54</sup> *Guta Lag's* compiler also noted that a priest who married a slave so debased his bloodline as to forfeit his own rights and those of his unborn children to hold the status of a Gotlander:<sup>55</sup> it was clearly important that the Gotlandic gene pool should not be polluted by servile blood.<sup>56</sup> The term for a slave woman's son (*bysun*) is used by the laws to denote any son born out of wedlock, and such individuals were strictly prohibited from inheriting property unless they were able to prove Gotlandic descent on both sides for three generations.<sup>57</sup> In Karras' view, the 'fact that the general term derives from the term for the son of a slave woman hints that originally the great majority of those born out of wedlock would have been the children of slaves'.<sup>58</sup> While this statement may be speculative, the compiler of *Guta Lag* very clearly and deliberately defined lineage and belonging in opposition to the exclusion and marginality of enslaved women.

*Guta Lag* depicts enslaved women as the weakest, most dishonourable and degraded of all individuals. Paradoxically, they appear to have mattered to the Gotlandic community precisely because they were so marginalised, embodying concepts of power, belonging, honour and superiority alongside deep-seated fears of deracination, dishonour, stigmatisation and exposure to arbitrary violation.<sup>59</sup> Such fears may have stemmed from genuine concerns that living in a slaving region engendered. Indeed, evidence for Baltic slave-raiding and -trading is relatively abundant between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, particularly in the eastern coastal regions of Livonia and Estonia, where women and children were prime targets.<sup>60</sup> Gotlandic merchants regularly travelled through this region and maintained longstanding ties with the urban centre of Novgorod, with its lively slave trade and vibrant slave market.<sup>61</sup> Evidence for slaving in the Baltic occurs in a treaty struck between Magnus Eriksson, king of Sweden, and Prince Yuri Danilovich of Novgorod in 1327. This includes an agreement that any slaves who escaped from one ruler's territory to the other's should be captured and returned across the border.<sup>62</sup> Novgorodian warriors launched numerous raids on Finland and Estonia during the mid-fourteenth century, capturing men, women and children, some of them Swedes, and many appear to have ended up in the slave market at Novgorod.<sup>63</sup>

While we are not aware of any slave-raiding on Gotland in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, there is evidence to suggest that marauding fleets of raiders were active throughout the Baltic in this period,<sup>64</sup> and it seems plausible that legal preoccupations with belonging and exclusion should reflect insecurities about capture and abduction. Such insecurities are evident from *Guta Lag's* provisions on land purchase:

If someone is taken hostage and he ransoms himself with his land or property, then his nearest kinsman is to redeem it, if he wishes, and pay the money for it once the other comes home. If a farmer's son is captive,

or a minor, no one may ransom him for more than three marks in silver, unless authority exists from his father or kinsmen [. . .].<sup>65</sup>

Similarly, if a brother who owns shared property falls captive when travelling abroad, his sibling is to ransom him; but if he is travelling ‘with divided goods then he is to ransom himself’.<sup>66</sup> While these provisions seem to relate to hostage taking and not enslavement, the implications are clear: the compiler of *Guta Lag* thought it possible, even probable, that individuals might be taken captive, either on Gotland or journeying abroad. As the laws were designed for relatively wealthy landowners, they probably reflect abductions where the hostages were ransomed and freed. But this may not always have been the case: significant areas of the Baltic were dangerous slave-raiding and -trading arenas at this time;<sup>67</sup> and poorer individuals or slaves taken captive were unlikely to have had wealthy relatives to ransom them. Their fates are not easily seen in *Guta Lag*, since they were of little or no consequence for the Gotlandic lawmakers, although the clauses on the purchases of slaves suggest they might be abducted and illicitly sold on to new owners, hinting that this may not have been an unusual occurrence.

There is no direct evidence in *Guta Lag* that free Gotlandic women might be abducted and sold, although it does depict a society in which some women were held as slaves, and several of its provisions suggest a real fear of female abduction. The crime is taken very seriously, with severe penalties for any man caught carrying off an honourable Gotlandic woman from her family by force: ‘his neck[,] or wergild’.<sup>68</sup> More subtle indications of these insecurities can be seen in a provision regarding assaults on women, where anyone deliberately knocking the headdress off a woman had to pay a significant fine of one mark if her head was left partially exposed, and two marks if completely uncovered.<sup>69</sup> Hair coverings were important physical markers for women in Scandinavian societies, symbolic of both honourable status and sexual inaccessibility to all but her husband. Exposing a free woman’s head and hair dishonoured both the woman and her male guardian, giving her the appearance of a slave.<sup>70</sup> If a female slave were assaulted in the same way, any fine related simply to the physical blow, since she could not be dishonoured.<sup>71</sup> This provision reinforces the legal constructions regarding identity and belonging discussed above. It also suggests that on Gotland appearances mattered, especially for women. How one looked and dressed could make the difference between being taken hostage for ransom or being trafficked and sold on the slave market.

### **Tracking slaves and slavery in literary sources and chronicles**

We are able to glimpse such stark realities in a number of Old Norse sagas which, like *Guta Lag*, date from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. *Heimskringla* presents the Baltic as a politically fragmented yet closely interconnected maritime region characterised by endemic raiding, violence,

slave-taking and struggles for power and honour between a bellicose elite.<sup>72</sup> The abduction of women features prominently, emphasising prestige and strength; an account in the *Saga of Harald Sigurtharson* of an expedition against the Danes of Funen in the mid-eleventh century shows this. A stanza by the praise-poet Valgard of Voll describes how Harald ravaged the local population:

Down-cast, away drifted  
 Danes who lived still, scattered  
 in flight, while fair maidens  
 fell into our power.  
 With fetters fastened, women  
 followed you down to your vessels;  
 cut chafing chains the flesh of  
 chattel maidens cruelly.<sup>73</sup>

Not just noteworthy but boast-worthy, such raiding for women was expected of a young warrior with pretensions to power.<sup>74</sup> This is not the saga's only account of female abduction: some years later, after becoming king, Harald raided Denmark once more, taking great booty in Jutland. His spoils included the daughters of the chieftain Thorkel Geysa, whom he 'led down to the ships bound'. Unlike the women from Funen's farming community, whose fate was clearly enslavement, these noblewomen were the offspring of a powerful guardian and thus bound rather than manacled with chains and later ransomed for an 'immense amount of money'.<sup>75</sup> The account suggests that Snorri and his audience clearly understood that the treatment and fate of captive women depended on their status, appearance, the wealth of their guardians – and a degree of luck.

The *Saga of Olaf Tryggvason* provides further insight into the nature of slave-raiding and -trading in the eastern Baltic through the eyes of our thirteenth-century author. Snorri relates events said to have taken place in the second half of the tenth century, when Olaf was only a child. Olaf and his mother Astrith sailed across the Baltic in the company of merchants to visit his uncle in Novgorod, but their ship was attacked by Viking pirates based in Estonia and they were enslaved and the group was then split up. Separated from his mother, Olaf was acquired by Klerkon, an Estonian warrior, who 'got him as his share' along with two other male captives, Thorolf and Thorgisl. Klerkon decided that Thorolf, Olaf's foster-father, was 'too old to be a thrall, nor able to do slave work', so killed him, but took the boys 'with him and sold them to a man called Klerk'. Olaf was soon sold on again, this time to a certain Reas, and worked on this master's farmstead for several years before being recognised at an Estonian market by the Norwegian noble Sigurth Eiriksson. Sigurth, who was on a diplomatic mission in the region, bought and freed the boy, taking him with him to Novgorod where Olaf was raised at the court of Prince Vladimir