Revealing the biographies of Europe’s early medieval trading towns:
the case-study of Hedeby

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Early medieval *emporia* / wīcs of the 7th-/8th centuries in the North Sea area
(Middleton 2005 after Kalmring 2010)

**Definition of a wīc**
according to David Hill (2001)

1. Commercial centre
2. Provided with a harbour
3. Pre-Viking date
4. Large occupied area (over 5 ha)
5. No defensive works before AD 850
6. Craft centre
7. Evidence of long-distance trade
Hedeby: selection of imported Badorf ware vessel sherds

Badorf ware pottery in Scandinavia and the Baltic Sea area (Brorsson 2010, fig. 20)
Søren Sindbæk’s synoptic comparison of excavation sizes and selected imports (2008):

„1. Ceramic sherds (domestic & imported), 2. Glass beads, 3. Sherds of glass vessels, 4. Sherds of Badorf-ware, 5. Sherds of Tating-ware, 6 Fragments of Mayen-basalt quernstones. The size of the symbol to the left corresponds to the volume of soil or finds. For the imports to the right, each repetition denotes 100 fragments, except for quernstone: 500 fragments. Small symbols indicate less than five finds in a site.“
Network representation of the associations of ten different types of pottery vessels in 152 settlement-site Assemblages of the 10th c. in the North Sea and Baltic sea areas (Sindbæk 2012)
The 9th century in Northwestern Europe

Significance of Hedeby’s location:

Border area

Node between: North and Baltic Seas Scandinavia and the Continent
The significance of the Danevirke
symbolic border – control of traffic – ease of passage between the seas
Attested early medieval names for Hedeby:

- Haithabyr
- Heiðabær
- Æt Hæthum
- Of Hæðum
- Sliesthorp
- Sliaswich

Attested early medieval names for Hedeby.
Hedeby: King Svend (Forkbeard, 987–1014) rose the two runestones in memory of Skarthi (left) and Erik (right), who were killed in action at Haithabyr.
Hedeby with all excavation areas since 1900

Excavations 1900-2012


Geophysical prospection 1981-2013

Hedeby with all excavation areas since 1900
5 different phases of research strategies:

1900-21: concept of small trial trenches to verify the place’s character

1930-39: large scale settlement excavations developed from a trial trench

1962-69: continuation of large scale settlement and cemetery excavations

1979-1980: harbour excavation and ship salvage

2002 onwards: systematic prospections with selective small scale excavations
Facts and numbers from over a hundred years of Hedeby research

1.189 excavation areas (GIS)
32.831.6 sqm excavated areas (GIS)

1.297 burials, biritual (Arents/Eisenschmidt 2010)

44.000 constructive timbers from the settlement (Schultze 2008)
2.044 constructive timbers resp. 1.641 post holes from the harbour (Kalmring 2010)

c. 117.283 pottery sherds (only 1962–69: 2.160,104 kg) handmade and Baltic ware (Hahn 1977)
6.401 sherds(171,7 kg) of imported pottery (Janssen 1987)
c. 1.500 pottery fragments (c. 200 kg) from the harbour (Lüdtke 2013)
3.428 objects (540 kg) of soapstone (Resi 1979)
5.948 fragments of mill stones (1.274 kg) (Schön 1995)
19.740 or c. 350 kg whetstones (Resi 1990)
3,4 tons of iron slags (Westphalen 1989)

12.576 metalobjects from systematic metaldetecting (Hilberg 2009)
8.849 glassobjects (Steppuhn 1998)
288.000 deer’s antlers (Ulbricht 1978)

c.a. 420.000 bones of domestic animals from the harbour (Heinrich 2006)
1.999 wild mammals from the settlement and the harbour (Reichstein 1991)
726 hand laid-up rests of fishes from the harbour (Heinrich 2006)
c. 17.000 sieved rests of fishes from one quadrant of the harbour (Schmöölcke/Heinrich 2006)
No younger settlement traces

Organic preservation in stratified layers

Documentation since 1900 without losses
Development of the central settlement area: 830ies AD (Schultze 2007)
Dendrodates in the central settlement area (Schultze 2007)
Hedeby – settlement excavation 1969
Dendrodated well, built in AD 1020
valued as dendrochronologically attested settlement activity

Stratigraphical situation, excavation 1969
Layers of the 10th and 11th centuries are not preserved in wood
Hedeby 1967, central excavation area

Irregular and apparently ploughed-up packages of stones immediately underneath the surface
Trade, craft-production and the hinterland

Bulk commodities from the continent:

Lava quernstones
Interaction with the surrounding hinterland
Interaction with the *hinterland*

Diet of Hedeby’s inhabitants: dominance of fish and domestic animals

Viking period find spots between Kongeå and Eider (Eisenschmidt 1998)

Mid-11th c. civitates and their catchment territories (Randsborg 1980)
804 & 808:
The Danish king Godfrid gathered his retinue and fleet at Sliesthorp, after the destruction of the emporium Reric he took the merchants on his ships and sailed to Sliesthorp

1050 & 1066:
Sliaswig plundered by king Harald Hardråde and finally destroyed by pagan Abodrits and Wagrians
10th century

11th century

(Arents/Eisenschmidt 2010)
Hedeby’s development: from farmstead to *emporium*?

Oldest horizon from metal detecting: Settlement start in the younger Germanic Iron-Age
Early finds and topography
Character of the Southern settlement:

the Southern settlement is **not an emporium**
- low amount of imported pottery
- glass vessels are lacking totally
- only seldom early coinage (2 Wodan-Monster-sceattas)
- evidence of handicraft activities is not outstanding (esp. iron smithing)

It seems to be an excavated **part of a farmstead**
- nucleus for the development into an *emporium*
- comparable to the development in Birka (Arrhenius 1976)
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Hedeby's harbour as one of the most important structural elements
Hedeby: Reconstructed harbour jetty, built in the winter AD 885/6, space 385 sqm
The Carolingian influence: 9th century continental pseudo-coinbrooches found in Hedeby
Hedeby in the 820s:
Own coinage as a basis for trade and tolls

Archetype:
Charlemagne’s pre-reform coinage in Dorestad
Reconstruction of one of the main streets through the settlement (seen from the south)
Relation between the excavation from 1913 and the geophysician survey from 2002
Hedeby, metal detector prospections: high increase of Islamic dirhams
Islamic dirham from four Scandinavian find places

- **Paviken** (108 coins)
- **Haithabu** (101 Dirham)
- **Kaupang** (76 coins)
- **Uppåkra** (224 coins)

(Blackburn 2007)
Hoard from Ocksarve, Gotland, more than 5 kg of silver, deposited after 999 AD (416 coins: 393 Ottonian deniers, 5 Islamic dirham)

The disappearance of the Samanid dirham

(Leimus 2007)
Hedeby: Frisian copies of Cologne pennies (Häv. 29), unknown mint, end of 10th cent. AD
Hedeby: late coin finds from metal detecting and the excavation 2005-10 (= 105 coins)
Late Viking period single finds from the old excavations in Hedeby

Unfinished casting of a sword scabbard sheath of brass, Ringerike style (990/1000-1050/75)

Denar, Lower Lotharingia/Frisia, mint Dokkum Bruno III., c. 1050

Late Viking period single finds from the old excavations in Hedeby
Hedeby’s biography:

Revealing its development with distinct phases and different interferences during its existence from the 7th to the middle of the 11th century AD

GIS-based model of all excavated and assumed settlement features
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GIS-based model of all excavated and assumed settlement features
Forschungsprojekt HAITHABU

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