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Daniel Melleno

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NORTH SEA NETWORKS: TRADE AND COMMUNICATION FROM THE SEVENTH TO THE TENTH CENTURY

Daniel Melleno*

Abstract: This article explores the commercial links that bound together the peoples of the North Sea from the seventh to the tenth century. At the heart of this trade lay Frisia, whose location as the cross roads between the North Sea and the heart of the Frankish Empire allowed Frisian, Frankish, and Scandinavian merchants to carry goods back and forth across the North Sea while at the same time facilitating the movement of ideas and cultural exchange. Annalists gathered information from these merchants, kings used them to pass messages back and forth, and missionaries traveled with them. By tracing the physical and textual evidence of merchants' travels between foreign worlds, this article demonstrates that the steady growth of economic activity in the North Sea facilitated contact and communication between Francia and Scandinavia well before the first major Viking attacks on the Frankish empire in the 830s.

Keywords: trade, Frisia, North Sea, networks, Carolingians, Scandinavia, Vikings, merchants, archaeology, numismatics.

In 834 Scandinavian raiders sacked the trading port of Dorestad. The *Annals of Saint-Bertin* report that a fleet of Danes entered the province of Frisia, “came to Dorestad, and ravaged the entire area, killing some men, taking others captive, and burning the surrounding territory.”¹ Northern raiders returned to raid and pillage the port with alarming frequency over the next several decades. For these raiders, Dorestad’s role as the premier Frankish emporium made it a particularly enticing target. Beginning in the early eighth century, the Frisian port, located on the Rhine some twenty miles south-west of modern day Utrecht, linked the heartland of the Franks to Scandinavia and the North Sea. It served as the major base of operations for Frisian and Frankish merchants and as an entry and exit point for luxury goods to and from Denmark, Norway, and Sweden.

Yet in the various historical annals of the Franks, it is only with the first major raids of the 830s that Dorestad becomes visible. Indeed, our entire modern narrative of interaction between Scandinavia and Francia is shaped by the overwhelming attention that Frankish sources pay to the violence and conflict of the ninth and tenth centuries. Those who specialize in the history and archaeology of Scandinavia have gone so far as to label this period the “Viking Age,” explicitly linking these

*dmelleno@berkeley.edu.

¹ “Interim etiam classis de Danis veniens in Frisiam, aliquam partem ex illa devastavit. Et inde per Vetus—Treiectum ad emporium quod vocatur Dorestadus venientes, omnia diripuerunt. Homines autem quosdam occiderunt, quosdam captivos abduxerunt partemque eius igni cremaverunt”; *Annales Bertiniani*, s.a. 834, MGH SRG 5, ed. G. Waitz (Hanover 1883) 9.

centuries to the raiding and aggressive expansion that the word “Viking” carries with it.² Over the last several decades, however, various scholars have demonstrated that framing interactions between Franks and Scandinavians within the context of the raids and violence of the ninth and tenth centuries eclipses a much larger array of possible interactions between these two cultures.³ In this article I will focus on one of these types of interaction, trade, to demonstrate that the movement of goods between Francia and Scandinavia created economic, social, and cultural ties between representatives of both worlds well before the first appearance of Viking raiders on Frankish soil. At temporary beach-side markets and in the flourishing emporia of the North Sea (map 1) traders from both worlds were meeting and exchanging goods and information from at least the mid-seventh century. Coin finds and archaeological excavations, accounts of merchants traveling with luxury goods and messages, and stories of Frankish slaves taken from their homes are all tangible evidence of the links that stretched across the North Sea well before the conflict of the ninth and tenth centuries.

For all this, the world of trade is almost entirely absent from the minds of annalists and chroniclers and is more often the subject of economic than social historians. But commerce served not merely to move goods. It was also a connective force that fundamentally shaped relationships between Scandinavians and Franks. Trade cannot occur without communication; the exchange of money and goods can only be accomplished by people willing to make the effort to travel and to engage with foreign worlds.⁴ The Frisian trader has become a by-word for Frankish commerce and much work has been done on the economy of the North Sea.⁵ Only recently, however, have economic and social historians begun to find common ground, looking not just at the mecha-

² Throughout this work I have preferred the term “Scandinavian” to “Viking,” which I have reserved for activity and interactions following the first major raids on Frankish territory in the 830s.

³ Peter Sawyer, *The Age of the Vikings* (London 1962) 5; Richard Hodges and David Whitehouse, *Mohammed, Charlemagne & the Origins of Europe: Archaeology and the Pirenne Thesis* (London 1983) 111–118; Simon Coupland, “From Poachers to Gamekeepers: Scandinavian Warlords and Carolingian Kings,” *Early Medieval Europe* 7.1 (1998) 85–114.

⁴ Michael McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce, A.D. 300–900* (Cambridge 2001) 16; Søren Sindbæk, “Networks and Nodal Points: The Emergence of Towns in Early Viking Age Scandinavia,” *Antiquity* 81.311 (2007) 119–132.

⁵ Dirk Jellema, “Frisian Trade in the Dark Ages,” *Speculum* 30.1 (1955) 15–36; Stéphane Lebecq, *Marchands et navigateurs frisons du haut moyen âge*, vol. 1 (Lille 1983); *Dorestad in an International Framework*, ed. Annemarieke Willemsen and Hanneke Kik (Turnhout 2010).

nisms of trade but at its effects on the peoples and societies of northern Europe. In an attempt to address this neglect, scholars such as Stéphane Lebecq have teased out passing references to merchants from annals and *miracula* to put a human face on the men who moved goods between cultures.⁶ Michael McCormick's groundbreaking *Origins of the European Economy* has made it clear that commerce and communication go hand in hand and that where we see goods, we can infer people.⁷ His focus, however, is firmly on the Mediterranean, with only forty or so pages out of nearly one thousand devoted specifically to the economic activity of the North Sea and Baltic. Anders Winroth's recently published work, *The Conversion of Scandinavia*, demonstrates the ways in which trade and luxury goods could foster communication and change in Scandinavia, with powerful leaders actively seeking contact with the south to further their standing at home. Yet Winroth's focus is on the Viking raiders and chieftains of the late ninth and tenth centuries, not on the creation or nature of commercial networks and relationships in the previous decades and centuries.⁸

These earlier interactions had their origins in the border regions of an empire that did not yet exist in the seventh century. In Frisia (corresponding roughly with the present-day Netherlands), we see an area that was as connected to the northern reaches of Scandinavia as it was to the Frankish heartlands of Austrasia and Neustria. Frisia as a Carolingian *regnum* ran from the Zwin River in the south to the Weser in the north, though Frisian influence and settlement seems to have projected farther north prior to the Carolingian period. Frisian settlement was largely coastal, limited to the relatively few highland areas, islands, and artificial mound villages known as *terps*. These nucleated structures remained largely separated by rivers, inlets, and bays, with communication between settlements made primarily by means of water-travel. Water was in fact one of the defining features of this area and thus of the communities which developed there. Where agriculture was the rule in most parts of the Frankish world, Frisia's geography and ecology lent itself to the pursuit of maritime activities and to trade rather than farming.

By the seventh century, Frisians were engaging in long-distance trade and exchange to make ends meet and to compensate for the area's limited agricultural potential. The growth of this region and the rise of Dorestad as the preeminent trading port of the early medieval period

⁶ Stéphane Lebecq, *Marchands et navigateurs frisons du haut moyen âge*, vol. 2 (Lille 1983).

⁷ McCormick (n. 4 above) 15–18, 281–282.

⁸ Anders Winroth, *The Conversion of Scandinavia: Vikings, Merchants, and Missionaries in the Remaking of Northern Europe* (New Haven 2012) 90–92.

were the direct result of these activities.⁹ Frisia's connection via rivers and seas served to link it not just internally but also to the wider world. The presence of multiple important river systems, especially the Rhine, tied Frisia to the heartland of the Franks. As Frisia came more firmly into the orbit of the Franks during the early eighth century these regional links grew ever stronger. By the time the Carolingians took the throne in 751, the Frisian kingdom was considered to be part of the Frankish realm: the Franks' gateway to the north.¹⁰

While never directly connected to the Roman world, Iron Age Scandinavia had nevertheless participated in limited exchange with its southern neighbors. Archaeological evidence in the form of glassware, pottery, and coinage all point to trade based primarily on ties to the eastern Roman empire, with routes moving through the Baltic and into central Europe.¹¹ However, with the arrival of the Avars and various Slavic peoples in the sixth century these links were severed. It is at this juncture that a North Sea "zone" truly began to take shape.¹² Though information on Scandinavia is sparse in our written sources, archaeological evidence shows the first signs of Frisian inroads into Saxony and Scandinavia beginning in the seventh century.¹³ Signs of colonization and active trading—including habitations, cemeteries, and Rhenish pottery and glass shards—are visible on the islands along the western coast of Jutland, particularly at Amrum, Föhr, and Sylt (map

⁹ Detlev Ellmers, "The Frisian Monopoly of Coastal Transport in the 6th–8th Centuries AD," *Maritime Celts, Frisians and Saxons. Papers Presented to a Conference at Oxford in November 1988*, ed. Seán McGrail (London 1990) 91; Heidinga, *Frisia in the First Millennium* (Utrecht 1997) 51; Stéphane Lebecq, "Entre Terre et Mer: La Mise En Valeur Des Contrées Littorales de L'ancienne Frise," *Histoire, Économie et Société* 16 (1998) 184–185; Dries Tys, "The Scheldt Estuary as a Framework for Early Medieval Settlement Development," *Dorestad in an International Framework*, ed. Annemarieke Willemsen and Hanneke Kik (Turnhout 2010) 169.

¹⁰ Timothy Reuter, "Charlemagne and the World beyond the Rhine," *Charlemagne: Empire and Society*, ed. Joanna Story (Manchester 2005) 187.

¹¹ A. N. Zadoks-Josephus Jitta, "Looking Back at Frisians, Franks and Saxons," *Bulletin Van De Vereeniging Tot Bevordering Der Kennis Vande Antieke Beschaving* 36 (1961) 49; Svend Nielsen, "Urban Economy in Southern Scandinavia in the Second Half of the First Millennium AD," *The Scandinavians from the Vendel Period to the Tenth Century: An Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. Judith Jesch (Woodbridge 2002) 183.

¹² Hayo Vierck, "Imitatio imperii und interpretatio Germanica vor der Wikingerzeit," *Les Pays du Nord et Byzance*, ed. Rudolf Zeitler (Uppsala 1981) 65; McCormick (n. 4 above) 563.

¹³ Dirk Meier, "Transalbanorum Saxonum Populi Sunt Tres: Das Dithmarscher Küstengebiet Im Frühen Und Hohen Mittelalter," *Studien Zur Archäologie Des Ostseeraumes: Von Der Eisenzeit Zum Mittelalter: Festschrift Für Michael Müller-Wille*, ed. Anke Wesse (Neumünster 1998) 83.

2). The dubbing of this archipelago as the Frisian Islands is further confirmation of a Frisian presence.¹⁴

By the mid-eighth century the Frisians were thus settled quite firmly on the crossroads between the Frankish kingdoms and Scandinavia. As the foremost participants in long-distance trade and exchange, the word “Frisian” would itself become synonymous with “merchant” in medieval sources.¹⁵ Settled at the various trading sites of the North Sea and the Baltic, Frisian merchants could tap into local markets and acquire the raw materials of Scandinavia in exchange for goods produced throughout the Rhine valley.

Although certain references to traders and commerce exist in the written sources, it is the archaeological record that provides the clearest signs of connections between Scandinavia and the Continent. Numismatic evidence of these links dates from the mid-seventh century (map 3).¹⁶ Small numbers of Frankish gold coins have been found at sites such as Sylt, Altenwalde, Limfjord (in the far north of Jutland), and especially at Danekirke—which served as one of the first proto-emporia in Scandinavia. These coins, known as *trientes*, appear only in relatively small numbers before the second half of the seventh century. From the 650s on, however, the number of finds of foreign coins in Scandinavia, both in isolation and in hoards, becomes more substantial. In place of the earlier gold coins came the introduction of a new cur-

¹⁴ Lebecq (n. 5 above) 85; Martin Segschneider, “Trade and Centrality between the Rhine and the Limfjord around 500 AD. The Beachmarket on the Northfrisian Island Amrum and Its Context,” *Central Places in the Migration and Merovingian Periods*, ed. Birgitta Hårdh and Lars Larsson (Stockholm 2002) 247–256.

¹⁵ Stéphane Lebecq, “On the Use of the Word ‘Frisian’ in the 6th–10th Written Sources: Some Interpretations,” *Maritime Celts, Frisians and Saxons. Papers Presented to a Conference at Oxford in November 1988*, ed. Seán McGrail (London 1990) 85–90.

¹⁶ The data in map 3 is based on several different sources. As new finds are constantly being discovered, especially with the increased use of metal detectors, this map is meant to be representative rather than definitive. For Madelinus *trientes* see Mark Blackburn, “The Coin-finds,” *Means of Exchange: Dealing with Silver in the Viking Age*, ed. Dagfinn Skre (Aarhus 2007). For *sceattas* see W. op den Velde, W. J. de Boone, and A. Pol, “A survey of sceatta finds from the low countries,” *Sceatta in England and on the Continent*, ed. David Hill and D. M. Metcalf (Oxford 1984) 117–145; and Kristen Bendixen, “Finds of sceattas from Scandinavia,” *Sceatta in England and on the Continent*, ed. David Hill and D. M. Metcalf (Oxford 1984) 151–157. I have chosen not to include Carolingian single-finds in this map as there does not yet exist a comprehensive catalog for these finds. For Carolingian hoards, however, see Simon Coupland, “A Checklist of Carolingian Coin Hoards 751–987,” *The Numismatic Chronicle* 171 (2011) 203–256. For ninth-century Scandinavian coinage see Brita Malmer, “South Scandinavian Coinage in the Ninth Century,” *Silver Economy in the Viking Age*, ed. James Graham-Campbell and Gareth Williams (Walnut Creek 2007) 13–27.

rency, typically called *sceattas*.¹⁷ Made of silver and generally of high quality, *sceattas* came in a variety of styles. While their origin seems to be English, the practice of minting these silver coins quickly crossed the Channel. Strikingly, *sceattas* bear no inscription of any sort; rather than being issued by specific kings or rulers the coins seem to have been created at numerous sites in a more ad-hoc fashion. In contrast to most of the gold coinage of the early medieval period, these coins were tools designed primarily for easy exchange in the growing market of the North Sea rather than for cultural or political ends. The diffusion of these *sceattas*, not just in Scandinavia but in large numbers throughout England and Frisia (at Dorestad, on the island of Domburg further to the south, along the northern coast-line, and down the Rhine), shows the routes of exchange that stretched from Frisia north into Scandinavia, west into the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, and southeast into the Frankish kingdoms by the beginning of the eighth century.¹⁸

The rise of Carolingian power brought about a new stage in the economic and monetary practices of the Franks. Perhaps inspired by the usefulness of the *sceat*, and certainly due to the changing availability of metal, the Franks abandoned gold coinage and began minting a new silver coinage, called the *denarius*.¹⁹ This shift in currency demonstrates a central aspect of the developing Carolingian economic policy. On the one hand, a desire to bring minting back under centralized control, and on the other, a goal of creating a currency useable in both local and long-distance trade.²⁰

Beginning in the reign of Charlemagne, and especially following his decision to reform coinage weights and minting practices in ca. 793, the

¹⁷ This term has come under periodic attack due to its somewhat anachronistic associations with later Anglo-Saxon coins of the same name. Both Ian Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms, 450–751* (London 1994) 299; and Lebecq (n. 5 above) 54–55 use the term in quotations and make it clear that they might prefer to use the term “penny” instead. Given the weight of scholarship, however, it seems that the *sceat* is here to stay.

¹⁸ Lebecq (n. 5 above) 54–61; Philip Grierson and Mark Blackburn, *Medieval European Coinage*, vol. 1 (Cambridge 1986) 153–154; D. M. Metcalf, “Viking-Age Numismatics 2: Coinage in the Northern Lands in Merovingian and Carolingian Times,” *The Numismatic Chronicle* 156 (1996) 402–409; Michael Müller-Wille, “Ribe - Reric - Haithabu: Zur frühen Urbanisierung im südsandinavischen und westslawischen Gebiet,” *Haithabu und die frühe Stadtentwicklung im nördlichen Europa*, ed. Klaus Brandt, Michael Müller-Wille, and Christian Radtke (Münster 2002) 330.

¹⁹ Grierson and Blackburn (n. 15 above) 81–154; Wood (n. 17 above) 218; Arent Pol, “Madelinus and the Disappearing of Gold,” *Dorestad in an International Framework*, ed. Annemarieke Willemsen and Kik Hanneke (Turnhout 2010) 94.

²⁰ Richard Hodges, *Dark Age Economics: The Origins of Towns and Trade A.D. 600–1000* (New York 1982) 39; Jean-Pierre Devroey, *Économie rurale et société dans l'Europe franque* (Paris 2003) 161–164.

numismatic evidence grows significantly. Charlemagne's reform should be viewed, at least in part, within the context of a growing focus on commerce, including that with Scandinavia.²¹ The reign of Louis the Pious saw increased control over coinage throughout the Carolingian Empire and a corresponding rise in the number of Frankish coins circulating throughout Europe.²² Indeed, the period of 820–830 was a particularly productive period for North Sea trade, and the uptick in Carolingian minting reflects this.²³

Alongside Dorestad's central role as a site for export and import, the town also functioned as a mint. The so-called Dorestad *denarii*, minted by both Charlemagne and Louis the Pious attest to the emporium's growing importance and to the continuing expansion of trade between Francia and Scandinavia. These coins—which bore the name of the *vicus* where they were minted, and sometimes an image of a ship—have been found widely throughout the Netherlands and the northern routes into Scandinavia. Finds of these coins in the Baltic indicate the further development of the North Sea network. The minting of knock-off coins at Hedeby and elsewhere in imitation of the Dorestad *denarii* is indicative of the influence that these growing trade links had in the north.²⁴

The presence of southern coinage in Scandinavia indicates the existence of active, ongoing trade. But what were merchants using these coins to purchase? What were the key items of exchange that linked the world of the Danes, Swedes, and Norwegians with those of their southern neighbors? On the Scandinavian side of the equation there are major gaps in the archaeological record that mirror those in the written sources. The major trade goods of the north—raw materials meant for consumption, such as salt, honey, and beeswax, or for the shops of Frankish craftsmen, like furs and leather—tend to leave little in the way of physical evidence. There are, however, some exceptions to these

²¹ Philip Grierson, "Money and Coinage under Charlemagne," *Karl Der Grosse: Lebenswerk Und Nachleben*, vol. 1, ed. Helmut Beumann (Düsseldorf 1966) 501–536; Hodges (n. 20 above) 43; Simon Coupland, "Charlemagne's Coinage: Ideology and Economy," *Charlemagne: Empire and Society*, ed. Joanna Story (Manchester 2005) 221–223.

²² Simon Coupland, "Money and Coinage Under Louis the Pious," *Francia* 17.1 (1990) 23–54.

²³ Simon Coupland, "Carolingian Single Finds and the Economy of the Early Ninth Century," *The Numismatic Chronicle* 170 (2010) 287–319.

²⁴ Sawyer (n. 3 above) 116; Klavs Randsborg, *The Viking Age in Denmark: The Formation of a State* (New York 1980) 89; Ellmers (n. 9 above) 92; Gareth Williams, "The Influence of Dorestad coinage on coin design in England and Scandinavia" *Dorestad in an International Framework*, ed. Annemarieke Willemsen and Hanneke Kik (Turnhout 2010) 105–111.

perishable items. Whale bones, walrus tusks, and reindeer antlers were a major trade good both within Scandinavia and with the outside world.²⁵ From Norway came soapstone and whetstones that were exported to Denmark and Francia in large quantities.²⁶ Even more valuable was amber imported from Sweden and the Baltic. Massive quantities of unworked amber, as well as numerous finished and in-progress amber and glass items such as beads, have been found at Dorestad, indicating the importance of the site as an entry point for this exotic luxury.²⁷

While the movement of goods from north to south is only dimly visible, when we look for evidence of Frankish imports in Scandinavia a much richer picture emerges. Luxury goods manufactured in the Frankish kingdoms, and especially in the Rhine and Meuse valleys, linked the continent to the north. Ceramics and glassware are by far the most common Frankish items found in Scandinavia. Glass drinking vessels from areas such as Eifel and the Ardennes begin to appear in large numbers from the late seventh century all along the North Sea coastal routes with substantial finds as far east as Sweden. Many of these finds are connected to particularly rich burial sites, indicating the high value placed on these Frankish wares by the elite of Scandinavia. Glass drinking vessels, sometimes in great numbers, have also been located in the remains of the halls which housed powerful chieftains and their bands of followers. These vessels would have been items of great prestige and their use a conspicuous display of wealth and power.²⁸ In addition to these finished pieces, archaeologists have located numerous

²⁵ Ohthere, *Two Voyagers at the Court of King Alfred: The Ventures of Ohthere and Wulfstan, Together with the Description of Northern Europe from the Old English Orosius*, ed. Niels Lund, trans. Christine E. Fell (York 1984) 19–20; Stig Jensen, *The Vikings of Ribe* (Ribe 1991) 13; Nielsen (n. 11 above) 184.

²⁶ Herbert Jankuhn, *Haithabu: ein Handelsplatz der Wikingerzeit* (Neumünster 1956) 167–169; Heid Resi, “Reflections on Viking Age Local Trade in Stone Products,” *Proceedings of the Tenth Viking Congress*, ed. James E. Knirk (Oslo 1987) 95; Lise Bender Jørgensen, “Rural Economy: Ecology, Hunting, Pastoralism, Agricultural and Nutritional Aspects,” *The Scandinavians from the Vendel Period to the Tenth Century: An Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. Judith Jesch (Woodbridge 2002) 139–140.

²⁷ W. A. van Es, “Dorestad Centred,” *Medieval Archaeology in the Netherlands: Studies Presented to H.H. van Regteren Altena*, ed. J. C. Besteman, Johannes Maria Bos, and H. A. Heidinga (Assen 1990) 174–175.

²⁸ Peter Sawyer, *Kings and Vikings: Scandinavia and Europe, A.D. 700–1100* (London 1982) 72; Heiko Steuer, “Der Handel der Wikingerzeit zwischen Nord- und Westeuropa aufgrund archäologischer Zeugnisse,” *Untersuchungen zu Handel und Verkehr der vor- und frühgeschichtlichen Zeit in Mittel- und Nordeuropa*, vol. 4, ed. Klaus Düwel et al. (Göttingen 1987) 146–151; Winroth (n. 8 above) 17–18; Ulf Näsman, “Exchange and Politics: The Eighth-Early Ninth Century in Denmark,” *The Long Eighth Century*, ed. Chris Wickham and Inge Lyse Hansen (Leiden 2000) 37–46.

glass beads used in jewelry, mirroring those found in the soil of Dorestad.

Rhenish ceramic wares allow us to trace similar lines of communication and interaction stretching from the heart of Francia into the Baltic. Pottery is particularly useful for gauging trade in the pre-Viking period since, unlike jewelry and other luxury goods, it tends not to appear in later Viking Age hoards, which may contain objects and coins plundered long after their creation. Badorf ware, a style of ceramic popular from ca. 750 onward and named for its origin site in the Cologne region, is found throughout the Netherlands as well as along the Jutland peninsula, especially at the Danish emporium of Hedeby.²⁹ Another style, Tating ware, is even more useful as an indicator of growing links between Francia and Scandinavia from the mid-eighth century. Badorf ware most likely served a largely utilitarian function, as a transport for wine or more frequently as a utensil for Frisian merchants.³⁰ Tating ware, on the other hand, is demonstrably a luxury good. These high-quality Carolingian pitchers, decorated with tin foil, were, as Richard Hodges puts it, “the finest pottery available in north-west Europe in the period between ca. 770 and ca. 825.”³¹ They can be used to trace the growing popularity of Frankish goods in Scandinavia and the rising levels of contact between these two spheres decades before the ninth century. Tating ware is found in large numbers at all of the major emporia of Scandinavia, including Kaupang in Norway and Birka in Sweden.³² Not just a vessel for carrying goods to Scandinavia, these pitchers have been found in pagan graves in Sweden, an indication of their status as a luxury good. The existence of imitation styles produced at these Scandinavian sites also indicates the popularity of Frankish pottery.³³

A variety of other materials (some traceable in the archaeological record, others through documentary evidence) provide further proof

²⁹ Christoph Keller, “Pottery Production in Badorf and Walberberg During the Carolingian Period,” *Vikings on the Rhine: Recent Research on Early Medieval Relations Between the Rhinelands and Scandinavia*, ed. Rudolf Simek and Ulrike Engel (Vienna 2004) 162–163.

³⁰ Claus Feveile, “Ribe: Emporium and Town in the 8th and 9th Centuries,” *Dorestad in an International Framework*, ed. Annemarieke Willemsen and Hanneke Kik (Turnhout 2010) 145–146.

³¹ Hodges (n. 20 above) 59.

³² Richard Hodges, “Dark Age Economics Revisited,” *In Discussion with the Past: Archaeological Studies Presented to W. A. van Es*, ed. H. Sarfatij, W. J. H. Verwers, and P. J. Woltering (Zwolle 1999) 230; Björn Ambrosiani, “Birka and Dorestad,” *In Discussion with the Past: Archaeological Studies Presented to W.A. van Es*, ed. H. Sarfatij, W. J. H. Verwers, and P. J. Woltering (Zwolle 1999) 241.

³³ For a discussion on just how telling pottery can be for the changing political and commercial face of the eighth and ninth centuries see McCormick (n. 4 above) 659–661.

that this was a trade based around luxury and prestige items. Basalt millstones, produced in the same region as the luxury glassware, have been found at all of the major trading ports of the North Sea (map 4).³⁴ The numerous wooden barrels found at Dorestad, crafted from fir trees from far up the Rhine, are indicative of a trade in wine; we can also see evidence of this from the Frisians referenced in a diploma from 753 concerning the fair at Saint-Denis, known for its central role in the wine trade.³⁵ Fine Frankish swords have been found at Hedeby, and it appears that Frankish blades were shipped without hilts to Sweden, where they could be finished in local styles.³⁶ Frisian textiles are regrettably lacking from the physical record, due to their perishable nature, but textual references attest to their popularity as an item of prestige.³⁷ In Notker's *Gesta Karoli Magni Imperatoris*, the emperor Charlemagne is said to have sent to Harun al-Rashid, the Abbasid Caliph, "Frisian cloaks of white, grey, red and blue which were rare and very expensive."³⁸ Finds of brooches and combs, and metal goods such as keys and tools likewise show the value of transporting small but highly sought after goods.

Alongside the pottery, glass, and amber carried in merchant ships came another commodity unlike any of the others: slaves. It is difficult to get a clear view of the slave trade in the North Sea, especially if we depend on archaeology to trace the flow of goods between Francia and Scandinavia.³⁹ Unsurprisingly, given the scant interest of medieval writers in commerce in general, we do not find much more on the slave

³⁴ Lebecq (n. 5 above) 78; Steuer (n. 28 above) 142–146; Näsman (n. 28 above) 47–48; Claus Feveile, "Mayen Lava Quern Stones from the Ribe Excavations 1970–76," *Ribe Excavations 1970–76*, vol. 6, ed. Mogens Bencard and Helge Brinch Madsen (Esbjerg 2010) 133–156; Map 4 is based primarily on information from Näsman and Feveile. Note that new finds are being discovered each year, therefore this map is representative, rather than definitive.

³⁵ Pippin I, n. 6, MGH DD Kar. 1, ed. E. Mühlbacher (Hanover 1906) 9–11; and see McCormick (n. 4 above) 651, on the centrality of wine to the Saint-Denis fair.

³⁶ Jankuhn (n. 26 above) 154–163; Steuer (n. 28 above) 151–156.

³⁷ Georges Duby, *The Early Growth of the European Economy: Warriors and Peasants from the Seventh to the Twelfth Century*, trans. Howard B. Clarke (Ithaca 1974) 106; Chrystel Brandenburgh, "Textile Production and Trade in Dorestad," *Dorestad in an International Framework*, ed. Annemarieke Willemsen and Hanneke Kik (Turnhout 2010) 82–88.

³⁸ "Poro autem imperatori Persarum direxit indefessus augustos ... pallia Fresonica alba, cana, vermiculata vel saphirina, que in illis partibus rara et multum cara comperit"; Notker, *Gesta Karoli Magni Imperatoris*, 2.9, MGH SRG n.s. 12, ed. H. Haefele (Berlin 1959) 63.

³⁹ Marios Costambeys, Matthew Innes, and Simon MacLean, *The Carolingian World* (Cambridge 2011) 341; McCormick (n. 4 above) 654; cf. Joachim Henning, "Gefangenensesseln Im Slawischen Siedlungsraum Und Der Europäische Sklavenhandel Im 6. Bis 12. Jahrhundert," *Germania* 70.2 (1992) 403–426.

trade in the North Sea when we turn to the written sources. In many ways slaves suffer from the same lack of attention in medieval sources that merchants do, though for different reasons. Where merchants seem to have been regarded as largely unimportant—and perhaps occasionally distasteful—to the elite, Christian world that most interested the churchmen writing in the early medieval period, slaves were effectively not even a part of that society. They were, as Orlando Patterson puts it, “socially dead,” forever outside of the community, in effect non-entities.⁴⁰ Little wonder, then, that slaves tend to flit on the margins of medieval sources. They are nameless, often lumped together in groups and only occasionally coming to the forefront, and then generally as lenses through which other more important figures, almost always saints, could be seen.⁴¹

The secondary literature reflects this lack of available source material. Studies of slavery in the Carolingian empire are almost completely focused on the question of when, why, and whether slavery slowly disappeared or morphed into other forms of servility such as serfdom.⁴² When the study of the slave trade, as opposed to the everyday structures of slavery, is discussed, the eighth- and early ninth-century North Sea trade seems to invariably appear as a brief aside to the larger discussion of trade in the Mediterranean or with the Islamic world of the east.⁴³ Works on slavery in Scandinavia tend to focus either on the second half of the ninth century and the Viking raids and slave-taking made famous by the various annals, or on the later period when written laws and sagas can provide some sort of framework for a more comprehensive study of slavery as a social system.⁴⁴ In the last twenty

⁴⁰ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: a Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA 1982) 38.

⁴¹ Ruth Karras, *Slavery and Society in Medieval Scandinavia* (New Haven 1988) 203 n. 23; David Pelteret, “Slave Raiding and Slave Trading in Early England,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 9 (1981) 105; Wilhelm Levison, *England and the Continent in the Eighth Century* (Oxford 1946) 9.

⁴² Marc Bloch, *Slavery and Serfdom in the Middle Ages: Selected Essays*, trans. William Beer (Berkeley 1975); Pierre Bonnassie, *From Slavery to Feudalism in South Western Europe*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge 1991); Carl I. Hammer, *A Large-Scale Slave Society of the Early Middle Ages: Slaves and Their Families in Early Medieval Bavaria* (Burlington 2002).

⁴³ Charles Verlinden, *L'esclavage Dans l'Europe Médiévale*, vol. 1 (Brugge 1955) 717; Peter Johanek, “Der fränkische Handel der Karolingerzeit im Spiegel der Schriftquellen,” *Untersuchungen zu Handel und Verkehr der vor- und frühgeschichtlichen Zeit in Mittel- und Noreuropa*, vol. 4, ed. Klaus Düwel et al. (Göttingen 1987) 37–40; McCormick (n. 4 above) c. 25; Gene W. Heck, *Charlemagne, Muhammad, and the Arab Roots of Capitalism* (New York 2006) 284–285.

⁴⁴ Niels Skyum-Nielsen, “Nordic Slavery in an International Setting,” *Medieval Scandinavia* 11 (1978) 126–148; Karras (n. 41 above); Tore Iversen, “Thralls’ Manumission, Land Clearing, and State Building in Medieval Norway,” *Settlement and Lordship*

years there has been a move by scholars such as David Wyatt and David Pelteret, both of whom focus primarily on the British Isles, to view medieval slavery in a cultural rather than a legal or economic context, but this approach has yet to be applied to Francia or Scandinavia in any concerted way.⁴⁵

The earliest evidence for Frisian involvement in the slave trade appears in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, where he describes a Frisian trader purchasing captives at London for sale in Merovingian Gaul.⁴⁶ Most of these slaves were probably destined for Frankish estates. By the Carolingian period, however, we can safely say that members of the Christian west were finding themselves in the hands of pagan owners. In his study of slavery in early medieval England, Pelteret points out that "the frequent enactment of legislation against the sale of Christians abroad supports the evidence ... that Englishmen regularly transported slaves across the sea to sell."⁴⁷ The same concerns are present in the conciliar legislation from Francia. An episcopal council convened in 743 declared that "Christian slaves were not to be handed over to pagans."⁴⁸ A similar statement was made in 772 in Bavaria, when it was forbidden to sell slaves across the borders.⁴⁹ In the ninth century Agobard of Lyon wrote angrily of kidnappings occurring in the heart of Francia, where free Christians were carried off into captivity.⁵⁰

At the close of the eighth century we begin to see signs of active predation by Scandinavian raiders on the Continent and in England, adding to and perhaps supplanting the established slave trade of other peoples with more direct methods of acquisition. Though these attacks are far less frequent before the 830s and described in far less detail, they certainly involved the capture of Christians, as well as of Christian goods. An Irish annal from 821, for instance, recounts an attack upon

in *Viking and Early Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Bjørn Poulsen and Søren Sindbaek (Turnhout 2011) 263–276; for a critique of this practice see Stefan Brink, "Slavery in the Viking Age," *The Viking World*, ed. Stefan Brink and Neil Price (New York 2008) 49–50.

⁴⁵ David Pelteret, *Slavery in Early Mediaeval England* (Rochester 1995); David Wyatt, *Slaves and Warriors in Medieval Britain and Ireland, 800–1200* (Leiden 2009).

⁴⁶ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4.22, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford 1992) 404–405.

⁴⁷ Pelteret (n. 45 above) 76.

⁴⁸ "Ut mancipia Christiania paganis non tradantur"; *Concilium Lifinense*, c. 3, MGH *Concilia* 2.1, ed. A. Werminghoff (Hanover 1906) 7.

⁴⁹ "Ut nullus a provincia sua mancipium limine venundare vel proprium vel fugitivum presumperit, et si quis hoc decretum non observaverit, wergeldo suo culpabilis permaneret"; *Concilium Neuchingense*, c. 1, MGH *Concilia* 2.1, ed. A. Werminghoff (Hanover 1906) 99.

⁵⁰ Agobard, *De Insolentia Judaeorum*, CCCM 52, ed. L. van Acker (Turnout 2001) 195.

the kingdom of Ulster in which a large number of women were carried off.⁵¹ The frequent references in Frankish annals of slave taking from the 830s on reinforce the idea that when raiders came to Christian lands in search of wealth, they were not just thinking about silver.

Most of the slaves who ended up in Scandinavian hands were destined for warmer climes; Scandinavia depended far less on large numbers of slaves than the eastern Islamic world. And yet Scandinavians, like the Anglo-Saxons and Franks, not only traded in slaves, they also used them at home. At least some of those they carried off would have ended up in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway.⁵² When Anskar first came to Birka in 829–830 it was not just the king and his subjects who were happy to receive the missionary. His biographer Rimbert reports, “There were, moreover, many captive Christian being held amongst the Swedes who rejoiced since now they would at last be able to participate in the divine mysteries.”⁵³ Just how many of these captives there actually were, we cannot say. But if these Christian slaves were glad to see Anskar, no doubt he was also glad to see them. While slaves were outsiders to those who owned them, the fact that they are consistently referred to as *captivi* rather than as *servi* or *mancipia* in the *Vita Anskarii* indicates that to missionaries they remained fellow Christians, a source of familiarity in a foreign world.

Slaves in Scandinavia could thus provide a means for communication and community for those Franks who ventured willingly north. We also know that not all of these captives remained permanently enslaved. The written sources contain several accounts of the redemption and return of slaves from Scandinavia. Rimbert writes several times of Anskar’s habit of seeking out and freeing Christian slaves from Sweden and Denmark. In the anonymous *Vita Rimberti* Rimbert himself is similarly said to have been instrumental in the redemption of Christians.⁵⁴ While this is in part a topos of the genre (the redemption of slaves appears as a standard saintly act as early as Merovingian *vitae*), this does

⁵¹ *The Annals of Ulster (to A.D. 1131)*, ed. and tran. Séan Mac Airt and Gearóid Mac Niocaill, (Dublin) 276–277.

⁵² Karras (n. 41 above) 47–49; Joachim Henning, “Strong Rulers—Weak Economy? Rome, the Carolingians, and the Archaeology of Slavery in the First Millennium AD,” *The Long Morning of Medieval Europe*, ed. Jennifer R. Davis and Michael McCormick (Burlington 2008) 47.

⁵³ “Multi etiam apud eos captivi habebantur christiani, qui gaudebant iam tandem se mysteriis divinis posse participari”; Rimbert, *Vita Anskarii*, c. 11, MGH SRG, ed. G. Waitz (Hanover 1884) 32.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, cc. 34, 35; “Ad redemptionem captivorum cunctis pene quae habebat expensis, cum multorum adhuc apud paganos detentorum miseriam cernere cogeretur, etiam altaris vasa ad redemptionem eorum impendere non dubitavit”; *Vita Rimberti*, c. 17, MGH SRG 55, ed. G. Waitz (Hanover 1884) 95.

not preclude it from reflecting reality. The specific stories of Anskar or Rimbert freeing Christians from the yoke of the heathen may be exaggerated or in part invented, but that does not mean they are purely fictitious. After all, if *vitae* present an idealized picture of saintly behavior, then it makes sense for those engaging in pious activities to emulate and enact these deeds.

And it was not only through the good deeds of saints that Christian slaves might return from Scandinavia. Captured Christians could also engineer their own freedom. In the *Vita Anskarii* Rimbert tells us of “a group of miserable captives who, having been seized from their homes and carried off to the land of the Barbarians suffered greatly at the hands of these foreigners. Hoping to escape captivity, these slaves fled to those Christians called the Nordalbingen who are the neighbors of the pagans.”⁵⁵ We also see evidence for the possible return of slaves in an annal for 845, where a Viking chieftain, facing a plague, sent home a group of Christian slaves in an attempt to propitiate their angry God.⁵⁶ While they probably did not have anything positive to say about their experiences, these former captives are also a part of the web of engagement between these two lands.

Christian captives in Scandinavia and those who had been freed from such captivity form one part of the slave network that stretched between Francia and Scandinavia. But another type of slave also played a part in these exchanges. From as early as the time of Gregory the Great pagan slaves, especially young boys, were utilized by Christian missionaries to help them make headway in their proselytization. In preparation for the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons, the pope wrote a letter instructing those priests serving in Gaul to use the money from their positions to purchase and place Anglo-Saxon slave-boys into monastic orders.⁵⁷ Several centuries later Anskar engaged in similar activities. In 831, Louis the Pious granted the missionary possession of

⁵⁵ “videlicet cum nonnulli miseri captivi, qui de christianis terris rapti et ad barbarorum terras perducti, nimis apud externos affligebantur, spe evadendi inde fugerent et ad christianos venirent, ad praedictos videlicet Nordalbingos, qui proximi noscuntur esse pagani”; Rimbert, *Vita Anskarii* (n. 53 above) c. 38, 72–73.

⁵⁶ “Suadente autem eos quodam captivo Christiano, ut coram deo Christianorum sortem ponerent, quod et fecerunt, et salubriter sors eorum cecidit. Tunc rex eorum nomine Rorik una cum omni populo gentilium XIII dies a carne et medone abstinuit, et cessavit plaga, et omnes Christianos captivos, quos habebant, ad patriam propriam dirigunt”; *Annales Xantenses*, s.a. 845, MGH SRG 12, ed. B. de Simson (Hanover 1909) 15.

⁵⁷ “Volumus ut dilectio tua ex solidis quos acceperit vestimenta pauperum vel pueros Anglos, qui sint ab annis decem et septem vel decem et octo ut in monasteriis date Deo proficiant”; Gregory I, *Ep.* 6.10, MGH Epp. 1, ed. P. Ewald and L. Hartmann (Berlin 1891) 388–389.

the monastery of Turholt, in modern day Belgium, in order to aid in the conversion of Scandinavia. According to Rimbert, “At the time when he was in possession of Turholt, and because all of his energy was focused on his calling to the heathen, in order that his work might be of benefit to them, he purchased a number of boys from the Northmen and Slavs and placed them in that monastery so that they could be trained for this holy campaign.”⁵⁸ Both Gregory in the sixth century and Anskar in the early ninth were interested in fostering communication between their culture and that of the pagan. These former slaves could act as a link between worlds, since they spoke both tongues and had a better understanding of the mind and culture of their birth. The slave trade, in this case, provided the raw materials necessary for missionary work and another opportunity for cultural exchange.

Slaves, pottery, fine glass, and other goods were transported throughout the North Sea area, linking cultures and peoples. Through trade, treasures could be acquired to be flaunted, sold again, or gifted. For both Scandinavian chieftains and Frankish aristocrats, fine luxury items from distant lands served to display their power and wealth. The Danish ruler who could offer Frankish wine in delicate glass goblets instead of local mead was demonstrating to his followers just how worthy he was to lead them. Likewise, amber jewelry and luxurious furs from the distant north could make an impressive gift from a Frankish ruler to a loyal supporter. In a world driven by gift giving, trade functioned alongside warfare and raiding as a means of acquiring and distributing the goods that greased social wheels. At both a local level and on a growing international scale, productive commercial relationships were forming between Francia and Scandinavia.

The fine items that circulated throughout the North Sea—the foil decorated Tating ware, bronze brooches, Frisian cloth, glass bowls, and amber beads—were the physical bones of trade; they speak, in their own silent way, of commerce and of communication. Yet these objects did not just appear of their own accord on the docks of the emporia or at the courts of Danish and Frankish kings. They were carried, sometimes vast distances, by men willing to brave the elements and the hazards of leaving their homelands in search of profit.

Specific details about the merchants who bridged the worlds of Franks and Scandinavians are hard to come by. While we can trace their physical movement through the artifact record, when we turn to

⁵⁸ “Eo quoque tempore quando cellam praedictam Turholt habuerat, quoniam omnis ei cura de vocatione gentium erat, ut eis in sua legatione prodesse potuisset, nonnullos pueros ex Nordmanis vel Slavis emptos in eadem cella causa discendi ad sacram militiam nutriendos posuerat”; Rimbert, *Vita Anskari* (n. 53 above) c. 36, 71.

the written sources for further details we find a dearth of information. The standard title for these figures is *negotiator*, which functions as something of a catchall word.⁵⁹ A few examples show the wide variety of contexts in which the term appears. In the *Vita Anskarii*, Rimbert uses *negotiator* quite frequently for both Frankish and Scandinavian merchants. In the *Miracula Sancti Goaris*, written by Wandalbert in the mid-ninth century, a Frisian *negotiator*, saved from drowning on the Rhine by the intercession of the saint, gives a silk robe to the monks of the abbey of Prüm in thanks.⁶⁰ In secular documents the same term appears in the capitulary from Thionville, issued in 805, where tolls for merchants are discussed. We also see it used in one of Louis the Pious's formulae, the *praeceptum negotiatorum*, laying out the privileges for those merchants serving the royal court.⁶¹ Nevertheless, though they appear across a wide range of genres, it is striking how infrequently the activities of merchants are featured or detailed in the writing of the Carolingian period. A combination of growing ecclesiastical contempt for commerce and profit, on the one hand, and the aristocratic focus on martial power and gift giving on the other, may in part explain this underrepresentation.⁶² It probably also stems from the fact that most writing, whether ecclesiastical or secular, was concerned with the deeds of the great and powerful. When we do see *negotiatores* in miracle stories or in the legislation of kings, it is generally at moments when their activities bring them into contact with the powerful, often as servants or supplicants; they are supporting players, witnesses to a saint's power or

⁵⁹ Less often the term *mercator* is used, but these words appear to be interchangeable; Peter Kneißl, "Mercator–Negotiator: Römische Geschäftsleute und die Terminologie ihrer Berufe," *Münstersche Beiträge zur Antiken Handelsgeschichte* 2.1 (1983) 73–90; Dietrich Claude, "Der Handel Im Westlichen Mittelmeer Während Des Frühmittelalters," *Abhandlungen Der Akademie Der Wissenschaften in Göttingen* 144 (1985) 169.

⁶⁰ "Consimili prope eventu cum quidam ex Fresonum gente negotiator navem circa ripam ulteriorem ageret, neque littori in quo monasterium situm est propinquare disponeret, ubi ad scopulos illos, de quibus supra diximus, navis acta pervenit, subito rapta et in gurgitem undarum violentia tracta, praesenti cunctos discrimine perculit. Sed cum dominus navis Goaris saepe nomen et meritum iterans subsidium expetiisset, in portum continuo navis illaesa devehitur; ille ut continentem attigit, oratum perrexit, ac pro salutis munere vestem holosericam venerandae memoriae tribuit, quae etiam vestis postea ab eo qui haec mihi retulit Theodrado clerico ad Prumiam monasterium est delata"; Wandalbert, *Miracula S. Goaris*, PL 121.667C–667D.

⁶¹ *Capitulare Missorum in Theodonis Villa Datum Secundum, Generale*, c. 13, MGH *Capitulare* 1, ed. A. Boretius (Hanover 1883) 124–125; *Praeceptum Negotiatorum*, MGH *Formulae*, ed. K. Zeumer (Hanover 1886) 314–315.

⁶² Vito Piergiovanni, "The Itinerant Merchant and the Fugitive Merchant in the Middle Ages," *Of Strangers and Foreigners*, ed. Laurent Mayli and Maria Mart (Berkeley 1993) 82.

subjects of a specific royal decree.⁶³ They are almost always anonymous figures, referred to simply by their role. We are told about large groups of merchants or of singular figures identified often only as “Frisian” but moments where we learn the name of a trader, as when Alcuin mentions one Hrotberct, are exceptionally rare.⁶⁴ The combination of disinterest and the problem of limited literacy and haphazard record preservation thus leaves us with little to work with.

Although merchants are difficult to track or to study in depth, we can still make certain observations about these obscure figures. From at least the time of the late Roman Empire the term *negotiator* identified someone who made their living primarily or exclusively through the act of buying and selling goods. The term thus distinguished them from craftsmen and farmers who might appear at emporia or markets to sell but who were directly responsible for the production of the goods in question.⁶⁵ In addition, based on the evidence provided by both written sources and by archaeology, the term *negotiator* seems generally to refer to those engaged in long-distance trade, men who travelled in order to make a profit rather than shopkeepers or local dealers. The *praeceptum negotiatorum* of Louis the Pious, for instance, provides a picture of merchants who each year (or every other year) presented themselves at court at the end of May to renew their service to the emperor. In return they received royal protection and exemption from tolls at the various trading sites around Francia, such as Dorestad and Quentovic, which they would frequent on business.⁶⁶ We are already familiar with those merchants whose business took them along the northern trade routes, sometime as far as Sweden. Lest we think that this was merely a Frisian or Frankish practice, the *Vita Anskarii* provides evidence that Scandinavian merchants, too, were in the habit of making long trade journeys. During an assembly at Birka, reported in the *Vita Anskarii*, an elderly Scandinavian trader defended the saint,

⁶³ Michael McCormick, “New Light on the ‘Dark Ages’: How the Slave Trade Fuelled the Carolingian Economy,” *Past and Present* 177 (2002) 29; Peter Sawyer, “Kings and Merchants,” *Early Medieval Kingship*, ed. P. H. Sawyer and Ian Wood (Leeds 1977) 139.

⁶⁴ Alcuin, *Ad Amicos Poetae*, 12, MGH Poetae latini medii aevi 1, ed. E. Dümmler (Berlin 1881) 221; Lebecq (n. 6 above) provides a comprehensive catalog of sources which reference, explicitly or implicitly, Frisian trade and Frisian merchants. Of the 65 works or authors presented, only 5 provide a proper name for the merchant in question; see also McCormick (n. 4 above) 14.

⁶⁵ Claude (n. 59 above) 168.

⁶⁶ “Ita ut deinceps annis singulis aut post duorum annorum curricula peracta dimidiante mense Maio ad nostrum veniant palatium, atque camaram nostram fideliter unusquisque ex suo negotio ac nostro deservire studeat hasque litteras auctoritatis nostre ostendat”; *Praeceptum Negotiatorum* (n. 57 above) 314–315.

declaring, “Some of us, who have traveled to Dorestad, have found the Christian religion to be beneficial and have taken it up of our own accord.”⁶⁷

We also know that at least some of these merchants undertook their business as the representatives of the great and powerful. The *praeceptum negotiatorum* makes this abundantly clear, as do references to the trading privileges of ecclesiastical institutions such as Saint-Germain-des-Prés or the cathedral of Worms.⁶⁸ It is likely that this was not the case for every merchant. Although benefits such as immunity from tolls and legal protection made serving under the auspices of a powerful monastic house attractive, there were almost certainly independent merchants as well, making a profit of their own accord and forced to pay full measure on the goods they transported.

At least some merchants were quite wealthy. The *Miracula Sancti Goaris* contains several accounts of merchants travelling up the Rhine in the company of slaves. In one of these stories the slaves are almost certainly the property of the merchant rather than a commodity, as they are seen serving as manual labor. The wealth of this merchant is further confirmed by his gift of a pound of silver to the church of St. Goar in thanks for the rescue of one of the previously mentioned slaves from drowning.⁶⁹ Some merchants could afford to give gifts of silver or fine silk to saints, others probably were not so lucky. While those whose business led them to the great assemblies of nobles and churchmen might expect to reap rich rewards, other *negotiatores* might be small time peddlers, travelling shorter routes and dealing in small numbers of goods.

Whether a successful servant of the emperor or a simple Danish trader moving up and down the coast of Jutland, merchants were more than just the movers of physical goods and money. Long distance traders regularly moved between worlds and could operate as go-betweens and intermediaries.⁷⁰ Meetings between Scandinavians and their southern neighbors involved the exchange of information, news, and ideas as much as trade goods. Many of these encounters were likely seasonal, occurring at market beaches or at emporia during the summer months of trade, before the weather made travel difficult and unprofitable. Yet

⁶⁷ “Aliquando nempe quidam ex nobis Dorstadum adeuentes, huius religionis normam profuturam sibi sentientes, spontanea voluntate suscipiebant”; Rimbert, *Vita Anskarii* (n. 53 above) c. 27, 58:

⁶⁸ Charlemagne, n. 122, MGH DD Kar. 1, ed. E. Mühlbacher (Hanover 1906) 170–171; Charlemagne, n. 257, MGH DD Kar. 1, ed. E. Mühlbacher (Hanover 1906) 371–372; Johanek (n. 43 above) 55–68.

⁶⁹ Wandalbert, *Miracula S. Goaris* (n. 60 above) 667D–669A.

⁷⁰ Heidinga (n. 9 above) 30.

we also know that the Frisians had a tendency to set up colonies at the sites they frequented. At Hedeby and Ribe archaeological finds of non-indigenous building styles on the outskirts of the town have been discovered. These were likely built to serve as homes and shops for Frisian traders and to provide a sense of security and community by separating them from the local inhabitants.⁷¹ Colonization and settlement would have allowed for longer periods of contact, with Frisians and Scandinavians living as neighbors. Thus alongside the presence of Frankish items in graves, halls, and ports, we can also see signs of Frankish influence on crafts native to Scandinavia from at least the seventh century. Weapon styles, jewelry, pottery, and bronze casting such as keys at Birka and brooches at Ribe, all show the ways in which Scandinavian craftsmen emulated and utilized styles and artistic motifs from their southern neighbors.⁷² The appearance of Scandinavian-influenced brooches in Frisia and the Rhineland indicates that this sort of cultural exchange was not unidirectional.⁷³

Even as merchants facilitated the gradual diffusion of artistic styles and techniques they also aided in the movement of ideas and information. Commerce could not exist without lines of communication. The very act of trading, of knowing where proper markets existed, what goods were in demand and whom to seek out for protection or profit, created a network of people with knowledge of the language, customs, and lands of their foreign neighbors. And not every instance of communication would be limited to matters of trade. If Scandinavian merchants could learn of Christianity through their travels to Dorestad, they also must have received at least some information from the Christian merchants who traveled north.⁷⁴ This is one explanation for the initial interest in Christianity (perhaps over-emphasized by the nature of the source) that Anskar encountered on his arrival in Scandinavia. Merchants probably also served as a source of information for those

⁷¹ Lebecq (n. 5 above) 237–238; Stéphane Lebecq, “Les marchands au long cours et les formes de leur organisation dans l’Europe du nord et du nord-ouest aux VII–XI siècles,” *Voyages et voyageurs à Byzance et en Occident du VIe au XIe siècle*, ed. Alain Dierkens, Jean-Marie Sansterre, and Jean-Louis Kupper (Genève 2000) 333.

⁷² Signe Horn Fuglesang, “‘The Personal Touch’: On the Identification of Work-shops,” *Proceedings of the Tenth Viking Congress*, ed. James E. Knirk (Oslo 1987) 220–221; Signe Horn-Fugelsang, “Copying and Creativity in Early Viking Ornament,” *Early Medieval Art and Archaeology in the Northern World*, ed. Andrew Reynolds and Leslie Webster (Leiden 2013) 825–841.

⁷³ Dirk Jellema, “Frisian Trade in the Dark Ages,” *Speculum* 30.1 (1955) 20; Zadoks-Josephus Jitta (n. 9 above) 53.

⁷⁴ Stéphane Lebecq, “Long Distance Merchants and the Forms of Their Ventures at the Time of the Dorestad Heyday,” *In Discussion with the Past: Archaeological Studies Presented to W.A. van Es*, ed. H. Sarfatij, W. J. H. Verwers, and P. J. Woltering (Zwolle 1999) 235–237.

writing about foreign events, allowing for the detailed accounts of Danish politics present in the *Royal Frankish Annals*. We know that at least some merchants made their way to court on a regular basis, as well as to the great assemblies. And information need not have come only from Christians; discussions with Scandinavian merchants would not have been out of the question. In the later ninth century a wealthy Norwegian trader named Ohthere would have his accounts of travel and trade in Scandinavia—including a stop at Hedeby—immortalized as an addendum to the Old English translation of Orosius's *Historiae Adversos Paganos* made at King Alfred's court.⁷⁵ The gathering and sharing of information would not have been confined only to the annalists writing at court; local annalists would also have depended on merchants for news of distant events, even as they utilized the "major" annals for much of their information.⁷⁶ In a world where few people travelled, those who did so regularly must have served as links between distant points, in much the same way that pilgrims or diplomats might. A stop at a monastery to pray or to spend an evening, an encounter with officials at a toll site, a layover at an estate to collect goods, all of these would have provided opportunities for gossip and communication about events occurring both inside and outside the realm.

A growing familiarity with the neighboring lands is evident on the part of the Scandinavians as well. The first major continental Viking attacks of the 830s demonstrate that Scandinavians had a clear idea not just of the location but of the wealth of sites such as Dorestad, Quentovic, and Domburg.⁷⁷ The fact these initial raids on Francia targeted trade sites, not the rich and vulnerable monasteries and churches which would later become favorite targets, is a further indication of the importance of the commercial links between Scandinavia and Francia. These northern pirates were almost certainly also northern traders playing a different part.⁷⁸ The Frankish merchants who made their living in the North Sea and Baltic networks must also have become quite famil-

⁷⁵ Ohthere (n. 21 above) 18–22.

⁷⁶ Rosamond McKitterick, *Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity* (Cambridge 2008) 37.

⁷⁷ Rudolf Simek, "The Emergence of the Viking Age," *Vikings on the Rhine: Recent Research on Early Medieval Relations Between the Rhineland and Scandinavia*, ed. Rudolf Simek and Ulrike Engel (Vienna 2004) 13.

⁷⁸ Klavs Randsborg, "Les activités Internationales des Vikings: raids ou commerce?" *Annales HSS* 36.5 (1981) 862–868; Timothy Reuter, "The End of Carolingian Military Expansion," *Charlemagne's Heir: New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious (814–840)*, ed. Roger Collins and Peter Godman (Oxford 1990) 403–404, and see also n. 62; John Sheehan, "Viking Raiding, Gift-Exchange and Insular Metalwork in Norway," *Early Medieval Art and Archaeology in the Northern World*, ed. Andrew Reynolds and Leslie Webster (Leiden 2013) 814–815.

iar with the coasts and emporia of Scandinavia. Merchants did not go wherever the wind or their impulses took them. As Michael McCormick puts it, “For all their brevity, the ‘snapshots’ of merchants that crop up in acts, saints’ lives and toll regulations usually show us *where the merchants were* at the moment they were mentioned. Analyzing the disparate mentions reveals that traders were not randomly distributed. They cluster in a small number of places, like customs posts and towns. In other words, they unveil nodes in a network of commercial communications.”⁷⁹ Traders would have been quite familiar with these routes and foreign locations. For Anskar and his fellow missionaries, Scandinavia was a frightening and unfamiliar world. It makes sense that they would turn to merchants as their guides and protectors on the voyages into what was, for them, the unknown.⁸⁰ It is also likely that the detailed description of the Baltic provided by Einhard in his *Vita Karolii* owed at least something to discussions with those who had primary knowledge of the area.

Merchants could also serve as official sources of information and go-betweens for their rulers, playing a role in diplomatic and political matters.⁸¹ In a quite fragmentary capitulary issued sometime in the first half of Louis the Pious’ reign, counts and officials are apparently urged to seek out merchants as sources of information on proper coinage.⁸² In the entry for 809, the *Royal Frankish Annals* provides further evidence for the ways in which merchants could function as links between peoples. “Meanwhile, Godfrid, the king of the Danes, sent certain merchants to the emperor, having heard that the emperor was angry at him because he had led an army against the Abodrites in the previous year.”⁸³ Although the subsequent meeting was conducted by nobles (*primoribus Danorum*), the first steps of this tense negotiation were undertaken by more neutral and far less important figures. It is interesting to note that the annalist gives us no hint as to the nationality of these merchants. Were these Danish merchants who were familiar enough with Francia to serve as effective diplomats, or were these merchants Frisians or Franks pressed into service at the will of the Danish king? Both possibilities are plausible; the dearth of written sources

⁷⁹ McCormick (n. 4 above) 617.

⁸⁰ Ian Wood, *The Missionary Life: Saints and the Evangelisation of Europe, 400-1050* (New York 2001) 250–251.

⁸¹ F. L. Ganshof, *The Middle Ages: A History of International Relations* (New York 1971) 30–31.

⁸² *Capitulaire de Moneta*, MGH Capitulari 1, ed. A. Boretius (Hanover 1883) 299–300.

⁸³ “Interea Godofridus rex Danorum per negotiatores quosdam mandavit, se audisse, quod imperator ei fuisset iratus, eo quod in Abodritos anno superiore duxit exercitum”; *Annales Regni Francorum*, s.a 809, MGH SRG 6, ed. G. H. Pertz (Hanover 1895) 128.

dealing with merchants unfortunately makes this difficult to answer, just as it makes it hard for us to know whether Godfrid's use of merchants was unusual or part of a wider pattern.

From as early as the mid-seventh century, merchants, like the ones pressed into service by Godfrid, moved goods, ideas, and information between the Continent and Scandinavia, forging links that would only grow stronger as time passed. Frisia, home to the most important North Sea emporium, straddled these two worlds. Even as her inhabitants were establishing colonies along the northern coast—in Saxony, the Jutland Peninsula, and beyond—they were making connections, sometimes unwillingly, with the world of the Franks. Trails of silver coins, first minted independently and then under the aegis of kings, attest to the growing Frankish trade with their northern neighbors. An impressive and ever growing number of archaeological finds demonstrate just how lively this trade could be. Built around a network of urban centers and the desire of powerful figures in both cultures for luxury goods and the esteem that they brought trade created not just physical links but social ones as well. The people responsible for propping up this luxury network – some merchants and others the very merchandise itself – moved back and forth across the North Sea and interacted with customers near and far. New goods were accompanied by new skills, information, and ideas. For all this interaction, however, we must remember that knowledge of the wider world remained largely the purview of those involved with trade. The vast majority of those living in Francia, or in Scandinavia for that matter, had little to no concept of their North Sea neighbors. This was true even for the elites of both cultures, the very people whose desires spurred the growing North Sea trade. The same could be said for many priests and monks, the men responsible for the scant records we have on Scandinavia. Even Rimbert, whose account of Anskar's mission is one of our most important sources of information on commerce in the ninth century, and who spent time missionizing in Denmark himself, was unsure of just what lay in the far north. In a series of letters with his colleague Ratramnus of Corbie he discussed what one should do if they happened to encounter dog-headed men, or *Cynocephali*, while spreading the word of God in Scandinavia.⁸⁴ Clearly, the churchman in his cell in the heart of Francia, or even perched on the edges of the empire at Hamburg, could still regard the pagan north as a dark and mysterious place.

⁸⁴ Ratramnus of Corbie, *Ep.* 12, MGH Epp. 6, ed. E. Dümmler (Berlin 1925) 155–157.

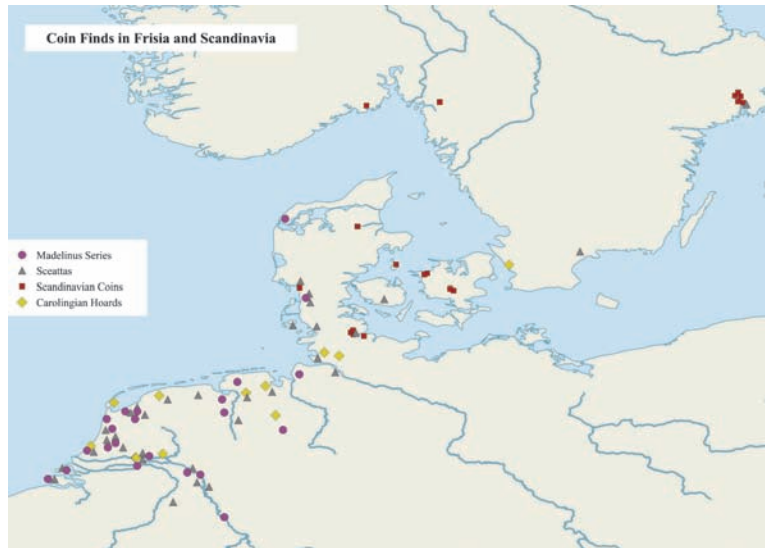
But for the men who carried goods back and forth across the North Sea things must have seemed far more mundane and familiar. And even in the written sources penned by churchmen safe at home we begin to see how much more familiar and attuned to this world Francia was becoming by the time of Louis the Pious. Commerce, an inherently communicative act, served as one strand in a growing web of interaction between the Carolingian Empire and the peoples of the north in the eighth and ninth centuries. When we look at the networks of trade forming across the North Sea in the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries, we come away with a narrative of communication and contact that pre-dates and actively informs the Viking Age and that is far more vibrant and complex than our primary sources reveal at first glance.



MAP 1



MAP 2

**MAP 3****MAP 4**