

Silver Landscapes in Viking-Age Gotland: From Hoards to Settlements

A workshop to be held in the School of Archaeology, Oxford

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Abstracts

Per Widerström (Gotlands Museum, Visby)

Was there life before death?

When we consider the Gotlandic archaeological record, it may seem that in some periods of its prehistory people just died, while in other they only lived. The Viking Age is such a period where we find many graves, but we have few investigated settlements. Therefore, we tend to build our view of the Viking-Age life on Gotland from the graves. In fact, we do not know much about the Vikings' home environment, the farms. I will try to put some life, or traces of life, rather than death, into the Gotlandic Vikings. I will discuss sources with which are better acquainted, as well as those we know much less about. I will compare Gotland with “Sweden”, especially the lake Mälaren area, and attempt to characterise some of the traditions, trends and different ways how we believe the Viking-Age peoples expressed themselves. Finally, I will try to paint a picture of how these dynamics influenced the growth of the first Gotlandic town in the Viking Age, Visby.

Dan Carlsson (Arendus Ltd., Visby)

Inside or outside? Hoards and buildings

Few phenomena in the Gotlandic history, and in the Viking Age history in Sweden generally, have faced so much discussion as the issue of the Viking Age silver hoards, especially on Gotland. The theories about why this amount of silver is found on Gotland, as well as the reasons why it was deposited, and why it remained in the ground to the present day, are as numerous as the needles on a Christmas tree. The essential question that will be discussed here concerns the deposits and their spatial context considered at a local perspective. It is essential to understand this in order to be able to discuss the causes of the deposition of hoards and why they were never retrieved. The discussion will build on a detailed spatial analysis, aimed at highlighting the landscape dimension of the hoards. Since Majvor Östergrens dissertation, where she interprets that hoards in general are located inside houses or directly at farm sites, this assumption become almost an archaeological axiom, with no discussion to what degree this is true. Ny Björn Gustavsson in his recent dissertation considered silver deposits on Gotland indirectly by linking them to the issue of metalworking, and put forward a slightly more nuanced picture of the deposits, although he still emphasizes “that [...] a majority of the Gotlandic hoards can be tied to buildings”. Even in the latest interpretations of silver hoards from Gotland, the idea of the hoards inside houses prevail; “They stored their coins beneath the floors of their houses in Gotland until it was time to venture on a new trade expedition”, as Dagfinn Skre puts it in his recent article “Markets, towns and Currencies in Scandinavia ca. AD 200-1000”. This archaeological axiom, in the

light of recent metal detector surveys, needs to be revised and the purpose of this presentation is to illustrate a more nuanced picture of the spatial location of hoards as a basis for the interpretation of the causes of depositions of objects, not only silver, but also jewelry of bronze, etc.

Christoph Kilger (Uppsala University Campus Gotland, Visby)

Inflow and use of Samanid and other silver on Gotland. Some thoughts on targeting local, regional and long- distance networks

It is a well-known fact that each Viking hoard has its own foot print and displays a unique composition of different coin types, jewelry, ingots, hacksilver etc. Foreign coins such as Samanid dirhams are often described and presented as proxies for contacts with distant worlds. However, the inter-connection between individual hoards on different local and regional scales has to my knowledge not been sufficiently explored before. Different methodologies such as combined correspondential and GIS analyses may have a great potential in this respect revealing common, but hidden structures between hoards, indicating circulation patterns of use and distribution within a region but also delivering fingerprints on how and where silver was originally acquired. The occurrence of specific coin types issued from the same monetary region may indicate the ventures of trading expeditions and pioneers, other affluent coin types, huge clusters of die-identical coins may indicate mainstream engagement, when contacts have been established and secured. One essential prerequisite to undertake such kind of analysis is a proper numismatic publication of the coin material, but also other objects such as ornaments. What I want to talk in our workshop is - if such a kind of network analysis is feasible for the Gotlandic material - where do we start? And which kind of coin material, hoards and even other silver objects should we target first?

Ny Björn Gustafsson (Visby)

From foreign to familiar. The entry and circulation of silver in the Gotlandic society

In 2000 Gotland's first, and hitherto only, unaltered early-medieval metal workshop was excavated in Fröjel on the island's west coast. Prior to that, only scattered remains had been collected, chiefly by means of metal detection of ploughed-over contexts. This had helped to create a rough notion on a general level, but it was not until the Fröjel workshop occurred that the stray objects could be properly contextualized. Given this, it is clear that the importance of the workshop as a general template cannot be overestimated, despite the fact that it appears to have been an integrated part of a harbour settlement which to some extent was un-typical to Gotland as a whole. Analyses of technical ceramics from the workshop has made it possible to follow the silver, at first as raw metal which entered the building and was cupellated. This proofed bullion was then cast into several types of Gotlandic jewellery which left the workshop, presumably to be circulated on the island.

Despite the distinct technical nature of these finds they allow for a discussion on the social and judicial implications of silver in the Gotlandic society. The fact that the silver was carefully cupellated is central to this as it points to a strive to control and ascertain value. The hoard evidence suggests that Gotlandic jewellery have been subjected to fractioning and test pecking on a very limited scale. It might thus be suggested that they were to some extent guaranteed to hold a certain standard in terms of silver content. This would place native Gotlandic silver jewellery above bullion, as a pre-monetary currency. It is probably safe to

say that there existed some kind of central control on a national level. The highest political power on the island would have had the executive power to prescribe and settle the measures necessary to turn foreign silver into an integrated part of the Gotlandic society.

Majvor Östergren (Visby)

Excavated contexts of hoards. Three case studies

Gotland is famous for its silver hoards from the Viking Age. Although about 750 hoards are known from the island, only a very few find spots have been excavated by archaeologists on a larger scale. Three of those are: Spillings in Othem parish with the large silver hoard (67 kilos) dated to the 9th century, Gannarve in Hall parish, dated to about 1120, and Burge in Lummelunda parish, with two hoards dated to after 1140 and to the 11th century. In all three cases there are remains of farms located in about the same place for at least 1000 years.

Gustaf Svedjemo (Uppsala University Campus Gotland, Visby)

Silver hoards in the context of settlements. Social structures and environment

It is often regarded as an axiom that the Viking Age silver hoards of Gotland can be used as a proxy for contemporary farms, and that the settlement structure of Gotland has consisted of single farms since the middle of the Iron Age and onwards. This is, however, not always the case. In this presentation an alternative picture of the social organisation and settlement structure will be painted, in which the village is a central part. The spatial distribution of the silver hoards will also be discussed based on the notion that there has been greater variation in the settlement pattern and location than most often recognised.

Dan Carlsson (Arendus Ltd., Visby)

The Middle man in the Baltic Sea. Viking Age harbours on Gotland

Viking Age Gotland is a cosmopolitan entity, with a network of contacts around most of the Baltic Sea and with an economy that is unparalleled in the Viking world, not at least reflected in the huge amount of silver that flowed into the island during the Viking Age. Finds from Gotland, an island which measures only about 170 km x 50 km, comprise $\frac{2}{3}$ of all silver hoards encountered in Sweden. It is now not only silver objects that reflect the rich network of contacts, but also those of other materials, which are not found naturally on the island. This includes both different types of metals as well as raw material for bead making, and horns for processing into combs etc. Gotland during the Viking Age is obviously an economy crucially dependent on imports of raw materials and finished products from abroad. Such dependence requires a well-developed organization in terms of contacts, transportation and ports. It is notable, for example, that silver coins and silver deposits occur in large over the whole island, suggesting that the booming economy not only touched an elite, or a group of governing persons, for example, along the coasts, but the entire island. A system of this kind, where basically everyone participated in one way or another, requires, among other things, a harbour system that benefits the entire island. It should, in other words, comprised several important ports along the coasts to work in an economy that could involve the entire island. Until a few years ago, only one Viking-Age port was known in some detail, namely Paviken in Västergarn parish, which was investigated in the 1960-70's.

Gitte Ingvardson (Lund University)

Trade craft and religion. Silver hoards as mediators of Viking Age life in the island of Bornholm, Denmark.

Preliminary analysis of 35 excavated hoard sites on Bornholm divides the deposition of the hoards into three main categories, deposited in:

- the central part of a settlement area – often in a house.
- the outskirts of a settlement area, perhaps in areas with production activity.
- an area without other prehistoric remains

In a case study of seven hoard sites the actors and processes behind the hoards are visualised by combining the evidence of coins and non-minted silver in their archaeological context, thus associating the hoards with three essential activities in Viking Age society: trade, craft and religion.