

VIKING-AGE HOARDS IN NORTHERN SWEDEN – THEIR FIND PLACES, CONTENT AND ORIGIN

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of our paper is to highlight the historical and cultural significance of Viking-Age silver hoards found in south-eastern Norrland. In comparison with other Swedish regions, the history of Norrland during the Viking Age and the early Medieval period is much less studied. The role of archeology and numismatics in knowledge-building is crucial.

Today researchers distinguish five different communities that inhabited the region during the Iron Age and lived on distinctive means. Access to various kinds of resources created good opportunities for exchange, trade, export and import of raw materials and the establishment of contacts with neighbouring lands. During the Viking Age, an important change took place in the northern interior, namely a large-scale transition to domestic reindeer, which was set by researchers in connection with the establishment of the international trade network and a great demand for fur and leather. In this context, Norrland's relatively large number of silver treasures (15 hoards, of which 12 are coin-dated) are conspicuous. The coin-dated hoards are spread along the cultivated coastal lands.

MATERIAL

The Viking-Age silver hoards can be subdivided into three main chronological groups. The first group (two hoards) is dated to the first half of the tenth century. The characteristic feature of these hoards is that they only include Islamic coins. Two hoards have been referred to the second group of Viking-Age hoards and dated to the second half of the tenth century. They are composed of Islamic and German coins in addition to jewellery or exclusively jewellery. The coin hoard include Islamic coins with a bronze loop of Estonian type, which is unique in a Swedish context.

The third group is considerably numerous and comprise nine hoards of mixed character dated to the first half of the eleventh century. Two hoards with tpq 1024 include a large share of newly-struck, uncirculated English coins which is a unique characteristic. One large hoard with the same tpq have a large proportion of coin fragments clearly showing contacts with the West-Slavonian area.

METHOD

In ongoing project, we would like to highlight the following issues:

- How did the changes in the regional economy and the remote contacts be reflected in the composition of the hoards?
- What can the hoard's content tell about the owners' status and their social and economic contacts?
- Which role did the silver economy have in Norrland compared with other Swedish and Nordic regions?
- What can hoards tell about cultural contacts between Scandinavian and Finnish-speaking people?

The project's method has a contextual perspective, i.e. a material study from a social, cultural and economic context. Particular attention will be paid to studies of the composition of the hoard finds in relation to their metal content, the purity of the silver, local and international weight systems.