

# Trade and Communication Networks of the First Millennium AD in the northern part of Central Europe



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Trade and Communication Networks of the  
First Millennium AD in the northern part of Central Europe:

Central Places, Beach Markets,  
Landing Places and Trading Centres

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# Neue Studien zur Sachsenforschung Band 1

herausgegeben vom  
Niedersächsischen Landesmuseum Hannover

in Verbindung mit dem  
Internationalen Sachsensymposium

durch  
Babette Ludowici

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herausgegeben von

Babette Ludowici, Hauke Jöns,  
Sunhild Kleingärtner, Jonathan Scheschke  
und Matthias Hardt

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## Vorwort zur Reihe

Mit dem vorliegenden Band beginnt das Niedersächsische Landesmuseum Hannover unter dem Titel „Neue Studien zur Sachsenforschung“ eine neue Reihe von Veröffentlichungen aus dem Bereich seiner Forschungstätigkeit. Dazu gehört die wissenschaftliche Erschließung der umfangreichen archäologischen Sammlungsbestände zur Geschichte des ersten Jahrtausends im Gebiet des heutigen Bundeslandes Niedersachsen, die am Haus unter der mittlerweile traditionellen Bezeichnung „Sachsenforschung“ betrieben wird. Sie bildet einen der wichtigsten Schwerpunkte der am Landesmuseum Hannover geleisteten Forschungsarbeit. Vieles von dem, was wir heute über die Lebenswirklichkeit und die kulturhistorische Entwicklung in den Landschaften Niedersachsens im ersten Jahrtausend wissen, basiert auf hierbei gewonnenen Erkenntnissen. Die „Sachsenforschung“ am Landesmuseum Hannover zielt aber auch auf die wissenschaftliche Durchdringung der Ethnogenese und Geschichte des frühmittelalterlichen Stammesverbandes der Sachsen, die seit dem 6. und 7. Jahrhundert als Bewohner weiter Gebiete zwischen Rhein, Elbe, den Mittelgebirgen und der Nordseeküste überliefert sind. Wie andere germanische gentes, etwa die Franken, die Bajuwaren oder die Alamanen, haben die Sachsen die politischen und historischen Abläufe in Europa entscheidend mitgeprägt. Bis heute stiftet ihr Name territoriale Identitäten.

Initiator und Doyen der genuin landesgeschichtlich orientierten „Sachsenforschung“ am Landesmuseum Hannover war Albert Genrich (1912-1996), der hier von 1954 bis 1977 zunächst als Kustos und später als Leiter der vormaligen Abteilung Urgeschichte tätig war. Mit der „Sachsenforschung“ von Beginn an und bis heute aufs engste verknüpft ist das 1949 von Karl Waller ins Leben gerufene „Internationale Sachsensymposium“ mit heutigem Sitz in Belgien, zu dessen Gründungsmitgliedern Albert Genrich gehörte. Die damals noch „Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Sachsenforschung“ genannte Vereinigung fungiert seit vielen Jahrzehnten als international maßgebliches wissenschaftliches Forum für die Archäologie der frühen Geschichte Nordwesteuropas. Derzeit gehören ihr rund 130 Archäologen und Historiker aus Belgien, Dänemark, Deutschland, Finnland, Frankreich, Großbritannien, den Niederlanden, Norwegen, Schweden und den USA an. Albert Genrich war von 1968 bis 1986 Vorsitzender des Symposiums, das einmal jährlich tagt.

In der Nachfolge Genrichs wurde die „Sachsenforschung“ am Landesmuseum Hannover von 1977 bis 2004 von Hans-Jürgen Häßler fortgeführt. Seine Untersuchungen zu frühgeschichtlichen Bestattungsplätzen und Grabfunden aus Niedersachsen haben der Forschung wesentliche Impulse verliehen. Mit der von ihm am Landesmuseum Hannover begründeten und dort bis zu seinem Ausscheiden aus dem Dienst lektorierten und redigierten Reihe „Studien zur Sachsenforschung“ etablierte Häßler, der von 1996 bis 2002 auch Vorsitzender des „Internationalen Sachsensymposiums“ war, ein international anerkanntes Fachorgan zur Frühgeschichtsforschung.

Dem Forschungsverständnis und dem Wirken Albert Genrichs und Hans-Jürgen Häßlers verpflichtet, deren zentrale Konstante der rege fachliche Austausch mit zahlreichen Wissenschaftlern und Forschungseinrichtungen im In- und Ausland war, werden die „Neuen Studien zur Sachsenforschung“ vom Landesmuseum Hannover nunmehr in direkter Verbindung mit dem „Internationalen Sachsensymposium“ herausgegeben. In diesem Sinne programmatisch veröffentlichen wir als ersten Band der Reihe die Ergebnisse des internationalen Workshops zum Thema "Trade and Communication Networks of the First Millennium AD in the northern part of Central Europe: Central Places, Beach Markets, Landing Places and Trading Centres" am 4. und 5. September 2008 in Bad Bederkesa, den der Arbeitsbereich „Sachsenforschung“ am Landesmuseum Hannover mit veranstaltet hat.

**Jaap Brakke**  
Direktor des Niedersächsischen Landesmuseums Hannover

**Claus von Carnap-Bornheim**  
Leitender Direktor der Stiftung Schleswig-Holsteinische Landesmuseen,  
Vorsitzender des Internationalen Sachsensymposiums

**Babette Ludowici**  
Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum Hannover,  
Arbeitsbereich „Sachsenforschung“

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## Foreword

This publication presents the results of an international workshop entitled "Trade and Communication Networks of the First Millennium AD in the northern part of Central Europe: Central Places, Beach Markets, Landing Places and Trading Centres", which was held on September 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>, 2008, in Burg Bad Bederkesa, near Cuxhaven in Germany. Thirty-six participants from six countries discussed questions relating to structural relationships and points of contact in the first millennium AD between settlements and other localities that were dependent on agriculture and those that functioned as central places, which can be identified as such by evidence of religious activity, trade and exchange as well as traces of craft production.

For several decades now, research in northern Germany and southern Scandinavia has concentrated on coastal Viking Age trading posts and their hinterland. At present, more than eighty sites are known in the area of the North and Baltic Seas that were part of a supra-regional trade and communication network in the early and high Middle Ages. In the written sources, they are usually described as trading posts, market places or early towns. It has been established that these places also played an important role in the life of the inhabitants of other settlements, in both the immediate vicinity and the further hinterland. The discovery of numerous landing places for boats, seasonal markets and craft workshops shows that an infrastructure had developed in the surrounding area for the specific purpose of supplying the central place. The model used in modern town planning for centres or central settlements and their peripheries can also be applied, at least partially, to settlement structures at the end of the first millennium AD.

In southern Scandinavia, in particular, research has also been increasingly preoccupied since the early 1980s with the economic and social conditions before the Viking Age, i.e. in imperial Roman times and the Migration period. Focal points of this research are settlement areas and agglomerations in which settlement continuity can be traced over several centuries and where the archaeological finds and features indicate that they were centres of political, economic and religious power. A centre should not be understood as a clearly circumscribed area but rather as consisting of several contemporaneous settlements with different functions, including beaches or man-made landing places for boats in protected bays, where goods could be loaded and unloaded and where

there are signs of considerable trade and craft activity. Such places gave the central settlements direct access to supra-regional transportation and communication routes.

Scholars generally agree that these Iron Age central places, like the trading emporia of the Viking Age, were under the control of the social elite. On the other hand, the question of who organised the exchange or trading of goods, whether the ruler himself or several more or less independent traders, is the subject of much controversy. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that decisive social changes took place in the central places, which finally led to the transformation from the Iron Age tribal system to the Germanic kingdoms and states of the early and high Middle Ages.

The discovery and preliminary investigation of most Iron Age central places began with a systematic survey using metal detectors, whereby large quantities of high-quality objects made of bronze, silver or gold were recovered. A more detailed examination reveals that the finds consist mainly of jewellery and costume elements of various origins, which when dated often indicate settlement continuity over several centuries. The characteristic find spectrum includes not only the remains of non-ferrous metal-working but also figurative images made of thin gold foil, commonly called "gubber". Gold objects, either as single finds or in hoards, e.g. containing gold bracteates, are also found in low-lying areas around the central places. The purpose of these gold objects was to honour the gods; the gold "gubber" can probably be interpreted as temple money. Concentrations of theophoric place names in the proximity of several central places in imperial Roman times also underline the religious function of the central places.

Research over the past few decades has found increasing evidence of central places in the southwestern part of the North Sea region as well. However, their structure is still largely unknown. In inland areas, too, growing numbers of sites with similar ranges of finds have been found in remarkably convenient topographical locations from the point of view of transportation. A structural comparison of these sites and their functions has not yet been undertaken.

To sum up, it can be said that the research situation regarding central places, their various functions, their surrounding areas and the relationships between them is very different from region to region. While well-substantiated models can already be presented for parts of southern Scandinavia, research has

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only just begun in the southern Baltic and southwestern North Sea areas. Against this background, the main objective of the workshop was not only to present and collate the latest scientific approaches and the most recent research projects on the subject but also to discuss them thoroughly. Consequently, when preparing the workshop, the organisers did not send out the usual call for papers but, instead, defined specific topics to be discussed. The focal points thus defined, which not only covered the chronologically and geographically related cultures but also took into consideration the research done by other historical disciplines, provided the basic framework for both the programme of the workshop and the contents of this publication. Experts on each subject were selected and asked to collate the latest research, make a constructive critical appraisal, and produce a manuscript that included the most important points to be considered at the workshop. At the same time, for each subject, a second expert was selected to review the manuscript and write a commentary to be presented in a short statement as the starting point for the round-table discussion.

In order to create the right atmosphere for an animated debate, it was decided to limit the number of participants in the workshop to those colleagues who had agreed to take an active part as either first or second expert. To encourage the participants to prepare themselves thoroughly for the event, copies of all the manuscripts and all the commentaries were placed at their disposal about four weeks before the workshop. English was chosen as the official language. After the workshop, all the authors had an opportunity to revise and up-date their texts and comments to include issues raised during the discussions and take into account new points of view.

We would like to thank all the participants of the workshop for having accepted this unusual procedure without complaint and for having handed in their papers on time. We also wish to thank the Burg Bederkesa Museum for having placed such an impressive room at our disposal, which was a perfect location for our workshop. We also thank Beverley Hirschel (Cologne) for going over all the English texts and Holger Dieterich (Institut für Ur- und Frühgeschichte at the University of Kiel) who prepared the layout of the papers handed out for the workshop and took charge of the graphics for the illustrations in this volume. And, last but not least, our special thanks go to the Fritz Thyssen Foundation (Cologne), which not only financed the cost of accommodation, meals and travel but also provided the necessary funds for the subsequent editorial preparation of the manuscripts for publication.

#### The editors

Babette Ludowici  
Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum Hannover

Hauke Jöns  
Niedersächsisches Institut für historische Küstenforschung, Wilhelmshaven

Sunhild Kleingärtner  
Institut für Ur- und Frühgeschichte der Universität Kiel

Jonathan Scheschkewitz  
Landesamt für Denkmalpflege im Regierungspräsidium Stuttgart, Esslingen

Matthias Hardt  
Geisteswissenschaftliches Zentrum  
Geschichte und Kultur Ostmitteleuropas e.V. an der Universität Leipzig



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