

North-European trading centres and the Early Medieval craftsman. Craftsmen at Åhus, north-eastern Scania, Sweden ca.AD 750-850+.

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Abstract

The emergence and the further development of wics and trading places in Northern and North-western Europe (late 7th century to the 10th century) cannot be explained as the result of only one social and economic system. This complex background could be studied in the archaeological material from the workshops of craftsmen. In the person of the craftsman different social and economic and possibly also cultural spheres join together. The site of Åhus II (S. Sweden) and its waste material from diverse crafts is presented shortly: amber-working, antler-working, bronze- and silver-casting, glass-working, specialized forging, fine textile-working). The craftsmen were mainly residents of the site although some may have been absent e.g. during the summer months. The number of active craftsmen was high (hundreds of them). The craftsmen at Åhus II to a considerable extent were generalists performing several crafts. Fine dresses and clothes with accessories may have been the most important products. They joined in small-sized work groups forming an important element in the social system of the site. The relative regularity of plots may hide a considerable variability. Many craftsmen at trading sites in Northern Europe were free men although the community of the site was dependant on the protection of local holders of power. The military potential of a site of this type should however not be played down completely. Presumably the emergence of more extensive and more complex estates in the 7th and 8th centuries was an important mover for the development of wics and trading centres. The craftsman often worked intimately together with traders and merchants and may even sometimes have been the same person.

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The discussion about wics and North European trading places and their place in archaeology and history

The phenomenon of trading places *cum* craftsmen of the late seventh to ninth and tenth centuries in North-western and Northern Europe has been much discussed during the last decade. From the beginning mainly being a topic of Scandinavian archaeology and with

very slow progress, it has now shifted its focus away from the northern examples and has been predominantly involved with the *wics* of Anglo-Saxon England, the Channel area and the Rhine estuary. It is however most essential to see all these places as integrated parts of a single extensive network, albeit with various distinctive branches. There have been three dominant approaches to the question how and why these very special and

undoubtedly in many ways urban sites emerged and functioned in relation to each other and in relation to surrounding regions. Some authors have pointed out these places as embryos of the trading towns of North-western Europe in the High Middle Ages (e.g. Hodges 1989). They have thus taken a neo-evolutionist position. This stance has found some support in the undeniable continuity of urban society and culture in Western Europe from the 8th century onward. Other authors, often outspoken Marxists, have pointed out the importance of the relationship between *wics* and similar sites and local regional economy and political hierarchy (e.g. Saunders 2001). They have i.a. stressed the complexity of the problem how to support a large population with food mainly from outside. Sometimes their concern with the local conditions, makes them lose sight of the network structure of the phenomenon and *its* implications and consequences. They also argue the anachronistic total control model. Often they also bring forward the idea of discontinuity between the trading places and the later towns. A third position is taken by those, who see the phenomenon predominantly as a trade network (e.g. Müller-Wille 1989). Consequently they tend to play down and are also much less interested in the problem to link the sites to the local economy and political system. Also the question of production at the sites is not a central one: the dominant focus is long-distance trade. This third stance is often taken by scholars working with Northern Europe where distances *are* important. The discussion about this important phenomenon (both from a social and economical and also from a cultural point of view) has unfortunately been mainly restricted to archaeology. There are only few and mostly very meagre relevant written sources. This has contributed to a

situation where the importance of the phenomenon is hardly fully realized by historians. At this point it is easy to understand that neither of these schools is able to supply us with a convincing explanation and a deep understanding of the problem. It is also rather obvious that the reason for this failure is the misconception that there is one monolithic system and consequently only *one* explanation. A more fruitful approach recognizes the necessity to include diverse perspectives and the positive potential in attacking the problem as a heterogeneous complex of different interests, connections and relations of power. One way to come closer to the central problems is to concentrate on the activities and especially on the production at the sites: both the quantity and the quality and furthermore the cultural dimension of the products. It is perhaps more in the person of the craftsman than in that of the merchant or trader that we can perceive the complexity of these sites and their population. In the archaeological record the merchant and the trader are much more elusive than the craftsmen. The craft production leaves a multitude of tangible traces, which can be studied by archaeology. I will here discuss the role of the craftsman at a relevant site in Southern Scandinavia.

Åhus II and source criticism of the site

Beginning in 1978 two important sites intimately connected with trade and exchange were partly excavated at Åhus on the lower Helge (Holy) River of north-eastern Scania (Callmer 1991) (Fig. 1). The earlier of the two sites, dated ca. AD 700-750, is situated on the southern riverbank. The subsoil is sand and a few hundred meters to the south there



Fig. 1. The topographical situation of the two trading sites Åhus I (ca. AD 700-750) and Åhus II (ca. AD 750-850+).

are dunes of Early Modern date. It is most probably a non-permanent site with only flimsy constructions. Activities were obviously restricted to repeated short intervals of time. The extension of the site is considerable, measuring no less than three or four hectares. There are however large expanses without finds between concentrations of waste material from several different crafts. Of the crafts represented at this site glass working (bead production) with a profusely rich material, bronze casting, comb making and blacksmithing should be mentioned. These finds are closely related to the find material from layers A-D in the stratigraphy of the Post Office site at Ribe in south-western Jutland (Feveile & Jensen 1993). Finds normally

indicating settlement like pottery, discarded iron tools and other iron artefacts, loom weights, spindle whorls and whetstones were rare. It was observed that kaolin, very suitable for the production of crucibles, had been excavated on the site (accessible at a cliff-like section of the riverbank). It is important to be aware of the existence of this earlier site for the following exposé but it will not be discussed in any detail in this paper.

The other site, called Åhus II or Transval (the name of an agglomeration of houses nearby) is situated on the northern bank of the river a few hundred meters downstream. Also here the subsoil is sand, mostly of a fine quality. The site is quite extensive and measures more than 12 hectares. Of this at least 3.5

hectares had been completely destroyed before the beginning of the excavations. The most important factors of destruction were two gravel pits and a Late Medieval water mill with a water channel cutting through the southern part of the site from west to east. Later, in the early seventeenth century, the channel was widened and rebuilt as a real canal for barges.

The excavations were first concentrated to the southern part of the site profiting from particularly well-preserved sections along the canal. Here especially, the construction of the canal had resulted in the deposition of vast masses of subsoil on both sides. Consequently the ploughed seventeenth century surface was completely sealed off. Later due to a disastrous decision by the local administration of National Monuments almost the entire north-eastern quarter of the site was stripped and excavated for a large scale house-building exploitation.

The excavations through the years were carried out with similar methods for the recovery of the find material and for the documentation of features. Although staff changed during the years there was always continuity, which must be considered very important when discussing the compatibility of the results from different parts of the site. Totally ca. 30.000 square meters were excavated but only ca. 4000 square meters with cultural layers (Fig. 2). The number of features was ca. 5200. Most important for many reasons were 149 sunken-featured buildings (Fig. 2). For the discussion of the traces of craft activities below it is essential to elaborate at length on the formation or rather the deformation of the monument. After the site was abandoned and probably relocated nearby some time in the second half of the ninth century the whole surface came under cultivation. It is reasonable to assume, that this extensive site, like other abandoned Late Iron

Age and Early Medieval settlements, was eagerly exploited by later farmers. The soil at an old settlement site was rich in organic matter (agglomerations of humus), trace elements and phosphates and the numerous pits did contribute to an increased capacity to hold water in dry seasons. The fields here were ploughed without serious intermissions for 1100 years until the present day.

As already pointed out the site today was covered by cultural layers only in the southernmost part cut off by the canal, until recently forming a complete island, and in a band along the northern side of the canal. There is however no good reason to assume that the entire surface of the site was covered by equally thick cultural layers. Layers did develop where organic waste material was deposited regularly. Consequently the rubbish-heap was the origin of the development of layers. This is however a truth with certain modifications. Layers also develop at house sites and where activities are concentrated. In the latter case the material tends to be more mixed with non-organic components like sand, clay and stone. Deposition of organic matter however also was considerable. The effect of gardening close to the dwelling(s) must also be taken into consideration. These conclusions could be reached through studies of the stratigraphy in those parts of the site where layers were extant. There were slight differences in thickness but the complete surface below the Late Medieval and Early Modern deposits did display cultural layers without interruption. However the parts excavated in this well-preserved southern sector of the site had all been intensively settled. Open surfaces between the intensively settled parts may have featured insignificant layers or no layers at all.

The sunken-featured buildings provide us with a very strong argument for the conclusion

that all settled parts of the site once had a similar deposition of rubbish and a similar subsequent formation of layers. With only very few exceptions the fill in the sunken-featured buildings consists of cultural earth. The formation of layers in the fill indicates that the content of organic matter often must have been very high originally. Much of this fill and perhaps all of it must have been available in huge masses close by. In general the fill looks very much the same irrespective of if we are 30 or 300 m from the river. A general idea of the speed of destruction of the dry and sandy cultural layers is provided by a comparison of the depths at which the sunken-featured buildings are preserved in different parts of the site with and without cultural layers. Obviously agriculture during 1100 years has completely destroyed all cultural layers in the unprotected part of the site. There is documentary evidence of very destructive wind erosion already from the Early Modern Period, but there is much to suggest that the landscape already in the Late Iron Age was open and without considerable woodland. In the Early Medieval Period it was even more open than today. The combined effect of the progress of technical and eolian destruction has been most considerable. When the cultural layers had been destroyed destruction reached between 0.2 and 0.4m further down into the sandy subsoil. In some sectors only the lowermost parts of the sunken-featured buildings have been preserved and shallow buildings of this type, which are known from the southern part of the site (depth 0.2-0.3m) may be completely eliminated. Many pits must be completely gone and only very deep postholes could survive.

Observations in the southern part of the site however have made it possible to reconstruct a little more in detail the progression of

this destruction. As already noted the circumstances that allowed the conservation of cultural layers were the construction of the canal and the watermill, the relocation of a road and a field dividing bank. In connection with the construction works for the canal masses of dug out earth (changing at a depth of 1-2m to clayey sand) were mainly deposited as close as possible in a band along the bank of the canal but flattened out and reaching a breadth of up to 60m to give place for a tow track. This means, that the surface of the early 17th century was covered by an easily recognizable protecting layer of sterile earth. Observations of the plough soil below this cover made it clear that there were two phases in this area along the canal: one early and one considerably later. Late 14th and 15th century pottery suggested that the early phase corresponded well with the information in the written sources about a big water mill situated on the river immediately to the west of the medieval town of Åhus. It is however worth noting that already the formation of this Late Medieval plough layer (ca. 0.2-0.3 m thick) was partly a result of the destruction of the original 8-9th century cultural layers. These original cultural layers seldom measured more than 0.2 to 0.3 m and sometimes they were thinner. Farming from the Viking Period until the 15th century must have annihilated at least 0.2m of the layers. It seems reasonable to think that the cultural layers if they had remained completely intact would have measured at least 0.5 m. Before the breaking down process of the organic content had come to an end layers must have been much thicker. Especially the rubbish heaps had formed low mounds. A fine confirmation of the extension of cultural layers all over the settled parts of the site was provided by the extant layers below a field dividing bank running north

south in the north-eastern quarter of the site. Unfortunately grave mistakes in connection with the stripping of this sector for excavation led to widespread destruction of the layers but enough was preserved and documented to allow this assessment. The dividing bank must belong to a system of land division, which is earlier than the 18th century and probably antedates a new system laid out in connection with the demise of the Medieval town and its relocation to the new site at Kristianstad in 1617. An old road, definitely of medieval date, ran on the high ground along the river. In connection with the construction of the water channel and later the canal it was relocated towards the north. Below the road constructions were better preserved than to the north and the south of it.

Six important questions concerning craft production and craftsmen

These details concerning the deconstruction of the site must be taken into account when we now proceed to a discussion of our main topic: the evidence for craftsmen at the Åhus II site. At the heart of the matter is a comparative analysis of the spatial distribution of artefacts and waste material. This analysis is necessary to carry out irrespective of which of the relevant main questions we turn to:

1. Which crafts could be identified at the site?
2. Did craftsmen live here permanently or were they only guests?
3. How many craftsmen were active at the site simultaneously?
4. To what extent do we meet highly specialised craftsmen here or were they mainly generalists?
5. How were the different basic social units (“households”, “families”) organized?

6. What was the social position of the craftsman in society?

The reconstruction of the site

For many of these questions it is also necessary to discuss the lay out and the spatial division of the site. It is not possible yet to present a very detailed and final interpretation of the structure of the settlement at Åhus II. Work with the documentation of the excavations of the site during the last few years have resulted in some substantial progress. First and most important it could be ascertained that, the documented features do not occur haphazardly all over the place but are found in special patterns and definite concentrations. In this respect the excavation 1989-90 of the north-eastern quarter of the site was especially important. The stripping of a very extensive surface made it possible to follow the confines of the settled parts over a very large area, which had not been possible earlier. The very extensive stripping also made comparative studies of the configurations of different types of constructions feasible. The various concentrations of constructions indicate the macro-structure of the site. Constructions, i.e. hearths, pits, postholes and sunken-featured buildings are found in broad strips orientated parallel to the river course. Other usually important factors for the organisation of settlement space like the relief and the cardinal points were not decisive in a comparable manner. These strips measure ca. 25 or 50 m in breadth. Between these strips of settled land corridors of free space ca. 10-15 m broad are running. The detailed study of the microtopography of the features suggests concentrations at rather regular intervals following divisions perpendicularly to the general axis of the settled strips along the river course.

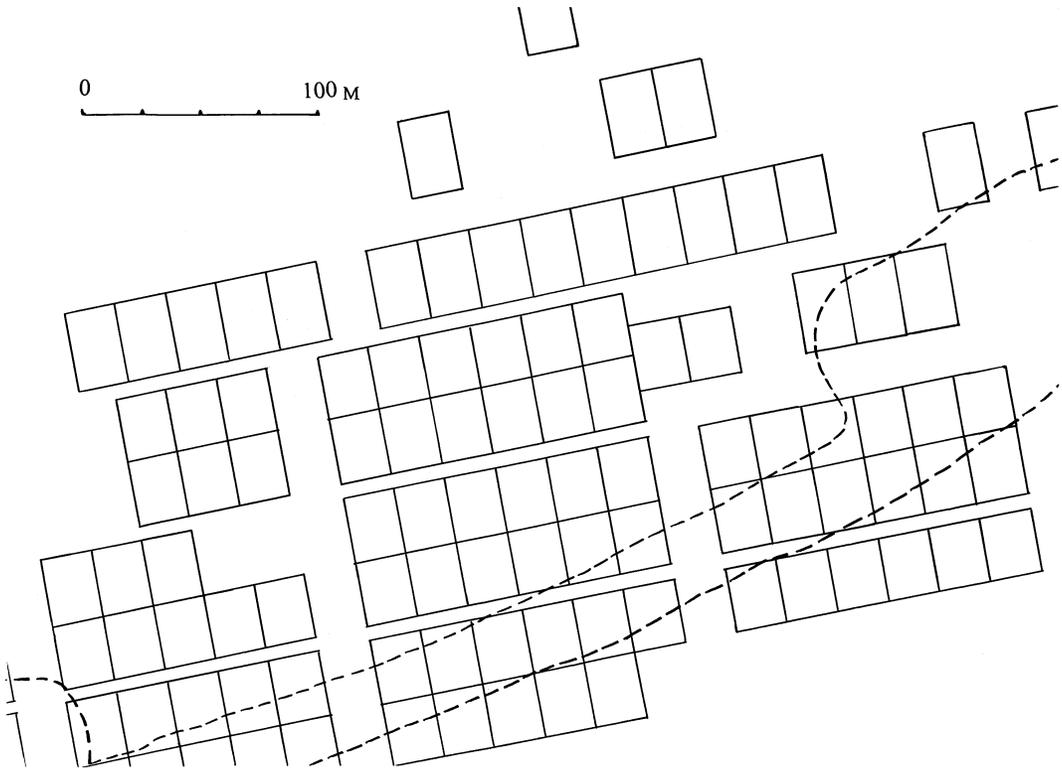


Fig. 3. A theoretical plot model for Åhus II.

With these principles of division of space we arrive at a plot division with modules measuring ca. 25 m x 20 m (Fig. 3). With these considerations we arrive at a picture of an innermost single row of nine plots measuring more than 175 m. Further inland (as far as 300 m from the river) there were some plots laid out but they are few and they do not form a continuous strip. The innermost single strip is separated by the next double strip by a free corridor ca. 20 m broad. The documented length of this double strip is ca. 225 m. There are probably all the way through double rows of plots similar in size to those already defined for the innermost strip except at the eastern end where there are two separate plots lying side by side. Between this and the next macro-structural element there is another free corri-

dor. This time the corridor measures ca. 10 – 15 m in breadth. The next macro-structural element is another strip with single plots running parallel to the other ones but discontinued for at least ca. 50 m forming an open space in the middle of the settlement measuring at least 50 m x 30 m. Towards the river this single row of plots is followed by a free corridor perhaps 10 m broad. The next macro-structural element is a double row of plots documented for ca. 190 m. Through excavations in the southernmost part of the settlement, now forming an artificial island, we have been able to demonstrate that there is another strip (probably double) along the river bank with a very rich find material. This strip may have been the longest on the site.

Based on these reconstructions we may

proceed to a calculation of the number of plots originally found at Åhus II. First, however, we must decide if there is reason for us to understand the site as static or dynamic with a transformation. A completely static settlement structure existing over more than a hundred years is of course most unlikely. On the other hand large parts of the area now excavated shows us a pattern, which does not suggest great changes. There is so far no evidence of a gradual displacement of the site. With regard to the special topography we could expect either a movement towards the north-east or the south-west but, with the exception of a small sector in the south-western part of the site there are no indications of a possible re-arrangement. After this conclusion we can proceed with a minimum calculation of the total number of plots at the site. All settlement indications so far known considered gives the number of plots at around one hundred. There are some possibilities to arrive at higher as well as at lower figures, but the arguments are generally weak for a substantial reconsideration. With the number of plots counted it is possible tentatively to estimate the total population. There is no convincing basic social unit-model for this type of society with strong elements of specialized production. It seems unlikely that the number of inhabitants of the plots would exceed the interval five to ten individuals (see further below). Consequently we are confronted with a simultaneous population residing on the plots of ca. 500 to 1000 individuals. Incidentally we can conclude that this is not the population size of an ordinary agglomerated agrarian settlement in Southern Scandinavia. As we have already pointed out, the constructions and the find material also strongly differ from that from ordinary agrarian settlements.

The different crafts

There are four activities of craft character, which differ absolutely and two, which differ qualitatively from activities at ordinary settlements. The four absolutely different activities are amber-working, comb-making, silver- and bronze-casting and glass-working. Traces of these activities are with just a few dubious exclusions only found at so called trading-sites and residence-sites.

Amber-working

Amber-working at Åhus is concentrated on the production of beads and axe-shaped pendants. The number of finds is 3015, which could be regarded as surprisingly low. The find material is a typical production-material with only 36 finished beads and three finished axes (1.3%). The vast majority of the finds (2474 units constituting 82%) are pieces of raw amber and among these small pieces dominate. These small pieces have been sorted out as not suited for processing and thus discarded. Small pieces of amber are difficult to find in the process of excavating and it could be maintained, that these finds only constitute a small sample of the total. There are 343 pieces of cut amber and no less than 117 plaquettes for the production of beads. These plaquettes are in the three different stages of production: raw plaquettes, plaquettes with perforation begun, plaquettes with the perforation finished. Work at these stages was primarily carried out with a knife whereas the delicate perforation stage was executed with a fine borer. The waste material resulting from these types of work tends to be very small in size and crumbly. The final symmetrical shaping and polishing of the beads is often supposed to have been done on a turning lathe. Since the lathe was

used during the period, this may be a reasonable conclusion. High quality abrasives are also needed. The use of less sophisticated alternative techniques like rotation in a circular cavity in stone should however not be ruled out. Three gaming pieces of amber are among the finds but there is no hard evidence for the production of these artefacts. A most intriguing find of a sandstone slab with several circular cup-shaped cavities suggest a production of gaming pieces. This may however apply to gaming pieces of bone rather than amber.

Amber finds are encountered all over the excavated parts of the site (Fig. 4). A certain tendency regarding the distribution of amber finds could however be noted. The majority of the production finds could be located in the plot rows close to the river and in an intermediate position. On the plots far from the river there are few finds but we can still observe that there are finds indicating production. Considering relationship to other crafts we cannot see any obvious and consistent link with antler-working, which could be supposed to be vaguely related. Only a few plots lack indications for amber-working completely.

Antler-working

With a total of 28.136 find-units antler-working is the most fully documented craft production at the site. It must be understood that unless antler waste was almost instantly covered, e.g. by deposition on a rubbish heap or in a rubbish pit, the material will be consumed (by rodents), weather, become brittle and will ultimately be completely broken down and destroyed. Red deer antler is the dominating raw material but there are also minor elements of elk and roe deer antler present. All stages of the production could be

studied in the rich material. This is a very typical waste material deriving from intensive craft-production. Like in all other well-documented trading sites antler-working here is mainly aimed at producing composite, single sided combs. Basic antler is represented both by shed antler (84 %) and antler from slaughtered animals (16%). Comb-making is only possible with the help of a number of specialized tools. When the antler has been softened in water, parts of the work could be carried out with a knife and a light, thin-bladed axe. Other parts demanded tools like a high precision fine-toothed saw and several special tools used for the decoration of the side plates of the combs. The finish of the surface of the connecting plates is always very fine and implies the use of high quality abrasives. The production of connecting plates and tooth-plates requires much skill and above all a high degree of precision. The primary division resulted in relatively few waste products (only 101 units, 0.4%). The secondary division waste of the antler branches sawed or chopped into suitable lengths for further work on side plates and tooth-plates is also relatively few (620 units, 2.2%). These lengths of antler are then further divided into rough-outs for side plates and tooth plates and the spongiosa of the antler is cut away. The number of find units is 1.231 (4.4%). Further work is needed to shape these rough-outs resulting in very numerous waste products (22.875 units, 81 %) of which chips from work with the axe, knife or plane are dominating (20.432 units, 73%). The number of side plates (whole and fragmentary) (319 units, 1.1%) is surprisingly small when we consider the number of whole and fragmentary tooth plates (2.457 units, 8.7%). The number of connecting side plates only corresponds to 159.5 produced combs, whereas the number

of tooth-plates corresponds to more than twice the number of combs (351) (considering 7 tooth-plates per comb). Ambrosiani has proposed another calculation concentrating on the burrs (1981 p. 155). Assuming a production of three combs per antler we arrive again at a lower figure of ca. 240 combs This is of course a surprisingly small number but it must be considered with regard to the quality of the source-material. The vast majority of the once extant waste material is destroyed.

When we turn to the distribution of antler waste (Fig. 5) we must consider variations in the calcareous content of the soil. The riverine zone is definitely richer in lime than the inland plateau. However the fill in the sunken-featured buildings with a high proportion of bones created a favourable milieu for the conservation of antler also. When we consider the quality of the finds we can observe differences but we may maintain that quantitative differences are insignificant. The concentration of finds is varying very much. From singular stray occurrences of waste material the maximum number of find units is 3.045 in a sunken-featured building and 133 per square meter in the cultural layer. The distribution of the waste material on the site shows a distinct tendency with strongly decreasing numbers of finds when we proceed from the river towards the interior. However, like in the case of the amber-working waste, antler waste is also still occurring in the back-row of plots ca. 300 m from the river. If we consider an equal spatial division of the site in a riverine and an inland part it is very clear that the intensity by far is highest in the riverine part. Very high numbers of waste material are found all along the river from the far westernmost trench to the eastern limit of the excavations. Only few plots lack finds of antler waste material completely. Comparing the distribution

of waste products of diverse crafts antlerworking shows a certain but not really distinct tendency to co-occurrence with amber-working.

Bronze- and silver-casting

Like antler-working bronze-casting is represented by vast numbers of waste material on the site. Silver has also been worked at Åhus II but much less frequently. Among the metallic waste products silver amounts to ca. 6 % only. Bronze- and silver-casting is a complex craft involving several stages requiring expertise. The highest level of sophistication is needed in the metallurgical stages of the production. The work process begins with scrutinizing and sorting out the metal available for processing. Metal was available both as scrap (83 units) and as metal bars (6 units). Scrap metal seems to be totally dominating (93 %), but since failed casts may be the origin of much of the scrap, the original composition of metal is difficult to ascertain. Next, larger objects must be divided into smaller pieces matching the size of the crucibles. The production of suitable crucibles demands complex knowledge and skill. The tempering material should preferably be pure quartz and many ceramic clays are not suited for this production. It is also desirable to build the crucible with more than one layer. When discarded after the casting process crucibles are often brittle and break up in small pieces, which must have a considerable influence on the degree of retrieval in the course of archaeological excavation. At Åhus II 532 units of crucibles have been recovered. In addition to crucibles there must be moulds for the casting. Moulds were made from special clay and obviously not seldom built with two layers. In order to ensure a perfect rendering of the ornamental design the innermost

layer consists of very fine clay. Unfortunately this practice results in frequent damage on the inner surface and subsequently to considerable difficulties to identify the cast object. The number of mould units recovered is 3.596. Like crucibles mould pieces deposited on the surface break up into small crumbling pieces. Surprisingly, mould pieces have a slightly better chance than pieces of crucibles to survive. A hearth or an oven with bellows is necessary for the casting process. No intact remains of constructions of this kind have been recovered. There are however rich finds of burnt clay, some of them with distinct wall character (up to more than 37 kg in a single sunken-featured building), and numerous fragments of *tuyères*. When the metal pieces are melted down impurities as slag must be removed. The casting itself must be done rapidly but with caution. Later the cast object must be removed from the mould and carefully trimmed. Although no traces of mercury were found several of the ornaments produced at the site appear as gilded objects. Consequently the case of gilding with the help of mercury cannot be ruled out. For the brooches a pin, mostly of iron must be added. This requires the skill of a blacksmith as well. Exceedingly interesting, the pin construction changes radically from a spiral model with long tradition to pins with a springing head plate. It seems to be completely unrelated to other changes in the production. There are numerous finds of separate pins (30 units of the earlier A-type and 23 of the later B-type). The production of bronze objects comprises several different brooches, armlets, mounts and keys. The types represented here belong to well known types used all over Scandinavia.

The spatial distribution of finds related to bronze-casting is not restricted to a single sector or zone at the Åhus II site (Figs. 6 and

7). Only occasionally we can observe a lack of finds at a single plot. It is also worth noting that, when we proceed to a detailed analysis of the various types of objects produced at different plots, we find that the same type of ornament was produced at several different plots. For example we can consider oval brooches of the well known 9th century type Petersen 37, one of the most frequently found brooch-types all over Scandinavia (Petersen 1928). Mould fragments for the production of this type of brooch were found at four different places all over the site. There is a certain dependence of crucible-finds on mould-finds especially when we consider finds from the cultural layers. The links between the mould-finds is however stronger with amber-working when we consider the different links of this category of finds. A moderately negative relationship is only found with antler-working.

Glass-working

Glass-working is another "pyrotechnic" craft intensively practised on the earlier (first half of the eighth century) Åhus I site. Glass-working on both sites is aimed at the production of beads. There are two techniques used: winding glass around a metal rod and fusing millefiori components into beads. Both simple, undecorated and complex, decorated beads were produced. The production of beads requires a high degree of skill. Knowledge of various glass materials and how they can be combined is essential and so is also knowledge of how to construct, maintain and control appropriate sources of heat. The production technique is demanding, especially with reference to the degree of precision, swiftness of movements and steadiness. At Åhus II glass-working debris are found only in relatively

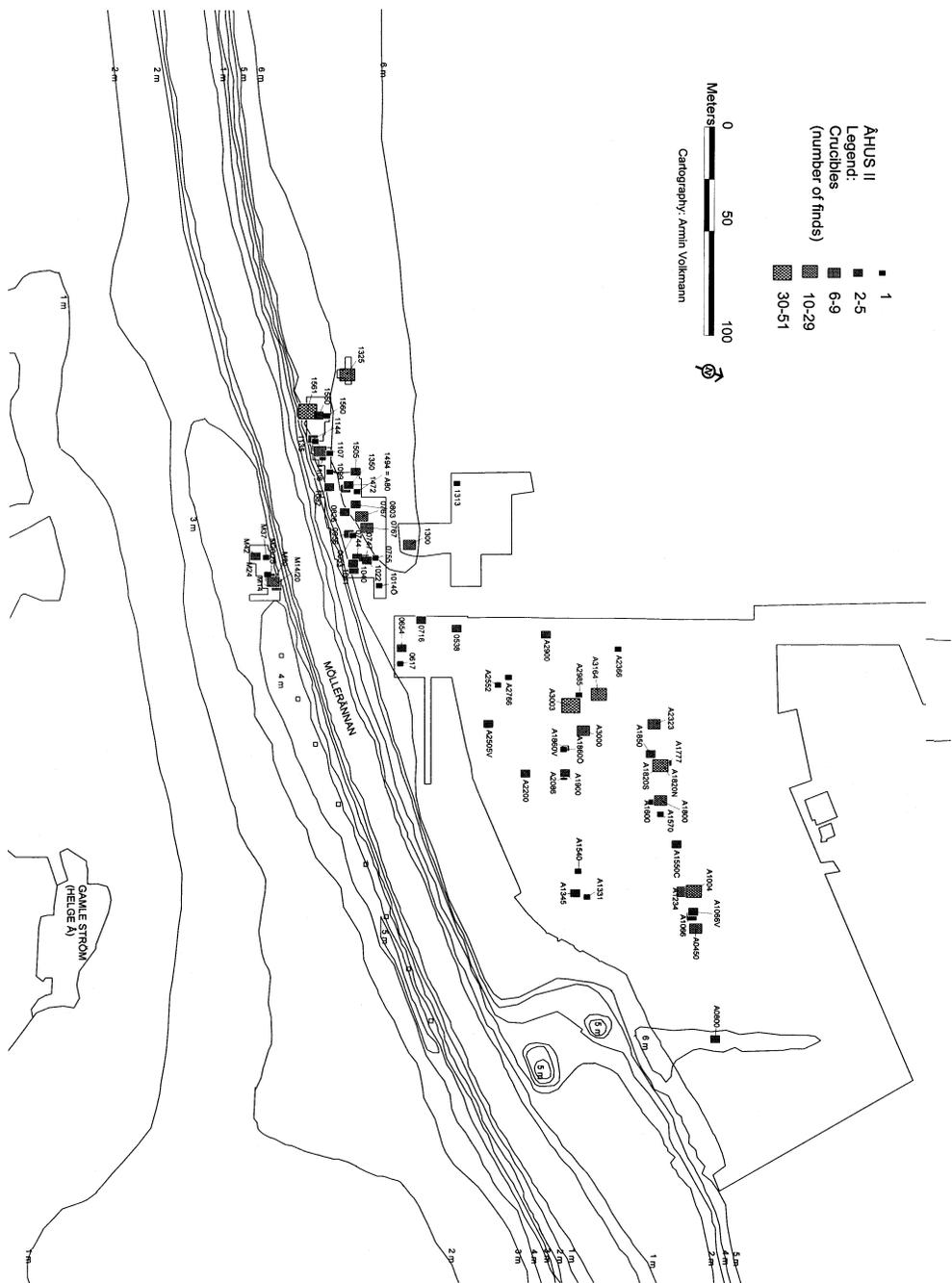


Fig. 7. Distribution of crucibles in features at Ahus II.

small numbers. There are 124 find units including 28 lumps and drops of molten glass, 15 pieces of glass slag, 14 tesserae and 67 other pieces (mostly fragments of staves and chips and splinters). This is in sharp contrast to conditions at Åhus I with more than 70.000 find units. These finds of bead-making debris were found only in the riverine part of the Åhus II site and on just a few, a little removed plots in the eastern part (Fig. 8). In addition there are however numerous finds of imported beads which definitely have not been produced on the site (a little more than one thousand). The distribution of glass-working debris does not suggest a concentration of production to a certain part of the site but rather reflects the historical development of the site. Considering the general datings of the bead-making debris and of the imported beads it becomes likely that the production debris belong to the earliest phase of the site and that this type of production was soon altogether abandoned. Beads from Western Europe and the Middle East began to be imported in vast numbers during the second half of the eighth century. Many of the beads found at Åhus II are defect and thus discarded products but there are no production debris. This fact shows that imported beads arrived at Åhus II not yet strung. In other parts of Scandinavia, production continued but on a more modest scale. Our observations here allow us to follow the dynamic development of the earliest riverine part towards the interior. This observation agrees well with some other peculiarities of the riverine part .

Forging

When we consider different forms of craft-production forging is one of the activities, which is most difficult to form an opinion of. To what extent was forging a domestic activity

necessary for maintaining a reasonable technical level and to what extent was it a specialized and exclusive activity? There is much evidence of “pyrotechnical” production processes all over the site. Notwithstanding the fact that we have found no traces of ovens among the features excavated there are distinct pieces of walls of ovens among the finds (as noted in connection with bronze-casting) and there are numerous finds of bloc-shaped, subrectangular tuyères as well as smaller loom-weight-like, round tuyères. Since these sources of heat and protection devices for bellows could also be useful in the production process of bronze- and silver-casting (and as well glass-working) it is uncertain to which extent they were used for forging. The bigger, bloc-shaped tuyères are however hardly necessary for the rather small hearths probably used by the jewellers. This type of tuyère much better matches a forging milieu. The round, trundle-shaped tuyères are more difficult to judge. Slag was found all over the site sometimes in considerable quantities (Fig. 9). A total of ca. 100 kg iron slag was collected. The distribution of slag is uneven with ca. 30 kg retrieved in the fill of a single sunken-featured building and in layers close by. This concentration most probably could be interpreted as the remnants of a slag-rich rubbish-heap used to fill in the nearby sunken-featured building when it was abandoned. The later destruction of the site does not exclude the possibility that there once were numerous rubbish-heaps of the same character.

A strong argument for intensive forging at the site is provided by frequent finds of pieces of rod-shaped iron bars (with a rectangular section). Also some iron bars of other shapes are represented. As already pointed out both comb-making and the production of brooches had a close connection with blacksmith's work



Fig. 8. Distribution of glass finds in features and layers at Ahhus II.

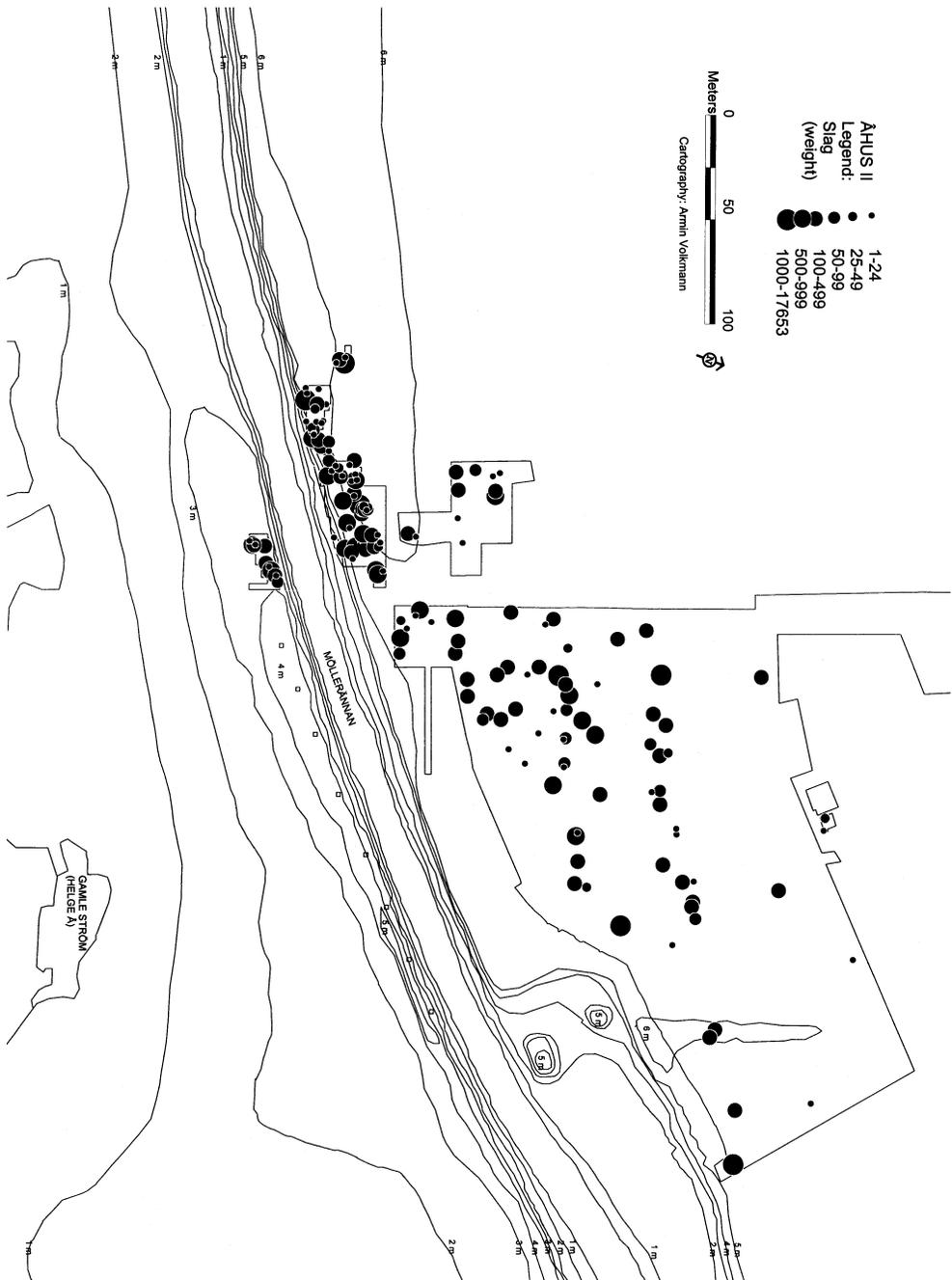


Fig. 9. Distribution of slag (predominantly iron slag) in features at Åhus II.

(fine rivets and pins respectively). There are also indications that other forms of specialized blacksmith's work were carried out on the site. We may notice evidence of production of chests and caskets with complex locks and mounts on the site. There are also several finds of semi-processed knives suggesting a considerable production of knives. Since the production of other cutting tools like scissors and shears is closely related to knife-forging it is likely that knives were not the only tools made on the site. Whether there also were armourers among the blacksmiths at Åhus II is an open question. There are few pieces of offensive weapons (excluding arrow-heads) and a fragment of mail among the finds. Numerous finds of fragments of sheet-iron riveted together strongly suggest that the production and repair of iron cauldrons also was an important activity. The making of sheet-iron of good quality necessary for watertight cauldrons was probably beyond the competence of most ordinary rural smiths. Cauldrons played an important role for the preparation of food (probably more important than pottery) although they seldom are found intact (almost exclusively in grave contexts). The indications for specialised blacksmith's work on the site in our opinion are convincing. There is both a quantitative and qualitative difference between Åhus II and contemporary "ordinary" rural sites. It is however much to desire, that the qualitative differences between village forging and forging on special sites could be more fully researched. We have also to consider forging at residences where specialisation e.g. in the production and repair of weapons is most likely to occur. For obvious reasons a certain degree of overlap is however to be reckoned with between forging at sites of different types. Any site situated on or near the coast or a major artery, for example,

will produce finds of rivets in considerable numbers. Also in this respect Åhus II is exceptional with more than 2400 find units. This extreme frequency of rivet finds must be somewhat reduced since boat timber was certainly much used as fuel and repair work on boats and ships must have been a major activity.

Textile-working

Like forging textile working can only conditionally be regarded as a craft. Textile-working was probably carried out in almost all rural households. The basic knowledge of spinning and weaving was widely spread and many items of clothing and other textiles no doubt were produced in the homes. On some sites, residence sites and trading sites, textile-working definitely adopted a specialised form. Arguments for the existence of a specialised production of textiles can only be based on qualitative properties of the archaeological source material. Unfortunately no textiles were recovered during the excavations. This deficiency is somewhat compensated by rich finds of textile tools. Several categories of this material have been studied by Andersson (1996), who concluded that the weight spectrum of the spindle whorls not only shows a wide variation but also distinct tendencies to a certain standardisation. Whorls intended for the spinning of very fine threads are common. The number of whorls is very considerable (107 find units). The frequency of whorl finds clearly so far exceeds all other known sites. A site with a certain likeness to Åhus II with regard to settlement structure and socio-economic pattern like Löddeköpinge/Vikhögsvägen has significantly less whorl finds and the weights of the whorls are not so clearly grouped.

Weaving is well documented on the site with numerous finds of loom weights of raw or baked clay. Secondary sorting of the material has shown several fragmentary baked clay weights in fact to be discarded tuyères. Weights are mostly found in small numbers of two to three in the fill of sunken-featured buildings. Only occasionally they appear in large numbers (up to 28 find units). Among these finds of weights the vast majority is not baked. The weights are relatively light (70% of 87 well preserved weights are found in the interval 200-400g with a distinct peak at 225-275g). The relative lightness of the weights corroborates the evidence of the spindle whorls for the production of fine threads and corresponding fine cloths. Weaving of decorative ribbons presumably for the application on fine dresses was also carried out at the site as indicated by two finds of special weaving combs of antler. The only parallels to these specialist implements have come to light at Birka (Geijer 1938:57). At Åhus II sewing is also well documented. No less than 34 fine sewing needles of iron and two of bronze were recovered during the excavation. It is of course difficult to compare the material from a site like Åhus II, where the fill of all features was sieved, with sites where the finds were hand collected. It is still striking that the probable trading site at Löddeköpinge/Vikhögsvägen only yielded a single needle (Ohlsson 1976:112). At Åhus II there are also 33 bone needles probably used for working in coarse textiles e.g. sail-cloth.

Textile working was practised almost all over the site and there are only very few hints that some plots were not at all engaged in this kind of production (Fig. 10). There is no difference between the riverine part of the site and the interior portion in this respect.

The different crafts and the product

The different crafts discussed here: amber working, antler working, bronze- and silver casting, glass working and the specialized forging and textile-working activities, hardly exhaust the list of crafts, which in reality were carried out at the site. It is most likely that a number of other crafts were executed there as well like e.g. the production of turned wooden vessels and the production of belts and shoes of leather. We have no evidence of these additional activities but it is all the same essential not to forget that the palette no doubt was broader than we can see in the material remains. The production at Åhus II was certainly concentrated on dress, both masculine and feminine. It is most likely that complete dresses including ornaments and accessories like fine, ornamental combs were produced. Other parts of the production included forging of quality tools and possibly weapons. Vessels of wood and iron and caskets were most probably also important products.

Permanent resident or guest?

As it has been pointed out, the main difference between the early Åhus I site and the later Åhus II site is the almost complete lack of layers and constructions in the first case and the presence of manifest features and layers when sufficiently protected in the second. To the reader it must be explained that Åhus I is situated on land belonging to the village of Yngsjö situated 5 km further upriver. This division of land, for several reasons, must be regarded as of Early Medieval date, which then means that this site always has been situated in an extreme periphery with correspondingly extensive land-use, in this case

permanent pasture until the 19th century. Agro-technical and eolian destruction of the kind met with at Åhus II never occurred. Consequently we can maintain that this difference between the sites is a real one. Activities at Åhus I must have been going on only for short spells of time and there cannot have been permanent settlement there. But, what about Åhus II? Was it permanently settled with the same population remaining on the site all year round or is it more likely that there were fluctuations through the seasons. Different forms of trading certainly took place at Åhus II and at least some of the agents of trade did not live there permanently. In our implicit model of the Viking Period trader they would appear for longer or shorter spells of time, but would then leave again. Some of them may have stayed on board their ships anchored or beached on the riverbank below the site. In this study we are concerned with the craftsmen. The massive evidence of the presence of craftsmen at Åhus II paradoxically contradicts the idea of a permanent and stable population. Our reconstruction of the structure of the site allows for a very considerable population engaged in craft production. The volume of the production has no plausible relationship to the population of the region. We shall not enter here on a discussion of absolute numbers (a regional study is under preparation) but it is a fact that the potential production of the craftsmen highly exceeds the demand of the population of the region. This calculation is valid no matter how the transactions between the inhabitants and the producers were organised. The number of craftsmen at Åhus II must rather be seen in relationship to a much larger circle of consumers. The production should probably be understood in relationship to a coastal network of trade and craft production func-

tioning along the east coast of the Scandinavian Peninsula from the Danish Isles (and Hedeby) as far as the Mälars region in present Eastern Middle Sweden. There must have been a well-known route along the coast similar to the Northern way (Norway) on the west side of the peninsula. This does however not mean that we think that all craftsmen active in this network had a house at Åhus II. Certainly there must have been other important sites of this type elsewhere at still unknown locations or incompletely known places like Trelleborg and Ystad (cf. Callmer 1995). Among the not yet identified locations there must have been at least one, where glass-working was carried on during the late eighth and the ninth centuries, until Scandinavian bead-making experienced a new peak in the second half of the ninth. For a portion of the craftsmen mobility must have been important and they may have left the site for several months during the period favourable for travel on the sea from April to the end of September. If we accept this interpretation we must also conclude that it is likely that craftsmen from other sites could turn up at Åhus II and to remain there for some time as guests. It may be concluded from the minute conformity of the items of material culture transmitted during these centuries that these close personal contacts between craftsmen was a characteristic feature of the coastal network. We may then answer the question whether craftsmen lived permanently at Åhus II or if they were only guests. Numerous craftsmen lived at the Åhus II site for a considerable part of the year. It must have been an important home base for them where a significant portion of the production was carried out. It is also clear that many left for a part of the year. We may also consider an important presence of guests.

How many craftsmen were at work? Specialist or generalist?

Is it possible to calculate the number of craftsmen active at Åhus II? First we must conclude that all efforts in this direction are approximations. We must also remember that in connection with our review above of finds related to glass-working, it was possible to demonstrate at least two phases in the development of the site otherwise not so obvious. The earliest phase probably only includes the riverine part of the site. It is most unfortunate that this part is also the least studied and the most destroyed section (by the canal and the sand pits). The distribution of the glass-working debris suggests a subsequent enlargement towards the interior at a rate of ca 100%. The length of time of this process is not easy to measure but in our opinion it is unlikely that it exceeds one generation. One of the important observations at Åhus II is that craft-activities are located all over the site. There are only very few minor sectors where the presence of craft production could be called in question. This means that we have reason to assume that almost the entire site has this economical structure. Above we have already calculated a tentative population of the site. It was argued that the plot structure indicated by configurations of sunken-featured building gives us 500 to 1000 inhabitants on ca. 100 plots. This population to a very considerable extent was active in craft-production. These craftsmen composed the majority of the population and must have numbered several hundred. Especially during the winter season it is likely that the vast majority of them were present on the site. Closer than that to an answer to this question we cannot come at present.

How can we classify the craftsman active on the site? Is the designation specialist appropriate as mostly argued in studies of Early Medieval crafts or is it necessary to turn the concept upside-down and to argue for the opposite: the generalist? The unfortunate shortage of excavations of contexts of craft-production in the Early Medieval Period has until recently left us with our own classifications and analogies, mostly of High Medieval date or later. The recent excavation of a bronze-casting workshop at Birka has apparently confirmed the idea of the specialist craftsman (Ambrosiani & Erikson 1996:27 p.). Some observations at Ribe seemingly give the same message of activities exclusively of craftsmen specialised in bead-making or comb-making or brooch-casting etc (Jensen 1991:42). Other observations at Ribe are less distinct with waste material from several different crafts occurring together. The conclusions to be drawn from the excavations at Hedeby so far are also difficult to interpret in terms of a strict separation of different crafts (cf. Ulbricht 1978). Consequently it is at present difficult to argue one of the principles exclusively and we are faced with contradictory observations. In this connection the observations at Åhus II are of great interest. As shown above in the reviews of the various craft activities on the site it is not possible to designate different sectors of the site as exclusively the domain of the comb-maker or the brooch-maker etc. On the contrary we must conclude that traces of most activities are found all over the site. Differences in frequency between various parts can at least partly be explained through differences in the degree of destruction of layers and constructions. If we now approach the question of

which activities were executed on the single plot we must try to combine our observations from those parts where layers are preserved with those where our source is the fill in sunken-featured buildings and a few additional pits with other functions. The fill in the buildings and the pits, as we have argued above, must mainly stem from rubbish-heaps where not desirable material was deposited. The handling of rubbish must mean two things: first that activity areas, not only in the houses, but also surfaces outdoors were regularly cleared; secondly that waste material in these rubbish heaps give ample evidence of the various activities which have taken place on the plot. It is not likely that the handling of rubbish was a communal matter but rather it was a task for the people on the different plots. The filling in of pits must have been an *ad hoc* action with no direct connection with the accumulation of rubbish and waste material on the heaps. The representation of different craft activities must be completely random, which of course is of paramount interest to us. We can also conclude that accumulation on the heaps must have been rapid since several categories of finds would have been weathered, gnawed etc. or had completely disintegrated like coprolites (there is a considerable number almost exclusively from the sunken-featured buildings) unless rapidly covered by new garbage. It is thus very likely that the fill of the sunken-featured buildings gives an excellent reflection of the ongoing activities on the plot. They may however give an exaggerate rendering of the quantitative and qualitative relationships between different crafts when we try to bring together a generalized picture of craft activities. It is consequently probably wise to enlarge the weaker indications somewhat and to diminish the stronger indications. Compared

to the material from the fill finds from the cultural layers on the contrary mainly give us a rather generalized picture. There are, however, sections where we have a strong impression that concentrations of certain types of material (esp. antler-working waste) indeed represent compressed and spread out rubbish heaps. We have taken the trouble to discuss shortly a little further the quality of our sources because we think that the observations concerning the spatial distribution of different crafts from Åhus II are of central importance for the further discussion of the question.

Based on the observations on the site our conclusion must be that very often all the crafts taken into consideration were practised on the same plot. As we have noted this conclusion partly contradicts the usual picture of Early Medieval craftsmen and artisans in Northern Europe. Important products from sites like Åhus II, we have concluded, were fine dresses for women including textiles, various brooches and other jewellery and trinkets and as well other accessories, like ornamental antler combs. Dress on the male side is probably equally relevant although less well known. The production of these complete sets included first textile-work, some of which was certainly carried out on the site, but we should not exclude the possibility, that some textiles were procured locally or from regions with a production of good quality. Fine textiles, probably not only silk, were traded over great distances as well. Some of the most important parts of the textile work were perhaps dying and sewing with applied ribbons and thin strips of cloth (e.g. of silk). This part of the work was most probably mainly in the hands of females (although we do not know for sure). The production of brooches and other ornamental bronzes (occasionally also in silver) was to a considerable extent carried

out on the spot although import of brooches made elsewhere is not to be excluded. Bronze and silver had to be imported from outside unless obsolete ornaments for melting could be acquired locally. There is much to suggest that some of the metal was indeed procured this way. Like most crafts connected with fire, metal work was a male activity. It is not known whether this probable division has its background in taboo ideas. Imported beads were strung on the spot. The combs certainly were items of prestige and carried symbolic values. The blacksmith's work necessary to produce these items belonged to the male sphere according to our interpretation. Other most likely products of Åhus II mentioned above like wooden caskets or boxes with locks probable intended for the very conservation of the dresses, brooches, trinkets and accessories and iron cauldrons are reasonably closely connected with the male sphere. The production of cutting tools and the tentative production of weapons are likewise traditionally regarded as male activities. Considered together we must conclude that the production integrated both female and male activities. On the plot level close cooperation in the production may have been essential. In reality it seems likely that gender division lines were transgressed so far as it was acceptable with regard to social conventions and religious taboos. Many individuals active on the different plots must be designated generalists rather than specialists. It is reasonable to envisage individuals working with bronze- and silver-casting, forging and carpentry and perhaps as well stringing beads rather than specialist brooch makers, blacksmiths, armourers etc. The production community must have included both women and men. Consequently the term craftsman may seem inappropriate in this place. The term artisan, which

carries no gender association may be preferred, however the historical context provides us with an argument to retain the terminology used so far. We must all the time remember that craftsman like ombudsman in reality carries no clear gender connection.

Social organisation of the craftsmen

The fifth question above was concerned with how the basic social unit was organised. The size and the repetitive character of settlement remains and traces of production make it reasonable to look upon Åhus II as a community of rather similar basic social and economic units. The different plots were each inhabited by a number of individuals sufficient for the maintenance of a level of production, which allowed survival. The poor standard of documentation of the exact size and the disposition of houses built on the surface does not allow any far-reaching conclusions concerning the number and the relationships of the inhabitants. We consider it most unlikely that the sunken-featured buildings could be used for housing. Where house-size could be assumed we are confronted by rather small buildings of no more than 5m of breadth and 10m or slightly more of length. Similar houses are known from Hedeby (Schietzel 1981) and Ribe (Jensen 1991:45). Probably there are exceptions with more than one house on each plot but the usual layout only comprises one house of this type. This plot-*cum*-house pattern instinctively turns our minds towards the sphere of the nuclear family. The importance of the nuclear family should not be underestimated but in Early Medieval society extended family relationships were important as well. We should also consider organisation from the production perspective. Several of the activities, which concern us here are not a

one man's work but should preferably be executed by a small collective of at least two craftsmen. Above we have already reflected on whether women could join men in forging, bronze- and silver casting and bead making but found it unlikely. Rather, crafts intimately connected with fire may have been regarded taboo for females. The ideal production group would comprise two families. Also with reference to the necessary textile work carried out within each social unit a close collaboration between two families would be preferred to work on one's own. As in all traditional societies family here must be understood to comprise members of the former generation, children and possibly unmarried close relatives. As suggested above maximum numbers for each site would be 10 individuals. The relationship between the two families cannot be ascertained based on the archaeological sources. It could of course be speculated about a family relationship like brothers, brothers-in-law etc., but this is pure guesswork. It is however worth remembering that the social framework at localities like Åhus II largely must have represented something new with only modest and relatively few predecessors. People active here had certainly highly varying backgrounds. Thus it is not unlikely that in the primary stage in the history of these sites families with different backgrounds combined their efforts. The organisation sketched here does not exclude the possibility that the inhabitants on some plots did cooperate intimately with others for some special part of the production when even more hands were needed or desirable. Cooperation like this could either be *ad hoc* like an artel or could have a more permanent and firm organisation. Our reconstruction of the plot structure of Åhus II has resulted in a number of plots of exactly the same size. So far we

think the majority of the plots had approximately the same or very similar measurements. Complete regularity is however most unlikely and there may have been considerable variations and exemptions. The organization of space and the layout invite speculation about a truly regulating power at work. The first row of plots along the river could however as well have been spontaneous formations dictated by the demands of each residence group and the wish for access to the river. At some point the row becomes too long and then the second row is formed. In this way the site (like other comparable sites) will grow with a pseudo-regularity and maybe compared to any self-regulating system. The deviations in size may have had their demographic correlates.

The position of the craftsman in the wider social system

The last question posed is intimately connected with the preceding one. Is it possible to say something about the position of craftsmen in the wider social system of the period? First we have to make clear which were the dominant social groups of the Early Middle Ages in Northern Europe. The vast majority of the population in Southern Scandinavia were peasants living from animal husbandry and agriculture. The settlement pattern varied from small single farms over groups of farms or hamlets in loose or developed associations to villages with a reasonably close cooperation (horizontal social connections). Many of these peasants were legally free men but their social position was most variable. Especially in the densely populated regions with a long continuity of settlement most peasant households were integrated in systems of dependence and

of followers. It seems today difficult to deny that in these regions estates of varying complexity had begun to evolve already in the Migration and Vendel periods. The population of these estates included thralls both as servants and hands at the residence farm and as tenants on some of the farms. A number of regions of this character were not seldom brought under the dominion of a supreme lordly family. Some of these political constellations had achieved a certain stability (territoriality) while others would disintegrate and might become part of new ones. Basically this was a mostly self-supporting and as well largely self-sufficient society.

In order to make it possible to understand the position of craftsmen at Åhus II we must look closely also into a rather special part of the social sphere. Not only the socio-political macro-structure of society, but also cultural tradition contributed to the organisation of exchange between the different regions and dominions and to the production of exclusive items. Many of these things exchanged were perhaps of little absolute value but the important thing was that they could not be produced in every household since the material could not be procured locally and the expertise knowledge necessary for their production was not generally accessible. An important factor in this system was that the pre-Christian religion prescribed that some items of fine clothing, ornaments, trinkets, quality tools, weapons etc should accompany their owners or users when they were buried or should be destroyed some other way. Some objects were also deposited as offerings and thus left the system and were not reclaimed. This permanent loss of material made a continuous production of new items necessary. As we have noted all things in the possession of the dead were not consumed in this way

but the number of objects was not sufficient to minimize the production of new things. Empirically we can observe several thresholds in the quantitative and qualitative development of the deposition of such things. Certainly some of the fluctuations we can observe are the result of some changes in details of the mortuary ritual, but we can still establish the main tendencies of the production of exchanged goods. Such thresholds are for the first Christian millennium to be noted in the 1st century A.D., in the Late Roman Period, in the Migration Period in the late 5th century, in the earliest part of the Vendel Period around A.D. 600, in the first half of the 8th century and at last in the second half of the 10th century. This is not the place to discuss the character of and the reasons for all these changes and we will concentrate on the later part of the millennium. On the whole the development must be seen as a continuous growth in the volume of the production. In the second half of the 6th and in the beginning of the 7th century we may perhaps have a certain retrograde development, but it is questionable how sharp and how protracted it was in reality.

Residence sites on the topmost levels in society were probably visited by craftsmen regularly in the Migration Period and probably already in the Late Roman Period. The most important of these residence sites had some craftsmen of their own, but most of this group led a partly ambulating life visiting numerous important sites of various kinds. The observations at Gudme and Lundeberg on Funen provide us with some interesting examples of these variations already from this early phase (The archaeology of Gudme and Lundeberg 1994). Craftsmen were actively at work both at the inland residence site and at Lundeberg, the contemporary, only temporarily occupied coastal site. This pattern with variations

probably persists in Northern Europe until the High Middle Ages. Although materialist archaeologists and historians have maintained that craftsmen were mainly slaves and dependant producers there is much both in the archaeological source material and in the written sources to suggest that the position of the craftsman was not that of a person completely without legal rights. It is likely that the widespread and obviously popular (and highly relevant) Wayland-myth defines the social position of itinerant craftsmen. Although the craftsmen were highly vulnerable and it may have been tempting to force them to do certain things and especially to remain at your place the myth makes it clear that this is not the way to handle the situation. Their skills craftsmen will always keep for themselves and any act of violence will result in retaliation one way or the other (Callmer 2002). Itinerant craftsmen were most probably free members of society but their ambulating existence visiting various regions with different law codes makes it clear that they could only exist with the protection of the locally powerful. Special peace-regulations for markets and trading sites only gave short-time respite and may have changed little in the end. What we have is a form of symbiosis, which was not unique for craftsmen only but as well did apply to other individuals and groups with an ambulating life-style like merchants and traders and possibly mercenary warriors as well. Both sides had great possibilities to injure the other and both had profound interest to maintain a balanced and positive relationship. It is much more difficult to form an opinion about craftsmen who lived and worked on residence sites of major estates. This is partly connected with the problem to define what was actually regarded as a craft and what was skilled and specialised production after all belonging to

the sphere of the “normal” activities and production of a big farm. Also craftsmen remaining all their life on the big residence farms may have been free whereas many skilled producers in the latter sphere no doubt were unfree (considerable parts of the production being in the hands of thralls).

Conclusions and perspectives

Around AD 700 large sites with ample evidence for large numbers of craftsmen, artisans and traders living together, perhaps not all of them throughout the year, but certainly for long spells of time, are known from North-western and Northern Europe. Why and how these large so-called emporium sites did develop is a highly contentious issue in contemporary Early Medieval archaeological and numismatic (and historical) research. A considerable difficulty in this connection is, that earlier non-permanent coastal sites with evidence of craft-production and trade and exchange (like the just mentioned Lundeberg site) have not been identified and excavated. This circumstance gives their emergence an explosive quality in North-western Europe. Most of the emporium sites are however situated in locations, where we may suppose that some variety of these activities had been going on through the centuries after the Roman collapse. In reality it seems most unlikely that the development is so rapid as it is often thought. There is, as perhaps the numismatic material best shows, a highly relevant gradual change in the economy beginning in the middle of the 7th century or a little earlier. This means that this process of change takes about two generations. It is both a qualitative change with gold coinage and gold as a basic meter of value being replaced by silver and a quantitative change with a highly restricted

coinage being replaced with what we, with some reservation, could call a mass coinage (Metcalf 1967, 2001). The problems to keep up gold coinage were, as it has long been well known, a result of trouble outside North-western Europe. This fact in no way can explain the remarkable quantitative change. This is not the place to go deep into a discussion about this little known but – I think we have reason to state – most important transformation. To be short, the single large and decisive factor we can consider seriously is the development of well functioning estates. Trade and exchange between estates and increasingly further afield with other regions and even further with other states becomes a common concern for those administrating these manors and they also carry away minor owners. This growth in the number of transactions and the need for increased production of tools, clothes, shoes, trinkets, vessels etc. called for a further development and reorganization of places for production and exchange and trade, the latter becoming more important. Probably still going on since the days of the Roman Empire trade in slaves sees a strong up-turn (McCormick 2001). Kings, other rulers and leaders and men of the church, who often may have been engaged in organizing the security of these places, soon realized the possibilities to increase their revenues. This they achieved by an active policy of emission of coins and by exacting tolls (most probably a tithe) and other fees. It has been maintained that the kings and their equals were the organizers of these emporia and that they completely controlled them. This seems to be unlikely for several reasons. Organizing and controlling these transactions and this production of goods was probably much beyond the capacity of the administration of the day. To try to profit from transactions going on was rather the mentality of

this uppermost stratum in society. There is no reason to suspect that the majority of those active in trading and in producing at the emporium sites were unfree, although we may imagine trusted serfs selling products from secular or ecclesiastical estates there. The fact that there is an emporium to each of the kingdoms of Wessex, East Anglia and Northumbria does not mean that we unconditionally must accept the hypothesis propagating royal initiatives. The location of these is related to both economical-geographical and political considerations. The case of London is intriguing since Mercian influence there comes later than the beginnings of Lundenvic (cf. Vince 1990:151 pp.). A more suitable location for a trading place for Mercia in the late 7th century would have been on the lower Trent. Lundenvic in the beginning obviously served a number of political entities in South-eastern England. We can conclude that the Northwest-European emporia are social and economic phenomena closely related to the economical and social developments in this part of Europe in the second half of the 7th century. Their development is not primarily the result of royal or episcopal initiatives but of a complicated process involving traditional patterns of interregional connections and the wishes of those primarily active there: merchants/traders and artisans/craftsmen. Only later those wielding political power tried to profit from them and to regulate the layout of the sites (how successfully we do not know). The majority of the people visiting or living permanently at these places were not slaves but in many ways highly dependant on those locally in power. Although the historical evidence of guilds is two or three hundred years later it seems highly probable that they had developed a framework for cooperation and mutual support. In the archaeological

material we find plenty of evidence for close cooperation and intimate sharing of ideas between craftsmen.

It has been necessary at some length to discuss the background of the development of extensive places for trade and exchange and craft production in North-western Europe since the development of rather similar places in Northern Europe is closely related. No doubt, the North European development of these places with manifest settlement remains comes later than that in North-western Europe. The earliest sites closely connected to the development in the west are Ribe in South-western Jutland and Åhus I in North-eastern Scania both starting in the very beginning of the 8th century as non-permanent places visited for short spells of time (Callmer 1991; Jensen 1991). The earliest Ribe site comprises a *terp*-like, artificial sandbank. Consequently there are arguments for a gradual development from non-permanent to permanent also in the North. The subsequent development comes in the next generation when already considerable parts of Western Scandinavia and the Baltic Region are part of a network of sites. Gross Strömkendorf on the Slavic South Coast is established already in the first half of the century (Müller-Wille *et al.* 1997). From the middle of the century they tend to include elements of permanent settlement and activities. For these Scandinavian examples as for their Northwest European counterparts it is essential to recognize the network structure of the phenomenon. Like in the West precisely the network structure makes it unlikely that prime movers were the local potentates along the coasts. It is, as we have already stressed, more likely that the development in the North was an extension of the Northwest European network and that it evolved on similar lines. The new network was perhaps not so new

since we must realize that it seizes on an earlier, little known coastal network (cf. Lundeberg mentioned above). We can also remember the thresholds in the production of brooches, trinkets etc. stressed above). Like in any earlier network it was necessary to cooperate closely with local power structures (probably differently organized in the various regions) because mostly only they could organize the collection of desired products and only they could supply food provisions (fresh or staple) in sufficient quantities. As recent results have made clear, some important residence sites (also those somewhat removed from the coast) were certainly visited by craftsmen regularly and the obvious success of the system for many generations means that the close cooperation with estates matched very well interests from the side of the local partners.

The life-style, culture, perhaps also their vernacular set the people active as craftsmen and traders aside from the inhabitants of the different regions. Frequently the remoteness (in relation to central locations in the regions) and the coastal location of the places contributed to this social isolation. Local society of the period had great difficulties in assimilating a population, which by its habits, doings and for many, by its extraction was alien. Consequently it is most likely that many of these traders and craftsmen never became part of the local society and then we must consider the probable issue of the formation of a separate society. We may tend to imagine these people, on the margin of the majority population, weak and vulnerable and exposed to conditionality. This may be a false picture. They gathered many together (cf. above) and they could certainly instantly muster a relatively large troop of armed men. They probably built and they owned ships. All

necessary transfers were certainly undertaken by numerous ships together.

There is no reason to think that unfree individuals were less numerous in this society. Since trade in slaves, as remarked, may have been an important part of the trade, some slave servants are likely members of the community. The most intriguing question is however the relationship between craftsmen and traders. Until this point we have maintained a division by convention between these two categories. Here we must however state the fact that we have very little to support this interpretation. In the written sources we have of course enough to prove the existence of distinct traders. We have also good reason to count with several different categories of traders and merchants. At two *wic* sites in England we have some indications of a predominantly merchant's zone along the waterfront. At most sites this section is little known (e.g. at Dorestad and Hedeby). Also at Åhus II this part is insufficiently studied and partly inaccessible. We have maintained above that the craftsmen at Åhus II were much too numerous for the region and thus we see one possibility to solve this problem through mobility and visits to other trading sites and to residence sites. This mobility of craftsmen and merchants was perhaps from the beginning (in the days before the permanent or partly permanent sites) the main reason for the development of a close symbiotic relationship between the two categories. Sometimes even the distinction between the two trades could be transgressed in the same person or in the small integrated working group. In fact this close relationship may be a special characteristic of the North European sites, which sets them apart both from the North-west European *wics* and the later Medieval towns.

Note

An important argument in this article is the complexity of craft production processes. In a tandem publication the majority of these processes are fully documented in picture (Callmer 2002).

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