

The Perception and Interpretation of Hanseatic Material Culture in the North Atlantic: Problems and Suggestions

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Abstract - This paper takes the discussion on the concept of Hanseatic material culture from the Baltic and moves it west towards the North Atlantic islands and Norway, focusing on the contact zones between Hanse traders and societies at the fringes of northern Europe. The peoples of this area conducted considerable exchange with the Germans during the 14th through the 17th centuries, a process which could have led to significant impacts on the native cultures. This study describes artifacts produced in northern Germany and imported to the north as a medium transporting culture, and points out the many complex problems in tracing artifact distribution in northern Europe that are caused by multilateral and illegal trade, piracy, and the involvement of third parties. With the help of archaeological methods, the second part of the paper attempts to address some of those issues by suggesting a classification of Hanseatic artifacts.

Introduction

During the last few years, Hanseatic archaeology has prospered as a particular area of study within the wider field of historical archaeology. Though the study of Hanseatic culture is thriving, especially in the Baltic, generating not only studies of material culture, but also discussions about methodology and theory (e.g., Gaimster 2005, Immonen 2007), the archaeological community in the North Atlantic and North Sea regions has not fully explored the potential of this field.

Recently, in the Baltic area, the field has been invigorated by contributions discussing the definition of Hanseatic culture (see, e.g., Immonen 2007). Such a discussion was long overdue, and Visa Immonen in his inspiring paper came to the conclusion that the term “Hanseatic culture is not a matter of mere attribution of artefacts, but refers to a multitude of things, such as the source of production, channels of distribution, emulated features, forms of practice, or even the social standing and identity of users.” (Immonen 2007:730). It is true, of course, that culture is more than artifacts. It includes aspects such as language, perception, beliefs, music, values, practices, morals, and much more (e.g., Foucault 1989:xxii). Strictly speaking, archaeology can contribute to this discussion largely on the basis of material culture as shown through the analysis of artifacts and structures, and any adjunctive interpretation connecting the finds to the Hanseatic League. Such interpretations, especially those of material culture, have generally depended to a large extent upon an artifact’s provenance.

Many equate a possible Hanseatic material culture with a possible Hanseatic historical culture, and for many, Hanseatic historical culture is an urban culture (e.g., Gaimster 2005, Immonen 2007). This paper seeks to contribute to the discussion with a

somewhat different perspective, that of a possible Hanseatic material culture penetrating rural and marginal societies in the far North Atlantic and of its potential influence on any society.

In Hanse archaeology, several contributions to material culture studies have identified problems in interpreting traded artifacts (e.g., Davey 1988, Verhaeghe 1999), with some of them also raising the problems of artifact distribution. However, such issues are still not taken sufficiently into account when it comes to the interpretation of artifacts emanating from the Hanseatic trade zone. Frans Verhaeghe, for instance, has set up guidelines for future work with late medieval traded ceramics (Verhaeghe 1999:141), but the situation for the area discussed here is somewhat different as the goods were destined for marginal insular societies with very small populations. In contrast, those seemingly isolated societies have their own potential to contribute to the discussion about the concept of Hanseatic culture. This concept, as this paper hopes to demonstrate, is increasingly evolving towards a post-colonial approach, including the idea of a decentralized Europe (Cohen 2000:7). The Hanseatic expansion northward in the late medieval and early post-medieval periods created many hybrid zones of cultural interaction at the fringes of northern Europe.

In picking up Immonen’s definition of Hanseatic (material) culture (see above), the present paper seeks to relate to it by making the various aspects approachable from an archaeological point of view. The problems involved in defining Hanseatic culture and its spatial and hierarchical distribution are of course very difficult and complex, and this paper cannot present final answers. The intention is rather to contribute to the discussion with methodologically orientated proposals for the identification of artifacts as Hanseatic. Thus, the paper is in two

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parts. The first presents an overview of those problems in Hanse history that most hinder the interpretation or identification of any Hanseatic material culture. Secondly, the discussion becomes more archaeological, discussing certain groups of artifacts and materials and their Hanseatic significance. Following on from this, a classification of Hanseatic artifacts is attempted.

Geographic Area of Discussion

The Hanseatic League was the major economic force in northern Europe during the late Middle Ages and also in some areas until the 17th century. Its main area of activity was enormous in terms of geography. The countries where Hanseatic merchants traded and lived and where Hanse *Kontore* developed stretched from Bruges (Belgium) and London in the west, to as far east as Estonia, Livonia, and Novgorod (north-west Russia); and from Cologne (Germany) in the south to Bergen (Norway) in the north (Dollinger 1998, map 3; Hammel-Kiesow 2004:10–11). Beyond those regions, its sphere of influence was even larger, approaching and finally crossing the polar circle. In the Nordic Seas, meaning the far north Atlantic, Hanseatic merchants traded with Scotland, Orkney Islands, Shetland Islands, Faroe Islands, Iceland, and possibly even Greenland (Debes 1995, 171–177; Dollinger 1998, 318, 323; Friedland 1973). It is on this North Atlantic Hanse zone, which united communities from the Norwegian to the Greenland Seas, that the paper focuses.

Merchants from the German cities that later became part of the Hanseatic League already traded regularly with Bergen in the early 13th century (e.g., Helle 1995:378). After the first Hanseatic commercial settlement was established in Bergen in 1343, the town remained the major Hanse base for the area under discussion (Dollinger 1998:136–137, 316–318; Helle 1995:773–788). Bryggen, with its prominent German wharf, and the many different segments of the German population—e.g. merchants, agents, sailors, and craftsmen—living together in their own quarter, was the only place in this area comparable to an urban Hanseatic trading center in the Baltic. It is estimated that during the 15th and 16th centuries, about 2000 to 3000 Germans lived in Bergen during the summer months. However, Bryggen was not an isolated German ghetto, but operated in vibrant interaction with its surroundings (Burkhardt 2005, Helle 1995:743–744).

From 1294 onwards, Hanse merchants were banned from trading with other sites north of Bergen, including Iceland and the Shetland and Faroe Islands. This ban was based on, among other things, the fact that different Hanse cities were competing in this large trading area in the North Atlantic.

However, it was apparently not very effective since it needed to be renewed several times, e.g., in 1417 (Dollinger 1998:318, Friedland 1973:67–68, Müller-Boysen 1998:226). In defiance of the ban, we hear of direct Hanseatic trade with Shetland for the first time in 1415, with the Faroe Islands probably in 1416, and with Iceland in 1419 or 1423 (Friedland 1973:68, Skúlason 1938:196 f.)¹. However, written documents strongly indicate a Hanseatic interest in the Faroe Islands as early as the second half of the 14th century (Mortensen 2008:16–17).

Iceland and Shetland experienced considerable exchange with the Germans for about two centuries. A number of small trading sites developed all over the islands, and many Germans lived there each summer (Friedland 1973, Gardiner and Mehler 2007:402–405, Hofmeister 2000). In contrast to that trade, the Faroe Islands trade appears to have operated on a much smaller scale. There, the Hamburg merchant Thomas Koppen was awarded a trade monopoly in 1529, but this lasted only until 1553. After that, trade appears to have crossed into the hands of Danish and Norwegian merchants (Debes 1995:172–187). While Iceland and Shetland are practically strewn with Hanseatic trading sites, the Faroe Islands seem to have had only two, at Tórshavn on Streymoy and at á Krambatangi on Suðuroy (Gardiner and Mehler 2007:figs. 4, 5, 6, 9; Nolsøe and Jespersen 2004:234–235).

Almost nothing is known about the character of the Hanseatic contacts with the Norse population of Greenland. Prior to the existence of the Hanse, Bremen merchants played an important role in the ecclesiastic organization of Greenland, not only through the intermediation of archbishop Adalbert of Bremen, who installed the first bishop of Greenland in the year 1056, but also by securing contacts beyond the purely ecclesiastical (Friedland 1984:541–542). After the establishment of the Hanseatic League in the 13th century, there is little evidence of contact by them. We need, however, first to consider what the nature of such interactions could have been. A meticulous investigation of medieval material culture found in the Norse settlements of Greenland would help to understand those connections. Greenland came back into Hanseatic focus only in ca. 1643 with the beginning of the Hamburg whaling period (Friedland 1984:542–543).

It is apparent that the further north we look, the less we know about Hanseatic activities. For quite a while, scholars tended to treat the whole of the North Atlantic as a single and homogenous trading sphere for the Hanse. This view has often been criticized (e.g., Blomkvist 1998:12, Immonen 2007:728) by pointing out that a large trading sphere does not necessarily mean the area was culturally uniform. Moreover, when discussing the Hanse and its impact

on the far north, I believe it is necessary to divide the area generally referred to as the North Atlantic into smaller cultural units. A first distinct trading area, the North Sea, clearly one of the main Hanse areas, would include present-day Germany, Denmark, the eastern part of Great Britain, and the southern part of Norway. A second zone, that of the Norwegian Sea, would consist of the settlements north of that, like northwestern Norway, the Shetland Islands, the Faroe Islands, and Iceland. The suppliers of stockfish, the most important bulk good of the north, are in this area. A third and even more remote area would be that of the Greenland Sea, the Denmark Strait, the Labrador Sea, and the Davis Strait, with access to the Eastern and Western Settlements in Greenland populated by the Norse.

The people that the Hanseatic merchants encountered in these three areas were all successors of the Norse. In that respect, the Germans dealt with cultures and environments that had much in common. However, while Norway had a considerable population with urban communities such as Bergen or Trondheim, the insular societies with their agriculturally marginal, geographically distinct, and rural landscapes, such as Iceland, the Shetland Islands, the Faroe Islands, and Greenland, were in comparison sparsely inhabited, lacking urban centers or even other nucleated settlements. This pattern of settlement is probably the most important difference between the Hanseatic trade zones in the Baltic area and the North Atlantic. Provisions were often scarce for the greater part of the population in the far north. Societies were mainly based on subsistence economies and started to develop craft for trade only during the later Middle Ages, a development also influenced by the Hanse (Mehler 2007:235). As a consequence, professionalization of certain crafts, such as pottery-making or glass-making, did not develop. Economic concepts such as competition and consumer choice hardly played a role. Competition between local and external supply in many consumer goods did not exist and, once a foreign ship arrived, the choice of imported ceramic vessels was limited. Thus, up to the 17th century, for Icelanders it was not a question of buying a German jug or an English jug or a local jug, but rather a question of getting a jug at all. During the heyday of Hanse trade with Iceland, for about 200 years, the majority of all imported material culture available to the Icelanders came through the merchants of the Hanse.

Theoretical Background: Artifacts as Culture Carriers (*Kulturträger*)

Our understanding of the concept of Hanseatic material culture is slowly improving, but it still needs closer examination in order to discuss certain

problems. A social science approach towards culture in general equates culture with identity and cultural practices. In addition, most post-colonial theories focus on culture, concluding that culture is far more than an ethno-linguistic unity expressed in the distribution of artifacts (Gosden 2001:243, Immonen 2007:728).

When we now look at material culture, it is clear that artifacts are inseparably connected with non-utilitarian aspects of social interaction. Material culture profoundly penetrates peoples' lives and may reflect both individual and group thought and behavior. Artifacts are like detachable parts of people moving through social networks and impacting on others. Traded objects can be dematerialized, especially when their material qualities are less significant as the basis of their value (Gosden 2004:36–39, Müller-Beck 2003:128). Evolving from these discussions is the view that material culture is a socially active medium and each artifact represents a process rather than a limited physical entity (Gosden and Knowles 2001:4 f., Herva and Nurmi 2009:179). Hence, the artifact creates, expresses, and carries the meaning of culture, becoming a *culture carrier*, as conveyed in the German word *Kulturträger*.

In what ways are artifacts able to transport a Hanseatic identity? It is important to stress that most papers dealing with the subject from an archaeological point of view—including this one—want the term Hanseatic not to be understood in its political sense, but see it rather as an indicator of acculturation (Gaimster 2005:410). Good examples illustrating a possible transportation of identity are the countless Rhenish stoneware vessels distributed by Hanseatic merchants all over northern Europe (Gaimster 1997:65), which, according to David Gaimster, are part of a “German-style Hanseatic mercantile culture” (Gaimster 2005:410). For any late medieval citizen or traveller in the north, a Siegburg jug set upon a table was quite a normal sight. Thus, although the object was produced in the Electorate of Cologne, it quickly lost its “German” identity and became an integral part of a material culture shared by many people in different countries. In that respect, it makes little difference whether a consumer in Norway, for example, chose a Hanseatic object like a Siegburg jug out of a range of other European items or simply because nothing else was available; with the widespread distribution of artifacts produced in the core areas of the Hanseatic League, *Hanseatic* became a particular way of life, whether acquired by intention or not. However, the question remains: how well are material culture studies able to help us qualify and quantify a common Hanseatic lifestyle (Gaimster 2000:237)?

The adoption of Hanseatic culture in North Atlantic societies was also clearly expressed through

ways other than material culture, e.g., through language or dialects, and measurements and values. On the Faroe Islands, for example, the old Norwegian ell was replaced by the Hamburg ell, then called the Faroese ell or *stikka*, and was in use until 1684 (Mortensen 2006:106). With such an early post-medieval *stikka*, like the one displayed in the Faroe National Museum (Fig. 1), we have an artifact transporting (Hanseatic) value and an example closing the circle from culture to material culture where value becomes materialized.

The Discussion About Hanseatic (Material) Culture in the Baltic

Hanse archaeology has been going on in the Baltic area for some years, and recently a discussion has developed about how to define Hanseatic culture. This discussion was initiated by a shift in the interpretation of artifacts. Previously, artifacts were simply seen as indicators of trade. This view has now changed towards a more complex point of view inspired by post-colonial theories. In Finland, for example, artifacts are increasingly considered as indicators of cultural and ideological interactions creating something which some archaeologists call a Hanseatic culture. The discussion of the concept of Hanseatic culture, which arose in the Baltic in the late 1990s, was led by David Gaimster who, while concentrating on medieval Baltic urban societies, repeatedly argued that the Hanse created a proto-colonial situation, in which material culture, especially German stoneware, expressed the identity of medieval burghers (e.g., Gaimster 1997:65, Gaimster 2005).

In a recent paper, Visa Immonen (2007:720) has reviewed this concept of Hanseatic culture as applied to Finland, and has called into question the ethnic model for a Hanse culture set up in the Baltic.

Immonen distinguishes several strands of criticism: one strand, as raised by Mervi Suhonen, doubts the wisdom of applying concepts of Hanseatic culture to archaeological material. Suhonen's arguments are based on the view that such notions are highly abstract, and she reminds us that the identification of archaeological material as Hanseatic in origin must be confirmed before an expanded significance is proposed (Immonen 2007). If this is not the case, the notion of Hanseatic culture remains a descriptive term stamped upon a certain group of material. For Suhonen, it is vital to break down the question of Hanseatic culture into sub-questions solvable from an archaeological point of view. Immonen, in response to this, fears that this approach would conceal both the social dynamics and the place of material culture in the Baltic (Immonen 2007:728). A second strand of criticism, as expressed for example by Nils Blomkvist, deals with the concept of Hanseatic culture as a whole, and is based upon the argument that the Baltic and the North Sea cannot be viewed as a homogenous trade region (Immonen 2007:728). As a consequence, people who share this criticism doubt the idea of a culturally uniform area². Clearly, the latter argument cannot be recalled often enough. It is not possible to make one-to-one comparisons among Hanse history, Hanse archaeology in the Baltic, or Hanse archaeology in the North Atlantic. The Hanse history in the Baltic area might be largely focused on urban settings, but on the North Atlantic islands, with their very rural, marginal, and remote societies, Hanseatic encounters operated on a different level.

This discussion of the Baltic makes us aware of how important it is to define the concept of Hanseatic culture in order to identify artifacts, and hence to understand their cultural impact on societies in the North. In answer to both Immonen and Suhonen, I believe that developing archaeologically approachable



Figure 1. Hamburg ell or Faroese *stikka* in the Faroe National Museum, Tórshavn.

sub-questions can lead to more secure interpretations. If treated with the necessary awareness of certain problems, the solution to such questions does not need to disregard the underlying social dynamics.

The following part of this paper takes a closer look at Hanse history in the North Atlantic, with the intention of pinpointing problems that certain aspects of this history bring to archaeology and to the interpretation of imported material culture.

Problems of Artifact Distribution in the North

Many archaeological excavations throughout the North Atlantic have revealed a number of finds which are interpreted as evidence of Hanseatic connections of some sort. However, in most cases these finds are only rather generally connected to the Hanse, and often the term “Hanseatic” is applied without further explanation or discussion about the basis of the interpretation, or how these artifacts made their way to a particular site.

As far as ceramic distribution is concerned, David Gaimster has argued that pottery is particularly sensitive to reflecting levels of adoption of, and resistance to, Hanseatic cultural influences (Gaimster 2005:408). Yet it should be stressed that this statement only relates to certain Baltic urban sites, and cannot be applied to the area discussed here. Peter Davey and Frans Verhaeghe have mapped out a number of key questions in the interpretation of traded ceramics, all of them still applicable today, especially for the North Atlantic area (Davey 1988:10, Verhaeghe 1999:141). These include questions like “How can distribution patterns be stated and analyzed?” and “How did the trade in ceramics actually function?”

The underlying problems are at first glance rather obvious. In most cases, the ultimate origin of the artifacts is known, either the general area of production or the actual site. It is the distribution that causes problems of interpretation, either expressed in the possible routes along which objects were traded, or in what kind of mercantile group transported them. There are many possible ways in which artifacts produced in the Hanseatic core area could have been distributed in the North Atlantic regions, and some of them will be discussed here in more detail. These historical aspects would have had a profound impact on artifact distributions in North Atlantic archaeology.

The Problems of Multilateral, Triangular, and Indirect Trade

A major characteristic of the Hanseatic League was its role as the dominating transport agent of goods from east to west, south to north, or north to

west in northern Europe during the late medieval and early post-medieval periods. However, direct trade between points of supply and the final destinations of goods seldom took place. Instead, goods were usually distributed in several steps within the Hanseatic network (Dollinger 1998:278–281, Irsigler 1998:701). The various stopovers in this long-distance trade, and hence the actual trading routes, are hard to track down in the archaeological record, and it is very difficult to link artifacts to a transporting nation or a particular group of merchants. Interpreting trade through spatial analysis of particular artifacts is rather common in any kind of archaeology, but it entails several complex considerations hardly discussed from an archaeological point of view to date. In 1975, a number of these important aspects were pointed out by Colin Renfrew, and he concluded that, with respect to trade and exchange, “... we have not yet understood their complexity, nor the range of interpretive uses to which the archaeological record may be put.” (Renfrew 1975:4). Given the fact that Hanse archaeology is a young field, it is hardly surprising that Renfrew’s statement is still up to date.

The first two important variables critical to this question are those of multilateral and triangular trade, which were clearly influential mechanisms of distribution. Many artifacts reached the North via a number of trading stops; e.g., Portuguese and French pottery ended up as far north as Iceland via ports such as London and Bergen (Mehler 2004:168). Others were distributed via triangular trade, a trade model mostly known in connection with the post-medieval transatlantic slave trade or the English trade with Newfoundland (e.g., Pope 2004:91–98), but already practiced by Hanseatic merchants in the late Middle Ages. Many established triangular-trade routes existed within the Hanseatic network, e.g., the Iceland-Hamburg-London trade, which transported fish from Iceland first to Hamburg, usually arriving there in late August or September. Some of the fish was then unloaded and other goods were brought onboard. From Hamburg, the vessels continued their journey further to London, arriving there in late October. In London, the cargo was unloaded and new bulk goods (e.g., cloth, cottons) were brought on board and sent back to Hamburg (Friedland 1960:9–10, 13). Another example is the Lübeck-Bergen-Boston trade, bringing flour, grain, and beer to Bergen, then transporting fish and timber to Boston, and finally sailing back to Lübeck with English cloth (Burkhardt 2007, Irsigler 1998:701). Besides these bulk goods, many other items were on board the vessels, but most of them only in small quantities (e.g., Friedland 1960:plate II), and it is those other items, such as ceramics, glass, and metal, that we are dealing with as archaeologists, because the organic bulk goods like grain and cloth only seldom survived.

In the archaeological record, the problem becomes evident with, for example, London-type pottery dating to the second half of the 14th century found at the Bryggen site in Bergen. London-type vessels appear in a period when direct Anglo-Norwegian trade had more or less ceased to exist (Blackmore and Vince 1994:80, 99–100). It therefore seems likely that ceramic vessels were most likely brought to Bergen by Hanseatic merchants as part of their triangular trade via England. Are London-type ceramic vessels then part of a Hanseatic material culture, despite the fact that the goods were originally produced in England? Similar problems and questions arise in the case of French pottery of the same date and site, because there was hardly any direct connection between Norway and France in the Middle Ages. In this case, French wares also most likely came to Bergen with Hanseatic merchants who had traded with France since the late 13th century (Deroeux et al. 1994:180, Dollinger 1998:331–336).

A third problem, especially when interpreting the spatial distribution of Hanseatic artifacts in the North, is that of indirect trade. Again, this problem is complex and it can concern either Hanseatic trade of objects from non-Hanseatic nations or the distribution of goods from a Hanseatic port to its hinterlands by one or several local merchants. In very rare cases, we find written evidence for the first category; for example, in the early 16th century, Hamburg merchants bought glass vessels in the Netherlands and sold them in England (Friedland 1960:11). This leads us to a question similar to that above: Is Dutch glass traded by Hanseatic merchants to the North part of Hanseatic material culture (Fig. 2)? Another aspect in the problem of indirect trade applies particularly for artifacts regarded as Hanseatic cultural markers (see below), which emerge away from Hanseatic trading sites. A good example of this is the frequent occurrence of Siegburg stoneware at sites in northern Norway in times when Bergen was the only official staple market for the North and direct Hanseatic trade north of Bergen was forbidden (see above). There the appearance of Siegburg and other Rhenish stonewares of the 15th and 16th centuries, as found at Vågan (Lofoten) for example (Brun 1996:48), does not necessarily imply the presence of Hanseatic merchant ships in this area. The ceramic vessels may have been brought there as a result of indirect Hanseatic trade, that is by local merchants returning with the pots from Bergen in exchange for their fish. For both of these patterns, written sources are extremely scarce, and this deficiency is a characteristic problem of multilateral, triangular, and indirect trade. Only when we know the actual operation of trade in detail, that is, the practices of exchange taking place between two parties at the site and the distribution of goods from the ports to their

hinterlands, can we draw reliable conclusions about the real impact and assertion of Hanseatic trade contacts in the north.

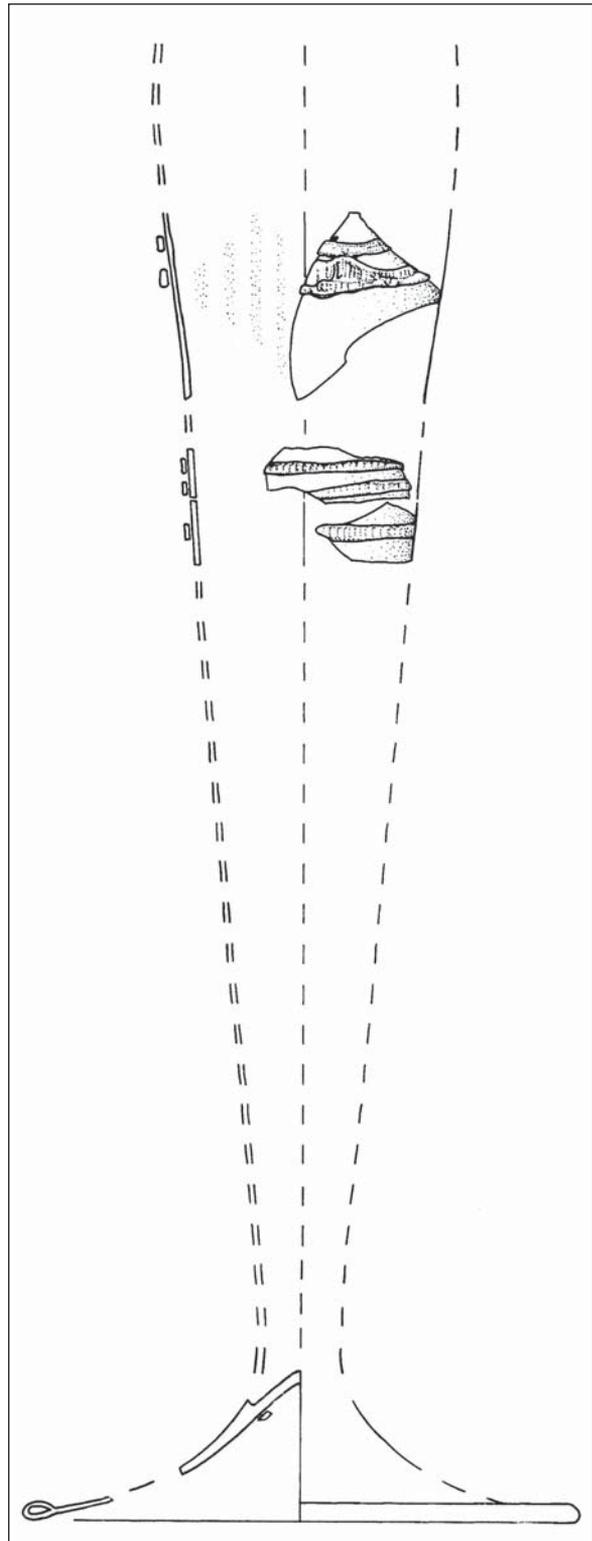


Figure 2. Drinking glass of the 16th or early 17th century (so called *Stangenglas*), generally used to consume beer, found during excavations in Reykjavík (scale 1:2). It could have been produced in Northern Germany, the Netherlands, or Denmark (from Mehler 2000b:fig. 2).

The Dutch Problem

The Hanseatic League was not a uniform group of German merchants, but rather an aggregation of merchants from several nations, coming from trading towns stretching over several countries and arranged in several different quarters. The Dutch especially were soon established as serious rivals in trade, a fact leading to several problems for the questions this paper deals with. Merchants from cities of the so-called Wendish Quarter (e.g., Lübeck, Hamburg, Rostock) primarily travelled to Norway, Iceland, and the Shetland and Faroe Islands, while Bremen merchants, belonging to the Saxonian Quarter, concentrated on trading with Iceland and the Shetland Islands. Dutch cities like Nijmegen, Deventer, and Groningen also belonged to the Hanseatic League.

During the 15th century, the economy of Dutch communities strengthened considerably. They began to withdraw from the League and went north in search of fish autonomously. Dutch merchants progressively gained in power throughout the 15th century, and in 1490, King Johann I of Denmark (1455–1513) granted towns like Amsterdam the right to free trade with Iceland and Shetland (Friedland 1973:69, Karlsson 2000:124, Wubs-Mrozewicz 2008:71). This expansion of trading rights possibly extended to the Faroe Islands, since in 1506 the Hanseatic *Kontor* in Bergen complained about the Dutch trading with those islands (Leganger 2006:48, 90). Fish was brought from Tórshavn to the Netherlands either via Bergen or on a direct route at least until 1617 (Tingbókin 1615–54:65). By that time, the Dutch had long been the most feared business rivals of the Hanse and had surpassed them (Dollinger 1998:253, Winter 1948:279–282, Wubs-Mrozewicz 2008).

The Dutch made their products accessible to customers, not only in the Hanseatic home regions (Winter 1948:283–284), but also in the North. By the end of the 16th century, citizens of Bergen complained that Hanseatic goods were mingled with those of the Dutch (Röhlk 1935:25). Not only goods but also people were difficult to distinguish by that time. The similar sound of the Dutch and German languages and the words *Dutch* and *Deutsch* caused many misunderstandings in sparsely populated islands and led to traders being wrongly labelled. Shetlanders, for example, could often not distinguish a Dutch from a German trader, confusingly calling German merchants *Dutch* (Goodlad 1971:69, Smith 1984:14). Many written sources mistakenly call merchants from Bremen and Hamburg *Dutch*, for example in a complaint of ca. 1624, where “ane honest merchand of Hamburg” is described later in the document as a “Dutchman” (Reid Tait 1955:10, 12). However, it is possible to tell the difference in some cases, especially when merchants are described as *Hollanders*

(Court Book of Shetland 1615–1629:29), and here we can assume that they really did come from the Netherlands. Hence, in the case of Shetland sources, the word *Dutch* applies not to natives of the Netherlands, but rather refers to *Germans*, while merchants from the Netherlands are called *Hollanders*.

Seen from an archaeological point of view, the parallel presence of Dutch and Hanseatic merchants in the higher latitudes of the North Sea causes complex problems when interpreting sites and artifacts. A glass vessel produced in the Netherlands during the 16th century for example, could have been brought to the far North either by traders from German Hanse towns like Hamburg (see above) or by Dutch traders. Similarly difficult to interpret are German ceramics of the so-called Werra ware. This type of pottery developed during the second half of the 16th century in central Germany, and production ceased during the second quarter of the 17th century as a result of the Thirty Years’ War. Werra ware was exported to the Netherlands in large quantities, mostly via Bremen, a town closely connected to the Netherlands as its main transshipment port (Demuth 2001:113; Stephan 1992:39, 46; 1994:102–103; 2000:328–338). To make things even more difficult for archaeologists, the Dutch during the early 17th century copied Werra ware with great skill in Enkhuizen, but only for a couple of years, and those vessels are often marked with potters’ marks (Stephan 1992:45–46, 2000:334).

Thus, how can we interpret a fragment of (original) Werra ware found at á Krambatangi, Faroe Islands (Fig. 3)? The site, located on the south side of Trongisvágsfjörður on the island of Suðuroy, was a Hanseatic trading port from the second quarter of the 16th century, but it was also frequented by Dutch merchants. In 1656, the Icelandic Company established a trading house nearby at Trongisvágur (Nolsøe and Jespersen 2004:235, 249) and it is very likely that trade was then relocated from á Krambatangi to there. Two interpretations are possible for that fragment. It can either have been brought to the Faroe Islands by Hanse merchants or traded first from Germany to the Netherlands and then further north by the Dutch. In both cases, the artifact represents a direct link to Germany because of its place of manufacture. However, the transporting nation is not clear, and we can therefore question the extent to which this fragment expresses a Hanseatic lifestyle.

The Problem of Piracy

Heavy competition from the Dutch that hampered German trading activities was not the only problem Hanseatic merchants encountered in the north during the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries. Hostile pirate vessels tried time and again to seize Hanseatic ships

at sea or raided their trading sites on land. Hanseatic maritime trade was mainly under threat from piracy in the Mediterranean, but was also severely affected in the North Atlantic (Prange 2001).

Among the best-known pirates were the Victual Brothers, also known as the Vitalian Brotherhood, an association of north German pirates from coastal cities such as Hamburg, which seriously endangered Hanseatic maritime trade in the North in the period from ca. 1392 to 1435. On the 22nd of April 1393, Victual Brothers from Rostock and Wismar raided Bergen, burning down the city before returning to their homeports to sell their stolen goods, such as cloth, fish, and everyday items. Bergen was attacked



Figure 3. Fragment of a small Werra ware bowl (diameter 12 cm) found during excavations at the trading site of “á Krambatangi”, Faroe Islands.



Figure 4. A Hamburg vessel fighting against a Scottish vessel off the Icelandic south coast. Detail of the Carta Marina (Magnus 1538).

by the Brotherhood several more times in the course of the next decades (Helle 1995:698, 700). This kind of piracy was indirectly supported by cities such as Hamburg or Bremen which offered a market outlet for the pirates to sell their stolen goods (Holbach 2005:149). In his chapter entitled “How Traders Slaughter each other for the Harbours of Iceland”, Olaus Magnus in 1555 describes: “The foremost among these are considered to be the people who live in the Wendish cities of Bremen, Rostock, Wismar, and Lübeck. Then there are the English and the Scots merchants, who so obstinately make a legal claim to preference and privilege in the use of Icelandic harbours, as though they were fighting a war at sea, and butcher one another in the quest for profit.” (Magnus 1998: book 10, chap. 15). The end of the Brotherhood in 1435 did not stop raiding and piracy in the Norwegian Sea. Other hostile vessels sailed under the flags of England, Scotland, and France or belonged to the Barbary corsairs (Fig. 4). The Faroe Islands especially were often attacked by pirates. Various cases are handed down in written documents, such as the raid on the warehouse at Tórshavn, one of the Hanseatic trading stations, in the year 1580 (West 1972:24, 28, 30–32; Young 1979:95–96). The second Hanseatic trading site in the Faroe Islands, á Krambatangi, had to be abandoned because of repeated threats as well as the fact that its location was so far away from Tórshavn (Nolsøe and Jespersen 2004:234–235).

In the case of the Victual Brothers, the pirates came from the same cities as the Hanseatic merchants they preyed upon. Consequently, the likelihood that artifacts originating in the Hanseatic core area could have been distributed by German or Hanseatic pirates does not really affect the archaeologist’s interpretation about whether an artifact is Hanseatic or not. However, such an interpretation is more difficult in the case of an English or French ship in the possession of Hanseatic artifacts captured during a pirate raid and resold. From an archaeological point of view there is, of course, hardly any chance to detect pirate booty amongst everyday items in a late medieval or early post-medieval North Atlantic settlement. That ambiguity poses yet another dilemma in Hanseatic artifact distribution.

The Problem of Illicit Hanseatic Trade

Over the course of its history, the Hanseatic League encountered a number of regulations and bans on trade with the various countries and islands, e.g., the trade embargo with Iceland after the beginning of the Danish trade monopoly in 1602 (Aðils 1971:3–64; Karlsson 2000:138 f.). However, there are a number of indications that Hanseatic merchants continued to trade despite those bans. Illicit activities were generally hard to control and eliminate for any authority, and particularly so for any wishing to project authority over the coastlines of Iceland or Norway, which are cut by extensive and deep fjords. Thus, we have to consider the possibility that Hanseatic artifacts were not only illegally distributed by pirates, but also by Hanse merchants themselves. Such activities are, of course, hardly recorded in written documents, making it all the more important to take artifacts from archaeological excavations into account. The extent of illicit Hanseatic trade in the North Atlantic has yet to be studied in detail, but a few examples can be given here to illustrate the problem this implies for the question of artifact distribution.

It is clear from indirect evidence that Hamburgers, for example, continued to trade with Iceland even after the proclamation of the above mentioned trade embargo in 1601 (Entholt and Beutin 1937:56 f.). Afterwards, Germans were frequently allowed to continue to travel to Iceland in order to collect their debts from Icelandic clients. Gunnar Karlsson assumes that the Icelandic-German trade lasted at least until ca. 1620 (Karlsson 2000:139). In fact, the so-called *Islandfahrer* (company of Iceland farers) of Hamburg appear in German written sources until 1626 (Koch 1995:42), implying continuing journeys of some kind until at least that time. In addition, strong links between Hamburg and Iceland remained, as shown by the fact that many Icelanders travelled to Hamburg in order to further their education or work until the end of the 17th century (Koch 1995). Additionally, in 1645, after the end of the so called *Torstenson War* (1643–1645), the conflict between Sweden and Denmark-Norway, King Christian IV was bankrupt, which almost led him to pawn the “*Province Ißlandt*” for the amount of two or three tons of gold to Hamburg over a period of ten years (Loose 1968:143 ff.). Not far away from Iceland, Hanseatic trade with the Shetland Islands lasted much longer. Bremen, for example, continued to trade with Shetland at least until 1671 (Friedland 1973:76), and it is thus hard to imagine that Hanse vessels did not also travel to Iceland at the end of the 17th century.

If we look at the material culture of the 17th century, as found during archaeological excavations in Norway or Iceland for example, we find a number of objects produced in present-day Germany. Rhen-

ish stoneware from that century was found at the post-medieval trading site at Valan, near Trondheim (Strøm 2004:20, 94) and, similarly, 17th-century Weser ware and Westerwald stoneware of the 17th and 18th centuries has been found on Iceland (Sveinbjarnardóttir 1996:101,107).

Interpreting the occurrence of these wares in the North is difficult. Bearing in mind the still strong links between the Hanse and the northern regions during the 17th century, we have to consider the possibility that the ceramic vessels were brought there by Hanseatic ships, even in times when regular trade was prohibited. However, in 1619, Danish merchants of Copenhagen founded a company to run the trade with Iceland, the Faroe Islands, and northern Norway. This enterprise is often simply called the *Icelandic Company* (1619–1662). This company also purchased goods from Hanse cities to transport them to Iceland, employing, for example, a Hamburg merchant based in Hamburg as *Faktor* (agent) to supply them with goods (Loose 1968:145, 148 f.). Nevertheless, the connotation and identity of such wares as Hanseatic remains and is not lost simply because they are transported by Danes.

Hanseatic Artifacts: An Attempt at Assignment

The problems above were outlined to demonstrate the extent to which the distribution of Hanse-period artifacts produced in the core regions were influenced by complex political and economic factors. In fact, the problems seem to be too complex to allow conclusive artifact attribution. However, the following part of this paper attempts to approach a possible concept of Hanseatic material culture by splitting aspects of attribution into several sub-questions solvable from an archaeological point of view (see above).

Much information about Hanseatic trade is handed down in almost unmanageable amounts of written documents. However, the sources get rather fragmentary when it comes to more detailed descriptions of traded goods other than cloth, grain, and fish. While metal items are mostly described rather clearly according to their function (e.g., wires, copper pots; Friedland 1960, Plate II), others, such as ceramics or glass vessels, are hardly ever mentioned. Another category of written sources, that of inventories, accounts, and last wills, is similarly unspecific. Only few documents point to an object’s country of origin, like the account book of 1559 of the church of Laufás, northern Iceland, which lists some “*skerbord pysk*” (German cutting plates) (DI 13:nr. 293). Accordingly, we hardly know anything about the people who bought goods from Hanse merchants and the consumers of their goods (Hammel-Kiesow 1999).

For the archaeologists working mostly with vessel or tool fragments of various materials, the written records are therefore of little value for the interpretation of artifacts. It is therefore all the more important to try to trace connections with archaeological methods.

Diagnostic Criteria for a System of Hanseatic Material Culture

Formulating both a system and a classification of Hanseatic material culture and the objects that are part of it depends largely on the question of raw materials, their availability and processing, and the consequent lack of certain, specialized crafts in the North Atlantic hinterland. This concern is relevant for Greenland, Iceland, and the Faroe, Orkney, and Shetland Islands in particular, places with hardly any access to timber (except for driftwood), or, in the case of Greenland, no source of iron. In Iceland, the manufacture of ceramics would have been possible in theory, since clay is to be found, but often its quality is poor and fuel is lacking. In addition, Iceland had not enough quartz sand, sodium carbonate or potassium carbonate to produce glass (Mehler 2007:240–242; Veien Christiansen 2004:29; 33), to give just a few examples. Thus, the system of Hanseatic material culture can be divided into four classes based either on German production, and/or transportation by the Hanse. Those classes (A to D) are illustrated in Figure 5.

First, and most important of all, any object produced in the former Hanseatic centers of Germany, and traded via one of the Hanse cities has the greatest potential to be a Hanseatic object (class A; Fig. 5A). A great variety of objects falls under this class, which can be split up into various sub-classes according to their function or material

(Table 1). However, all objects belonging to this class need first of all to be examined carefully to assess whether or not they really were produced in Germany. In some cases, this will be easy, as with stonewares and other ceramics, for example, which can be regarded as Hanseatic cultural markers (see below). In other cases, assignment to a specific place of production will be very hard and might require scientific analysis. Some could be attributed with the help of inscriptions or marks, like oak barrels bearing incised owner's marks (*Hausmarken*) that can be connected to their owner or a Hanseatic city. In very rare cases, we can link an object directly to Hanseatic mercantile activities, as is the case with the seal matrix of a Hanse merchant found at the Hanseatic trading site at Avaldsnes, Norway (Fig. 6) (Elvestad and Opedal 2001). This object corresponds nicely with the stamp of the Hanse merchant Georg Gisze depicted on the famous work of art by Hans Holbein the Younger from 1532 (Fig. 7). Georg Gisze, a Gdansk merchant, is painted in his office at the Steelyard, the main trading base of the Hanseatic League in London. On the table sits his official stamp, consisting of a bone handle and a metal seal matrix. Gisze is a rather well documented person, having been involved in the stockfish trade. He imported fish on Hamburg vessels most likely from Iceland, sold them in London, and transported cloth back to Hamburg (Friedland 1999:176 f.).

Some of those objects listed in Table 1 are discussed in detail below. Some are known to have been traded to the North because they appear in written sources. We frequently read about copper cauldrons, axes, small arms weapons, metal items, tin jugs or plates, and fish hooks in registers of traded items (e.g., Bruns 1953:47, Friedland 1960:plate II, Crawford 1999:39). However, on finding a fish hook during archaeological excavations, it is hardly

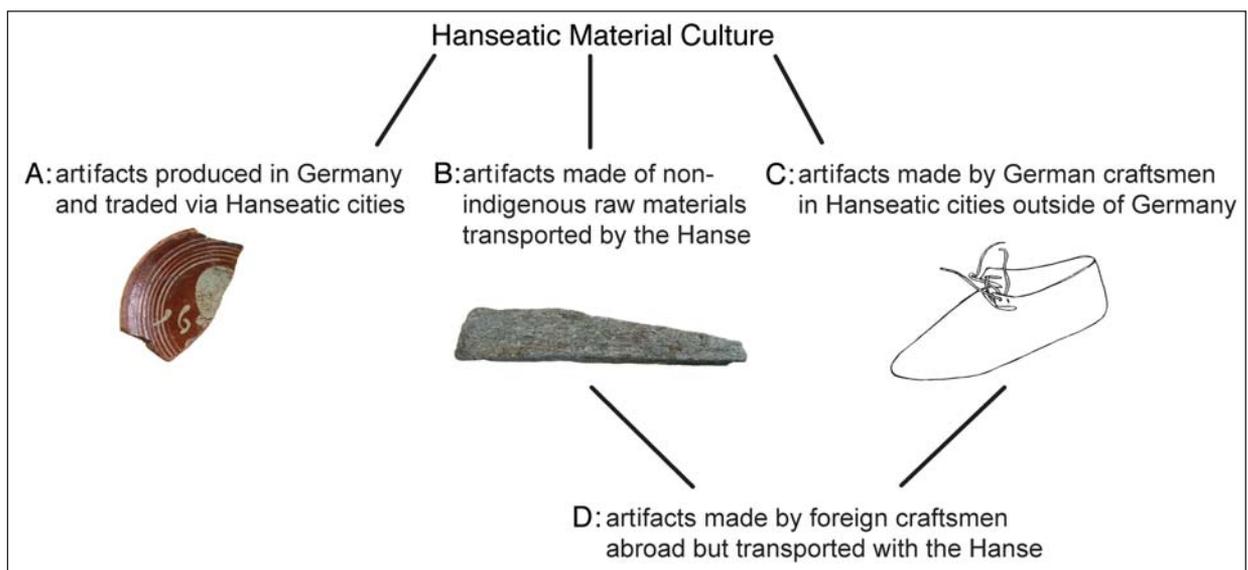


Figure 5. System of Hanseatic material culture.

possible to tell whether the hook was indeed made in Germany or produced somewhere else and only transported by Hanse merchants.

Secondly, some artifacts occurring in the area of discussion which are made from non-indigenous raw materials should be considered as having possible Hanseatic value (class B) (Fig. 5B). Finds of this class are somehow an amplification of the first class, adding to those an additional diagnostic criterion. These finds include first of all ceramics appearing in those countries and islands with no local pottery production during the period from ca. 1350 to 1650, the main period of Hanseatic activities in the area of discussion. All other wares apart from stoneware and certain slip wares discussed above and below should be analyzed under this classification. None of the societies discussed here produced pottery during the Hanseatic period. This also applies to glass vessels (Mehler 2007:241–242).

But Hanse merchants also traded with foreign raw materials, distributing them further north. They bought timber in the Baltic and Norway and *osmund*, a particular type of iron, in Sweden to sell it in other markets (Daly 2007:200–202, Friedland 1960:plate II). Timber was used for many things, e.g., the construction of buildings and boats, and could also be

used to create smaller artifacts, although this has yet not been proven archaeologically. This foreign wood would be easy to identify, as imported timber is often very easy to distinguish from driftwood, even with the naked eye. In addition, dendrochronology could not only provide the date of felling but also the provenance of the timber in use (Daly 2007:66, 187 f.).

There are many interpretative possibilities for wooden artifacts and their roles in Hanseatic material culture, since they can be part of all four suggested classes in the proposed system of Hanseatic material culture (see Fig. 5). They can have been produced in the area that is now Germany (class A), they can consist of raw material traded through the Hanse (class B), and they even could have been made by foreign craftsmen or German craftsmen abroad but transported by the Hanse (classes C and D). An analysis of wooden artifacts of a site in the area of discussion has taken place at Stóraborg, Iceland, where it was shown that 48% of the late medieval and early post-medieval wooden artifacts consisted of oak wood, a tree not native to Iceland. It is clear that those finds, staves of coopered vessels, were once part of oak barrels and smaller tuns coming to Iceland as containers for other items. Many still had owner's marks on them, leading back to

Table 1. Classification of possible Hanseatic objects according to their function, based on archaeological evidence and documentary sources. Classification refers to Figure 5A.

Tablewares				
Stonewares	Slipwares (Weser and Werra wares), redwares	Glass: drinking vessels, bottles etc.	Wooden dishes	Metal dishes: copper or iron cauldrons, tin jugs, plates and spoons, cutlery
Tools and weapons				
Knives, axes, fire weapons, lead bullets	Nails, horse shoes, hooks etc.	Metal hoops, straps	Metal wares: bars, wires, etc.	
Containers and constructional elements for buildings and ships				
Barrels	Bricks	Timber	Ballast	Building materials, tar
Church fixtures and religious objects				
Furnishing: stove tiles, chests etc.	Textiles	Objects for the service: chalices, crosses, etc.	Fixed furnishings: window glass, bells, etc.	(Clay) figurines, pilgrim's badges
Mercantile objects				
Coins, medals	Touchstones	Seals, lead seals	Weights etc.	
Personal objects				
Textiles	Toiletries	Jewels	Leather garments, shoes etc.	



Figure 6. Seal matrix of a Hanseatic merchant, found during underwater investigations at the Hanseatic trading site at Avaldsnes, Norway (photograph © Arnfrid Opedal and Endre Elvestad).

their Hanseatic place of origin. Another source for oak artifacts was shipwrecks, some of which still lie off the coasts of Iceland today. The wood was either washed ashore or collected at the wreck site itself (Mehler 2007:231–233).

Another raw material important to the entire northern region and much sought after was schist from Eidsborg, Norway, which guaranteed the highest quality possible in the production of whetstones. Whetstones from Eidsborg, or the raw material, were

already distributed to the north via Skien, Telemark, during the Viking age. This established market continued to exist throughout the Hanse period. Evidence for continuity in this trade becomes clear on looking at the finds material of the Hanse period in the area of discussion (Mehler 2007:241, Mitchell et al. 1984, Myrvoll 1986:168–172). Two shipwrecks and their cargoes recently analyzed are providing new insights into the later medieval, international schist trade by the Hanse. The trade mechanisms and



Figure 7. The Hanse merchant Georg Gisze (1497–1562) painted by Hans Holbein the Younger (1497–1543). Left of the quill at the table sits his stamp, consisting of a bone handle and a metal seal matrix (after Friedland 1999:color plate).

transport networks from inland waterways to maritime trade routes emerging from that analysis could also be applied to other Hanseatic bulk goods such as wood.

First, the so called Bøle ship discovered in the river Skien, close to the town of the same name and the main port of trade for the supply of whetstones, leads us directly to the place of origin and manufacture of Eidsborg whetstones. The ship, uniting the building traditions of a cog with Nordic influences, was built of Polish timber felled around 1380. The cargo consisted of large quantities of light grey schist originating in Eidsborg. It has been argued that the schist was not only a trade item, but also used as ballast, and that the ship sunk while on its way down-river in order to get to the Skagerrak (Daly and Nymoen 2008).

The second ship, the so called Cog of Darss, was built of Polish oak felled between 1298 and 1313 and sank about the middle of the 14th century off Darss, in the German state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. The cargo consisted, amongst other things, of schist from Eidsborg, transported as bars of about 60 cm length. The schist bars had been roped together in batches of about 20 kg weight. This and other wares from the cargo indicate that the ship was a Hanseatic vessel coming with goods from Norway.

Looking at both vessels and their finds, we get an idea of the local networks behind the whetstone industry of Eidsborg and the way the stones were distributed during the early Hanse period. German merchants knew that the schist of Eidsborg had long been a much sought after commodity which could not be replaced with a German raw material. Thus, the Hanseatic trade system made use of the already established local networks and crafts in the Eidsborg area by obtaining raw material, that is ready-made bars of schist, to distribute to the markets further north. Once hewn out of the quarries, the bars were obviously loaded on river-going ships, which then made their way to either Skien or any other nearby trading port to be sold to Hanse merchants for loading on to their vessels. Therefore, this method of distribution places whetstones originating in Eidsborg in classes B and D in the system of Hanseatic material culture (see Fig. 5).

The last class consists of artifacts made by German craftsmen living and working in Hanseatic *Kontore* outside of Germany (class C; Fig. 5). German craftsmen were living and working in all four principal *Kontore* in Bergen, Brugge, London, and Novgorod as they did in other cities with close Hanseatic connections (e.g., Turku, Finland) (Dollinger 1998:73, 137; Gaimster 2005:417). The German craftsmen from Bergen are particularly important to the area under discussion. German tailors, bakers, goldsmiths, comb-makers, coopers, barbers, fur-

riers, and shoemakers were all working in Bergen during the Hanse period. The shoemakers, also working as tanners, were the largest group amongst them, even having a monopoly on the production of shoes in Bergen. All German craftsmen were working to order for the merchants. The coopers were especially important, providing the necessary containers to transport goods (Burkhardt 2005:145, 148; Dollinger 1998:137; Helle 1995:473 f.; Herteig 1978: 41–58; Larsen 1992: 86). The products of the shoemakers have been analysed from an archaeological point of view, the material ranging from the 12th century until ca. 1702. It has become evident that the various shoe types produced in Bergen followed northern European fashions in general and did not show any regional differences, for example, in comparison to shoes found at Gdansk (Larsen 1992:62 f.). Naturally, this result is not surprising when we take into consideration that German craftsmen were also working in Gdansk. The many German craftsmen working across the Hanse area were without doubt responsible for a general and uniform spread of fashion and manufacturing techniques. From an archaeological point of view, we cannot distinguish a shoe made in Bergen by a German craftsman from a shoe made in Lübeck. Rather, the widespread uniformity in northern European shoe fashion reflects a widespread uniformity in material culture. Thus, we must consider any artifacts produced by Hanseatic craftsmen as having Hanseatic identity, regardless of their place of origin.

Ceramics as Hanseatic Cultural Marker

Over the past decades, certain ceramic wares have turned out to be sensitive indicators of Hanseatic connections with the North. It is true that tracing trade by using pottery has its limitations, as Frans Verhaeghe has put it, when he argued that imported ceramic finds reflect different forms of contact and exchange, and that it is hardly possible to interpret them with certainty as truly reliable indicators of trade (Verhaeghe 1999:141). However, most archaeologists see Rhenish stoneware as a cultural marker for Hanseatic trade, not only in the Baltic area but also in the North (e.g., Davey and Hodges 1983; Demuth 2001a:70–72; Gaimster 1997:64–78; Hurst et al. 1986:176–226; Mehler 2000a:45–50; Reed 1990:36–37; Sveinbjarnardóttir 1996:38–42,132).

The Hanseatic cities Cologne and Hamburg played a leading role in the trade and distribution of Rhenish stonewares. Cologne merchants traded Siegburg stonewares along the Rhine up to Hamburg, as revealed in written documents. Between 1570 and 1599, for instance, the right to export Siegburg stonewares to Hamburg was granted to one Dietrich Dulmann, merchant of Cologne, who

had to acquire one hundred vessels per year from each potter in Siegburg. The strong links between the producers in Siegburg, the Hanse, and the final consumers are also illustrated by a Siegburg tankard, showing the arms of the Hamburg “*Englandfahrer*”, a company similar to the Iceland farers (see above), and the inscription “DER*ENGELANDES*FARER*GESELSCHOP*IN*HAMBORCH*”³ (Fig. 8) (Gaimster 1997:65 and cat.nr. 23).

In the course of the later Middle Ages, Siegburg faced heavy competition not only from other producing sites in the vicinity (e.g., Raeren, Langerwehe), but also from sites within Lower Saxony and Saxony. Stonewares from these areas are also to be found in the North (Gaimster 1997:67–70), although in smaller numbers, varying from site to site. In Iceland, the total amount of stoneware fragments dating to the Hanseatic period is 49 (75%), compared with 16 fragments of other contemporary wares⁴. Those stonewares mostly originate in the



Figure 8. Siegburg tankard with the date of 1595, the arms of the Hamburg *Englandfahrer* Company and the inscription DER*ENGELANDES*FARER*GESELSCHOP*IN*HAMBORCH* (height ca. 170 mm) (after Gaimster 1997:cat.nr. 23, p. 183).

Rhineland, but there are also examples from Lower Saxony and Saxony (Mehler 2004). They occur not only on sites close to Hanseatic trading ports but also inland (Fig. 9).

Apart from German stonewares, it is also possible to identify Werra and Weser wares of the 16th and 17th centuries as cultural markers for Hanseatic trade (see above). The occurrence of these wares in the area of discussion has yet to be studied in detail, but it is clear that those wares regularly emerge during excavations in the North. In places like Bergen, large amounts of fragments are to be found (Demuth 2001b), and they can also be found in much smaller numbers in Iceland and the Faroe Islands, for example (see Figs. 3 and 9). Since Bremen was not only one of the main ports for exporting Weser and Werra wares but also an important Hanse constituent for our discussion area, it is not surprising to find such fragments there.

David Gaimster (2000:237) has pointed out the danger of reconstructing Hanseatic trade on the basis of ceramic distribution alone. However, synthesising such archaeological indications with the extensive documentary evidence of Hanseatic trade in general, there is hardly any doubt that those ceramics discussed here were distributed mainly by the Hanse.

Ecclesiastic Objects

Significant religious contacts existed prior to the extensive trading links between the region that is now Germany and the North Atlantic insular societies. Such contacts are illustrated, for example, by the installation of German bishops on Iceland (Marcellus de Nieveriis, 1448–1462) and the Faroe Islands (bishop Vikbold Verydema, ca. 1391–1408, succeeded by Johannes Teutonicus, ca. 1408–1431) or in the theological education of young Icelandic men in Rostock (Koch 1995:48–50; Mortensen 2006:105, 2008:10, 15; Þorsteinsson 1965).

In the Faroe Islands, the installation of German bishops is evidently strongly connected to Hanseatic interests even earlier than the first surviving reference, from 1416, to Hanseatic trade (see above). The extensive building activities at the bishop’s see at Kirkjubøur during the early 15th century were obviously made possible by substantial Hanseatic contributions (Mortensen 2008:17–19). Other examples of churches in the north re-built or built by the Hanse are St. Mary’s Church in Bergen and the church of Hafnarfjörður in Iceland, the latter erected by Hamburg merchants around 1537 and torn down in 1608 by command of King Christian IV (Skúlason 1938:194–196). These

strong religious links clearly contributed to the distribution of artistic ecclesiastic objects, such as the fine late-15th-century Lübeck triptych still on display in St Mary's Church of Bergen or the contemporaneous silver chalice from Grund, Iceland, the work of a Lübeck goldsmith (Eldjárn 1963:nr. 44).⁵

In addition to such church fixtures, many everyday objects with a religious meaning found during archaeological excavations point to a Hanseatic connection. In particular, those transporting Lutheran symbolic meaning were clearly distributed by the Hanse (Gaimster 2003). With the beginning of the Reformation, certain artifacts were ornamented with religious pictures and symbols to support the spread of Lutheran ideas and ceramic objects seemed to be suitable carrier material. Many stoneware drinking vessels were decorated with relief bands or medallions depicting saints or biblical motifs (Gaimster 1997:148–152). Other ceramic objects with Lutheran semiotics and connected to Hanseatic activities in the Baltic include glazed stove tiles and devotional clay figurines, the latter made in several parts of Germany from fine, white-burning clay by so called *Bilderbäcker* (Gaimster 2003:122, 125–127). Stove

tiles, however, were produced in many places across northern Europe, and attribution to a specific producer site is almost impossible. Clay figurines and stove-tiles also occur on Iceland, though in small quantities. In the following paragraph, an overview is given of objects transporting religious meaning found on Iceland which clearly have a Hanseatic connection.

Two clay figurines have been found in ecclesiastic buildings. During the excavations of a small chapel in Kapelluhraun, at Reykjanes, a fragment of a devotional clay figurine of St. Barbara was found (Eldjárn 1955–1956:11–12). Another example depicting the Virgin Mary came from the excavations in the monastery of Viðey.⁶ Stove-tile fragments on Iceland are not limited to ecclesiastic sites. Examples have been found during excavations at the monastery at Viðey and the bishop's see at Skálholt (Sveinbjarnardóttir 1996:119–120), but also at the governors' residence at Bessastaðir (Sveinbjarnardóttir 1996:119) and the early post-medieval printing press at the bishop's see at Hólar. Here, archaeological investigations revealed about 547 stove-tile fragments, one of them even showing the face of Martin Luther

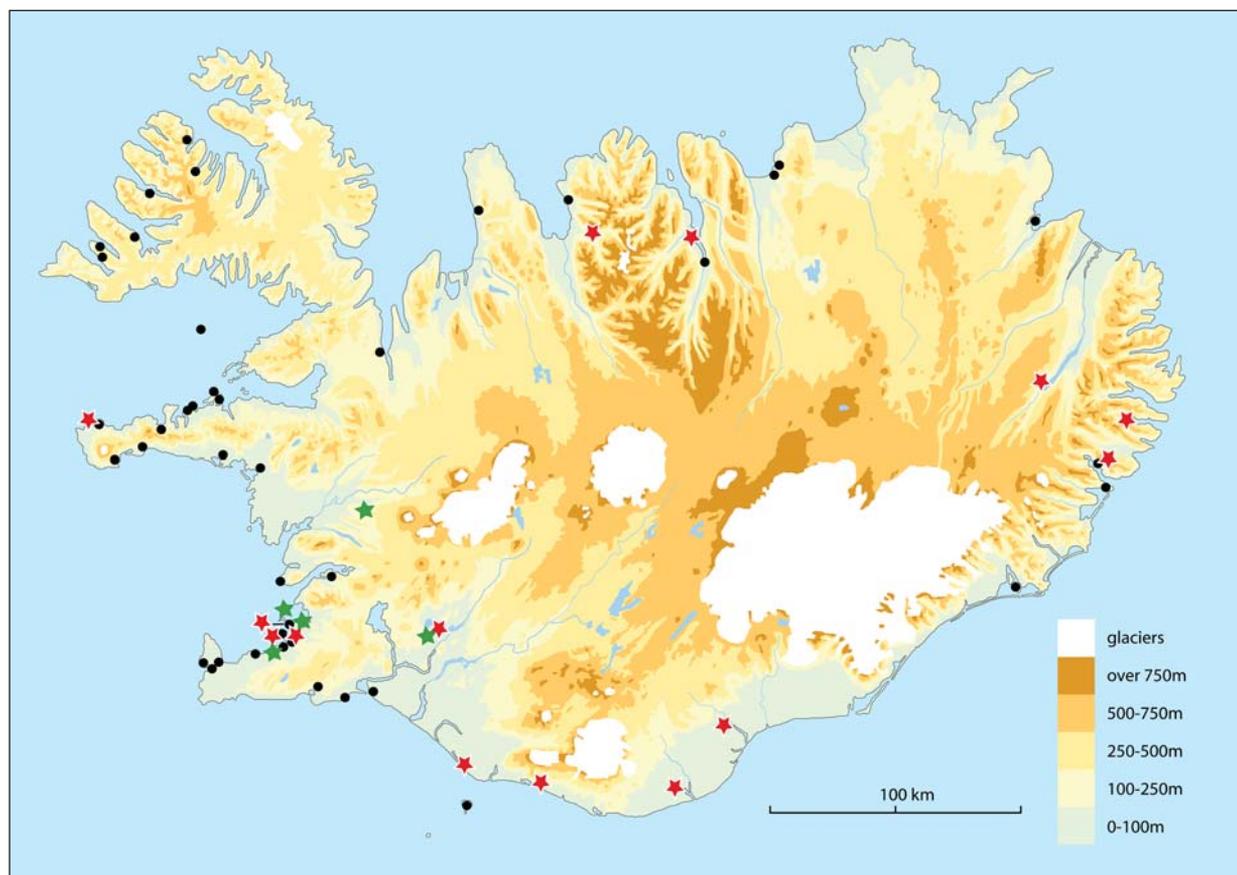


Figure 9. Map of Iceland with the location of trading ports frequented regularly by Hanseatic vessels (black dots), the distribution of German stoneware fragments (red stars), and the distribution of Weser and Werra wares (green stars). The mapping of Hanseatic ports is based on Skúlasson 1938:192; Hofmeister 2000; Gardiner and Mehler 2007:figs. 4–6 and 9; stoneware distribution is based on Mehler 2000:55–118; Kristjónudóttir 2003; Colic 2006:24–26; and Kristján Mímisson, Fornleifafræðistofan, Reykjavík, Iceland, pers. comm.; Weser and Werra ware distribution is based on Hallgrímsdóttir 1989:53; Sveinbjarnardóttir 1996:107) (map by Libby Mullqueeny and Natascha Mehler).⁷

(Blöndal 2005:32–38 and fig. 19; Hansen 2005:11). Hólar is the only Icelandic site so far where finds indicate the existence of a complete tile stove. The fragments found on the other sites are probably evidence for the interior decoration of living space, e.g., they were hung on the wall to express religious affiliation or simply to follow northern European fashion. A detailed study of imported medieval pottery found on Iceland has made clear that Rhenish stoneware vessels were also part of church furnishings. Excavations in the churches of Kúabót and Skálholt revealed fragments of Siegburg stoneware beakers possibly used during church service (Mehler 2000:125). Six complete jugs of Raeren and Westerwald stoneware survive in the collections of the National Museum, dating to the 16th and 17th centuries, having been used as holy water containers in Icelandic churches (Sveinbjarnardóttir 1996:99, 101 f.). These examples from Iceland have shown that a number of objects produced in the Hanseatic homelands and implying religious semiotics were traded to the North by the Hanse. They are yet another bond between the Hanse and the Church and expression of the Hanse's mediatory role.

Conclusions

For future material culture studies and to advance discussion about the concept of Hanseatic material culture, it is vital to examine any imported late medieval and early post-medieval object in the light of the problems of distribution and of the suggested interpretations outlined above. The questions presented with the proposed system of Hanseatic material culture (see Fig. 5) are to a great extent solvable from an archaeological point of view, not only considering but even stressing the social dynamics of artifacts and the processes they represent.

To sum up we can distinguish two strands in the assignation of Hanseatic material culture:

First, artifacts produced either in the Hanse core area, that is by craftsmen working in present-day Germany and delivering their goods to Hanse merchants for further sale, or produced in one of their *Kontore* (see Fig. 5A and D), that can be described as Hanseatic presuming their provenance can be identified. Such finds include, for example, the above-mentioned Werra ware vessels found on the Faroe Islands (Fig. 3), German stonewares, or leather fragments representing a common northern European shoe fashion. These goods would indeed have broadcast a Hanseatic identity, which they actively transmitted to foreign societies abroad. They are part of a uniform Hanseatic material culture, both urban and rural, stretching from the core areas of the Hanse up to Bergen and expanding into the northern periphery.

Second, artifacts made either from non-indigenous raw materials or made by foreign craftsmen, but transported by the Hanse, are also likely to have transported Hanseatic meaning or value (see Fig. 5B and C). This is the case with glass vessels found in Iceland, even when their place of manufacture is not certain (Fig. 2), or whetstones made of Norwegian schist. These objects acquire their Hanseatic meaning because the Hanse were their transport agents, whether or not the objects arrived at their destination in a direct, multilateral, indirect, or even illegal way. It is possible to presume that they were transported by Hanseatic merchants because the objects' date belongs to the main period of Hanseatic contact with the particular Nordic society, but of course this has to be evaluated carefully from case to case. As a consequence, when transported by the Hanse, each artifact can potentially be interpreted as Hanseatic, regardless of its place of manufacture, since it was an integral part of Hanseatic trade mechanisms. This view corresponds to the work of, amongst others, Chris Gosden, who unites artifacts with spatial and temporal dimensions, since they are used at times and places far from their place of manufacture and by people other than the original craftsmen (Gosden and Knowles 2001:19).

In both cases, it becomes clear that Hanseatic material culture includes many non-material aspects (Veit 2003:19), having the effect of creating social relations between the Hanse and the particular Nordic societies. Hanseatic objects are able to turn into symbols, transporting "Hanseaticness" from northern Germany to societies further north. Consumers could find such a Hanseatic identity in objects made of materials previously unknown in their country, such as glass drinking vessels which appear in Iceland first in the Hanse period (Mehler 2000b), in symbols transporting new religious tendencies expressed with ceramic objects, or even in distinctive and new vessel forms, like the funnel-necked Siegburg jugs. Such rare objects may have been appreciated in the far north not only for their high and alien value but also for any symbolic meaning they carried.

Both approaches also suggest that Hanseatic culture adheres not only to certain objects, but can also be grafted onto an object when its bearer is part of the Hanse. Seen the other way around, an object is able to keep its "Hanseaticness" even when transported by someone other than a representative of the Hanse. Objects produced in the Hanse core regions have an ethnic value from their production onwards, but they only acquired a detectable Hanseatic meaning once they became part of the Hanseatic trade system and reached their destinations. They were accompanied on their way by the underlying principles of commerce and profit, both being crucial components

of any Hanseatic material culture, which may have had profound effects on the material cultures of the Nordic societies.

As stressed in this paper, the response to Hanseatic culture was different in the North Atlantic area than in the Baltic. This distinction should free us from the idea of an undifferentiated and homogeneous sphere of Hanseatic influence. It seems that Nordic societies assimilated some aspects of Hanseatic culture by accommodating rather than simply accepting it. The use of measurement systems from, e.g., Hamburg, show that ideas relevant to trade were adopted, since Hamburg traders were of great importance. Not all objects produced in present-day Germany were used in the north according to their social value. In Iceland, local patterns of consumption are instead a sign of economic opportunity and availability of goods, as has also been argued for Finland (Immonen 2007:729). Certain types of pottery, like Rhenish stonewares, could also have been used because of their symbolic significance, being either Hanseatic or ecclesiastic. Others, like Norwegian whetstones, were used instead for economic or functional reasons.

Out of this mixture, something distinctively Nordic emerged. The spatial and temporal breadth of Hanseatic influence contributed to foster a distinctive Nordic culture. However, we still need to evaluate the extent of the Hanseatic impact on the societies of the North and the role the Hanse played in the process of the emergence of those Nordic cultures. We need to be aware that artifacts are not just evidence of trade, but may have carried a powerful cultural meaning for those in the North Atlantic regions who used them. Studies of Hanseatic material culture could contribute a considerable amount to such a post-colonial approach in archaeology and could transform our understanding of the Hanse in the North. Thus, the assignation of Hanseatic culture to archaeological finds would explore the materiality of cultural contact.

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Endnotes

- ¹Skúlason (1938:196 f.) argues for the date 1419.
- ²Visa Immonen gives an overview on the discussion in the Baltic and refers to the work of, e.g., Suhonen and Blomkvist (see Immonen 2007:727–730). The summary of this discussion presented here is based upon Immonen's overview.
- ³Translation: The Englandfahrer Company in Hamburg (Gaimster 1997:183).
- ⁴This number is based on an analysis of all excavated pottery found on Iceland until the year 2000.
- ⁵For more examples of ecclesiastic links between Germany and Iceland, see Þorláksson (2003:39, 127).
- ⁶The clay figurine from Viðey is not published, but was examined by the present author in 1999.
- ⁷This figure is intended to give a first overview. A systematic study of post-medieval ceramics in Iceland has not taken place yet, and the amount of Weser and Werra wares found on Iceland is only beginning to emerge.