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BENTE SVEN MAJCHCZACK, Die Rolle der nordfriesischen Inseln im frühmittelalterlichen Kommunikationsnetzwerk. Studien zur Landschafts- und Siedlungsgeschichte im südlichen Nordseegebiet Volume 11. Verlag Marie Leidorf GmbH, Rahden/Westf. 2020. € 64.80. ISBN 978-3-867-573412. 588 pages with 252 figures and 35 tables additionally 19 plates in 2 volumes.

The North Frisian Islands share the fate of many important coastal regions of the past: once at the edge of a world of maritime communication, they are now a quiet, rural and recreational zone with relatively rare opportunities for archaeological fieldwork. Rich barrow cemeteries and a few ring fortresses heralded their potential to early archaeologists. Intensive surveys and excavation campaigns were conducted in the 1950s, followed by a handful of targeted, long-term settlement excavations in the 1960s and 1970s (KERSTEN/LA BAUME 1958; KOSSACK et al. 1975; REICHSTEIN 1986). Since then, archaeology in the islands quieted down for years.

The stalemate was broken in the 2000s with the application of aerial photography and remote sensing. As often in the history of field research, a new scale of observation led to major new discoveries. Subsequently, surveys using geophysical prospecting techniques and metal detectors were

initiated. Yielding masses of new data on a scale closer than that of cadastral maps, but broader than that of excavation plans, the application of these technologies enabled researchers to bridge the observational ranges of landscape surveys and site excavations, and to target archaeology from a new perspective.

This is the transformative research effort materialised in Bente Sven Majchczack's dissertation, *Die Rolle der nordfriesischen Inseln im frühmittelalterlichen Kommunikationsnetzwerk*, submitted at the University of Rostock. The study springs from the *Nordseehäfenprojekt* („Gewerbewurten und Geestrandhäfen – mittelalterliche Handelshäfen an der Nordseeküste“), initiated 2013 by Hauke Jöns and Annette Siegmüller as part of the *Schwerpunktprogramm 1630* of the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*, „Häfen von der Römischen Kaiserzeit bis zum Mittelalter“, and with the key involvement of Martin Segsneider.

The book is published by the Lower Saxony Institute for Historical Coastal Research (*Niedersächsisches Institut für historische Küstenforschung*) in two volumes in hardback, comprising 588 pages with full colour illustrations. The main text, clearly structured and well written, takes up 314 pages of volume one. Four brief chapters presenting an introduction (p. 13), research history (pp. 14–15), research problems (pp. 16–17) and the landscape setting (pp. 19–26) are followed by the lengthy chapter 5, which documents the five main excavations, which form the basis of the project (pp. 26–227). They are complemented by two synthetic studies on the distribution of imported goods (chapter 6, pp. 227–244), and on settlement dynamics and networks (chapter 7, pp. 245–276), and by a summary (pp. 277–280). Four specialists contribute reports on scientific investigations: Katrin Struckmeyer on technical analyses of *Muschelgrus* ceramics (pp. 315–322); Frank Schlütz on archaeobotanical remains (pp. 323–339); Walter Dörfler on palynology (pp. 341–343); and Andreas Kronz on chemical analyses of glass (pp. 345–363). Volume two contains a catalogue of archaeological sites in the study area (pp. 371–417), and another catalogue of the finds and features recorded in the five major settlement excavations, which forms a basis for the study (pp. 418–588). The book contains no English summary, and for the present the various papers published by the author in conference proceedings must serve as the best introduction in English to this important work.

This, then, is a major, regional study of settlement archaeology in the three islands Sylt, Amrum and Föhr, and on the western coast of the mainland between Eiderstedt in the south and Wiedingharde in the north, a stretch of some 80 km along the North Sea. The focus is on the early medieval settlement pattern of the North Frisian Islands, and specifically on the role of trading places and their position in relation to supra-regional networks (p. 16). The term “trading places” is to be understood in a broad sense as settlements with evidence of trading activities, and a central concern of the study is to explore how local and regional harbour sites were articulated in relation to major hubs. This question is pursued in a diachronic framework, with an emphasis on changes and developments over the course of – mainly – the 7th to 11th centuries.

The development of early medieval trading networks in the North Sea region is often researched with a focus on the major trading emporia: Dorestad (NL), London (UK), Ipswich (UK), Ribe (DK), Kaupang (NO) – and beyond. What this book offers is an alternate view from the wider coastal communities of the region. Majchczack does for a key part of the Wadden Sea what researcher like Chris Loveluck and Dries Tys have done for the Western parts of the North Sea, or Hauke Jöns and Sunhild Kleingärtner for the southern Baltic Sea coastlands (LOVELUCK 2017; LOVELUCK/TYS 2006; KLEINGÄRTNER 2013; JÖNS 2015). He situates the growth and impact of sailing in relation to the population of the coastlands, who undoubtedly were a major agency in early medieval navigation, and were the ones most directly exposed to its effects.

The crux of the book is the 200-page long chapter five (pp. 26–227), which presents reports on five settlement excavations, a major contribution to the archaeology of the islands Sylt and Föhr. The first of these, Tinnum LA 128/134 on Sylt was excavated in a series of rescue campaigns between 2003–07, and previously presented in preliminary reports with Martin Segschneider (e. g. MAJCHCZACK/SEGSCHEIDER 2015). It is fully reported and analysed here for the first time. The site is located next to a tidal watercourse and in close proximity of the Tinnumburg ring-fortress. Investigations revealed a few dozen sunken-featured buildings together with wells, and with notable amounts of glass beads and vessel sherds, textile working tools, raw and worked amber, and other finds related to crafts. Glass beads were worked here on a small scale for a time in the late seventh or early eighth century. Activity at the site commenced in the seventh century, and at least in some periods, it saw seasonal use in connection with trade and specialised craft activities.

Wenningstedt LA 149 on Sylt was found eroding from a dune from 2007, and has been regularly monitored since then. A number of finds have been recovered from the surface, and at least one sunken-featured building is detected. While the circumstances of discovery do not permit a detailed interpretation of the site, it is clear that the finds mark close links with the emporium in Ribe, including glass bead types, ceramics, and a coin, which can be considered specific to the latter site.

Witsum LA 146 on Föhr is the first of three sites excavated specifically for this study as part of the *Nordseehäfenprojekt* in the years 2013–18. Echoing the situation of Tinnum on Sylt, it is located by the coast, next to a tidal stream, and some 2 km from the ring-fortress Borgsumborg. The site was discovered from aerial photographs and subject to a large-scale geophysical survey 2006–12. The excavations 2013–18 were guided by excellent geophysical results, which traced a comprehensive settlement plan with wells, fences, roads, post built houses, and well over a hundred sunken-featured buildings. The excavations were targeted to investigate specific aspects of this assemblage. Activity dates to the eighth and ninth centuries and is interpreted as a large agrarian settlement, but with an emphasis on textile production beyond the demand for local consumption, and with a material culture reflecting close engagements with trade through finds such as glass vessel sherds.

Nieblung Goting LA 151 on Föhr is located in the same settlement area as Witsum, just 2 km east along the coast. The site is known from a rare hoard of 87 sceatta coins found in 1976. As at Witsum, the investigations comprised an extensive geophysical survey, which produced excellent traces of settlement, followed by a series of targeted excavations. In many respects, the range of finds and features resembles that seen at other settlements investigated. The most intriguing addition, revealed by the geophysical survey data, is an area with a series of ditches reminiscent of the system of plot boundaries seen in some emporia. This area is shown by the excavations to belong in the eighth century, and to be associated with intensive traces on iron-smithing. The situation at the edge of the gentle slope leading to the waterfront leads the author to suggest (p. 208) that the area was used as a wintering haven for boats. Nieblung Goting was active in the Roman Iron age, and shows possible continuity through the migration period to the early medieval phase. Majchczack sees the site as the clearest case for a specialised production and trading place, founded in the eighth or late seventh century, and gradually residing into a role as a more regular agrarian settlement (p. 209).

Nieblum LA 67 on Föhr, another 2 km east along the coast from Nieblung Goting, is another site first identified from aerial photography, and subsequently subject to a large-scale geophysical survey and targeted excavations. A peculiar feature of the site, dated from the eighth to the eleventh century, is a series of ditches surrounding the settled area of c. 450 by 150 m. The finds from the limited excavations reflect a broad range of activities and connections, but do not fully clarify the nature of the site.

The data from the five settlement investigations is supplemented in chapter six (pp. 227–244) by a regional survey of the distribution of non-local objects (*Fremdgüter*) from the Roman Iron Age through the Early Middle Ages. The survey is intended to add legacy data to the study of long-term settlement dynamics. A series of distribution maps chart finds of Basalt lava quernstones, *Muschelgrus* ware and Rhenish wares, wheel-thrown wares from Ribe and Hedeby, Slavic pottery, Scandinavian-type metalwork, gemstones, vessel glass, glass beads, continental-type metal finds, coins, steatite vessel sherds, and Norwegian schist hones.

The final chapter seven (pp. 245–276), before a brief *Zusammenfassung* concludes the study, pulls the threads together for an analysis of settlement dynamics and communication patterns from the late Roman Iron Age through the Migration period and the Early Middle Ages. The analysis identifies four main periods: from the Roman period through to c. AD 550; the “settlement discontinuity” (*Siedlungslücke*) c. AD 550–650; renewed settlement c. AD 650–900; and continued settlement c. AD 900–1050.

Inevitably, a central part of this discussion is the complicated questions concerning the apparent discontinuation of settlement in the fifth and sixth centuries, and what is seen as a subsequent re-settlement by Frisians after 650. Despite problems concerning the dating of artefact materials in the period, the author upholds the view that settlement in the islands declined and was more or less completely discontinued at some point in the sixth century, before re-settlement occurred in the second half of the seventh. The central evidence for this discontinuity is the wholesale re-location of burial sites, and subsequent shifts in the locational patterns of settlements and graves. As a causal dynamic behind the abandonment, the author points to the Anglo-Saxon migrations: the previous population of the islands found their way west over sea (p. 256). Other possible factors, which are considered in recent debates, are not discussed. Could a decline in settlement be associated with the climatic fluctuations associated with the sixth-century Late Antique Little Ice Age, or the contemporary Justinian Plaque? This remains for the reader to consider.

While the conclusion is justified from the present evidence, it is worth noting that a change in settlement locations can sometimes mask chronological continuity, not least in a period of elusive material culture, such as the seventh century is in parts of Northern Germany and Denmark. The evidence for renewed settlement in the late seventh or early eighth century in the settlement sites as well as among the burials of the islands is consistent, but slight. Just a few new finds could move the balance of the evidence some generations back. It would not be too greatly surprising if further excavations were to demonstrate continuity, for example, at Nieblung Goting, or in the general area of this settlement cluster.

For the period of renewed settlement c. AD 650–900, which is the main focus of the study, Majchczack demonstrates how the greatly extended regional data set with 71 confirmed find sites and another 49 possible ones, enables coherent patterns of settlement to emerge. Whereas the ring fortresses and barrow cemeteries previously seemed a random scatter, a similar configuration can now be argued for both Sylt and Föhr with ring fortresses and associated trading sites at the centre of settlement clusters. The author pictures this as a settlement hierarchy with the fortresses at the summit, ostensibly the strongholds of “garrisons” controlling the trading places (p. 266).

The combination of harbour and fortresses is presented as a duality, following a model proposed by H. JÖNS and A. SIEGMÜLLER (2012). Although the analogy is not spelled out, one suspects that this is conceived with a thought to Max Weber’s designation of the “city” as a dualism of “market” and “fortress”. One is left with the intriguing, though implicit, suggestion that the island settlement of the famously non-urban Frisians is eligible as a dry-run for proto-urban centres. As an alterna-

tive, one might simply see the various elements – harbour, fortress, rural settlements, burials – as organic components of large, island-wide settlement system, to be considered at a different scale as composite mega-sites. This would seem consistent with the thrust of the study to challenge the boundaries between the traditional dimensions of “sites” and “landscape”.

In a final discussion, the major harbour sites of the islands are compared to trading places elsewhere. The author concludes that none of the sites investigated were at any time at a level comparable to emporia like Dorestad or Ribe. Instead, he compares them to the “specialised trading places” defined among Danish coastal settlements, and considers them to be the “settlement harbours” (p. 268) from which the island population reached out both to Rhineland trade and, arguing by the find material, to the more proximate emporium Ribe.

This assessment is wholly convincing, and within the given frames of the study, marks a fitting conclusion. If anything is to be regretted, it is that the discussion remains on the level of typological site-by-site comparison. One looks in vain for the authors and studies, who have developed synthetic approaches to early medieval coastal landscapes and societies elsewhere in the North Sea region, and have reached perspectives, which might also have invigorated the study of the North Frisian Islands. Such discussions are well served, however, by the pioneering efforts presented here. Majchczack obtains a fundamentally new, and infinitely more detailed picture of a key part of the early medieval maritime world of the North Sea. This will be an indispensable basis for future studies of this important coastal region – and well beyond.

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MADS RUNGE / MALENE REFSHAUGE BECK / MIKAEL MANØE BJERREGAARD / TORBEN BIRK SARAUW (eds), From Central Space to Urban Place. Urbanisation Processes in Viking Age and Medieval Odense and Aalborg, Denmark. Kulturhistoriske studier I centralitet – Archaeological & Historical Studies in Centrality volume 5. Research Centre Centrum – Odense City Museums, University Press of Southern Denmark, Odense 2021. 318.00 DKK. ISBN 978-78-7-90267-51-3 (Hardback). 367 pages.

This 367-page thick book provides the reader with a detailed insight into the project “From Central Space to Urban Place. From the central areas of the Iron Age to Medieval cities”, undertaken 2017–21 by Odense City Museum. The project has turned out to be one of the largest in Scandinavia with the ambitious aim to “... provide a new perspective on the earliest urbanisation in southern Scandinavia...” (p. 20): Two Danish urban medieval towns, Odense on Funen and Aalborg in northern Jutland, are studied throughout a period from about AD 400, when the first signs of “growth centres” emerged in their respective regions, to the time they ended up as *civitates*, royal and ecclesiastical urban centres around AD 1000. The main idea behind the project has been to study the early urbanisation process in South Scandinavia by broadening the geographical context to their hinterland and to follow the development prior to, during and after their establishment as towns. The towns were chosen according to their common characteristics: 1) they are both located on central land- and water routes, and 2) they are surrounded by metal-rich sites. A central objective has been to investigate the importance of the regional conditions for the urbanisation process, of particular interest for the pivotal question whether towns have developed from internal conditions or because of external impact and actions. Because of this, the different economic and subsistence conditions offered by the landscape have been particularly in focus for the investigation.

A productive methodological approach has been to add time and spatial depth to the overall investigation, which render a possibility to detect and analyse differences in the two towns’ course of development in a broader chronological and geographical outlook. Another creative move has been to develop a set of coherent theoretical guidelines for how the spatial and chronological course of development should be subjected to investigation and what to particularly search for of structures in the landscape and findings which can generate relevant and useful data for the overall synthesis. A theoretical point of departure was to establish a defined division between *space* as something abstract and without an a priori specific meaning, and *place*, a significant and meaning-loaded structure in the landscape. Within this conceptual framework, a town is a *place* because of its concentration of many functions, meaning-loaded and organised physical structures. This is opposed