La perception de l'autre: les zones maritimes de l'Angleterre et le commerce. Perspectives archéologiques, 650-1050 ap. J.-C.
The perception of 'other-ness', outside expected norms: the coastal and maritime zones of England and exchange. Some archaeological perspectives, AD 650-1050.

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Introduction, aims and objectives

This contribution will explore a number of themes relating to the nature of coastal and maritime-oriented societies in England, between the mid seventh century and the mid eleventh century, and will focus principally on the apparently exceptional nature of people who lived in coastal regions, through the perspective of archaeological evidence. The perception of the coastal margins of England (and their occupants) as 'liminal' or something outside the ordinary can be seen in various Anglo-Saxon written sources, dating from the later seventh century onwards, whether in Saints' lives, such as the Life of St. Guthlac, in the Fens of East Anglia and southern Lincolnshire; or in the writings of Bede, in his descriptions of key port or emporium centres, housing transitory or permanent merchant communities of foreigners, often Frisians. From the end of the eighth century, we also see the presentation of the seaways by churchmen as conveyors of death and destruction, primarily as a result of raiding or organised invasion by heathen 'northmen' from Scandinavia.

Hence, for ecclesiastical and secular landed-elites the seaways and coastal margins presented two paradoxical identities. They were liminal spaces on the edge of land, usually comprising poor quality agricultural land, with abundant salt-marshes and islands, and they were to be feared as regions bringing death from northern pagan worlds. Conversely, the coastal regions were also gateways to other lands, via the seaways of the Channel, the North Sea and the Irish Sea, and places where there was significant peaceful contact with foreigners. These two contrasting liminal characteristics gave both the

specialist communities (merchants, artisans and specialist producers) and wider societies of coastal regions distinctive characteristics, as something apart or outside expected norms for Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Scandinavian societies around the coasts of England, between the mid seventh and mid eleventh centuries. This paper will explore these two contrasting themes of liminality or 'other-ness' as they are expressed in the archaeological record. First, the nature of the societies of the coastal zones will be explored, using the results of recent excavations and surveys, to present the differences from societies in the English interior and to show how the archaeological remains of coastal inhabitants differ from many of the patterns expected by the application of anthropological models of interpretation, since the 1980s. Secondly, the nature of the populations within the port/emporia settlements will be explored in their own right, in relation to their archaeological characteristics, their social practices, and the way the inhabitants lived lifestyles beyond the 'normal' rules of rural social hierarchies, further inland.

Context

Much has been written in the last 30 years about the emergence of coastal and estuarine emporia/ports around the Channel and North Sea, from the early to mid seventh century, classified using concepts borrowed from human geography and social anthropology. These coastal and estuarine centres have been characterised as 'gateway communities' (using the work of Firth) and 'ports-of-trade' (borrowing from Polanyi and Renfrew), by Richard Hodges and others. Both terms come with conceptual associations where these settlements are viewed as outside or something apart from the wider settlement and social hierarchies of their landward hinterlands. Gateway communities were viewed as trading settlements designed to exploit landward hinterlands (originally in a colonial context) and ports-of trade were viewed as liminal settlements founded on social and geographical boundaries by elite groups, with a view to controlling trade and wider socially-embedded exchange, usually in objects and commodities classified as 'prestige goods', which could enhance social status by their possession. Richard Hodges, in particular, viewed the trading and artisan settlements around the Channel and North Sea, from the mid seventh to mid ninth centuries AD, as ports-of-trade, controlled by Frankish, Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian Kings, in order to support, enhance and consolidate their ruling authority. In particular, the emporia/ports-of-trade were seen as entry-points for the controlled redistribution of luxury 'prestige' objects, which had social

value due to their rarity. This was accompanied by the suggestion of a change in the organisation of production, both in the rural world and in the fabrication of specialist products at emporia centres.

At the time when these ideas were put forward and generally accepted, during the 1980s, comprehensive publication of much of the excavated remains from the Anglo-Saxon emporia had not yet been achieved. Furthermore, detailed studies had not been undertaken of settlement patterns and exploitation of coastal zones adjacent to emporia, nor of relations between emporia and hinterlands, in the interior, away from the coasts (apart from the suggested split functions between Hamwic-Southampton and Winchester, by Martin Biddle). In this context, the theoretical associations associated with the 'port-of-trade' label were superimposed on to the Anglo-Saxon emporia (or 'wic' settlements). Namely, that the settlements were controlled sites of exchange in luxury prestige objects, and specialist production, organised for the support of the Anglo-Saxon royal families and regional landholding aristocracies. Yet, the textual sources relating to the Anglo-Saxon emporia hardly ever mention imported luxuries and their control. Instead, they refer to tolls/taxes paid by merchants or their patrons, taken in the form of silver coinage, on the transport of bulk commodities entering and leaving the ports. Since the 1980s, the restrictive nature of the 'port-of –trade idea has also resulted in the presentation of merchants operating from these ports as highly subordinate clients acting on behalf secular and ecclesiastical patrons. In England, the potential for merchant seafarers to trade and make a profit, in addition to working for their patrons, has rarely been considered, nor has their social background as people from coastal, seafaring regions (in contrast to the more detailed work on these subjects by Stéphane Lebecq and Peter Schmid on the Continent). It is these shortcomings that are addressed below.

Coastal societies as a distinct entity in England, AD 650-1050

During the 1990s and the first decade of this century, the amount of archaeological evidence relating to settlement and exploitation of coastal landscapes has increased considerably, especially in eastern England, through a combination of systematic surface collection surveys (field-walking), palaeo-environmental surveys, targeted excavations and discoveries using metal-detectors. In certain regions we can now set the exchange, production and tax-collecting roles of the emporia into their true social context, due to

the increase in data. The coast of eastern England has received the greatest concentration of work, demonstrating that the coastal margins, despite often comprising poor-quality land of saltmarshes, fens and sand islands, were in fact dynamic and settled landscapes, with zones that were permanently and seasonal inhabited. They were marginal from the perspective of landholding authorities who judged value on the basis of potential for arable cultivation. Communication with and within coastal regions was also difficult by land.

Viewed from the sea, however, and from the perspective of transport by ship or boat, the coastal regions were not at all marginal. They were the principal point of call for shipping from Continental Europe. Coastal zones were also landscapes of opportunity, for their inhabitants, as a consequence of the difficulties of contacting and controlling them from their landward side. Shipping in the early medieval period required landfalls and landing places regularly in order to re-provision with food and fresh water, and the coastal islands and beach-landing sites of eastern England seem to have provided these provisioning functions, away from the eyes of ruling authorities. In addition, the poor quality of coastal landscapes for large-scale arable cultivation also promoted the development of specialist activities, especially salt production and animal husbandry of cattle and sheep. The role of the coastal regions as points of landfall and re-provisioning for Continental and other Anglo-Saxon mariners, and the tendency towards specialist production – and as a consequence, the need for exchange and trade as a basis of life – resulted in the very specific archaeological character of coastal societies, between the seventh and later ninth centuries. That character can be summarised as a lifestyle of long-distance contact and exchange, which resulted in a specifically maritime world view, and the presence of imported, apparent 'luxuries' on all elements of coastal settlement hierarchies, not merely aristocratic or 'higher status' settlements. In the coastal margins of eastern England, nearly everyone had access to imported goods and long-distance contacts. It is simply no longer possible to hold the notion that the role of emporia was to control access to imported, luxury prestige goods. If that was their function, then they did not have any influence on the dispersion and use of imports in coastal zones – a fact which sets coastal communities apart.

The trends from settlements around the Humber estuary, the main maritime entry point into Yorkshire and the East Midlands of England, abundantly illustrate the above points,

as does the evidence from the Lincolnshire and East Anglian coastal margins. By the mid seventh century, the Humber estuary gave access to Northumbria via the River Ouse, to the north; and Mercia, via the River Trent, to the south. A range of landing places and settlements have been discovered by systematic survey and chance discovery since 1990, which present a picture of the estuary zone and its immediate hinterland as the principal point of contact with seafaring traders bringing objects from France, Belgium, Rhineland Germany, and western Denmark, from the mid to late seventh century. Finds from these landing places and settlements, such as North Ferriby; Halton Skitter; Castledyke, Barton-upon-Humber; Holton-le-Clay and Riby-Cross roads and Flixborough, among others, seem to reflect a situation where the estuary was the principal zone of exchange with Continental Europe from the mid seventh century, rather than the likely emporium at Fishergate, in York, founded at the end of the seventh century at the main Northumbrian royal and Episcopal central place.

The settlement pattern around the Humber estuary and its hinterland, between the mid seventh and ninth century, appears to have comprised landing places and hamlets in the vicinity of the coast, and its immediate hinterland, alongside major estate centres further inland, like Flixborough, and possibly Holton-le-Clay, in north Lincolnshire, and Driffield, East Yorkshire. Distinguishing status differences between royal and aristocratic estate centres on the one hand, and lower status settlements on the other, is very difficult on the basis of access to imported objects. Old prestige good models would suggest that imported luxuries would indicate people of high social status, but as every settlement excavated around the Humber had access to imported goods, such ideas do not hold good in coastal regions. Similarly, where excavation has occurred most of the settlements around the Humber display evidence of people with weapons and riding gear, from the later seventh to ninth centuries (and sometimes later). The key difference between major estate centres and other hamlets seems to be the larger scale of consumption of foreign luxuries and animal and cultivated resources, especially in the case of Flixborough. Although, it is difficult to know the extent to which Flixborough is representative, due to exceptional preservation conditions on that settlement. When textual sources shed light on the social make-up of the inhabitants of the Humber coastal region, in the eleventh century, there was a high concentration of free 'sokemen' in this area, who lost significant elements of their freedom after the Norman Conquest. Such a situation also existed in the coastal regions of East Anglia, with very significant numbers of free-men.

The marginal and specialist character of coastal societies, and their maritime outlook and seafaring roles, may have resulted in the maintenance of greater levels of freedom for coastal family groups than for their counterparts on better agricultural soils in the interior of the Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms. Indeed, the trend for the possession of weapons, the ability to move round the landscape by boat and on horseback, and the apparent access to imported luxuries and the use of coinage, all suggest the likelihood of significant independence on the part of coastal inhabitants around the Humber, and southwards along the coast of the Lincolnshire marshes, the Fens and into East Anglia. The larger quantities of particular imports around the Humber, rather than York, and the absence of certain artefacts at York, also indicate direct exchange of imported materials. For example, the quantity of imported Ipswich ware, from the emporium in Suffolk, is much greater around the Humber than in York, and *sceattas* (silver coins) minted at Ribe, in Denmark, occur around the estuary and not in York, in addition to greater numbers of Frisian coins around the Humber.

At the conference further case studies will be presented relating to the Lincolnshire marshes, East Anglia and southern England, and further contrasts will be made with settlements in the interior of England.

Discussion will also addressed to the changing trends observable, from the late ninth to eleventh centuries, in England. Namely, the diminished maritime orientation of formerly key coastal exchange zones from the later ninth centuries, in favour of major port towns, such as York, Norwich, London, Southampton and others.

The population of emporia/port towns – a society apart

The current evidence from the coastal regions, especially along the North-Sea coast of England, suggests that emporia did not act successfully in controlling access to imported luxuries, if that was ever their intended role. Whereas, they certainly did play a key role as centres of taxation on the movement of bulk commodities by sea, as the textual sources have always suggested. However, if we remove their role on the control of socially-embedded exchange, as the data suggests that we should, then it becomes necessary to significantly re-evaluate the nature of the merchant and artisan communities that lived

permanently or periodically at the emporia, between the mid to late seventh and late ninth centuries. The past emphasis on their subordinate role to royal authority and landed aristocracies has resulted in a lack of attention paid to the archaeological characteristics of the people who lived in the emporia communities. Yet, there are striking traits observable amongst the archaeological reflections of these artisan and merchant seafaring communities. For example, weapons were abundant amongst the artisan and trading tenements at both Fishergate, York, and at Hamwic-Southampton, as was evidence of riding gear, suggesting the ability to move around the land quickly, in addition to maritime and river routes. Furthermore, in the refuse pits associated with the artisans and traders, imported glass vessel fragments of the finest quality, sometimes with reticella trails, were found (again at Fishergate, York and Hamwic-Southampton). The vessel fragments do not appear to have been used in bead making. It would appear, therefore, that a significant number of merchant and artisan households had access to the material culture of warfare, riding on horseback, and luxury drinking normally associated with the highest secular aristocratic households at their rural estate centres, like Flixborough in the hinterland of the Humber, and Portchester Castle, in the hinterland of Southampton.

What sets rural aristocrats apart from the merchant and artisan populations of the emporia is not their use of different items of portable wealth, and the trappings of mobility and warfare. Instead, the highest rural elites are marked out by their control of the resources of agricultural territories, and especially rituals of dominance such as hunting and wildfowling. In contrast, for artisan and seafaring communities their roles were defined by a much greater use of coinage and a broader usage of imported commodities in their everyday lives. Merchant seafarers or craft specialists based at a port also had greater freedom of choice in their movement in search of new patrons, in terms of immediate access to the seaways and other countries. This is not to say that the merchant and artisan communities were not the subject of policing and control. The discovery of the St. Mary's cemetery at Hamwic-Southampton, with its rich late seventh-century burials, often with weapons; and the Boss Hall and Buttermarket cemeteries, at Ipswich, could be interpreted as evidence of royal officers with a retinue to oversee toll collection and trade. The wider presence of weapons and other luxuries amongst the populations of the emporia, however, makes such an interpretation the subject of some debate. Although the need for a significant armed presence to control armed and, to a

certain extent, independent merchants would make sense from the administrative perspective of Anglo-Saxon kings.

While the movement of merchants, and specialist artisans in a seaward direction might have been the subject of less control, once tolls had been paid and patronage changes negotiated, it is likely that landward movement may have been the subject of greater regulation (at least as an administrative ideal). Away from the coastal zones, imported luxuries do seem, in general, to have portrayed status-related relationships. In such circumstances, the presence of travelling merchants or specialist artisans whose physical appearance and portable lifestyle was the same as many landed aristocrats, may have been deemed socially threatening and insulting to those with landed property who regarded themselves as the social superiors of merchants and craftsmen. The restrictions on travelling merchants and artisans in Anglo-Saxon law codes, in announcing their presence with bells or horns, prior to entering settlements, reinforces the sense of their being regarded as outside the ordinary in Anglo-Saxon society. Indeed, the perception of seafarer-merchants and craft specialists – especially metalworkers – as strange and outside 'normal' society may be one reason for specialist artisans banding together and locating themselves in coastal zones, with their tendency for specialist production and exchange. Alternatively, they could have been forcibly brought together, at emporia settlements by royal authority – although that authority seems to have had distinct limits. The wealthy, mid seventh-century fine-metalworking smith found at Tattershall Thorpe, Lincolnshire, buried on his own, next to the marshland and waterways to the sea, is emblematic of the transition from such 'outsider' itinerant artisans to the vibrant artisan and trading communities of the emporia. Yet, only in East Anglia were the products of artisans working at the emporia distributed widely into their hinterlands – seen most clearly in the dispersion of Ipswich ware pottery throughout East Anglia. So, the 'other-ness' of the emporia communities was largely maintained until their demise or transformation.

With the changes of the later ninth and early tenth centuries, especially Scandinavian influence in eastern England, and the creation of the West Saxon Kingdom of England, major port towns became much more integrated with their rural hinterlands, at the same time as the maritime-orientation and freedoms of coastal populations diminished overall. Consequently, the towns became the principal locations for artisan activity, producing for

their surrounding regions in a way that had not been the case with most of the earlier emporia. At the same time, Scandinavian rulers and their retinues were mainly resident in major towns – especially York, which resulted in the residence of political leaders and patrons, artisans and merchants in the same place. Taking York as an example, we can show that the concentration of political patronage and ecclesiastical patronage (from the Archbishops of York, under Scandinavian, and then West Saxon rule) resulted in very wealthy artisan and resident, or transient, merchant populations. The remains form the Coppergate excavations illustrate this point, with its concentration of ironworkers, gold and silver workers, amongst other crafts. Also found within these artisan tenements were found riding gear and weapons (spears, arrowheads and sword furniture), amongst items denoting integration within Scandinavian trade routes to the orient, in the form of silk and Arabic coins. The fact, however, that the wonderful, late eighth-century 'Coppergate helmet' was hidden in a well in Coppergate, probably during the tenth century, might suggest that there were limitations on what merchants and artisans could wear and use, without prohibition from political authorities.

Nevertheless, overall the Scandinavian, West Saxon and Danish stimulation of major port centres like York and London, through the later ninth, tenth and early eleventh centuries, reduced the extent to which major port towns and their populations were divorced from their rural hinterlands. For example, pottery produced in York was dispersed throughout its hinterland in the tenth and eleventh centuries, as was the case with pottery produced at Lincoln. What set the major port towns, like York and London, apart from their contemporary societies by c. AD 1000 was the shear scale of craft specialisation and trade, and the complexity and diversity of their populations. By AD 1000, London was the object of twice yearly visits by merchants, known as 'Esterlings' – the easterners, who paid their port tolls in large quantities of pepper from Indonesia or the Malabar coast of India. By the eleventh century, it was this early medieval 'globalisation' that set the major port towns and their societies apart.