

SILVER HANDLING TRADITIONS DURING THE VIKING AGE.

SOME OBSERVATIONS AND THOUGHTS ON THE PHENOMENON OF PECKING AND BENDING¹

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The phenomenon of secondary treatment of coins of the Viking Age has engendered great interest in numismatic research ever since the Swedish scholar Ulla Linder Welin published a classification system in the 1950s and since secondary treatment began to be systematically recorded in the CNS series.² Research on secondary treatment has facilitated not only new methodological advances in analyzing and characterizing the composition of coin- and hack silver hoards from the Viking period, as Marion Archibald has convincingly shown, but has also promoted an interdisciplinary dialogue between numismatics and archaeology.³ In this respect it is important to stress the significance of the CNS series, which aims to publish the coin material from individual Viking Age hoards found inside the borders of modern Sweden. A precondition for the preliminary conclusions on the pattern of secondary treatment drawn by Brita Malmer and other numismatists has been the archaeological principle of regarding individual hoards as closed finds. As such, hoards were not only seen as a reservoir for individual coin types which reflect the monetary history of coin-using societies outside Scandinavia its primary context-but also the 'silver-consuming' and non-monetary secondary context in which the hoard was buried.⁴ It was thus possible to conduct comparative analyses on secondary treatment in hoards between different regions inside Sweden. The secondary treatment of coins and other objects of silver, such as fragmentation, pecking and bending, has been regarded as the traces of 'economical behavior' in societies which were not monetized in the sense that they recognized and accepted coins as an official standard of value. In this respect research on secondary treatment has opened new perspectives in understanding the significance of silver during the Viking Age. Thus the CNS series provided not only numismatic data but also information about the treatment of coins after they left their primary monetary contexts. But, as I want to show here, research conducted in this field has interpreted secondary treatment as evidence of circulation only in the monetary sense.

¹ This article is a revised version of an earlier paper (Kilger 2003).

² Malmer (1975-); Welin (1956).

³ Archibald (1990).

⁴ However non-monetary objects like ingots, ornaments, rods and so forth were not integrated in the CNS series, which is understandable from a strictly numismatic point of view but has inhibited further common research between numismatics and archaeology in Sweden.

Alternative interpretations which might reflect social and cultural aspects of secondary treatment were not recognized or were simply disregarded.⁵

In this article I wish to discuss some aspects of silver-handling which developed in Scandinavia during the Viking Age. As I pointed out earlier, secondary treatment should not be seen only as evidence of economic habits, but also be put into a broader cultural-historical context, one which underlines the significance of social, symbolic and cognitive aspects and the changing meanings of silver in Viking-Age society.

There are three separate developments in the cultural history of secondary treatment and weighing seen from a Scandinavian perspective. First, there is an initial phase which is linked to the primary monetary role of silver coins, and in which the rules and handling principles valid in the monetized home countries, for example in the Caliphate for the dirham, continue to have momentum. Second, there is a phase of 'routinization', to use a term recently coined by Søren Sindbæk.⁶ This phase is related to the establishment of weight-related economic principles, ideas and practices in Scandinavia and Eastern Europe in the wake of the import of dirham silver from the east, which began in the ninth century. Several categories of secondary treatment have been identified which can be connected to the importation of foreign silver to Scandinavia. Generally techniques such as notches and nicks can be connected to the Early Viking Age and the importation of dirham silver in the ninth and tenth centuries.⁷ Pecking and bending are phenomena which generally - with some exceptions - are observed in hoards from the Late Viking Age which mostly contain penny silver from Western Europe. Secondary treatment became likely as a regular practice among those groups who handled, and thus valued, weighed and tested, silver as bullion. Here we can probably discern the development of different regional traditions along with the integration and amalgamation of weight-based economic thoughts into material culture.⁸ Finally there is a third phase of confrontation and transformation. In this last phase, which starts at the end of the tenth century when the importation of western-European coined silver began, we see the introduction of coin-based economic principles in Scandinavia. The rise of royal power in the three kingdoms and the concomitant establishment of towns, of a foreign religion and of different ways of evaluating and counting in the transactional sphere threatened to alter a society then accustomed to weight-based economic practices.

In the following pages I will touch upon some aspects of the second but will concentrate on the third phase, which emphasizes the silver-handling practices and the forms of secondary treatment of coined silver which became dominant during the late Viking Age, i.e. pecking and bending. The next section will consider some theoretical aspects underlying the concept of circulation which are often applied in numismatic research. Following this discussion is a reevaluation of some methodological and diagnostic aspects of the phenomenon of pecking and bending. Finally I will propose an alternative interpretation of this phenomenon.

⁵ Malmer (2003).

⁶ Sindbæk (2005).

⁷ Rispling (1998); Welin (1956).

⁸ Gustin (2004).

Royal coin economies and traditional weight economies

During the tenth and eleventh century large amounts of silver coins were transferred from the monetized regions of Western Europe to Scandinavia. There has long been discussion about whether coins were used as a general means of payment in Scandinavia during longer periods of the Viking Age and whether they had the same significance in the economic and politic life as on the continent or in the British Isles. For the eleventh century, however, there is growing evidence in the numismatic and archaeological record that coins were treated as money as, for instance, in the Elbe-Slavonic territory which had been characterized during the tenth century by extremely fragmentary hack-silver hoards and were thus dominated by weight-based economic principles.⁹ In Scandinavia monetary rules and principles were probably not introduced on a large scale, but rather gained an early foothold in localities which were under the firm control of kings. Towns and markets like Lund and Sigtuna, established on royal initiative at the end of the tenth century, were the centers of substantial coin production modelled on the advanced contemporary Anglo-Saxon coinage 'industry'.¹⁰ Hoard evidence demonstrates that foreign coins, scrap silver and ornaments which were previously used as bullion were increasingly replaced by the kings' own money. The thriving towns of the eleventh century show signs of a growing urban monetization.¹¹ Scandinavian kings had been trying to introduce a monetary system since the beginning of the eleventh century and succeeded, at least in Denmark and Norway.¹² Here they imposed a system of payment based on coins which aimed to control and finally disrupt the traditional handling of silver bullion within their territory.

Trade with silver had existed in Scandinavia from the beginning of the ninth century with the arrival of dirham-silver from the Caliphate. Until the formation of a royal coin-based economy, foreign silver in the shape of coins, ornaments and hack silver was valued indifferently, according to weight and silver content.¹³ In non-monetary societies of this kind a range of different rules and conventions for handling silver and using weighing equipment is likely to develop in the absence of a central authority. There are different ways to understand weighing traditions in a non-official and non-institutionalized sense. They were structured on a discursive level to suit the requirements of everyday practice between members of a distinct group and between members of different communities. There certainly existed conventions for what was tolerable and acceptable in an actual weighing situation. It is conceivable that, in a longer-term perspective, conventions evolved for the weighing and handling of silver out of established practices and standards. We should therefore expect these conventions to be conservative and to have distinctive features in different regions of Viking-Age Scandinavia. We should also expect, in the wake of an established weight-based economy, rituals that safeguarded the idea of morally-sanctioned transactions and of good partnership. Finally, the basic idea of weighing in the Viking Age implied calculating quantities of

⁹ Kilger (2000, 2004).

¹⁰ Malmer, Ros and Tesch (1991).

¹¹ Risvaag and Christophersen (2004).

¹² Gullbekk (2003) 20-25; Skaare (1976) 68-107; von Heijne (2004) 98-177.

¹³ Hårdh (1996).

unalloyed substances like pure silver and gold. In this context the balance scale was an important tool because it guaranteed that the substance in the right weighing pan was equal in weight to the substance in the left pan.

There are two main ways of approaching these weighing traditions. First, one can consider the weighing equipment itself, i.e. the types of weights or scales that were acceptable, and also the methods employed to handle precious metals: for instance, whether coins, ornaments, ingots and hack silver were weighed together. During the later Viking Age, coined silver was probably handled on its own, in both larger and smaller quantities, weighed separately from hack silver or, in some regions, probably even counted out.¹⁴ There is also the question of how hack silver fragments were handled. Some scholars suggest that these were not only weighed but were also counted individually. The most controversial aspect is whether they were used as a means of payment in a coin like manner during periods when weight-based economic principles were dominant in Scandinavia and Eastern Europe, between the ninth and tenth centuries.¹⁵ The second approach to weighing traditions would focus on analyzing the practice of weighing itself, i.e. the specific methods applied to calculate and measure silver and gold. This would also involve considering the types of mathematical knowledge in use. Different weighing practices are likely to have existed during the Earlier and Later Iron Age, which reflected the monetary situation of the countries where the specific weighing apparatus originally derived.¹⁶

Alongside the established practices for the handling of silver during weighing, there were also routines to validate the purity of the metal. In achieving this, silver was treated in different ways. It could be bent, scratched or pecked with a sharp tool, preferably a knife. The testing of silver was part of an established practice which developed among those groups of people who handle silver on a regular basis and in large proportions over longer periods of time. These practices encompassed a number of rules and techniques which became acknowledged inside these groups as the accepted method of handling silver.

The recording of secondary individual data and the idea of circulation

Viking Age hoards from Sweden have been published systematically by the CNS series since 1975.¹⁷ From the very start, the publisher's intention was to record all available information on monetary silver contained in individual hoards. Besides a numismatic description, it was also considered important to record all other data attainable from each individual coin. There is a distinction to be made between the primary data of an individual coin as it was minted, i.e. its weight, diameter and die-axis, and secondary data such as damage affecting each coin during circulation, which include the degree of fragmentation, and traces of bending and pecking.¹⁸ A system has been designed to record this secondary data, and the methodological principles and preliminary results have been laid down

¹⁴ Kilger (2000) 128ff.; (2003) 5.

¹⁵ Hårdh (1976) 141; Kilger (2000) 116-121; Wiechmann (1996) 173-178.

¹⁶ Kyhlberg (1980), 158-174; Steuer (1987).

¹⁷ Malmer (1975-).

¹⁸ Malmer (1985b) 49.

by Brita Malmer in several papers.¹⁹ Apart from the description and discussion of the methodological and diagnostic aspects of this secondary treatment, there has been little effort made so far to understand this prominent phenomenon of Viking-Age hoarding. A basic assumption in the interpretations made by Malmer and others is that silver in general, whether coined silver, hack silver or ornaments, functioned as a means of exchange in the transactional sphere. Silver was valued according to its weight and silver content. Furthermore, coins were probably not used in their original sense as official means of payment issued by a government, but changed hands as unauthorized scrap metal. A theoretical concept which is essential in this argument is the idea of circulation. Circulation describes the movement of silver, i.e. the frequency of exchange: how often bits of silver changed hand in societies which followed weight-economic principles. From this point of view the concept of circulation can be used as an index for the movement of silver and economic activity in certain regions across certain periods. Regions like Gotland have, for instance, been described as economically underdeveloped because silver was hoarded rather than circulating.²⁰ In contrast to Brita Malmer's view, Kenneth Jonsson regards Gotland as economically advanced. He claims that coins did in fact circulate, this being propelled by a silver surplus, and that silver functioned as a means of exchange in everyday trade. Individuals engaged in transactions required floating capital like silver coins.²¹ However, both scholars emphasize that there was no steady flow of capital in Gotlandic society. Only a small part of the hoarded silver was used in everyday transactions. Even traces of secondary treatment like pecks and bending have been associated with the concept of circulation. The number of pecks has, for example, been regarded as an indicator of how long coins circulated.²² In this view many pecks could provide evidence for the velocity of circulation, either that silver circulated intensively during a short period or more extensively over a longer period.²³

The use of the concept of circulation and its implications for our understanding of the economic structure of Viking-Age society may be seen as confusing for the non-numismatist. The way this concept has thus far been presented in numismatic studies inadvertently creates associations with an institutionalized money economy and, by extension, with the modern market economy. In a society dominated by the principles of supply and demand economic activity is measured and evaluated by the amount of capital in circulation. Circulation understood as cash-flow profoundly affects structures of investment and services. In addition circulation also automatically brings up the idea of trust or confidence. Trust in the currency is the cornerstone of a well-functioning market economy and without confidence, circulation will cease and society will be destabilized.

It might be doubted of course whether these associations were in the minds of the authors in their

¹⁹ Malmer (1981a, 1981b, 1993, 2000).

²⁰ Brahme (1990); Malmer and Rispling (1981).

²¹ Jonsson (1982).

²² Svensson (1986).

²³ Persson (von Heijne) (1992).

analysis of secondary treatment. There is no doubt that silver was used as a means of payment and circulated in a transactional sphere established by the individuals who handled and exchanged silver during the Viking Age. But it can be questioned whether the conceived movement of silver can give us a useful understanding of the 'economic situations', the circumstances in which silver was tested and exchanged, and according to what common ideas it was valued. So far, studies of secondary treatment have been applied to measure and quantify economic activity or, in a narrower sense, the flow of valuables in certain regions. Regions which displayed little or no sign of circulation, and thus a lower volume of transactions, were characterized as economically backward, while, conversely, regions with a surplus of silver were regarded as economically advanced. But this is to understand economic life in too narrow and restricted a sense. Thus, it is difficult to imagine how a quantitative approach on its own would lead to a broader understanding of the processes which governed and formed transactions. From my point of view the idea of circulation which is traditionally connected to the process and phenomenon of pecking only gives a one-sided interpretation to the anonymous movement of coins and silver which ignores the social and symbolic meanings existing in the transactional sphere during the Viking Age.²⁴

Quantitative aspects of Pecking

As already noted, different traditions of testing have been documented in numismatic studies.²⁵ The best-known such tradition is referred to as pecking. Pecking is a distinctive practice in which coins and silver objects generally were marked with a sharp instrument, probably the edge or rip of a knife. Pecking has been documented in northern and eastern European hoards from the Late Viking Age. The appearance of this 'new' way of testing silver is associated with the large-scale import of coined silver from Western Europe to Scandinavia and Eastern Europe which began in the last decade of the tenth century.²⁶ However, pecking was not a new phenomenon that started with the arrival of western European pennies in Scandinavia. Outside Scandinavia the practice is documented in the British Isles.²⁷ It is certainly documented in some instances in hack-silver hoards found in the British Isles, especially in the territory of the former Danelaw: these hoards are dated to the second half of the ninth century and can probably be linked to Viking activities and the presence of people of Scandinavian descent in England.²⁸

From the point of view expressed earlier, it has been stressed that pecks might indicate the economic activity in a given region at a given time. This raises the question of what the number of pecks on a coin can tell us. Are many pecks an indication that this coin has been circulating for a longer period of time than a coin with only a few pecks? Does one peck correspond to a single exchange situation? Has a coin with around 50 pecks necessarily changed hands a proportionate number of times, or

²⁴ Gustin (2004) 123-237.

²⁵ Welin (1956).

²⁶ Malmer (1981a) 24ff.; (1981b) 397ff.; (1985a) 190ff.

²⁷ Gullbekk (2003) 25ff.

²⁸ Archibald (1990) 12ff.

could it be that the person who tested it was suspicious and tested the coin repeatedly on a single occasion? Alternatively, is it reasonable to conceive that people who handled silver on a regular basis might well pick up and test just one coin from a larger sample?

There are examples from Viking-Age hoards which show that clusters of die-duplicate coins existed. Brita Malmer has made some interesting observations on hoards from Scania and Bornholm which contained parcels of die-duplicate Anglo-Scandinavian imitations. In her analysis of the patterns of pecking in Igelösa (t.p.q. 1003), Everlöv (t.p.q. 1018), Skovang (t.p.q. 1018) and Grönby (t.p.q. 1024), she concluded that these hoards had a low but average pecking frequency.²⁹ It could also be argued, however, that parts of these hoards, such as the parcels of die-duplicates, had never been split up between the place they were struck and the locality where they were finally deposited. They were handled together and may never have entered an open circulation pool. The person or the few persons who made the peck marks probably acquired the coins directly from the place where they were minted. The parcels of peck-marked die-duplicates might indicate that silver was exchanged in larger coherent clusters.

The methods used so far in documenting pecks are based on counting their number—a quantitative approach. It can be questioned whether this approach really has the potential to answer the question why coins were bent and pecked. Instead I will try to address this phenomenon from a different perspective. I am more inclined to answer the question of how coins were bent and pecked using practical observations of silver-handling. From this point of view it is more rewarding to focus more on the qualitative aspects of the testing of silver, which might give a different picture and a more varied basis of understanding. A first step in this direction is to visualize the technique of testing itself.

Bending

It is highly probable that the practices of bending and pecking are interrelated and were carried out together during the testing process.³⁰ However, it should be mentioned that coined silver from Irish and western Scottish hoards dating to the middle of the tenth century was bent but not pecked. Astonishingly, however, non-numismatic silver in these hoards was pecked.³¹ There are two conceivable reasons why coins might be bent: on the one hand, to test the purity of the silver and to recognize forgeries; on the other, to facilitate pecking. Coins with a copper core would probably crack on the surface from this treatment.³² It is difficult to describe how coins are bent in a systematic way that can be used to facilitate comparison. Bends were often executed quite randomly and indistinctly. Sometimes the same coin was bent from different angles. During their lifetime as bullion, coins could be bent back and forth several times. Some specimens were flattened and became completely even again. Malmer has described this technique as flattening, a process she connects to the end of the circulation of the coin, though she does not discuss the reasons for this

²⁹ Malmer (1997) 51.

³⁰ Malmer (2000) 24.

³¹ Archibald (1990) 20.

³² Hatz (1974) 99.

suggestion. Instead she emphasizes that coins treated in such a manner are difficult to record.³³ Despite being special cases, it is clear that these coins highlight the difficulties involved in creating a common classification and quantification system for bends as a specific technique of testing.³⁴

The practice of 'carving'

A distinct feature often observable on late Viking-Age coins is the way pecks are placed on the coin. They are often applied in rows (fig. 1)³⁵ or sometimes in pairs.³⁶ In a strict sense, coins were actually not pecked or 'stabbed' as implied by the terminology, but rather chafed with the sharp tip or blade of a knife. In fact, pecks in rows should actually be conceived as a special type of carved marks, resulting in a sharp edge on one end and a half circular shaped cut on the other. This cutting or carving could more easily be achieved by bending the coin, and pecks are often seen to follow the ridge created in this way.



Fig. 1

A closer look at the cut angle reveals that pecks were applied horizontally from the side, and not vertically. In this case I would like to use the term 'carving', which more accurately describes this particular technique of testing. A similar technique is used when a piece of wood is carved with a knife: when small areas or details are being carved in wood, it is easier to control the sharp edge of the knife if the blade is pressed on the wood or the metal and chafed in small movements towards the thumb of the cutting hand. A right-handed carver would hold the coin with the thumb and forefinger of the left hand. The thumb of the cutting hand counter-balances and guides the slow though strong carving movement being propelled by the forefinger holding the knife (fig. 2).

If the coin is bent into the shape of a V or U it can be held level more easily by the forefinger and held in place by the thumb of the left hand holding the coin. Furthermore a bent coin can be penetrated more easily by the rounded edge on the upper part of the knife. It should be possible to decide in

³³ Malmer (2000) 24.

³⁴ Kilger (2003), 6.

³⁵ Kilger (2003) 6-9; Malmer (2000) 24.

³⁶ Archibald (1990) 15.

some instances if the carvings on the bent ridge of a coin were made left- or right handed. The person making the carvings had to be skilled to handle the sharp knife effectively on the tiny surface. To conclude, I should like to distinguish the technique of carving, as applied to the ridged blank by horizontal movements of the blade, from actual pecking, which is executed on the coin surface with blows which are directed more vertically.



Fig. 2

Rows of carvings on the ridge of a bent coin probably indicate that these marks were all made on a single occasion. This technique of testing was probably executed with small rhythmic and repetitive movements at short intervals across the surface, giving the person who was applying the test a good perception of the consistency of silver, i.e. whether the metal was harder or smoother. Other pecking techniques on flattened coins have been described by Malmer.³⁷ In her analysis of coins from the late Viking-Age hoard of Johannishus (t.p.q. 1120), she found several examples of German coins which were covered with pecks. Previously-bent coins had been flattened to ease the process of vertical pecking. Only a few pecks were in the center, and most of them were aligned circularly along the edge of the coin.³⁸ Such coins were probably secured with a finger in the center and were turned over and over during vertical pecking.

Counting pecks and carvings

If we assume that the practice of carving is related to the testing of silver, then every ridge with cut-marks in rows should be understood as a single testing event. Understanding pecks in these instances as carvings will therefore have implications for how we count these events and whether we can relate the number of cut marks at all to the number of exchange transactions. More importantly, it forces us to look at individual hoards themselves.

³⁷ Malmer (2000) 24ff.

³⁸ Malmer (2000) fig. 9-10.



Fig. 3

I have tried to apply this insight methodically in a study of the late Viking-Age Norwegian hoard of Sandsaunet (t.p.q. 1011) and Dronningens gate (t.p.q. 1029) with the aid of a microscope it was possible to study the different testing techniques employed. The angle of the cut revealed the direction individual coins were cut from. It was also possible to distinguish different, but coherent, series or intervals of carvings. Some coins from the Dronningens gate hoard showed similar carving procedures. Two series of carvings were cut on the same ridge but obviously from different directions, probably indicating two different tests

In publications of late Viking-Age hoards the documentation of patterns of secondary treatment should record the series of carvings cut into ridges and even the angle of cut, if they were made from different directions. In what follows, and exemplified by three coins, I will illustrate a system of recording which take these features into account in a manner different from the established unspecified way of peck-counting used in the CNS series. The objective is to stress the different qualitative and individual aspects in the practice of carving.

The first example is a coin of Archbishop Willigis of Mainz from the Sandsaunet hoard (t.p.q. 1011). The coin was carved on the obverse only (tab. 1). Carving was executed in two series on the ridge 'r' of the obverse with 5 and 3 cuts. 2 more cuts were applied outside the ridge. Usually this would have been recorded as 10 pecks on the obverse.

Table 1.

Issuer	Dbg	Mint	Weight	Carvings
Archbishop Willigis	802	Mainz	1.0 5	r+3r+2/0

The second example is also from Sandsaunet - an anonymous cross denier probably struck Magdeburg. The coins from Mainz and Magdeburg were both issued at the same time, around the year 1000. Both sides of this example were carved, the obverse with 17 and the reverse with 7 marks (table 2). Three groups can be discerned. There are two groups on the obverse ridge, with 9 and 3 carvings respectively, and 5 marks not placed on the ridge. The reverse has one group with 5 carvings and two marks outside.

Table 2.

Issuer	Dbg	Mint	Weight	Carvings
Anonymous	1330	Magdeburg	1.4	9r+3r+5/5r+2

If we compare the two coins while remembering that both were issued at the same time and came from the same hoard, the Mainz pfennig was tested at least three times, while the Magdeburg coin was possibly tested on four or more occasions. The Mainz pfennig had 10 marks and the Magdeburg pfennig 24, this being one of the most-marked coins in the hoard. As a final example I would like to show a cross denier from the Dronningens gate hoard, discovered in the city of Trondheim (fig. 3). Looking closely at this specimen, it is evident that the carvings on the ridge are not oriented the same way: thus, while the prominent ridge was always used, it was cut from different directions. In this case it would be convenient to indicate different orientations on a carved ridge with the following sign, "><" (table 3).

Table 3

Issuer	Dbg	Mint	Weight	Carvings
Anonymous	1335	(Meissen)	1.05	15r><+4r/0

Using this system to record carvings it becomes clear that the traditional quantitative approach, as applied, for instance, in the Swedish CNS volumes, gives a different impression to the reader from a qualitative analysis of individual coins, as conducted here. Another interesting aspect is to look at coins from the same hoard which were not tested or tested on one side only. This could give us valuable insights into the routines of testing. As pointed out earlier, it is unlikely that all coins were tested when they changed hands. In the hoard from Sandsaunet different tools were probably used, which left either deeper cuts or more scratch-like marks on the coin's surface. Through this qualitative approach, I have demonstrated that it is possible to record these individual testing events and thereby also individual carvers. From this point of view, a combined analysis of the numismatic composition of the hoard and the secondary treatment of the individual coins would probably open perspectives and inspire further interesting questions. In my opinion the anonymous concept of circulation has overshadowed the possibilities of an individual and more qualitative approach to hoarded material, which focuses instead on the practice of silver handling during the Viking Age.

Pecking as repetitive practice and ritual

One such perspective would be to look at secondary treatment like carving, bending, pecking and nicking as various types of repetitive practices which became part of the routine of handling large amounts of precious metals. It is conceivable that the initial purpose of testing the purity of silver became at a later stage a convention among the community of silver handlers. Looking at secondary treatment from this perspective, the practice of testing is comparable to the skill of weighing silver. This required not only an insight into how to use high precision tools like the collapsible balance scale, but also the knowledge to calculate specific quantities of silver with the aid of weights. Similarly, handling silver required both a special kind of knowledge and a rubric for how to proceed in an exchange situation. Pecking could be understood in this context as part of different 'rituals' involved in exchange situations between two trading partners. For instance, it is conceivable that both sides were pecking a sample of objects out of the total amount of silver to be exchanged.

Pecking in this context would not only have the practical function of testing silver but have primarily a social significance, guaranteeing trust and good partnership. The practice of carving was understood as signing a contract, irrespective of the silver content. By contrast, the anonymous use of money as coined silver represented a totally different approach to exchange, which altered the 'old' and good practices and traditions of handling. The introduction of a coin-based payment system in the towns of the late Viking Age Scandinavian kingdoms can be interpreted not only as a strategy of monetary control and the achievement of profit, but also as an attempt to overthrow the old weight and silver handling practices which were at the heart of the traditional kin-based society. Seen from this perspective, pecking and carving can reveal the social and symbolic aspects of exchange scenarios in a silver-handling society. This provides a totally different picture from the concept of circulation which has traditionally been associated with the phenomenon of pecking, and which aims to quantify the movement of silver and to measure the scale of economic activity.

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