# discussion article

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## Exchange, religion, identity and central places in the early Middle Ages

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## Abstract

Exchange in the early Middle Ages has traditionally been studied from a 'technological', 'economic' or 'socio-political' perspective, and has examined such issues as transport practices, supply and demand, or the ways in which exchange helps to maintain and reproduce the socio-political order. A particular focus of research has been the significance of the exchange of prestige goods for the power of the king and the aristocracy. There has been almost no analysis to date of the complexity of the exchange system as a whole, which – together with the exchange of commodities and gifts – includes the keeping of objects. Nor have archaeologists paid much attention to the relationship between forms of exchange (and the norms and values associated with them) and the imaginary world from which 'value' is derived in exchange. In the early medieval Frankish world there seems to have been a close relationship between exchange and the imaginary Christian world. In this contribution, I will attempt to examine the relationship between exchange and the imaginary world in the early Middle Ages, and to demonstrate how the results can modify the picture we have of central places like Maastricht (an old centre) and Dorestad (one of the new emporia).

## Keywords

exchange; early Middle Ages; conceptualization; archaeology; emporia; saints; mythical capital; coins

### Introduction

The treasury of the St Servatius Basilica in Maastricht contains one of the most significant museum treasures in the Netherlands: according to tradition, the key of St Servatius, the 4th-century bishop of the Tongeren (Figure 1) (Koldeweij 1985, 61–128). Although a splendid precious metal object, its importance lies not only in its material value, but in the fact that it is still held at the same site where it is said to have been deposited at the beginning of the 9th century. Another object from the treasury, the silver-embossed crucifix base in the form of a Roman triumphal arch, has a less fortunate history (Timmers 1971, 25–26; Dutton 1998, 63–67). We only know of it from a 17th-century drawing (Figure 2). On one side was a *tabula ansata* (a specific form of plate with inscription) with the name of the man who commissioned it: no less a personage than Einhard, an important aristocrat, confidant to and biographer of Charlemagne and – although a layman – abbot

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**Figure 1** The so-called key of St Servatius (early 9th century).

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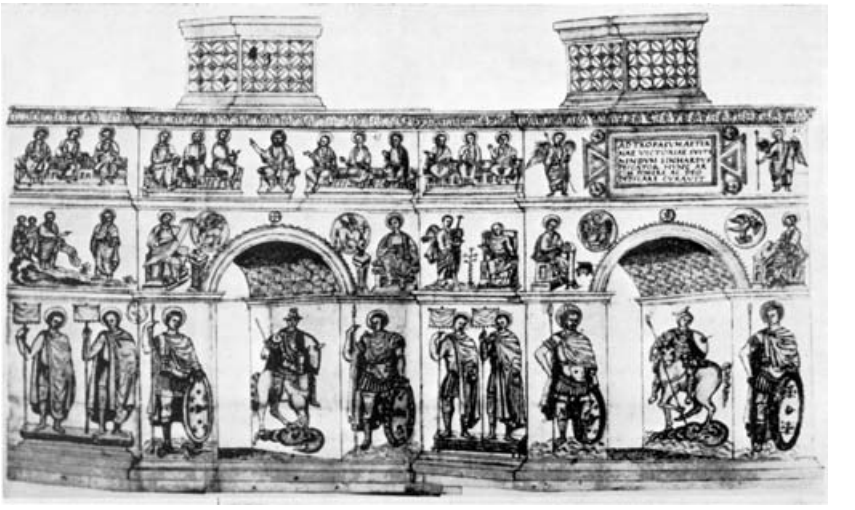


**Figure 2** Drawing of the foot of a cross in the form of a Roman triumphal arch donated by Einhard to the basilica of St Servatius in Maastricht (first half 9th century) (Paris, Bibliothèque national, MS fr. 10440, fol. 45).

of the St Servatius Abbey in Maastricht (Dutton 1998, pp. xi–xli). Einhard favoured one of his abbeys with this valuable gift, and we should bear in mind the possibility that, as with the cross on the triumphal arch, he was also responsible for bringing the key to Maastricht. In the early Middle Ages, Maastricht was the principal centre in the central Meuse valley, an area I regard as one of the core regions of northern Gaul (Maastricht: Theuws 2001; Panhuysen, De La Haye and Gauthier 2002; Meuse valley: Werner 1980). It was a highly dynamic region: competition there between aristocratic groups in the 8th and 9th centuries produced the leaders of the Frankish world. Alongside traditional power bases such as a retinue, landed property, official positions, a fortress and good marriage partners, their power probably also derived from the part they played in developing trade networks and their firm control over artisanal production (Theuws 1990). Maastricht was always a highly desirable prize in the competition between aristocratic groups, but probably did not fall permanently into the hands of the Carolingians until the time of Charles Martel (Theuws 2001, 182, 186–93, esp. 192, note 110). The emergence of a central place like Maastricht has traditionally been explained from an institutional and economic perspective.

Economic development has been one of the key models used to explain the emergence of Maastricht and other centres in the central Meuse valley such as Huy, Namur and Dinant (Rousseau 1930 and the responses of Despy 1968, Devroey 1993 (1991) and Hodges 1999). Rousseau and others saw these places as intermediate stations along the Meuse, linking the Mediterranean with the northern world. However, this model reduced economic development to trade alone and, more specifically, to long-distance trade in mainly precious commodities. Researchers viewed trade as self-explanatory, with transactions

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between traders being of a commercial nature, no different from those of modern times. The flourishing currency system in the 7th century seemed to lend tangible support to the economic model. Pointing to the significance of gift exchange, historians like Duby and the numismatist Grierson, however, expressed doubts about this view of early medieval exchange (Grierson 1959; Duby 1989). Somewhat later, archaeologists too became receptive to the anthropological concept of exchange. This led to the identification of societies where primarily prestige goods were not exchanged on a commercial basis but in other ways. This in turn generated the notion of prestige-goods circulation, and societies were described with this as their modus operandi. Such societies were said to have existed in early medieval north-western Europe. However, despite the genuine need for the differentiated picture presented by Duby, Grierson and others, the resulting distinction between the exchange of gifts and of commodities, and the strong emphasis on elite 'gift exchange' as pivotal to the system of exchange as a whole, remained unsatisfactory (Moreland 2000a). In the meantime the debate among anthropologists about the opposition between commodities and gifts had generated interesting new insights. I will briefly outline this debate, presenting some definitions in order to arrive at a framework for research into exchange in early medieval central places. I will then examine, using different types of central place (Maastricht, Dorestad, Tiel and Deventer) as examples, the complexity of the early medieval exchange system.[2] In contrast to the current debate (Hodges 2000; Moreland 2000a; 2000b), I will focus not so much on the socio-political frameworks of exchange, but on the relationship between exchange and religion, norms and values, and the imaginary world from which 'value' is derived. Taking this route, we will begin to see early medieval central places in a new light.

## Exchange: concepts

In 1982, in *Gifts and commodities*, Gregory defined the exchange of gifts and commodities as follows: 'Commodity exchange relations are objective relations of equality established by the exchange of alienated objects between independent transactors. Gift exchange relations are personal relations of rank, established by the exchange of inalienable objects between transactors who are related' (Gregory 1982, 71).

In addition to the relationship between those involved in the transaction, this definition still gave prominence to the role of the object. In 1989 Bloch and Parry introduced a further differentiation when they abandoned the concepts of 'commodities' and 'gifts' and emphasized the nature of the transaction and its meaning in the social system. They made a distinction between 'transactions of the long term' and 'transactions of the short term' (Bloch and Parry 1989, 24). Here 'term' is used metaphorically; it does not refer to the actual duration of the transaction. Their definitions are as follows: 'two related but separate transactional orders: on the one hand transactions concerned with the reproduction of the long-term social or cosmic order; on the other, a "sphere" of short-term transactions concerned with the arena of individual competition'.

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Bloch and Parry's definitions are clearly no less problematical for archaeologists – after all, by looking at the object itself, we cannot establish the kind of transaction it was involved in. Nevertheless we may assume that Einhard's gifting of the cross to the St Servatius Abbey was a transaction of the long term. This does not mean, however, that the transfer of a simple earthenware pot in a humble hut of the same period was necessarily a transaction of the short term. It is difficult to establish that from the object alone. Moreover, the same objects could belong to both spheres of exchange. Here we arrive at one of the central parts of my argument: an object can be transferred from one sphere of exchange to the other (see also Appadurai 1988; Kopytoff 1988). In so doing, the nature of that object changes. Bloch and Parry, and others, suggest why this should be so.

The chief reason is that each sphere of exchange is associated with a particular set of norms and values. This even applies to modern-day society. For example, we associate money primarily with short-term transactions, with the 'impersonal' and the 'calculating'. If money is given as a birthday present, it is usually followed by apologies (Bloch and Parry 1989, 9). Such apologies are rituals which must go hand in hand with the transfer of an object (i.e. money) from one sphere of exchange to the other. In other words, the transformation that objects undergo when moving between spheres is accompanied by procedures and rituals (Bloch and Parry 1989, 25). This is necessary not only because an object and actors are involved in the transaction but, much more importantly, because the central norms and values of a society are at issue (Bloch and Parry 1989, 23–30).

It is important to understand that the exchange of both commodities and gifts occurs in almost all societies. The transfer of objects between spheres shows that those spheres do not exist alongside one another, but continually articulate with one another. This articulation of spheres of exchange is not a casual matter; it involves the values and norms of a society (Bloch and Parry 1989, 23–28). To understand a society's system of exchange, we cannot be content with studying a single sphere such as the exchange of commodities; together the spheres form an indivisible whole, an entire transactional order whose interconnections need to be analysed (Bloch and Parry 1989, 23; see also note 1). Central places demonstrate that the articulation of spheres of exchange is not simply a mental construct, but critical to how a society functions. It is there, at defined points in time, that we are able to observe this exchange in specific practices. I base these ideas on the work of Appadurai, from whom I have taken the notion of 'tournaments of value' (Appadurai 1988, 21):

> Tournaments of value are complex periodic events that are removed in some culturally well-defined way from the routines of economic life. Participation in them is likely to be both a privilege of those in power and an instrument of status contests between them. The currency of such tournaments is also likely to be set apart through well understood cultural diacritics. Finally, what is at issue in such tournaments is not just status, rank, fame or reputation of actors but the disposition of the central tokens of value in the society in question. Finally, though such tournaments of value occur in

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special time and places, their forms and outcomes are always consequential for the more mundane realities of power and value in ordinary life.

Can we identify tournaments of value in the early Middle Ages? I believe we can, and I am thinking here of the well-known market of Saint Denis, north of Paris (Lebecq 1983, 25–26; McCormick 2001, 648–53). It is by now generally accepted among historians that King Dagobert I (623–39) created this market probably in 634 or 635. He granted the revenues to the abbey of St Denis to the detriment of the royal treasury and the income of royal officials in the region. Royal involvement in the creation, protection and continuation of this market is beyond doubt as can be seen from the interventions by Childebert III in 709 and King Pippin I in 753 (Lebecq 1983, 401–3; Lebecq 2000, 140–45). The fair started on 9 October, the day of the feast of Saint Denis, the patron saint of the abbey. The combination of fair and religious feast will have brought people of all social ranks to the monastery at this time of the year. The date coincides with the grape harvest and wine trade will have been a central element of the exchange activities. Later written sources explain that traders from Anglo-Saxon England and Frisia came to this market probably to buy wine. Because of this commodity, elite interest and elite involvement in the market may be expected. The status of the whole fair as a complex series of activities is further enhanced by royal interest. Interestingly enough, coin production starts at the abbey probably already under the reign of Dagobert I. Coins (*tremisses*) are produced bearing the name of the monastery of St Denis, as well as Catulliacus, the *vicus* next to which the monastery was created. Although exact information on special activities that may have taken place is lacking, the gathering of people from many different backgrounds and the diversity of activities suggest that the St Denis market was probably not simply a market involving the transactions of commodities, or transactions of the short term, but a total social event where social relationships were established or renewed, ritual acts carried out, gifts exchanged, relationships with the supernatural initiated or reconfirmed, where political acts took place, and where contracts were made that acquired a sacrosanct character because of the time of their making. All this took place in the context of a cult place; there was after all an abbey at Saint Denis (Semmler 1988; Lebecq 2000; see also the contributions in Cuisenier and Guadagnin 1988).

Did Maastricht have such a tournament of value? I believe so, and suspect that the Feast of St Servatius on 13 May was such an event. This day was already mentioned at the beginning of the 8th century in the Calendar of St Willibrord pointing to its importance already at that time (Wilson 1998 (1918)). Unfortunately, detailed information on the activities that took place at this time of the year in early medieval Maastricht is lacking. We may, however, expect that a diverse multitude of actors (as pilgrims) would have been present around that day, perhaps even the king. A variety of exchanges and transactions would have taken place, no doubt – as the date suggests – under the patronage of the saint himself.

Is it possible to investigate the significance of tournaments of value, central places and the articulation of spheres of exchange in relation to one another? I see two connections here. The first – coin production – will be discussed in

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**Figure 3** Coin struck by Adelbertus in Maastricht (Photo: Rijksmuseum Het Koninklijk Penningkabinet, Leiden).

the next section; the second – the meaning of cult places – will be discussed later, after I have elaborated on the conceptual framework a bit more.

## Exchange, saints and coins

The production of gold coins, or *tremisses*, began in the Merovingian period in the 6th century, culminating towards the end of the century in the production of so-called mintmaster coins (Grierson and Blackburn 1991, 81–154; Pol 2001a). Whereas prior to 600 the reverse featured the Roman Victoria, there was now a Christian cross surrounded by an inscription with the name of a person, a man, followed by the term *monetarius* (Figure 3). He was the one responsible for producing the coin. The obverse usually features a Roman-style bust, with around it an inscription with the name of the place where the coin was struck (Grierson and Blackburn 1991, 118–22). Strikingly, the king or others in positions of high authority barely feature on the coins (Grierson and Blackburn 1991, 128–29). The coinage was probably not directly connected with them. I interpret the presence of the names of *monetarii* as a sign that the coinage was linked only indirectly to the day-to-day political sphere of power. There has been much speculation about who these *monetarii* were and under whose patronage the minting occurred. They have been variously interpreted as royal officials, private entrepreneurs or members of a financial bureaucracy (Grierson and Blackburn 1991, 97–102; Pol 2002). In the Merovingian period minting occurred in central places like Maastricht, and Pol's research shows that the Maastricht coinage of the 7th century was of great importance (Pol 1995; 2001b). In the light of what I have said above, we need to relinquish some of our traditional notions about the production of Merovingian coins. First, there is no need to look for politically powerful social actors, such as kings and bishops, under whose patronage coins were minted. The second traditional notion to relinquish is that *monetarii* had reasonably permanent workshops, where they minted coins using other gold coins or gold in a different form and where the *monetarius* made his earnings from a small portion of the base metal that was not minted. The *monetarius*, according to this model, was a small entrepreneur.

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However, the striking of coinage need not have been a permanent practice and may also have occurred in the context of tournaments of value. Appadurai refers to a means of exchange with a special status that may have played a role during those tournaments. Might coin production in Merovingian central places have been linked to events like those surrounding the Feast of St Servatius on 13 May? If so, the coins would have been specially minted, deriving their significance from the sacred context in which they were struck. And it is probable that they could be used in different kinds of transaction for that very reason, thus enabling the articulation of spheres of exchange. In my opinion, the later use of the coin in different contexts (for example, as an obol in the burial ritual), which can be interpreted as a Christian *viaticum* at that time (Bazelmans, Gerrets and Pol 2002, 224), always points to the Christian, sacred moment of production. This is highlighted by the replacement of Victoria with the Christian cross on the reverse. All this suggests a pattern regarding the person under whose protection coins were produced: the saint himself, Servatius in the case of Maastricht. Just as in our own recent past money derived its value among other things from the supply of gold, hidden away in the vaults of the national bank (in other words, from a worth that had little practical use but a high imaginary – even mythical – value), so too did the early medieval *tremisses* derive their value from the saint's imaginary role in their production. It was the saint who functioned as mythical capital, and the coin's significance and value were derived from his sacredness. In the case of modern gold, as Godelier explains, we are talking about the inalienable property of a society (Godelier 1999 (1996), 27–29, 138, 163–67). The exchange of money is made possible by keeping gold out of circulation. In the same way, the saint too, and in later times objects associated with the saint, can be regarded as a society's inalienable property which enabled the exchange of golden *tremisses*. My interpretation implies that the *monetarius* was not an entrepreneur, but a key player in an event that constituted a tournament of value. That is why his name appeared on the same side of the coin as the cross. The name of the place where the coin was struck is given around the bust. The significance of this association also needs to be examined more closely.

This interpretation of Merovingian coinage has implications for how we interpret the change in coin production at the end of the Merovingian era from golden *tremisses* to silver pennies (Grierson and Blackburn, 1991, 93–94; Pol 2001a). Also, following on from this change, we observe a period at the northern Frankish periphery in which coins with only a limited reference to a Christian ideology – the so-called *sceattas* – enjoyed popularity (Op den Velde, De Boone and Pol 1984; Hill and Metcalf 1984; Grierson and Blackburn 1991, 149–54, 164–89). The switch from gold to silver, the popularity of *sceattas*, and the anonymity of the coin production sites all point in my opinion to a fundamental change in attitude towards the imaginary and inalienable capital in the use of those coins. It seems to have been a period of experimentation that lasted well into the 8th century, coming to an end early in the 9th century with the widespread use of coins bearing the legend '*Christiana religio*'. This leads me to observe that the Pippin III and

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Charlemagne class 1 and 2 coins (until 793/94) did not refer to the Christian religion (Grierson and Blackburn 1991, 202–3, 216–17).

## Exchange and cult places

I have demonstrated that I regard the saint as a pivotal figure in the system of exchange. To develop this idea further, we need to take a closer look at a third element of the whole transactional order. The first two – the exchange of commodities and gifts, or exchange of the short and long term – involve the actual transfer of objects. The third element relates, as Godelier puts it, to the things that people cannot sell or give away, but which must be kept (Godelier 1999 (1996), 1). Weiner explicitly brought this to our attention as early as 1992. She placed the keeping of inalienable objects, but also immaterial matters like stories, magical sayings and myths, at the heart of the exchange system. It is around these inalienable possessions that the exchange of objects is organized. According to Weiner, it is 'its exclusive and cumulative identity with a particular series of owners through time' that made a possession inalienable (Weiner 1992, 33). Inalienable possessions are very closely associated with the identity of the group and individual owner: they provide the keeper with a 'cosmological authentication'. Whereas the exchange of objects can serve to equalize positions, the keeping of inalienable possessions creates differences that could generate hierarchies (Weiner 1992, 40–49). Power arises in situations where there are rights and access to inalienable objects. Godelier attempts to qualify Weiner's view by regarding 'alienable' and 'inalienable' not as features of mutually exclusive objects, but rather as complementary aspects of the same object, and by further elaborating Weiner's concept of cosmological authentication (Godelier 1999 (1996), 90, 94–95, 100–1). He makes a distinction between sacred inalienable objects and alienable goods. Between them he places objects given as gifts or prestige objects: they have both the inalienable aspect of sacred objects and the alienable aspect of commodities since they are both substitutes for sacred objects and for people, and are transferable. Bazelmans, in his analysis of gift exchange as depicted in *Beowulf*, where the focus is on the relationship between people and objects (the commensurability of subject and object), elaborates further on the cosmological authentication of inalienable possessions and prestige goods (Bazelmans 1999, 13–68). According to Godelier, some objects reach a point where they no longer serve in exchanges between people, but between people and gods, or people and ancestors (Godelier 1999 (1996), 168–70). They have become sacred and are used to activate the symbolic and imaginary – but nonetheless valuable – relationship with the origin of the individual and the group. The *raison d'être* for the unfolding social order, here a God-given one, can also be found in this imaginary origin. Godelier emphasizes that in this origin humankind effaces itself as the author of the world it created (Godelier 1999 (1996), 171–75). It is important to note that in many societies (and I include here early medieval Europe), despite being presented as collective possessions, sacred objects were often owned – or at least kept – by individuals. By owning or keeping these

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**Figure 4** Aerial photograph of the cult complex of St Servatius in Maastricht (courtesy Town of Maastricht).

objects, people – whether shamans, aristocrats or priests – placed themselves to a degree above the common arena of exchange and social competition.

To conclude this part of my argument, then, the total sphere of exchange comprises the exchange of gifts and of commodities and – above all – the keeping of inalienable, almost invariably sacred, possessions. Moreover, the very essence of that system is manifested in the articulation of these three spheres, and central places are the locations par excellence where this articulation is expressed.

I return now to Maastricht because of the special place created there for keeping inalienable objects: the St Servatius complex (Figures 4 and 5) (Leupen 1997; Dierkens 2000; Theuws 2001; Panhuysen, De La Haye and Gauthier 2002). The picture that Gregory of Tours sketched for us in the second half of the 6th century seems to owe more to myth than to reality.[3] He tells how Bishop Monulphus built a new church at Servatius's grave in Maastricht, on the spot where a small, ramshackle wooden chapel is said to have stood. He adds a story about the last phase in the life of Servatius (whom he incorrectly calls Aravatius), in which he relates how Servatius travelled to Rome to pray at the grave of the Apostle in order to prevent the devastation of Gaul by the Huns (who were actually in Gaul in the 5th, not the 4th, century). In Rome, an angel told Servatius that he would soon die and should therefore return. According to Gregory, Servatius travelled back to the town of Tongeren, settled his affairs and – for reasons we cannot explain – travelled to Maastricht, where he died and was buried. On the basis of Servatius's recorded burial in Maastricht, it was until recently accepted that the St Servatius complex came into being in the 4th century (Panhuysen, De La Haye and Gauthier 2002). I had assumed until recently that Servatius perhaps went to Maastricht because it was his family's home base and that – at that

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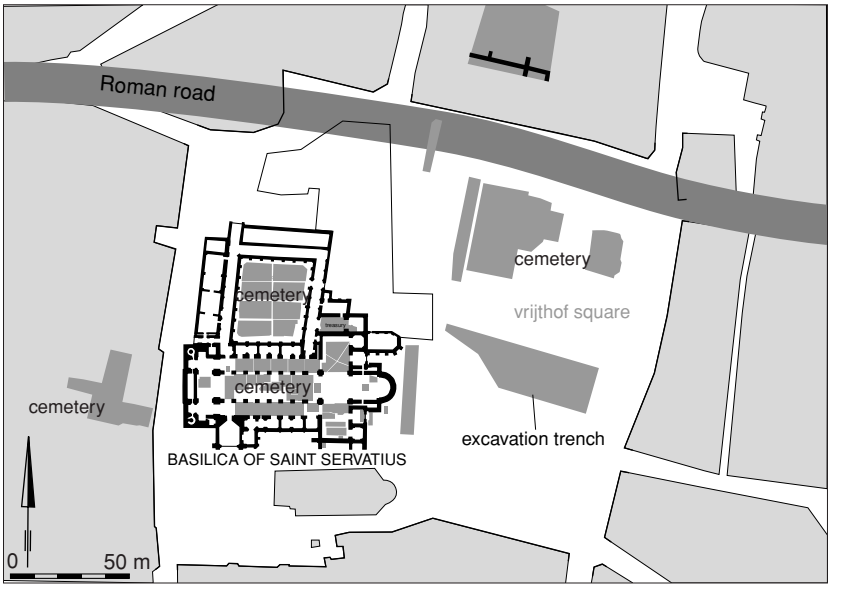



**Figure 5** Plan of the Vrijthof square and the location of the excavation trenches in and around the basilica of St Servatius.

moment – he was acting more like an aristocrat than a bishop (Theuws 2001). However, Gregory's story should be interpreted in quite another light.[4]

Gregory's report, which contains many historical inaccuracies (wrong name, wrong chronology), is probably connected with Bishop Monulphus's creation of a new cult place in the third quarter of the 6th century. This was also the first church building in the St Servatius complex. All this attention to Servatius has led historiographers to overlook the fact that Gregory not only had an eye to Servatius, but above all to Monulphus, a contemporary whom he may have known and who, seen from the perspective of Tours, was working in a distant place. One element has to be the focal point of Gregory's report: not Monulphus's significant building of the '*magnum templum*', as we have assumed until now, but the *translatio* of Servatius to the new cult place.

We do not know where Servatius came from but it is likely that Monulphus brought his remains from Tongeren (the obvious burial place for a 4th-century bishop of the Tongeren). Gregory's story thus lends a constructed historical depth to a new 6th-century situation. In this sense we can speak of a legitimation of the new state of affairs. The critical issue here, in my view, is not only the actions of Monulphus the bishop, but more particularly of Monulphus the aristocrat (Theuws 2001, 171). By transferring Servatius to a cult place that they had created, Monulphus and his family were making a place for themselves in the political and sacred landscape of 6th-century northern Gaul. What they did was to build a cult place around a clearly inalienable possession: for their own ends, they rescued from obscurity the remains of a saint and placed them in a new context. Monulphus is thus the

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creator of Maastricht, of the Servatius cult and above all of an identity and a place for himself and his family. Although an aristocratic group would present their possession as belonging to all, the sacred remains of a saint were among the most inalienable possessions that such a group could have had in the early Middle Ages (Wood 2001). Gregory of Tours did something that was central to this process: not 'falsifying' reality to legitimize a new situation, but expressing an imaginary origin for the inalienable possession in which the individual person (or family) is effaced as the author of the inalienable possession they have created. It is not clear whether Gregory himself is the author of this 'mythical origin', or whether he was simply expressing a 'story' created in the environs of Maastricht or by Monulphus's family. Keeping St Servatius's grave was vital for the aristocratic group in question and for how they defined themselves. But it was more than that. It was about the social order as a whole, the God-given order. We have already seen that the saint could be a reference point for the entire system of exchange. In later times too we find examples of inalienable possessions being created and aristocratic positions in Maastricht being defined in relation to the further development or reactivation of the cult place. I can point to Einhard's gift of the cross and the possible gift of the key at the beginning of the 9th century. Since the early 11th century, the key at least had a mythical origin in which people did not feature (Koldeweij 1985, 107–11, 117–28).

I therefore see Maastricht as a central place par excellence. Creating an inalienable possession was crucial to the development of the entire system of exchange. In Maastricht the articulation of gift exchange and commodities exchange was linked to the keeping of inalienable possessions at a cult place. These possessions became part of and were related to the mythical capital around which exchange and coinage were organized. We have seen, then, how closely related were religion and exchange (including trade) in the early Middle Ages.

## Cross-cultural exchange in the 8th century

My choice of examples from the 6th and 9th centuries suggests a considerable degree of continuity in the concepts, mentalities, norms and values underlying exchange in the early Middle Ages. This continuity has been called into question for the northern Frankish world (Hodges 2000). While at first glance these doubts may seem justified, a closer analysis reveals few changes at this structural level. Archaeological research in Maastricht, Huy and Namur has uncovered far-reaching changes in the structure of these places in the years around 700. At each of these places there are clear traces of artisanal production and exchange from the Merovingian period, but almost none for the Carolingian (Dijkman and Ervynck 1998, esp. 81; Panhuysen *et al*. 1992; Dijkman 1993; Plumier 1996a; 1996b; Plumier-Torfs and Plumier 1996). There is perhaps some evidence at Huy of continuity of earthenware production, although we have as yet no clear picture for the 8th century because we do not know for how long late-Merovingian earthenware production continued into that century (Giertz 1996, 37–38). Carolingian Maastricht in general is an enigmatic place for archaeologists. The topography of the centre seems to have changed after A.D. 700 to such a degree that we

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cannot grasp it archaeologically. One would expect the St Servatius complex to have been surrounded by a moat and wall, as was the case with many (late-) Carolingian centres, and that artisanal activities took place near this monastic centre. Such defences and activities have not been identified yet, but may be found when more excavations are carried out in parts of the town between the Roman castellum and the St Servatius Abbey. Changes in topography and artisanal production in these centres are indications of important transformations taking place at that time. To what extent are they indicative of structural changes in the exchange system in the Frankish world? As we have seen, the production of golden *tremisses* ceased, and it is difficult to attribute the almost anonymized late-Merovingian pennies and *sceattas* to particular coin-production sites (Grierson and Blackburn 1991, 138–46). In addition, the 8th century is a period for which we have only limited historical information about the St Servatius complex. Is that purely coincidental? It is clear that important changes occurred in the central places around the year 700. These changes seem to be related to the organization of production in the first place, but what impact do they have on the structural aspects of exchange? Some scholars like Hodges correlate the two and accept changes in the organization of production as indicative of structural changes in the system of exchange. I have already stated that I would like to interpret this period after A.D. 700 provisionally as an experimental phase that ended at the beginning of the 9th century.

It was precisely at this time that another central place – Dorestad in the central Netherlands river region – began to prosper (Van Es 1978; 1990; 1994; Van Es and Verwers 1978; 1980; 1993; Van Es, Van Doesburg and Koningsbruggen 1998; Verwers 1988; Lebecq 1983; Heidinga 1997). We only know the northern harbour area, which probably did not develop until after 690, after the battle at (not necessarily for) Dorestad between Radbod and Pippin II, which went well for the Franks.[5] Dorestad owed its importance to cross-cultural exchange between the Christian Frankish world and the non-Christian north. Much has already been written about how this exceptional place should be interpreted, with emphases in turn on long-distant trade and later, by Van Es, on production and the regional trade in goods (Van Es 1990; Hodges 2000, 69–92; 1999, 229). We have, however, scant evidence of artisanal production in Dorestad (Van Es 1990, 173–75). The town flourished in the second half of the eighth and the first quarter of the 9th century. After 830 a period of decline set in and in the second half of the 9th century Dorestad ceased to exist as a major harbour and trading place (Van Es and Verwers 1980, 294–303; Van Es 1990, 153). According to the traditional view, this was due to Vikings plundering the town and the river Rhine changing its course (Van Es 1990, 163).

There is, however, another way of interpreting the town and its expansion. We cannot fully appreciate its significance if exchange is reduced to the exchange of commodities (i.e. trade). If the entire transactional order is characterized by an articulation of the exchange of gifts and commodities and the keeping of objects, and if that articulation is linked to the essential values and norms of a society, what position does Dorestad then occupy? In my view, the exchange between the Frankish world and the north was first and foremost

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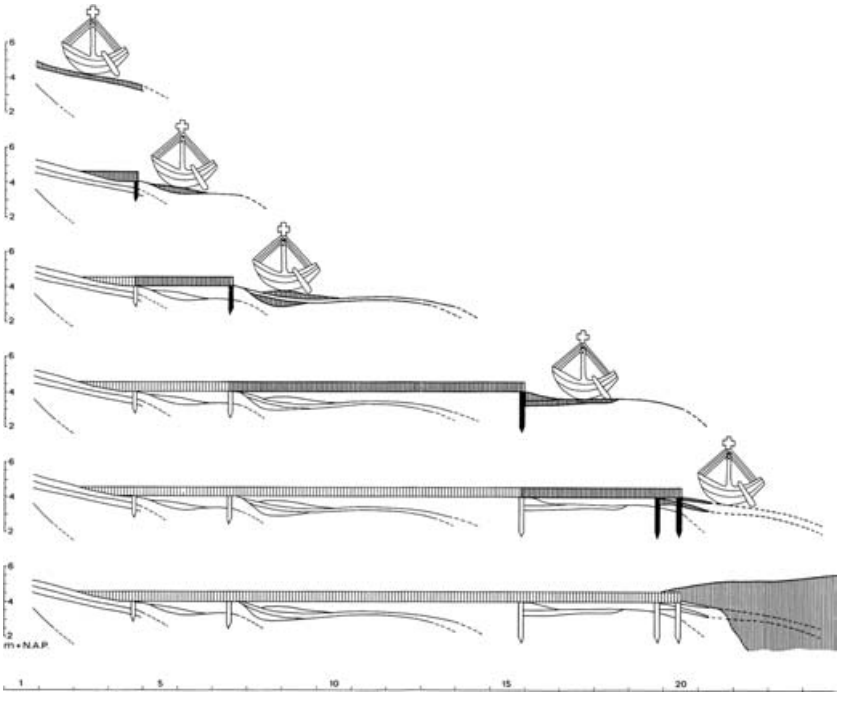



**Figure 6** A schematic representation of the development of the jetties at the Hoogstraat 1 site from A.D. ca 675(?)–700 to ca 830 (after Van Es and Verwers 1980).

a confrontation of world views. This means, for example, that Frankish coins – whose value derived from a primarily Christian, mythical capital – could not simply be used in the exchange with the north.[6] Until the third quarter of the 8th century the anonymized and non-explicit Christian *sceattas* and pennies went some way towards overcoming this problem. Dorestad's function lies in the fact that it was the place par excellence where the geo-cosmographies of different societies met one another, and where – at a higher level than in the Christian world alone – the total spheres of exchange were able to articulate with one another. This would have been inconceivable in the Maastricht of the 7th century. Together with Dorestad, places like Quentovic, Ipswich and Hamwic played a role in this intercultural communication (Lebecq 1991; 1993; Hodges 2000, 69–118; Hodges and Hobley 1988; Anderton 1999). They were a rare type of settlement, to a certain extent exceptional; they occupied a threshold position and as such are not a sound basis on which to evaluate the nature of the early-medieval system of exchange in the Frankish or Anglo-Saxon worlds as a whole. This is not to say that they were '*Fremdkörper*' in the 'economic landscape', that they were not firmly rooted in the regional and local economy. On the contrary, they were an important part of the economic system as a whole. But they occupied their own position in that system, a somewhat polymorphous whole that does not lend itself easily to broad single-concept labels like 'prestige-goods circulation', 'dominated by gift-exchange', 'proto-capitalist' or

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'market-oriented' (see also Moreland 2000a; 2000b). I disagree with the trend in modern research to downplay the role of these places in 'international', or rather 'cross-cultural', exchange in favour of their productive role, for which there is not much evidence in Dorestad for example. The written sources suggest that their role in exchange was the key to their existence. Hodges sees such trading places as the expression of a new ethos in the Carolingian period (Hodges 2000) based on rationality and a division of labour in the production sphere.

Can we use changes in the production sphere as indicative of structural changes in the exchange sphere? It is clear that changes did occur; at around 700, centres like Maastricht underwent a transformation, which at present is difficult to interpret. The question is whether this transformation points to structural changes in the nature of the exchange system as a whole. Hodges too emphasizes the liminal position that the emporia occupied and the role they played in relationships of 'the core Christian communities with those on the peripheries and indeed those non-Christian communities'. But this idea requires further elaboration. For Hodges, emporia like Dorestad were linked to a new Carolingian ethos which, secular in nature, came about through peer-polity interaction of a tribal kind, which 'fed an appetite for change' (Hodges 2000, 89–90). Hodges does not discuss the anchoring of exchange in different imaginary worlds. The transformation, which he saw as being linked to the rise of emporia, consisted of greater rationality in solving communication problems between the different communities. This was based on a different attitude to work, discernible in the growing division of labour, initially in the profane sector of society and later in the Church as well and, more specifically, the large abbeys. However, and this is perhaps too often overlooked in the debate, abbeys were first and foremost cult places which maintained the above system of exchange, anchored in a Christian imaginary world, and which perhaps took over that function from centres like Maastricht; only secondly were they 'businesses' (Lebecq 2000). Hodges seeks the 'roots of the spirit of capitalism' behind the creation of the emporia. His conclusions appear to me to be shaped by the economic models and ideas about material culture in the Middle Ages that underpin his thinking and an unjustified separation of the 'profane' and the 'religious'. He states that 'each centre was fashioned to serve the needs of local political forces'. It is not clear how he views the relationship between emporia as part of a large-scale network and emporia as regionalized institutions. There is as yet no clear answer to the question he himself asks: 'where do emporia belong in the making of Latin Christendom' (Hodges 2000, 92). Nor will it be easy to provide one. Hodges's ideas are very much shaped by an incomplete understanding of the exchange system as a whole, in both a conceptual and geographical sense, and his focus on emporia alone – he describes the other centres as 'small parts of otherwise derelict Roman towns' (Hodges 2000, 86; see also Samson 1999). When confirming in 779 that the monks of St-Germain des Prés near Paris were exempt from paying taxes, Charlemagne named the principal 'portes d'accès' of the empire in the north: Dorestad, Maastricht, Quentovic, Amiens and Rouen. He mentioned here only two new emporia alongside three old Roman towns (Lebecq 1983, i, p. 116, 158; ii, 418–19). Surprisingly, Carolingian Maastricht was

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one of them. Nevertheless we probably cannot speak of a new Carolingian ethos; in my view, its absence is demonstrated by the existence of Dorestad.

Dorestad's pre-eminence came to an end around the middle of the 9th century. It was not the violent Vikings who were responsible, nor the capricious Rhine, but the town's ultimate integration into the Christian Frankish world. The Viking attacks show that the town ceased to be important for the old trading partners from the north. It became a place where, from 822 onwards, coins were struck bearing the inscription *Christiana religio*. The reasons why Dorestad ultimately perished were the growing discrepancy between the exchange system of the Christian Frankish world, described above, and the incomplete articulation of the different elements of that system in Dorestad as a central place once it had become fully integrated into that world. One vital ingredient was missing: the keeping of inalienable possessions, as occurred in Maastricht in the abbey of St Servatius. Dorestad had no major Christian cult places (Van Es 1990); given Dorestad's role, they were unnecessary. They were also absent in Quentovic and the other places mentioned that occupied the same position. Hodges mentions this but fails to explain it adequately. There may have been two small churches in Dorestad that were no more than chapels or parish churches, simple facilities for local or passing Christians. No relics of a higher order were ever taken there. I do not share Van Vliet's view of the religious significance of Dorestad: that the town's size and importance meant there must have been a community of clergy there, attached to a minster (Van Vliet 2002, 115–17). I argue that, given Dorestad's function, no such community was necessary. Stronger still, the lack of such a community was a precondition for the town to function properly. The absence of religious communities and associated buildings meant that the town was unable to fulfil one important condition for the regional aristocracy of the 8th and 9th centuries. It was not possible to do what Monulphus did in the 6th century in Maastricht: establish a major cult place (perhaps with a small community of clergy) centred on the inalienable relic of a saint who anchored the exchange in cosmological terms, thus giving shape to the element of 'keeping'. The lack of an opportunity to act as keeper of inalienable possessions at a time when the town became fully integrated into the Christian Frankish world signified its end as a potential central place. I deduce this from the structure of Tiel and Deventer, the centres in the region that are mentioned in later sources and which most authors refer to as Dorestad's successors. Tiel dates to the later 9th century (Sarfatij 1999; Van Rij 1999; Van Doesburg 2002; Van Vliet 2002, 160–64, 182–85). The Sint Walburgis Monastery, containing Walburgis's relics, founded by a regional aristocrat and his wife in the late 9th or early 10th century, is almost the first feature of note that we hear about. Deventer had already existed for some time (Spitzers 1992; Van Vliet 2002, 79, 110–12, 149–58, 176–77); it owed its shaky early medieval existence primarily to the presence of the grave of St Lebuinus. Both places played a key role in the exchange of commodities from the late 9th century. They had in common the presence of saints and religious communities with connections to regional rulers. In that respect Tiel and Deventer differ fundamentally from Dorestad; they were established in accordance with the Maastricht model.

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The rise of Tiel and Deventer put an end once and for all to the regional experiment, and the normal order of the Christian sphere of exchange was implemented in the northern Frankish world. Only in a limited sense did Tiel and Deventer succeed Dorestad. The true successor was Haithabu to the north, which had since become a central place in terms of cross-cultural exchange. There too we find no major Christian cult places. Unlike Hodges, I see little evidence of a new ethos on the basis of the emporia, which were rare and which occupied a specific and probably non-representative place in the exchange system as a whole in north-western Europe. Nevertheless the 8th century is one of the most intriguing – though also one of the most enigmatic – periods in the 'economic history' of north-western Europe.

## Notes

[1] This article is a reworked version of the inaugural lecture I gave when appointed professor in archaeology at the University of Amsterdam. The text has also appeared in Dutch, albeit in a slightly different form, as part of the University of Amsterdam inaugural lecture series (Amsterdam University Press). The key difference from the original Dutch version is a drastic reduction in the number of footnotes, which discussed in detail issues such as the dating of Dorestad and the series of coins critical to this chronology. The number of references has also been reduced. I would like to thank Dr J. Bazelmans (State Archaeological Service) and Prof. Dr P. Leupen (University of Amsterdam) for their comments on an earlier version, as well as Dr T. Derks (Free University Amsterdam/*Archaeological dialogues*) for his comments on later versions. I also wish to thank Annette Visser for translating the text. After this article was finished, the study by S. Coupland (2003) appeared. It was not possible to include a discussion of his views here.

[2] I would like to point out that my focus here will be a single part of the total economic system; production and consumption will not be addressed. This should not suggest that I view exchange as the most vital component of the early medieval economy. See Moreland 2000b for a similar view.

[3] Gregory of Tours, *Historiarum libri decem*, ed. B. Krusch and W. Levison, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum 1, II-5, 45–47. Translated by L. Thorpe (1982, 114–15). Gregory of Tours, *In Gloria confessorum*, ed. B. Krusch, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum 1, c. 71, 340. Translated by R. Van Dam (1988, 75).

[4] This was suggested to me by Professor Nancy Gauthier (University of Tours François Rabelais) during a discussion at the University of Paris I Sorbonne Panthéon (4 December 2001). She saw the story as a legitimation for the building of the new church, but the issue goes deeper than legitimation alone.

[5] It is not possible here to address the question of the dating of Dorestad. There are well-founded reasons for doubting the existence of a Merovingian trading place. The only argument to support it is the activity of the mintmaster Madelinus, who is said to have struck coinage in Dorestad before 650. However, this date is open to question. The chronology of coinage in the northern Frankish empire during much of the 7th century seems to me a flimsy construction of historical, archaeological and numismatic arguments, full of circular reasoning and questionable assumptions about economic dealings in the early Middle Ages. I will return to this subject in detail in a follow-up article entitled 'Madelinus and the 7th century'.

[6] In view of the coin finds in the north featuring Christian symbolism, this does not mean that they did not circulate in that world at all. We know that Christian traders were present there (Lebecq 1983, 30–34). 'Trade diasporas' played a key role in 'cross-cultural'

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exchange (Curtin 1984, 1–14; Kopytoff 1986, 88–89). On the politico-ideological nature of cross-cultural exchange, see Helms 1988 and Hedeager 2001.

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## The cosmology of the early medieval emporia? *Richard Hodges*

### Introduction

This characteristically thoughtful essay by Frans Theuws illustrates how far our analysis of central places in the early Middle Ages has advanced. Like his study of Maastricht (2001), it reveals a close reading of the archaeological and historical sources. Indeed, as Michael McCormick's encyclopaedic volume (2001) on the origins of the medieval economy shows with stunning authority, as archaeologists we have taken huge strides since Philip Grierson quipped, 'It has been said that the spade cannot lie, but it owes this merit in part to the fact that it cannot speak' (1959, 129). Hence it comes as no surprise that Theuws is exploring the 'relationship between forms of exchange and the imaginary world from which "value" is derived' (p. 121).

With texts in hand as well as a wealth of miscellaneous relics in European treasuries, it is tempting indeed to see, as Theuws does (quoting Weiner 1992, 33) that 'immaterial matters like stories, magical sayings and myths [were] at the heart of the exchange system'. Of course, as Ian Wood has shown, the sacred remains of a saint were among the most inalienable possessions in the early Middle Ages (Wood 2001). No one doubts that these were mythical capital around which exchange and, perhaps, coinage were organized. Given these circumstances, Theuws focuses upon the emporia – places that have been treated largely as points of economic interaction as opposed to places 'where the geo-cosmographies of different societies met one another, and where . . . the total spheres of exchange were able to articulate with one another' (p. 134). Remains of churches or indeed of cult activity are largely absent from the emporia. Apparently odd, Theuws argues, that in a place like Dorestad the absence of a minster or clergy were a precondition for the town to function properly. His teasing conclusion is that the emporia (which were rare) were non-representative places in the exchange system as a whole and, in effect, experimental harbingers of central places where cosmological matters were embedded in economic activity.

### The nature of the archaeological evidence

These questions necessitate a brief reappraisal of the archaeological evidence itself. The archaeology of most central places from early medieval Europe consists of (i) multi-phase settlement plans, and (ii) material remains invariably in secondary deposits – that is, not in their original contexts. Put another way, primary deposits such as floors and uncontaminated rubbish middens are comparatively rare. At Dorestad, for example, most of the

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finds were retrieved from the making of the jetties into the river Lek. Intact production sites are rare, too. The archaeological picture has been further complicated by the fact that most of the ecclesiastical sites from this period have been excavated without reference to identifying and analysing primary archaeological deposits. In other words, the contexts in which relics were once 'used' remain largely a matter of supposition based upon interpretations of the written sources as well as their disposition in the high to late Middle Ages. Hence the rubbish pits at Hamwic, the pottery kilns at Ipswich, the black earth middens at Birka and the buildings with floors (tiled, mortared and beaten earth) from the well-preserved monastery of San Vincenzo al Volturno are invaluable primary sources.

The first observation to make about these primary deposits is how extraordinarily rich the refuse is. The Hamwic pits, the wasters around the Ipswich-ware kilns in Ipswich, the black earth middens at Birka, like the middens of St Lorenzo in Pensilis at the Crypta Balbi (Manacorda 2001, 45) and the 9th-century middens at San Vincenzo are literally full of economic materials: faunal material, wasted production materials and a great variety of other debris. This apparent affluence is in stark contrast to the rural settlement sites where objects, invariably from secondary deposits, tend to be rare. Indeed, the apparent wastefulness is in striking contrast to earlier Roman or later medieval deposits. This picture is confirmed by the evidence from the beaten earth floors at San Vincenzo and indeed the sealed A.D. 881 (sack) levels that reveal a material affluence.

The second observation is that only one monastery of this age is well documented archaeologically: San Vincenzo al Volturno. This was a Benedictine monastery that enjoyed Frankish patronage, and was located in a liminal position but not an exceptionally affluent one. With a limited economic base, nonetheless, the investment in creating a cosmology within the monastery in the early 9th century is truly extraordinary. Written descriptions and the signally important St Gall Plan offer only a hint of the all-embracing cultural environment created within its monastic precinct – an environment that was sharply at variance with the largely ascetic simplicity of its dependent villages (Hodges 1997, 176–200). Floors, the strategically conceived painting of dados, the painted programmes arranged room by room, the windows and even the building roofs were ordered (see Hodges 1997 for bibliographic references). Hence the workshops inside the monastery were not separate but fully integrated into the plan by passageways, and tellingly situated, literally, alongside the main centre of the cult dedicated to St Vincent (Figure 1). Here, physically and excavated, is a manifestation of Theuws's point about an imaginary world. It was strikingly different in form and arrangement from the *vicus* that existed outside the precinct (Francovich and Hodges 2003). Further, I do not doubt that Anglo-Saxon monasteries in the environs of Hamwic or Ipswich, or monasteries located within the territory of Quentovic, were as ordered as, and ranked around cosmological programmes resembling (and perhaps even richer in character than), those known from San Vincenzo al Volturno. The point to make here, then, is how extraordinarily focused the emporia were, by comparison. These were centres of economic activity with little programmatic variance of any kind.

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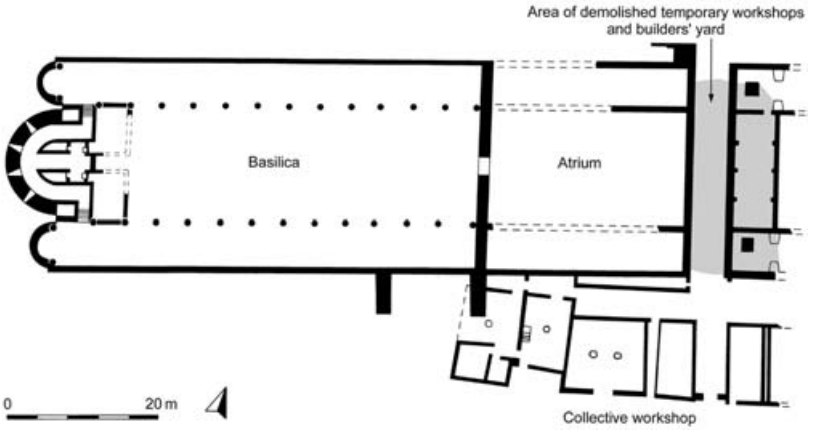



**Figure 1** Plan of the basilica with temporary and collective workshops at San Vincenzo al Volturno.

## An example: the cosmology of a monastery

The transformation of San Vincenzo al Volturno from a small 8th-century monastery to a major monastic city was contingent upon the capacity of its successive 9th-century abbots to promote it as a centre and manage not only its new community effectively but also those properties given to it as gifts. Clearly the personalities and connections of its abbots, in particular, should not be underestimated in any assessment of the monastery's ascendant standing in Italy and, indeed, Latin Christendom. The forcible acquisition of the relics of St Vincent obviously assisted its rise as a centre (cf. Hodges 1997, 79–81, 93–94). No less significant was the monastery's ability to find artists and craftsmen who constructed the grandiose new buildings to a master architect's design, and who sustained its regional authority and its network of donors through the production of gifts such as reliquaries and other prestige objects. These moveable objects were fundamental to the management of the monastery's growing number of dispersed estates throughout central and southern Italy. Given as gifts to local lords – thereby reinforcing growing social differences at a local, estate level – the monastery in return received benefactions in the form of land. The material goods, in short, were significant valuables in San Vincenzo's accumulation of landed wealth.

The excavations at San Vincenzo have discovered the remains of the temporary workshops used by the craftsmen when the basilica of San Vincenzo Maggiore was being constructed (Figure 2), and then a line of permanent workshops which, after the Plan of St Gall, have been described as the collective workshop. The evidence from these workshops shows that the craftsmen were producing prestige valuables: enamels, glassware, ivories, bonework and elaborate metalwork. These objects involved the craftsmen in cycles of production, as the later 12th-century German scientist Theophilus describes, as well as consumption. Such objects do not occur commonly in either urban or rural excavated sites of this period; quite the contrary, these are items of the kind described in the Treasury of Monte Cassino infamously robbed in A.D. 842.

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**Figure 2** The temporary glass workshop during excavation.

Fascinating though this gift-exchange cycle was, and critical though it may have been to the pre-feudal managerial strategy of San Vincenzo, it is not the most illuminating discovery from the workshops: besides the artefacts and waste from craft manufacture, the excavations brought to light two stratified prehistoric stone axes and a large assemblage of lithics, mostly middle Palaeolithic tools made from flint quarried on a nearby hill.

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The flint tools are particularly interesting in that they divide quite evenly between the workshop deposits. Of the 63 flints found in context, 28 were contained within the temporary workshops and 23 were recovered from the collective workshop. The remaining 12 flints are unphased. In summary, the distribution of flints seems very even throughout the 9th century, across the whole of the workshop complex. Perhaps the most notable discoveries in this regard were two stone axes. These were found within 9th-century deposits: a miniature greenstone axe of later Neolithic date was found in the mid-9th-century refuse tips behind the workshops, and a large igneous axe of early Bronze Age date was discovered in the later 9th-century burnt roof levels of room D (cf. Hodges forthcoming).

It is tempting to give these tools a functional interpretation. Perhaps the flints were used in some form of craft production? The 12th-century scientist Eraclius, for example, describes the use of powdered stones in his manual on metal and ceramic production. The problem here is that none of the flints or axes found in the excavations at the workshop show signs of wear or use. Instead it seems more likely that these tools were recognized at the time as special implements and deliberately placed in parts of the workshops as apotropaic instruments (apotropaic devices, it should be noted, occur throughout the painted programmes in the chapels, tombs and passages of the monastery). A number of medieval sources attest to the magical and apotropaic properties of prehistoric tools. Commonly, these are described as thunderstones, amulets used as protection against the worst effects of the weather. The weather, after all, was the greatest menace faced by the craftsmen and peasantry alike as they were compelled to increase production to service the new monastic community.

How are we to interpret these extraordinary objects? If we accept the interpretation of these objects as magical as opposed to utilitarian in function, some further insight is shed upon the changing conditions inside the monastery. The basilica and claustrum, like all the main service rooms of San Vincenzo, were decorated with painted programmes designed to promote the new renascent spiritual order. It was a spiritual order that depended, to some considerable extent, upon the productive capacity of the workshops to attract reciprocal donations from the monastery's lands. In the workshops, it seems highly likely, artisans from far-flung regions and their assistants drawn from the local communities came face to face with huge new tensions. Nor is it difficult to imagine the tensions in the rural communities around San Vincenzo, as the monastery pressed to increase agricultural production in order to feed a population that grew from perhaps 50 to 500 monks in the early 9th century. Fear and uncertainty, like fear of the potential effects of bad storms, might help to explain the presence of the prehistoric amulets, especially the stone axe that once hung in the monastery's own granary beside the abbey church itself. The new spiritual order was reinforced by recourse to age-old beliefs.

## Unearthing the cosmology of the emporia?

Are the emporia rare, extraordinary places that reflect some kind of economic experiment? It is tempting to think this. After all, given the paucity of written

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descriptions, it appears that these places were outside the world picture of the authors of the age. But, then, how many of the authors of our age write about the mechanics of contemporary business (as opposed to, say, seats of learning)? Economics, as Le Goff pointed out long ago (1980), was practised but not described in the Middle Ages; little has changed.

My regional analysis of early medieval Europe is described by Theuws: I have located emporia as monopolistic centres that evolve out of periodic centres, which, with time, were restructured around the institutional reforms of the Carolingian age. All the new evidence appears to affirm this model. Strikingly, the large number of sites found by metal-detectors in England, the Netherlands, Denmark and southern Sweden, described in Pestell and Ulmschneider (2003), show exactly the opposite of what Theuws is tacitly suggesting. Namely, these so-called 'productive sites' – which I would interpret as type A emporia, periodic fairs – are being discovered in increasing numbers (ironically, the name 'productive site' is highly confusing. Judging from the archaeological evidence, prominent in which is high-quality metalwork, these appear to be places of exchange and consumption. Craft productive debris is largely absent). These sites belong to the ranked regional exchange networks of the emerging kingdoms of the North Sea interaction zone. Defined as often as not by large numbers of coins, many of these places appear to be late 6th- to 9th-century harbingers of the archetypal Carolingian new town, the *portus* (cf. Verhulst 2002, 134), which in turn appears to be the Frankish model for the Anglo-Saxon *burh* and the later Danish towns.

Am I being too Darwinian? Should we regard the early Middle Ages as a good deal less prescripted and more fluid in structure? Moreover, such a model takes little or no account of the thrust of Theuws's seductive argument in which he correctly identifies the near absence of churches in the emporia.

Many have argued against the economic strategies I am describing here. The flaw in these arguments is the lack of comprehension for management concerns: to build a 10-hectare monastery decorated with an elaborate programme and then to sustain its community is a significant organizational challenge (as noted above in the case of San Vincenzo al Volturno). No one doubts this. Abbots, like bishops, because they were literate, merit our regard. However, where we confront a similar vision in the secular sector, we are naturally sceptical. Yet Dorestad and Hamwic, to take two examples of later, well-documented urban achievements, were mighty organizational undertakings. Indeed, these were possibly the greatest organizational achievements of their age, not least because making them sustainable (at least over several generations, as in the cases of the monastic cities) involved an economic determination as well as a grasp of social process. So why was the church virtually absent from these places? And, having witnessed the cosmology of San Vincenzo, what form, if any, did this take in the emporia?

First, the archaeology needs to be reappraised in some detail to answer these questions. Studies of the primary data are needed to examine the refuse in terms of interaction data such as dress jewellery betraying costume and animal bones showing feasting behaviour. As yet we know too little about social behaviour in these communities. Second, taking the San Vincenzo model, it is clear that the monastic precinct was structured in terms of its own

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goals, a rationally devised programme that secured resources largely in the form of humans (a workforce and monks) and land. However, the objectives of the programme are nowhere apparent in the cosmology of the planned monastic city. Only the collective workshop throws some oblique light upon this. Further, the *vicus* outside the monastic precinct had an entirely different character: much like an emporium, a place where production and storage were of paramount importance (Francovich and Hodges 2003; Moran 2003). The binary opposites between the monastery and its economic face to the world in the form of its *vicus* could not be more striking. Was this an accident of history? Of course not, this was a part of the structured objectives of the Church.

So, turning to the emporia, can we not imagine that the Church took the same approach? The sources register the Church as a stakeholder in places like Dorestad and Quentovic. Excavations at Hamwic, for example, have modestly confirmed this. Importantly, we should not expect the Church to be a high medieval urban presence in these places, when its role in the early Middle Ages was so emphatically strategic in terms of sustaining its place as one (with the secure nobility) of the twin pillars of society. In sum, the Church was intentionally not a manifest presence, but almost certainly an active participant in these monopolistic centres. Perhaps its low profile was due to what Le Goff regards as an aversion to economic affairs. Whatever, can we doubt that, as in the archaeologically exceptional example of San Vincenzo al Volturno, there were cosmologies enjoining emporia with the world that resourced them: with the royal palaces, villages and monasteries of their regions as well as with the indigenous traders and craftsmen and the visiting merchants and seamen present in these ports. Theuws's essay reminds us that if we have not identified how these people expressed themselves, we have simply confirmed a silence that is tantamount to imagining early medieval monasteries like San Vincenzo without visual and material programmes, which encompassed painted thoroughfares and dining rooms as well as amulets like Palaeolithic flints.

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## Objects, identities and cosmological authentication

*John Moreland*

Frans Theuws's paper reinforces and extends the developing critique of the early medieval economy as structured around gifts and commodities (for the 'orthodoxy', see Hodges 1982 and Hedeager 1993; for the critique, see Moreland 2000a and 2000b; Samson 1991; also Godelier 1999 (1996); and Thomas 1991). In the past, our assumptions about why certain objects were deemed valuable, and why they should have circulated as prestige gifts, have been influenced by notions of inherent worth (gold, silver and so on) or by the unthinking application of the laws of supply and demand (objects from

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afar are in short supply and must therefore be valuable). The proposition that value derives from the 'imaginary world' is one of the most significant in his paper and I will return to consider its implications in some detail.

First, however, it is worth emphasizing that the suggestions that saints were 'pivotal figure[s] in the system of exchange' and that the value of early medieval *tremisses* derived from their sacrality (p. 129) could only emerge from an analysis in which the conventional analytical (but frequently reified) categories of infrastructure–superstructure and economy–ideology have been collapsed. Theuws effects this through his critique of the idea that objects moved in separate 'spheres of exchange' (but see below and p. 146). He adopts the increasingly accepted position that objects can (and do) move between 'spheres' (pp. 124–25) but (characteristically) takes the argument further in his recognition that such transactions are not 'neutral' but are accompanied by or effected through 'procedures and rituals'. These, he argues, tend to take place at particular events ('tournaments of value') which have a direct connection with the supernatural (for example, the fairs held at St Denis, Paris on 9 October and at Maastricht on 13 May – the feast-days respectively of St Denis and St Servatius). His suggestion that gold *tremisses* might have been minted at such 'total social events' and, suffused with the power of the saint and the sacrality of place, functioned to articulate the different spheres of exchange (p. 126) takes us (I believe) closer to the spirit (and difference) of the early medieval past (see also below, p. 149). Here Theuws is asking us to enter an early medieval world in which objects, through their intimacy with saints and the supernatural, are more 'active' and 'meaningful' than anything envisaged by post-processual theorists.

In truth, this world – one in which the power inherent in consecrated objects could alter the course of daily events, in which 'the mere pronouncement of words in a ritual manner could effect a change in the character of material objects' and in which (conversely) the devil could be conjured out of an object by the 'pronouncement of prayers and the invocation of God's name' – has long been familiar to cultural historians even if archaeologists have, until now, been less keen to enter it (Thomas 1973, 28–57, esp. 37, 32; also Flint 1991, 254–328). In its conception of what we might call the 'spirit' of the object, this is also a world that bears some similarities to Mauss's understanding of the power of 'the gift' (Mauss 1967, 31; also Godelier 1999, 49–56; Thomas 1991, 31). It is here that we (perhaps) run into some difficulties for although the logic of Theuws's argument requires that the saint oversee 'an entire transactional order', in its presentation this 'indivisible whole' sometimes seems to fragment into separate spheres – gifts and commodities.

Towards the beginning of his paper, he introduces us to Bloch and Parry's 'transactions of the short term' and 'transactions of the long term' – the former concerned with the 'arena of individual competition', the latter with the 'reproduction of the long-term social or cosmic order'. These categories, we are told, focus on 'the nature of the transaction and its meaning in the social system' (p. 124) and entail the abandonment of the commodities/gifts opposition. However, it could be argued that, in general terms, these categories do not take us beyond this opposition.[1] Mauss would certainly have seen his 'gift' as being concerned with the 'reproduction of the

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long-term social or cosmic order' (Mauss 1967, Chapter 1) and he acknowledged its coexistence with forms of exchange involving 'individual competition'. In this specific case, Theuws to seeks dissolve the opposition, as we have seen, by the movement of objects between 'spheres'. However, despite his best efforts it re-emerges (on p. 126) where it is clear that he sees commodities as 'transactions of the short term' – 'the St Denis market was probably not simply a market involving the *transactions of commodities, or transactions of the short term*' (emphasis added). The implication of the next part of this sentence is that gifts (explicitly mentioned) are transactions of the long term. The gifts/commodities opposition appears to have survived.

This impression is strengthened by the fact that, apart from references to the grape harvest and the wine trade, there is very little discussion of this level of production/exchange and thus of how in practice it articulated (in the course of the 'tournament of value') with the other kinds of transaction. It is further reinforced by the fact that despite the discussion of the 'sacred value' of the *tremisses* we get no clear picture of how they actually worked in practice to articulate the entire transactional order. I appreciate that this level of detail can be difficult to provide in this kind of paper, but I firmly believe that it is only through the construction and dissemination of this kind of detailed historical analysis[2] that we can truly undermine the gift/commodity opposition.

As I have already suggested, Theuws's focus on 'the relationship between *exchange and religion*, norms and values, and the imaginary world from which "value" is derived' (p. 124, emphasis added) takes us in new directions – I think it probably gets closer to an essence of the early Middle Ages than other studies (including my own) that have focused on the socio-political frameworks of exchange. This is even more true of his foregrounding of inalienable possessions – things which 'must be kept and cannot be given':

> these sacred objects[3] and the knowledge that goes with them cannot be alienated . . . It is these objects which give . . . [a people] an identity and root this identity in the Beginning, in the time of the (imaginary) order of things, the time when the cosmic and social order was first established (Godelier 1999 (1996), 94, 121).

As Theuws notes, these objects provide the individual or group with 'cosmological authentication' (p. 129). I would, however, suggest that his treatment of these themes, while intelligent and provocative, is capable of extension in terms of its approach both to inalienable possessions and to the geo-cosmography of early medieval Europe.

Theuws has a tendency to think of inalienable possessions in 'vertical' terms – thus relics' links with the celestial realm provide individuals or groups with cosmological authentication – and this can be connected with his rather Christo-centric approach in the paper. Mary Helms, however, distinguishes between societies whose idea of

> cultural origins and legitimation lies on a vertical cosmological axis that generally relates contemporary society and its originating ancestors with a celestial world . . . [and those] that locate the temporally/spatially distant

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> centre of legitimating origins on a cosmological horizontal axis that generally relates contemporary society with a place, a centre, beyond the horizon (1993, 192).

The idea that inalienable possessions can have their origins in, and derive their value from, a place in this world is of some significance for any argument that seeks to foreground the relationship between exchange and religion. As Helms points out, the possibility of acquiring objects from the place of ancestral origins, from the Beginning, connects the acquirers 'with the activities and qualities of ancestors' and 'imbues acquisitional activities with tremendous import' (1993, 166, 196). However, she also argues that cosmological authentication derives not just from objects acquired from afar, but also from the products of skilled craftsmen and from the very act of crafting (1993, 24–25). This might prompt us to suggest that the significance of *tremisses* created at the 'tournaments of value' derived not just from the time and place of their manufacture, but from the process of their making. Helms sees in the craft producer's transformation of raw materials into cultural products the continual re-enactment of the creation of the world and of humanity by gods (who are often referred to as artisans) (1993, 24, 28). When those ancestral heroes and producers inhabit a geographically distant locale, objects and artisans (perhaps even styles) from that place assume a special significance.

Finally, Helms points out that if societies that rely on cosmological authentication are to reproduce themselves, then connections with the 'afar' must be maintained, since

> repetition constitutes reassurance that the energizing link between society and its cosmological realm and ancestral creative centres is still effective, still functioning. . . . Repetitive acts of acquisition or skilled crafting are means of continuing the communication between living human beings and the ancestral world (1993, 214).

This more nuanced perspective on inalienable possessions (and cosmological authentication) is, I believe, more appropriate to a world which, despite the fact that Christianity was an emerging force, still had its roots in the migrations of the 5th and 6th centuries. This was a world of *gentes*, many of whom had, by the end of the 6th century, come to believe that Scandinavia (the 'womb of nations') was their ancestral home (Wolfram 1994, 27; Hedeager 1998; Moreland 2000c). At the time when elites in Maastricht were acquiring the remains of St Servatius and exploiting their position on the 'vertical axis', other peoples may have been seeking cosmological authentication in connections with, and objects from, an imaginary world 'beyond the horizon'.

Origin myths provide us with a clear indication of the significance of this geo-cosmography for Europe's *gentes* (see Wolfram 1994), but it also manifests itself in material form. Brooches decorated with animal ornament originated in southern Scandinavia in the first half of the 5th century and spread across Europe in the 6th. The motifs are thought to derive from and to display Scandinavian myths. They exist, far from the 'source', both as Scandinavian originals and as copies, and whether acquired or crafted their

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value stemmed in large part from the connection they forged (and made manifest) with the Beginning – beyond the horizon (Hedeager 1998, 387–91; Høilund Nielsen 1999, 198–200).

Connections with the ancestral homelands were clearly of some significance to the 'Germanic' peoples of the 6th century. Howard Williams has recently proposed that, in Anglo-Saxon England, the cremation of humans and animals together, and their deposition in urns decorated with (especially) horses can be connected to shamanism, soul-journeying and shape-shifting (Williams 2001b) and concludes that this may enable us to perceive 'cremation rites as a pathway to political authority and identity creation in the societies of post-Roman Britain' (2001b, 207). I would further suggest that the 'pathways' taken to the ancestral homelands by the souls of the dead might also have been traversed by the objects of the living. Here the relationship between exchange and religion really comes to the fore.

We can, perhaps, extend this argument to suggest that even if Dorestad lacked Christian inalienable possessions,[4] it (and the other emporia) may have served as links in a chain that continued to connect peoples (including the Anglo-Saxons) to their ancestral homelands, their Beginnings, and through which they acquired the inalienable possessions that provided them with cosmological authentication. The presence of Germanic gods in the genealogies of 8th- and 9th-century Anglo-Saxon kings and of Germanic myths alongside stories from the Christian tradition on the Franks Casket demonstrate that these ancestral memories remained a potent force in 8th-century England (see Howe 1989). Chris Wickham has argued that 'only something as vast, all-powerful, and (above all) intrusive as the late Roman state' could have articulated the network of long-distance trade that spanned the Mediterranean (1994, 107) – in fact, maybe ideologies of belonging, ancestral memories and inalienable possessions could do something similar (if not on such a monumental scale).

The crux of my argument is that we underestimate the complexity of the situation and must, therefore, fail to recover the entire 'transactional order' if we focus only on one 'region' of Europe's geo-cosmography and on only one of the axes along which cosmological authentication flowed. One of the most significant features of early medieval Europe is the fact that the (Christian) celestial realm was not the only 'imaginary world' from which value derived, nor was the vertical axis the only pathway to group identity. People and peoples, at various times and to various degrees, drew upon the resources offered on both the horizontal and the vertical axes. I have already referred to the Franks Casket, and the objects deposited in the Sutton Hoo ship also come to mind (see Williams 20001a, 62–67), but in this context it might be useful to note that by the middle of the 8th century some relics derived their value not just from their links to the supernatural but also from the fact that they came from Rome (or, later, the Middle East) – beyond the horizon (Geary 1994; Geary 2001, 283–318).

Finally, I want to pick up on a point concerning exchange, order and inalienable possessions made (pp. 129–30), but not emphasized, by Theuws. There is a tendency in early medieval archaeology to see the 'gift' as Reason, and gift-exchange as a reciprocal exercise encouraging harmony (Moreland 2000a,

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15–16).[5] However, inalienable possessions cannot, by definition, circulate in a truly reciprocal exchange system – as Helms argues, they are more likely to be acquired (hence the continuous use of this word in the pages above) (1993, 91–108). This insight accords not only with Geary's work on the theft of relics (1978; 1994), but also with that of those who have emphasized the non-consensual means by which objects circulated in the early Middle Ages (for example, Samson 1991, 91–93). The emphasis on acquisition (as opposed to reciprocity) should encourage us to reconsider the distinction between gift and plunder which has been elided in many recent works (including my own), and to think again about the kinds of society we reconstruct for the early Middle Ages.

Theuws's foregrounding of the 'inalienable possession' not only provides a welcome return for 'the neglected material object' (Thomas 1991, 25), it also takes us closer to the spirit of the times. However, to fully explore the 'relationship between exchange and religion . . . and the imaginary world from which value is derived' (p. 124), to fully reconstruct 'an entire transactional order' (p. 125), and to fully appreciate the role of inalienable possessions and cosmological authentication (pp. 129–30) in the construction of the identities of *gentes* we need more 'densely textured facts' (see note 2 in this contribution) and a more expansive understanding of the range of imaginary worlds available in early medieval Europe.

## Notes

[1] 'Inventing . . . a new binary pair would not dissolve the exoticising force of that opposition, but simply make it available in superficially different terms' (Thomas 1991, 34).

[2] What Clifford Geertz has called 'thick description'. Our aim, he says, should be to 'draw large conclusions from small, but very densely textured facts; to support broad assertions about the role of culture in the construction of collective life by engaging them exactly with complex specifics' (Geertz 1973, 28; see also Thomas 1991, 26–27).

[3] Although they do not need to be objects – they can be stories, myths, soil, plants and so on.

[4] Theuws may, in fact, underestimate Dorestad's Christian 'infrastructure' – see the references to Dorestad's 'many churches, priests, and clergy', and 'its holy places' in David Hill's translation of the Life of St Anskar (Hill 2001, 122).

[5] See p. 129 – 'the exchange of objects can serve to equalize positions'.

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## Closer to the essence of the early Middle Ages. A reply

*Frans Theuws*

Ideas do not develop in a vacuum, they are stimulated by debate. The European Science Foundation programme on the 'Transformation of the Roman world', in which I participated, was a magnificent opportunity for the rekindling of this debate. The project entailed the creation of different

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study groups around such topics as economy, rituals and power, and culture. As a consequence, the realization dawned that the organizational separation into these social spheres generated just as many new perspectives as it hid from view. Once the separate spheres had been scrutinized, our perception of the relationship between rituals, economy and culture remained a key objective of research. It is most fortunate that Richard Hodges and John Moreland, representatives of the 'production, distribution and demand group', have now joined the debate because their contributions lead to further refinements, thus bringing us closer to the 'essence of the early Middle Ages'.

Richard Hodges once again draws our attention to the nature of the archaeological record, while John Moreland points to the need for a more differentiated theoretical framework. On the basis of their commentary I would like to add a few notes and refinements of my own to the present picture of early medieval exchange and the role of emporia.

Richard Hodges's comments on the archaeological record are most welcome. Naturally, our current perception is determined by the nature of that record, and to a certain extent by its inevitable shortcomings, which means that we do not always have at our disposal the level of detail we would wish for. Richard Hodges refers to the archaeological deposits of emporia as 'rich'. And in an archaeological sense they are, but a striking feature of the archaeological deposit of Dorestad, for instance, is that it is not 'rich' in the other sense. With the possible exception of a large golden brooch, the Dorestad finds are so commonplace that they could have come from any other rural site of that period. While not wishing to downplay the position of an emporium like Dorestad in the overall exchange system (see below), I believe that this aspect of the archaeological record should not be overlooked. The Dorestad finds relate to habitation on the site rather than to the site's 'core business'. The distinction between finds from rural sites and from emporia, as outlined by Hodges, is perhaps not as great as our current – inadequate – knowledge would suggest. There is growing evidence of artisanal, non-agrarian production on rural sites from the early Middle Ages – the 'wealth of finds' from the settlement of Villers-le-Sec north of Paris being but one example (Cuisenier and Guadagnin 1988). Of course, the situation in the north may well differ from that in Central Italy, but it is perhaps these regional differences that make up the core of a coherent 'European system of exchange'.

Richard Hodges rightly points out the vital role of the monasteries, with their phenomenal growth rate, in the overall transactional order of the Carolingian period. I referred to them only in passing in my contribution, but I had my reasons for doing so. Although in some areas archaeological research into Carolingian monasteries has been tackled with vigour – as Hodges himself does – the question of their role in Carolingian society has been insufficiently investigated, and there has been too great a focus on the religious infrastructure alone. The current discussion about the role of these institutions in linking practical economic transactions and the imaginary world can be added to the agenda for archaeological research, enabling us to modify our perception of monasteries – in economic terms – as primarily large multinational agrarian enterprises. While this is undoubtedly an important

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aspect, San Vincenzo al Volturno shows us that monasteries occupied a more complex and central position in the overall system of production and exchange than we have hitherto believed. Perhaps research is still excessively influenced by the simplistic models of the structure of the Carolingian world used by archaeologists. Based on written sources, these models present a top-down picture, which may invite Darwinian thinking and which – to use Hodges's words – was presumably 'a good deal less prescripted and more fluid in structure' (p. 143).

And now a brief comment on emporia before I go on to discuss John Moreland's response, and to incorporate both responses in my conclusion. Taken from written sources, the concept 'emporium' is a label that has been applied to a number of archaeological sites that disappeared from the landscape after the Carolingian period. However, not all sites with high-quality finds in the North Sea Basin need to be put in the same pigeon-hole, as Richard Hodges seems to suggest when he tries to show that emporia were a more common phenomenon than I proposed. The sites reveal that the production, exchange and consumption of high-quality finds was less exceptional than we have supposed. I can less readily accept, however, that sites like Dorestad existed everywhere. Dorestad occupied a special place in the overall system of exchange, but the extent to which it represented a 'mighty organizational undertaking', constituting together with other comparable emporia 'possibly the greatest organizational achievements of their age', is debatable (p. 143). Our picture of Dorestad is determined by the harbour constructions that have been published. The published part (Hoogstraat 1), however, lies in the zone where jetties were most extended. At Hoogstraat 1, after 150 years of building, the jetty area was ultimately 200 meters wide, that is an average of 1.3 meters annually (the oldest jetties had by then long since fallen into disuse because of silting up of the Rhine). The jetty area is considerably narrower to the north and south. Moreover, as Hodges correctly points out, we do not know the precise nature of social organization in the emporia. If the jetties were extended one by one, a possibility which cannot be ruled out, what then is the 'mighty organizational undertaking'? In my view, a comparison with the creation of abbeys is inappropriate. The houses in Dorestad resemble those found in any rural settlement in the vicinity. I believe that the construction of abbey churches like those at Fulda and San Vincenzo al Volturno (which were conceived as complete entities) is of quite a different organizational order, if only because the expertise required to build and decorate them was not readily available, in contrast to that needed for the wooden houses of Dorestad. Does this detract from Dorestad's position in 'the whole transactional order' of the early Middle Ages? Not at all, and for the very reason that – in my opinion – no major cult place existed there, a fact which has baffled archaeologists. Although the Church was involved in such places, its involvement was confined to non-religious matters. I believe that the Church's aversion to economic concerns, as claimed by Le Goff, is contradicted by archaeological investigations at San Vincenzo and non-religious involvement with these centres: the form and the substance of everyday acts do not always overlap in every respect. Moreover, I believe this explanation relies too heavily on the notion that religion and economy

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were separate in the early Middle Ages. This brings us to the point at which John Moreland's comments begin.

Moreland correctly points to my overriding concern to study as a coherent whole the spheres of economy and religion, hitherto viewed as separate. In order to do so, I have used concepts developed by anthropologists. The major problem here is that many of these concepts are derived from research into observed practices and from interviews with those involved – in other words, precisely those sources to which we as archaeologists do not have access. In my attempt to understand the system of exchange as a whole, I have tried to incorporate concepts that shift the focus of research from the meaning of the exchanged objects to the meaning of the act of exchange itself by the relevant actors. Naturally the range of meanings of the objects plays a role here, but so too does the place or context of the transaction itself and the perceived role of those involved in the transaction. We archaeologists, however, only have the objects and their depositional context to go by. Moreover, if we concentrate on the meaning of practices and on material culture, we encounter the problem of 'ordinary' language. Modern research proceeds from the assumption that 'communication' can occur just as readily with the help of material culture and acts as with spoken and written language. The problem is that a limited vocabulary is being used to denote a possibly much larger number of significant acts and objects, which may shape relations – perhaps unexpressed – with the imaginary world. Miller's potters from India had no terms for a series of observed operations that were part of earthenware production (Miller, 1985, 197–99). Herein may lie part of the problem, noted by Moreland, regarding the differences between logic and presentation.

Related to this problem is the relationship between the imaginary world and everyday practice. My contribution aimed to examine at a more abstract level how the system of exchange is linked to this imaginary world and the totality of norms and values in a given society. Ideally, such research would entail a study of relevant acts – the production of coins, for example. But here archaeologists are up against the problem already alluded to; namely, only to a very limited degree are they in a position to observe the activities that are vital to this kind of research. Here I agree with Moreland that meaning derives not just from the moment or context of production, but also from the process of making. I am thinking here of the importance, described by Tilley, of the canoe production process and the associated rituals and ceremonies as a group-forming element on the island of Wala (Tilley 1999, 102–32).

With regard to the cosmological authentication of objects, I have to agree with John Moreland's observation that we should employ not only a vertical, Christian perspective, but also the horizontal, 'space–time' perspective described in particular by Helms. I am familiar with the work of Helms, and with Hedeager's application of it (see my note 6). I see Dorestad's significance primarily in the context of understanding cross-cultural exchange (see the title of that section), and Helms's ideas are invaluable in this respect. The pieces of the puzzle were all there, but I somehow did not manage to join them together. Her basic idea – that moving through physical space means, at one and the same time, moving through (ancestral) time – is particularly important for Dorestad. I make use of this idea in my teaching to show

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the tremendous impact at a local level of the creation of new Christian cemeteries in the course of the 8th century, all the more since they may have been used in parallel with the old Merovingian cemeteries. Because the old and new cemeteries coexisted, moving through space to each type of cemetery had different cosmological connotations: visiting the old cemetery meant going back in ancestral time; going to the new, Christian cemetery may have meant that as well, but it also meant visiting those buried in anticipation of the Last Judgment. In the latter case, the dead 'lived' in a Christian eschatological context that looked to the future. Through the creation of new, Christian cemeteries, a new time dimension was anchored – as it were – in the landscape (see also Bauschatz 1982, 19, 147–48). Whereas Moreland further differentiates the cosmological authentication of objects by adding a horizontal space–time axis, I wish here to add an implication of the articulation of both axes – namely, the articulation of time dimensions. As I have already written, Dorestad owed its centrality to the fact that it was the place par excellence where this articulation of geo-cosmographies occurred. There is certainly a place for Moreland's horizontal axis here.

A central point in my argument is that the exchange of objects occurs partly on the basis of 'value' derived from the imaginary world, and from the system of norms, values and ideas in society. A central question we must then ask is how does exchange work when it occurs between groups that live and operate in different imaginary worlds and with different norms and value systems? In other words, how did cross-cultural exchange occur in early medieval Europe and how did the objects and people involved derive their value and meaning (Curtin 1984)? I would suggest, without being able to demonstrate precisely how it worked in practice, that places like Dorestad played a central role in this process. Imagine Dorestad being a point on a large circle encompassing early medieval Europe, north Africa and the Middle East around which people and goods moved. Moving around the circle we come to the Christian Frankish kingdom, the non-Christian north and east, and the Arab world in the south. Because the discussion in this volume emphasizes Christian and non-Christian Europe – as a consequence of the *gentes* of Europe seeking their origins in the north – we are in danger of losing sight of the Arab world in particular. But the world was ordered differently in Carolingian times. Movement around the circle will have occurred in both directions, and physical and imaginary boundaries will have repeatedly been crossed. Or perhaps not crossed at all, as was the case with Arabian coins which reached eastern and northern Europe but stopped short at an invisible, but virtually impenetrable border, in the central Netherlands. Why was this? Surely not because people in the south did not know the value of silver? What would have happened if the borders had been crossed? Are objects and people then transformed? And is crossing in the north of the same order and significance as in the Mediterranean region between the Arab and Christian world or between the Arab world and the non-Christian east?

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