Trade in medieval Malmö

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Introduction

The town of Malmö is situated in the southern part of Sweden on the seashore of the Sound separating the Scandinavian peninsula from Denmark. During medieval times this part of Sweden, the province of Scania, was part of the Danish kingdom.

Due to the scarcity of written sources from the high medieval period, we neither know when the town was established nor by whom. However, there are circumstances that indicate a foundation between 1260 and 1275 by King Erik Klipping (1259-1286). According to the Eric Chronicle, the Danish princess Sofia received two small towns as a wedding gift from her husband, the Swedish King Valdemar Birger son, in 1260. These towns were Malmö and Trelleborg (Tomner 1971, 181-182). In another source from 1284 also referring to the wedding gift, King Valdemar called Malmö "our town" (nostro uille) (DRB 2:2, no. 98). Hence, in both sources intimate connections between the royal family and the town of Malmö are apparent. In 1275 the town is for the first time explicitly called a merchant town (DRB 2:2, no. 252), and the first known city charter is dated 1353 (DRB 3:4, no. 67).

Malmö belongs to a group of commercial towns which were founded in the 12th and 13th centuries. The Crown's intention was probably to support the growing trade in the area, but also to gain control over the market places. These towns were situated on or close to the coast. The most important transports of heavy goods went by sea (Fig. 1), and at least the foreign trade had to go by merchant routes across the sea (Andrén 1985).

Fig. 1  Map showing some of the more important sea routes in the Baltic region, the Sound and the North Sea. The location of Malmö gave the town an important role in the trade with staple commodities.
The Hansa had a strong influence in Malmö, but the town never became a member of the Hansa. However, there are other characteristics that show the importance of the town. The German merchants established several companies and guilds there, and they also had their own name for the town: *Ellenbogen*, which means "elbow" (Fig. 2). Malmö seems to have been organized the same way as the towns in the Hanseatic League, i.e. with two mayors and twelve members in the town council, at least after 1330. Probably not all the seats in the town council were occupied at the same time (Tomner 1971, 207).

Fig. 2 One of the town-seals from Malmö. The seal with the cog belongs to a group of town-seals that are common in the area influenced by the Hansa. This particular seal has been preserved attached to just one document dated to 1417. On most other town-seals the name in the legend is spelled *Malmoegbe*, but here the German name *Ellenbogen* is used instead.

**The herring market**

The herring fishery was one of Malmö's most important economical resources and the herring market was probably the reason for Malmö's good trade connections, especially with the Hansatic towns on the southern shores of the Baltic (Tomner 1971, 217. Reinsert 1993, 141). At first glance, the geographical location that was chosen for Malmö seems somewhat peculiar, as there are no natural harbours. Only small vessels could use the shelved beach, while larger ships had to anchor at a road (Olsen 1995, 155-175). This meant that all goods had to be unloaded at sea, a quite complicated procedure. On the other hand, the shelved beaches were of great importance during the fishing season. The herring fishing took place close to the shore and it was carried out by small fishing boats. It was easy for these boats to land their draft on the seashore, and it was also on the beach that the herring was salted and packed in barrels. The beach, situated between the town and the sea, was also the setting for the important autumn fair, held between 24 August and 9 October every year. All transactions concerning the herring took place here. Both the trading and the handling of the herring were strictly regulated in the *Modbog*, a collection of laws that was effectual on the Scanian market (Tomner 1971, 217. SSGL IX, 485 ff.). The fishermen were mostly local, from Scania or the rest of Denmark, but fishermen from the Hansa towns also participated. Salt and empty barrels were supplied by the Hansa merchants.

An extraordinary source that reflects Lübeck's trade relations are the *Pfundzollbücher*, of which those from 1388 to 1400 have been completely preserved (Weibull 1922, 1966). Here we can see that, at least after 1399, most of the salted herring from Scania that went to Lübeck was exported *via* Malmö. In fact, the Malmö trade was larger than the trade with Norway and Sweden together, which clearly shows the importance of the herring and the Scanian market. In the years from 1398 to 1400 at least 89,567 barrels of herring were registered as imports from Malmö in Lübeck. This means that more than 11,000 tons of salted herring were transported from Malmö to Lübeck. Even by modern standards, this is a large amount.

From Lübeck textiles, hops, hemp, beer, wine, wax, pots (bronze vessels or ceramics?), iron, salt from Lüneburg, and empty barrels were exported to Malmö. On their return journey the ships transported herring, corn, barley, oats, hazelnuts, butter, hemp, potash, dyestuffs soaked in lye, hops, hides and horses. Some staple commodities, mostly textiles from Flanders, were also stored in Malmö before being sent to Lübeck (Weibull 1922, 54-57). According to the *Pfundzollbücher* in Lübeck, Malmö had an exceptional position in the
Hanseatic trade with Scandinavia. The total volume of Lübeck's trade with Malmö in the year 1399 came up to over 60,000 marks and was thus larger than the trade with Bergen, Stockholm and Sweden together. In the year 1400, Lübeck's trade with Malmö was considerably larger than the trade with the whole of Denmark (Weibull 1966, 122; Tommer 1971, 221-228).

For the local trade two market places were used, both were so-called "street markets". The main market was situated at Adelgata. Along the south and north side of this street warehouses and shops with stepped gables were built, facing the market place. This was also the place of the district court, the town hall, and the main church. The other market place was situated along Syndre gade, i.e. "South Street" (Fig. 3).

The Hansa Merchant Guilds, Houses and Organisation

In 1353 special privileges were given to those foreign merchants that wanted to stay in Malmö during the winter. They needed a special permission by the town council and they also had to pay the same taxes as the locals (DRB 3:4, no. 67).

The Hansa merchants in Malmö were associated in companies and guilds. Stettin, Rostock and Lübeck had their own offices and houses, but there was also the German Guild, that protected the commercial interests of the other Hansa towns. This Guild received its charter already in 1329 (DRB 2:10, no. 118). The buildings of the German Guild Hall are first mentioned in 1460, but they are probably much older (Rep. Dan. 2:1, 372).

The Rostocker House is first mentioned in 1444 and the Rostocker Guild is mentioned in 1452, together with the guilds from Stettin and Lübeck (Rep. Dan. 1:4, 637. LÄU III, 355).

The merchants from Stettin were granted permission to establish a guild or company in 1452, when they were also allowed to have their own altar in the church of St Peter (LÄU III, 352). At first they rented a rather small yard from Lund's chapter, but in 1475 they got a larger merchant

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Fig. 3 Reconstruction of Malmö's town plan around 1450 (by the author). A The beach where the autumn fair was held; B Market square with town hall, district court and the church of St Peter; C Market square on the South Street; D The yard of the German Guild; E The smaller Rostocker Yard; F The Rostocker Yard; G The older Stettiner Yard; H The younger Stettiner Yard; I The Lübecker Houses; J The premises of von Conow.
house with stone buildings and timber-framed warehouses (LÅU IV, 339).

The merchants from Lübeck had seven gabled houses, lying in a row along the main street near the harbour gate. It is uncertain when they obtained this property, but there is reason to believe that they bought it after 1370 when the peace treaty of Stralsund was signed. In this treaty, the federated towns of the Hanseatic League gained control over the most important towns and castles in Scania for a period of 15 years, and obtained two thirds of the income from the Scanian market (DRB 3:8, no. 369).

During an investigation in 1963, reused building material such as capitals and bases from a Romanesque church was found in the cellar of one of these houses (Bager 1982, 77; 1971, 258. Holmberg 1969, 79; 1977, 205. Reisnert 1992, 319). In 1381 merchants from Lübeck were accused of having demolished the church in "upper Malmö" (DRB 4:2, no. 165). Upper Malmö was the old village, first mentioned in 1170 (LDN, 10), from which the town and its name had originated. Some of the building material from the destroyed church of that village could have been reused when people from Lübeck built the merchant houses (Reisnert 1994, 35).

The archaeological material

The archaeological material reflects only part of the trade as it is known from written sources. To a certain extent, however, the archaeological finds can also supplement the picture of the medieval trade in Malmö. Moreover they can tell us when large-scale trading began.

The herring trade is indicated by finds of barrels that were imported from Hanseatic areas. In-

Fig. 4 Floats of pine bark, some with house-marks, from different excavations in central Malmö. Photo: Ingrid Nilsson, Malmö Museum.
vestigations on the premises of von Conow yielded a barrel that, according to dendrochronological analysis, dates from about 1290 and originated in the Schleswig area (Reinsert 1993, 134).

Floats made of pine bark are a very common type of find on most of the larger excavations in the town (Fig. 4). These finds and pieces of fishing nets are rather traces of the fishing of and not of the actual trade in herring. Pine-trees large enough to grow suitable bark for floats are not known from the Malmö area in medieval times, thus the pine bark must have been imported from the northern part of Scania or other places around the Baltic.

A special type of construction, so-called clay-lined pits, can also be connected with the production of salted herring (Fig. 5). These small pits, the sides and bottom of which are covered with clay, are a common feature in the early layers in Malmö as well as in other places connected with the fishing of herring (Billberg 1993, 117-118. Ersgård 1988, 41-48. Liebgott 1979, 18 ff.). A discussion concerning the function and use of these clay-lined pits has occurred now and then, and several explanations have been put forward. One of the most convincing suggests that they might have been used for the production of lamp oil. Waste products from the cleaning of the herrings were put into the pit and ground together, and after some time the oil started to separate (Billberg 1993, 117-118).

Casks

Finds of small wooden objects that belong to casks made of silver-fir are common in all medieval layers dated to before the mid-15th century. It seems that these casks have their origin in Lübeck, where numerous finds have been made. The casks were used as part of the tableware and are often found in or nearby houses (Fig. 6).

Proto-stoneware, stoneware and pots

Proto-stoneware is only found in layers older than 1350. Stoneware is more or less common in layers from 1340 on up to the end of the Middle Ages and even from the Renaissance and Baroque periods (Fig. 7). Mostly beakers, jugs, goblets, tankards and bowls are known, but there are also special objects, such as a little statue (Fig. 8), probably from Leiden in Westfalen (Reinsert 1993, 18), and a fragment of a "hedgehog-jug" from Waldenburg (Gaimster 1997, 67). The finds indicate a large-scale import from the most well-known production areas in Germany, and finds from Siegburg and Saxony are especially common. Among the 16th- and 17th-century imports

Fig. 5 Plan and section of a clay-lined pit investigated in the residential block Västerport in 1981. In Malmö a total of c. 100 clay-lined pits have been documented. This clay-lined pit had been reused and the two phases are represented by layer L and layer S on the section drawing.
from Cologne, Westerwald, Frechen and Raeren stoneware dominates clearly (Billberg 1987, Gaimster 1997, 67). The trade in ceramics is not directly mentioned in the Pfundzollbücher. However, ceramics may have been imported in the disguise of Olla, a term translated by Weibull (1922, 80) as "(bronze) pots". These Olla were

Fig. 6 One of several casks found in the residential block von Conow in 1976.

Fig. 7 Stoneware of different age and origin found in the cultural layers of Malmö. Photo: Lena Wilhelmson, Malmö Museer.

Fig. 8 A stoneware statuette found in one of the houses along the street in the residential block von Conow (see Fig. 11). Similar statuettes were produced in Leeden in Westfalen, Germany. Photo: Malmö Museer.
normally transported in barrels and boxes (or chests). On at least one occasion, as much as 1 1/2 lest (probably 36 barrels) of Olla with the suffix bona were shipped to Malmö. In 1400 a ship with 6 1/2 lest salt, 10 lest of empty barrels, 1 lest beer and 3 cistae olla (boxes or chests) left Lübeck for its destination Malmö. In this case the combination of beer and Olla, together with the normal rate of taxation (27 marks), indicates that we are dealing with pottery and not with bronze-vessels.

Fragments of bronze-vessels are not unusual in the archaeological material in Malmö, but their provenance is not known. Neither can the origin of any of the completely preserved medieval vessels be identified. One of these complete vessels was found in the backyard of one of the so-called "Lübecker Houses" and, according to the mark, probably is of German origin (Fig. 9).

**Lead seals and textiles**

According to the Pfundzollbücher, a large amount of cloth was exported from Lübeck to Malmö, but some textiles also went the opposite way. This was probably the result of the staple trade between Lübeck, Flanders, and other western markets via Malmö. The textiles that we find in the average archaeological investigations have probably been imported directly to Malmö.

Pieces of textiles are often found during archaeological investigations, particularly in cesspits. These are, so to say, the final station of the textile trade. The pieces are very fragmented and carry marks of intense use. The origin of most of the textiles is not known, but there are some fragments of cloth of very high quality.

Lead seals from bales of cloth are unfortunately very rare finds on our archaeological sites. Only

![Fig. 9 Bronze-vessels found in Malmö. The smaller one was found in the backyard of one of the Lübecker Houses in the 1930s. The founder's mark was reproduced on the bottom of each vessel. Photo: Helen Thoresdotter, Malmö Museum.](image-url)
eight of them can certainly be assigned to medi-
val layers, and in only two cases their provenance
could be identified. One comes from Göttingen
and the other from Leyden (Fig. 10). One seal
with the inscription H K may have its origin in
Hagen in Westfalen.

**Coins**

Coins normally indicate trade but are used
both in domestic and foreign trade. From Malmö
about 1,000 coins from archaeological investiga-
tions are known. About 850 of these coins date
from the medieval period. The majority were min-
ted in Denmark, but 78 coins derive from the Ger-
man-speaking area and most of them were min-
ted in towns dominated by the Hansa. The brac-
teates from Mecklenburg are the most common
group with 35 pieces. The next group is consid-
erably smaller comprising 7 coins from Güstrow.
Both Rostock and Lübeck are represented by 5
coins each, and from Wismar and Stralsund only 2
coins respectively have been found up to now.
The rest of the coins are from different places,
except a group of Vinkenaugen that have their
origin in Pyritz.

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**Fig. 10** Cloth seal from the town Leyden found in Malmö. Photo: Helen Thoresdotter, Malmö Museum.
The mixture of these German coins reflects the extraordinary position of Lübeck in Malmö, the domination of Mecklenburg bracteates being so evident in the material. This is not surprising, if we consider that Lübeck completely controlled the international herring market. But the Mecklenburg bracteate is a coin with a low value and more suitable for small-scale trade than for large-scale transactions. As the material is so heavily dominated by Danish coins, one can assume that the Hansa merchants were forced to change most of their money into the local currency – at least after 1444 when the centralized Danish mint was located in Malmö.

Most of the trade with the merchants from Lübeck and the other Hansa towns probably took place at the market place or on the beach. So far only minor excavations have been carried out there. One golden coin from Cologne has been found in Norra Vallgatan in the neighbourhood of the Beach Gate. This coin gives us a vague hint that some of the large-scale transactions actually took place on or nearby the beach.

On the other hand, ten coins, in this case only from Denmark, have been found in a warehouse in the residential area von Conow (Fig. 11). They were minted during the reign of Erik Menved (1289-1319). Just outside the house, on a stone-paved open place in front of the building, a seal belonging to a merchant from Norway or Sweden was found (Reisnert 1994, 12 ff.). In my opinion, the coins and the seal are the tiny traces of mercantile activity in the warehouse itself. This means that business activity also took place in a more secluded environment than the public market place.

An interesting find of coins shows a connection between Malmö and the Baltic region influenced by the Hansa. On the cemetery of St Jörgen a clearly defined group of ten infant graves was found. Under the back of five children a coin was found. Three of these coins could be identified. One derived from Hamburg, one from Güstrow, and one had been released by the mint master of the Teutonic Order, Winrich von Kniprode. The two other coins were in such a bad condition that they could not be identified. The supervisor of this investigation, Cathrine Einarsen, interprets these children as being the deceased infants of families that came from German-speaking areas and had their winter quarters in Malmö.

**Building material**

Imported building material is known from around 1291. Oak beams from a house on the premises of von Conow dated dendrochronologically to "around 1291" were imported from the Schleswig area. Obviously already at that time there was a considerable lack of wood suitable as building material around Malmö (Reisnert 1993, 138). So-called Pomeranian pine was used for some of the late medieval timber-framed houses, and sometimes also for wells. The system of water pipes was in its oldest phase (after 1550) made of Pomeranian pine.

In the middle of the 15th century and later, roof tiles and to a lesser degree probably also bricks were imported from Lübeck. Roof tiles with marks from different brick kilns are known. St Peter's key is the most common mark, but another one has recently been found (Bager 1969, 47). Even the H in a hart (probably from Großwesenberg on the River Trave) has been found on bricks and roof tiles in Hedmanska Gården, but these probably date from the post-medieval period (Fig. 12).
Glazed floor tiles, so-called Dutch astraks, are frequently found in layers from the late 15th and early 16th centuries and derive, as the name indicates, from the Netherlands (Bager 1936, 29).

All window glass was also imported. According to documentary sources from the end of the medieval period this type of glass mainly came from Hesse and France (Bager 1936, 25).

An exclusive import known from the Rosenvinge House is wallpaper probably dating to 1570, but it may be even be earlier than that as the house was already built in 1534 (Bager 1969, 71). According to the water stamps, the paper came from Rouen in France, but it must have been printed somewhere in Germany.

**Zusammenfassung**


Malmös ab, wird aber auch in der materiellen Kultur, z.B. in der Kleidung und beim Tischgeschirr, deutlich.

Literature
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