LOOKING IN FROM THE EDGE: NEW PERSPECTIVES ON EARLY MODERN TRADE BETWEEN SHETLAND, ORKNEY, AND GERMAN HANSEATIC MERCHANTS

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Abstract: This article delves into the transformative impact of reframing narratives on historical trade relationships across the North Atlantic, focusing on the islands of Orkney and Shetland. Drawing from the Looking in from the Edge (LIFTE) research project and its associated museum exhibition, hosted at the German Maritime Museum, Bremerhaven, the study challenges traditional perceptions. It highlights the Hanse, initially a network of German merchants connecting major European cities, expanding into North Atlantic trade in the 15th century. The research explores long-term relations between Hanseatic merchants and Shetland communities, re-evaluating the islands' roles in early modern European trading networks and capitalist markets.

Keywords: fisheries, trade relations, Northern Isles, Germany, Hanse.

Introduction

In 2018, the Scottish parliament issued a ban on putting Shetland in a floating box on maps used in official documents. The measure was part of the Islands Bill, a set of regulations to strengthen the position of Scotland's island communities, which aims to correct the 'geographical mistake' that conveys a false impression of the distance at which Shetland is located from the Scottish mainland and its connected political and economic challenges (BBC News 2018). The issue points not only to the geographical distance from Scotland, but by extension to the distinct cultural identity of the Shetland islands. Located almost midway between Scotland and the Norwegian coast, the islands were historically much more closely connected to Scandinavia as part of the Norwegian jarldom of Orkney, both economically and culturally. Even after they became Scottish in 1469, the Scandinavian influence remained strong: the Norse language Norn was spoken until the 18th century (Fenton 1978: 616) and traditional boats were built in the Scandinavian clinker shipbuilding tradition (Fenton 1978: 552-570). Today the Norse heritage is still celebrated each year during the festival 'Up Helly Aa',

which culminates in the burning of a Viking ship. Even in neighbouring Orkney, where the Scottish influence was much stronger much earlier (Crawford 1983), the Norse history remains visible, for example in geographical names.

Not only the Norwegians left traces on the islands, but also German merchants from Hanseatic towns and Dutch herring fishermen who frequented Shetland in the 16th and 17th centuries left lasting impressions. Yet from a Scottish, Norwegian, and continental European perspective, the Northern Isles are usually regarded as located at the fringes, which is mainly a land-based view. However, seen from the perspective of maritime trade and seaways, the Scottish Northern Isles can be considered located at a crossroads that connected various European regions: Scandinavia, the British Isles, Germany and the Netherlands, and North Atlantic islands Iceland and the Faroes. Being located on trade routes from Dutch and German ports to the Far East and the Americas, they even connected with the expanding colonial trade networks in the early modern period. The smoking of tobacco is a prime example of the impact of the colonial trade on insular communities, where it appeared in the 17th century.

This paper explores how the display of historical and archaeological research through exhibitions can reframe narratives of British islands in relation to larger urban centres throughout history by focusing on the Scottish Northern Isles Orkney and Shetland. We move away from mainland UK and continental Europe and recentre our gaze towards the North Sea and the North Atlantic, understanding the sea as a place of encounters and connection rather than a dividing barrier. We use the exhibition *Looking in from the Edge – The Hanse in the North Atlantic* (German title*: Immer weiter – Die Hanse im Nordatlantik*) in the German Maritime Museum in Bremerhaven to demonstrate how the Northern Isles were tied into international trading networks, both economically and culturally. The exhibition was opened at the German Maritime Museum on 23 March 2023 and shows the role of Orkney and Shetland within the international trading networks, with a special focus on the German Hanseatic merchants between the 15th and 18th century,

Looking In From the Edge: Research Context and Methods

By focusing on the entanglement of the Orkney and Shetland islands in early modern international trade networks, the exhibition is well-suited to challenge assumptions often related with islands, such as concepts of centre and periphery, connectedness, and isolation, big and small. In recent years it has been acknowledged that the study of island societies must

deal with these assumptions and calls have been made for an interdisciplinary and comparative approach in island studies (Dierksmeier 2021). Islands are often seen as small, remote, and isolated places, although this is in most cases a most problematic idea and depends very much on the eye of the beholder. The concept of Islandness problematises these assumptions and challenges us to look at islands in terms of connection, rather than isolation (Foley et al. 2023). From this point of view, we want to emphasise connection, exchange, and reciprocity and frame the Northern Isles as sites with their own agency that interact with, but are not merely dependent, from the UK mainland and continental Europe. We are doing so by focusing on historical trading relationships, centring Orkney and Shetland into a trade network that foreshadows international capitalism, and the social and cultural networks that were established between foreign merchants and local island communities.

The exhibition was curated as part of the output of recent research projects at the German Maritime Museum that studied German trade in the North Atlantic in the late Middle Ages and the Early Modern period. The latest of these projects, *Looking in from the Edge. The impact of international commercialization on north-west Europe's peripheral communities 1468–1712: production, commerce and consumption in Orkney and Shetland (LIFTE)* (2020-2024), focuses exclusively on Orkney and Shetland as trading centres and explicitly moves the focus away from large European trading centres towards the islands themselves. The project is a cooperation with researchers from the University of the Highlands and Islands, Orkney College, the University of Lincoln, and the University of Tübingen. An interdisciplinary team of anthropologists, historians, archaeologists, and others worked together to understand the importance of the Northern Isles in processes of commercialisation and international trade in the Early Modern period.

The methodologies used during fieldwork from all disciplines became part of the exhibition as such, and enrich the study of exhibition storytelling, displaying archaeological excavations, archival work, and the use of ethnography (Sitzia 2023). Archaeological artefacts uncovered at excavations in Orkney and Shetland tell the story of how international exchange influenced consumption and production patterns on the islands. Written sources are not just used to analyse the general trading patterns, but also serve as objects that allow a glimpse on the persons who produced them. This is part of the strategy of challenging ideas of margin and periphery by moving the focus to stories of single actors within the trade networks. Historians of the LIFTE project explored archival sources to learn more about individuals who were

involved in international trade relations. The exhibition provides examples of both German and Orkney merchants and the relationships and ties they formed within local communities. It does so with a display of archival sources in which relations between merchants and the island communities are narrated, and with objects that materialise the presence of the merchants within insular communities throughout the generations until this day: gravestones. Ethnographic contributions in this project tie finding of other disciplines together and reflect on them: how can we tell stories of science, Islandness, and relations along the sea in an engaging way and connect them to current experiences? Participant observation, interviews, and engagement with museum collections played a central role in supporting research and curating the final exhibition.

Next to the exhibition at the German Maritime Museum, exhibitions are planned on the Northern Isles (Shetland Museum and Archives in Lerwick and Stromness Museum in Orkney), each of which have their own emphases to accommodate local communities and other visitors of the museums. These exhibitions give opportunity to re-think the history of the islands without taking metropolitan Great Britain as the centre point. This article is based on the exhibition shown at the German Maritime Museum, as those other exhibitions are still in planning at the time of writing.

Crossroads Northern Isles

The main objective of the exhibition project, to move perspective on Orkney and Shetland from places at the fringes to the centre of commercial exchange, is visualised by a large wall map which is the centre point of the exhibition (Fig. 1). It shows a 17th-century map of the North Sea area, upon which Orkney and Shetland are highlighted with a magnifying glass. Labels for place names in different colours show locations where the LIFTE team conducts research in form of their home institutions (Bremerhaven, Tübingen, Kirkwall, and Lincoln), archives and excavations. Moreover, arrows and icons drawn in red display the most important traded commodities and sea routes that connected the islands to the rest of Europe, and in doing so, highlight the Northern Isles as an important crossroads between Scandinavia and the British Isles, Germany and the North Atlantic.

Figure 1: 'Crossroads North Atlantic' with wall map of the North Sea in the background and the sailing manual 'Het licht der zee-vaert' in a showcase in the foreground. Photo: Annica Müllenberg/DSM.

Stories trace the merchants from the Hanseatic towns Hamburg, Bremen and Lübeck, who crossed the North Sea to trade in Shetland from the late 15th century onwards (Holterman 2020; Friedland 1983; Smith 2019; Holterman & Grassel 2020). Predominantly interested in acquiring salted and dried fish caught by Shetland fishermen for the European market, they traded in more than 20 known harbours across the islands, which many of them visited each summer. As the settlement pattern of the islands was based on single farms, and urban centres were absent until the late 17th century, a clear central marketplace was absent in Shetland. The same goes for the fixed port infrastructure known from European commercial centres, such as quays, piers, and cranes. Instead, trading ships moored in the sheltered bays, while lighter boats brought commodities to the shore, where small booths were erected that served as storage spaces and shops (Holterman 2020: 215-225). The islands were not only of interest for Hanseatic merchants as a trading destination, but also as a waypoint on their way to Iceland and the Faroe Islands. For example, one of the first testimonies of the presence of German traders on the islands was a shipwreck in Shetland of a Bremen ship on its way to Iceland in

1469 (Hänselmann 1888).

Shetland was not only frequented by German merchants. Scottish and English merchants frequented the islands in increasing numbers from the late 16th century onwards (Smith 1984: 20-25; Shaw 1980: 174-175; Donaldson 1958: 68-69). These foreign traders were so present that their names became attached to certain bays on contemporary sea charts. An example is the Dutch sailing manual *Het Licht der Zee-vaert* by Willem Janszoon Blaeu (Blaeu 1620), which displays an anchorage in southern Shetland as 'Hamburger haven ofte Bremerhaven'. Next to it the name 'Schotsche ree' indicates that the bay was also frequently used by Scots (Fig. 1). A final foreign influence in Shetland were herring fishing vessels from Holland, the so-called busses, which anchored in large numbers in Shetland bays, first and foremost in Bressay Sound (Smith 1984: 25-28; Poulsen 2008). Under the influence of their presence, the current capital Lerwick developed on its shore in the late 17th century (Shaw 1980: 176).

In Orkney the economic situation was quite different. Where Shetland had developed export-oriented fisheries around 1500, Orkney instead specialised in growing barley, which was mainly exported to the urban centres in Scotland. Three storehouses built in the 1640s for collecting barley for export are visible testimonies of this activity. Trading in Orkney mainly centred in the town of Kirkwall (a royal burgh since 1486) and was in the hands of local merchants, so-called merchant lairds, instead of foreigners (Shaw 1980: 168-170; Marwick 1936). Orkney's grain was also exported to Shetland, which grew only little grain itself. According to a description of John Brand in 1701, Shetlanders paid for the Orkney grain with money they received from German merchants (Brand 1701); otherwise, the islands' economy was mostly based on barter exchange and credit extension (Holterman 2022). This influence is illustrated in the exhibition with a display of foreign (German, Dutch and Scottish) coins from the 15th to the 18th century found in Shetland. For both, Shetland and Orkney, the centuries-old connections with Norway remained vital even after the island groups had been pledged to Scotland in 1468/69. Norway was mainly important as a source of timber and as a market for coarse woollen fabric *wadmal* that was produced on the islands since Norse times (Shaw 1980: 178-179; Smith 1984: 32-35).

Orkney and Shetland were also a node in a larger network of sea routes, connecting northern Europe to the Americas, the Mediterranean and even the Far East. Large merchant ships from the Netherlands and Hanseatic towns in Germany passed the islands on their way to or returning from these regions, taking a detour around the British Isles to avoid going through

the English Channel. There, enemy warships posed a real threat, due to the many naval conflicts such as the English-Dutch naval wars. This is amongst others reflected in many ship losses of German, Dutch, and Spanish ships known from written and archaeological records. The most famous of these was the Spanish warship *El Gran Grífon*, originally a Hanseatic trading vessel, that was confiscated as part of the Spanish Armada and wrecked on Fair Isle in 1588 (Grassel 2015). A letter shown in the exhibition (sent by merchant James Omand to his employer, Shetland laird Laurence Sinclair of Brugh from 1640) narrates of peaceful trading with Germans as well as the violent attack of Spanish-sponsored privateers from Dunkirk on a fleet of Dutch warships that was waiting in Bressay Sound to escort merchantmen returning from the East Indies (Hibbert-Ware, 1640). Recently it has even been suggested that Shetland functioned as a provisioning station for ships sailing to Newfoundland and New England (Bouchard 2020), although the direct historical evidence for such a practice is rather thin.

Traces of Connection and Exchange

In line with the interdisciplinary character of the LIFTE project, the exhibition uses written records and archaeological evidence of historical exchange to trace social and cultural impact and effects which long-term and close trade relations had on the communities on Orkney and Shetland. Examples of material culture highlight social and cultural changes which communities in Orkney and Shetland experienced through the trading relationships with foreign markets. Illustrating the more agricultural economy of Orkney and the fishing communities of Shetland, production and trade of goods for the international market are analysed and international trade patterns are contextualised in day-to-day lived experience of locals. Central to the exhibition, below the wall map, is a large-scale aerial photograph of the farmstead Skaill in Rousay, Orkney. This farmstead was continuously settled from the Norse period until the 19th century, and archaeologists of the University of the Highlands and Islands have been excavating here since 2015. Museum visitors are invited to enter the excavation area and to explore examples of finds of imported and produced goods from a timespan of roughly a thousand years, which are made visible through openings in the floor.

As mentioned before, while inhabitants of Orkney predominantly grew barley for export, Shetland depended on its fisheries. Under the influence of foreign demand for dried fish on the continent and the British mainland, inhabitants of Shetland developed large-scale longline fisheries for cod and ling, as well as a distinct method for curing fish. They were beheaded and gutted, salted, and laid out flat on the rocks and stony beaches (*ayres*) to dry. The method was

in use until the early 20th century (Fenton 1978: 579-584). The importance of Shetland fisheries is among others illustrated by a model of cured fish and a collection of early modern cod bones found in Bremen, Germany (Fig. 2). Their large size and the fact that cranial bones are almost completely absent from the assembly (as the heads were cut off before the fish was dried) attests that these were imported dried fish from the North Atlantic, quite probably from Shetland (Küchelmann 2019).

Next to barley and fish, the islanders paid their taxes with produce such as butter and wadmal, a coarse woollen cloth. These items were subsequently exported by local authorities to Scotland, Germany, and Norway. All kinds of other products that could not be produced on the islands had to be imported: flour, beer and wine, guns, clothing, kitchenware, tools, tobacco, fishing tackle and salt for salting fish. Timber was mostly imported from Norway. Imports are mainly visible in archaeological excavations through ceramic fragments. Analyses show that these came among others from Scotland or Germany. This influx of foreign products and the presence of foreign traders also led to cultural influences: contemporary accounts describe Shetlanders for example as dressed in German fashion (Irvine 2006: 57-58).

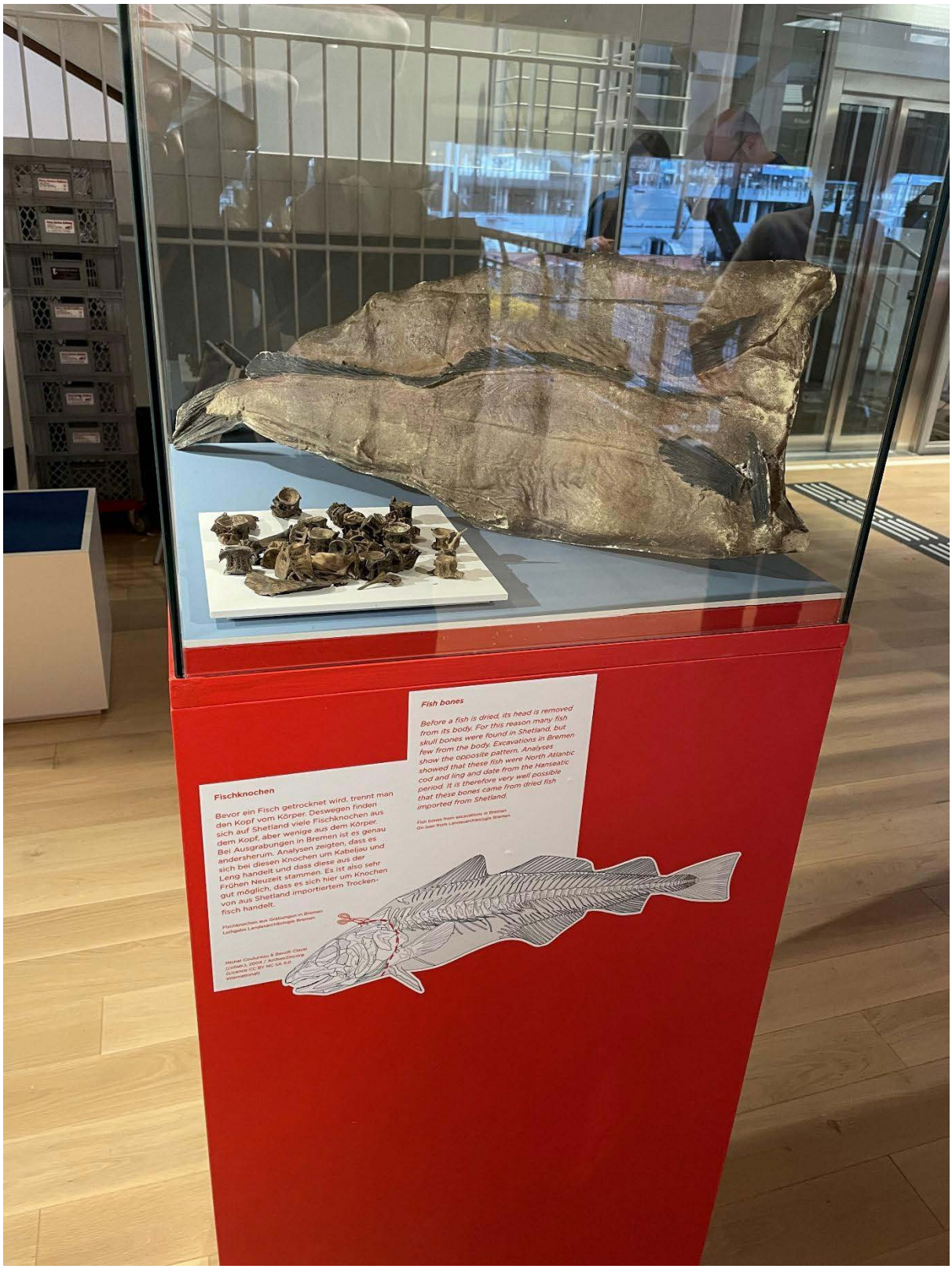

Figure 2: Display of fish bones from excavations in Bremen, Germany, and a model of fish salted and dried in Shetland. Photo: Hans Christian Küchelmann.

A distinct group of imported products are colonial products. They appear on the island markets in the late 16th and 17th centuries. Trading accounts of Hamburg merchant Otto Make from

1653 (Neven of Windhouse Papers 1635) and of Orkney captain Peter Winchester (Traill-Dennison Papers 1664) show that commodities such as sugar, ginger, pepper, and other spices were imported in large quantities. However, one of the primary examples of the consumer revolution that was set in course by the colonial trade of European countries was tobacco. Due to the inclusion of the Northern Isles and the North Atlantic, the exhibition offered the opportunity to include a more detailed understanding of the influence of early modern capitalist trade on island societies, a topic which can be traced very well by the advent of smoking. Tobacco began its triumphal march through Europe in the 16th and 17th century. Make's and Winchester's accounts show that by the 17th century, smoking had also reached the Northern Isles. Tobacco was grown on plantations in America (Virginia), but also in Europe, and reached Orkney and Shetland via ports like Hamburg or Bristol in England. In the archaeological record, the rapid spread of smoking is primarily attested by large amounts of clay pipe fragments. A selection of these fragments found in Shetland is included in the exhibition. Thus, this crop is a good example of a global, colonial commodity, like spices and coffee. These goods gradually found their way into people's everyday consumption and changed their lifestyle habits, made possible by the colonialism of European countries.

Making Research Visible and Challenging Perceptions of the Hanse

The above developed storyline does not only reflect on archaeological findings that help us trace relations between German merchants and the communities of the Northern Isles, but also intends to show how research challenges existing views of history by constantly asking new questions. In the exhibition this is done by incorporating four tables of the existing permanent exhibition into the temporary exhibition. Additions and commentaries are written in red handwritten letters next to exhibition texts, showing the audience how new research questions arise and how historical narratives are questioned within that process (Fig. 3). An example of these questions is the role of Orkney within the trading networks, which was neglected in former research. It was especially unclear why German merchants were so prominently present in Shetland but seemed to have had no interest in trading in Orkney. By comparing the economic situation on both island groups and their commercial links, it is possible to get a beginning of an answer to this question, which has to do with the focus on grain instead of fish as most important export product, the closer connections of Orkney with Scotland and the earlier emergence of a merchant class in Orkney.

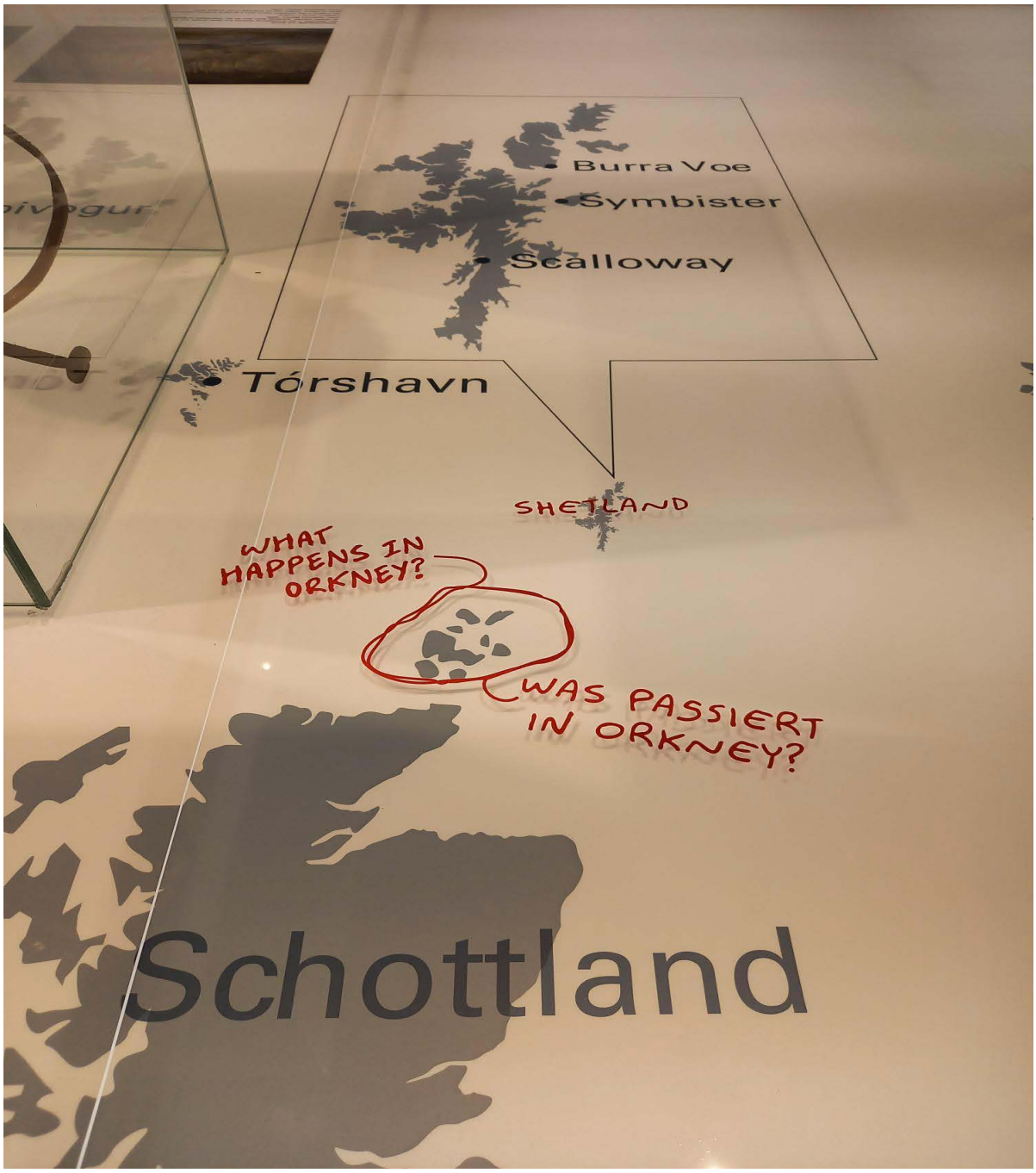

Figure 3: Interventions with the permanent exhibition are asking new questions. Photo: Paula Schiefer.

Another question that figures prominently in the exhibition is which role the German Hanse played in trade around the islands. This is particularly important, as narratives around medieval and early modern maritime heritage in Germany are linked almost exclusively to the Hanse, an organisation of Low German merchants and cities who were active in trade across the North and Baltic Seas from the late 12th to the 17th century. Intensive trade between Hanseatic cities bordering the North Sea and Baltic Sea contributed to the development of a regional (Blockmans 1996), but also locally distinct identity (Asmussen 2022) until this day. Those urban

centres in the continental European North as well as the four most important outposts of the Hanse (*Kontore*) Novgorod, London, Bruges, and Bergen are the focus of Hanseatic studies until today (Dollinger 2012: 124-35). The renewed interest in the Hanse in the 19th century maintained a process that could be categorised as 'cultural remaritimisation' (Tommarchi 2021) and shapes storylines of exhibitions, cities, and representation of the Hanse until today. This is particularly evident in the permanent exhibition in the German Maritime Museum, which focusses on the well-preserved medieval shipwreck (c. 1380) known as the Bremen cog. In German historical research since the 19th century, cogs were seen as the main type of long-distance trading vessel during the heyday of the German Hanse in the 14th century and a symbol of German commercial power (Tanner & Belasus 2021: 315; Dolinger 2012: 182). The permanent exhibition therefore necessarily devotes much attention to topics relating to the Hanse, which forms the background against which the LIFTE exhibition is placed.

Recent historiographical debates have challenged traditional views about the character and role of the Hanse. Traditionally seen as a unified commercial power block (cf. the usual English translation 'Hanseatic League', recent research has emphasised diverging and often conflicting interests between various members of the Hanse, leading to models of the Hanse as community of interests, network organisation, or an institution for conflict resolution (Huang 2020; Ewert & Selzer 2016; Wubs-Mrozewicz 2017). This paradigm shift goes hand in hand with a shifted focus of scholarly research from centres to the margins, such as for example the role of small inland Hanseatic towns (e.g. Ashauer, Holterman & Siegemund 2021) and the late Hanseatic period of the 16th and 17th century, which is traditionally seen as a period in which the Hanse was disintegrating (Dolinger 2012: 433-87).

The attention on North Atlantic trade is an important part of these debates. Originally it was forbidden for Hanseatic merchants to trade directly with North Atlantic islands under privileges granted by the Norwegian king to the Hanse in its important *Kontor* in Bergen, which controlled trade in dried fish from Scandinavia. Merchants from Bremen and Hamburg, who had a marginal position in Bergen until the 16th century, started to ignore these trading bans in the late 15th century and traded with the islands directly (Holterman 2020: 84-85; Hammel-Kiesow 2019). The Hanseatic trade with North Atlantic islands, including Shetland, is therefore an example of both trade outside the large Hanseatic centres and of the transformation of the Hanse in the early modern period. North Atlantic trade was already outlined in the newly curated permanent exhibition in the German Maritime Museum in 2017, and this topic is now further explored by the LIFTE exhibition (Fig. 4). The topic of trade in Orkney and Shetland

therefore not only forces us to reconsider the role of islands in early modern trading networks, but also questions established views of these networks in general. By tracing how local and foreign actors responded to the economic circumstances on the islands, it prompts the question whether we should rather understand this period as a transformation of activities and priorities within the upcoming international capitalist market than as a period of Hanseatic decline.

Figure 4: Opening of the exhibition, 23 March 2023. Photo: Annica Müllenberg/DSM.

Personal Stories of the Actors in the Trade

In Shetland, German and other foreign merchants traded directly with inhabitants on location. Traders returned each year and developed enduring financial and social relations with the islanders, which often lasted for many generations. Visible testimonies of these relations are two 16th-century gravestones of merchants from Bremen, Segebad Detken and Hinrick Segelken, in the church of St Olaf on the island Unst, the northernmost of the Shetland islands (Fig. 5). Detken's gravestone reads: 'Here lies the worthy Segebad Detken, citizen and merchant of Bremen. He carried on his business in this country for 52 years, and passed away blessed in our Lord in the year 1573 on the 20th of August. God rest his soul' (MacDonald 1934: 29-30). Detken's burial place was even remembered almost a century later, as is attested in a letter from 1661, in which the elders of the church supported the merchants Herman and Gerdt Detken, descendants of Segebad, in a conflict with the Shetland tacksmen about import duties. The letter explicitly refers to the text on Segebad Detken's stone (Staatsarchiv Bremen, 2-W.9.b.10.).

Contrary to Shetland, in Orkney the organisation of international trade was in the hands of a few local merchant families, known as the merchant lairds (Marwick 1936; Shaw 1980: 169-70). They were well-respected in their communities, and traces of their status can be found throughout the old town in Kirkwall. In the St Magnus Cathedral, memorial plaques of the family of Captain Peter Winchester from 1674 as well as the Traill family can still be found today. Placing individual biographies into the network of relationships exemplifies how social and cultural influences between all sides could have been created through trading. Without knowing many more details about Segebad Detken, visitors can imagine that regular visits over 52 years of trading with Shetlands' communities will have left a long-lasting impact on him, his family, and his trading partners in Shetland.

Figure 5: Bart Holterman cleaning the grave of Segebad Detken, a merchant from Bremen who traded for 52 years with the Shetland communities and died there in 1573. The available documents show Detken's long-term involvement in the trade with Shetland and include a lawsuit about the use of the harbour of Baltasound by other German merchants. His gravestone on Shetland highlights how traces of trade are still visible above ground today. Photo: Paula Schiefer.

Figure 6: Bart Holterman and filmmaker Cameron Carroll at the grave of Hinrick Segelken, church of St Olaf, Unst. Photo: Paula Schiefer.

Conclusion

Trade goods, merchants, other people, ships, and stories travelled along the North Sea and North Atlantic, connecting local, international, and global markets. This paper demonstrates ways in which the dissemination of interdisciplinary research through museum exhibitions can make these relationships and networks visible. The case of Hanseatic and other foreign merchants and the Northern Isles shows the connective networks of trade, social, and cultural exchange that developed across oceans in the late Middle Ages and the early modern Period. The main aim of the exhibition and the LIFTE research project is to recentre so-called peripheries and show how marginal societies of Europe, in this case Orkney and Shetland, were integrated into international trade networks and parts of processes of commercialisation just like the major centres of Europe. We understand this paper as an addition to retell the histories of the Northern Isles, not only in relation to Scotland and major centres of Great Britain but also to continental Europe.

Regarding the concept of Islandness, the exhibition challenges our perceptions of islands as

small, remote, and isolated places in two ways. Firstly, the focus on trade changes our gaze to a maritime perspective that emphasises connection, exchange, and cross-cultural influences on individuals and communities across the North Sea. It shifts the concept of peripheries and centres, not only within the German Hanseatic trade in Europe, but also in context of early modern capitalism. Not only are the Northern Isles embedded in larger European trading networks, but they also experience the consumer revolution that was set in course by the colonial trade. In doing so, the Northern Isles can be seen as a node in these networks rather than some distant place at the edge. Secondly, it changes the perception by including personal stories of actors in the trade, both from the islands and from Germany. This reminds us of the fact that trade is not an abstract phenomenon, but something that is conducted by humans travelling between places, with personal ties and relationships. A German merchant trading in Shetland was therefore not a passive vector in trade relations, but a person with lived experiences who was embedded in both, societies at home and on the islands. Likewise, it shows that inhabitants of Orkney and Shetland were playing an active role in establishing and managing commercial exchange with the islands, and, in doing so, changed their social status within the local communities.

Interventions in the existing permanent exhibition at the German Maritime Museum show how narratives about history are always changing, depending on the context and the questions asked by researchers. This applies not only to history, but also to our understanding of the nature of islands. After all, Orkney and Shetland are not single islands, but island groups with their own centres and peripheries, depending on the view of the observer and changing through time. For example, the remote northern islands of Shetland Unst and Fetlar were well-integrated into the fish trading network of the Hanseatic merchants in the early modern period. It remains unknown however, which roles small islands played in these networks - such as Foula, Fair Isle and North Ronaldsay, far away from the Orkney and Shetland mainlands.

The exhibition reframes Shetland and Orkney not in a box on the map as some place far away, but as a maritime crossroads in Northern Europe in the late Middle Ages and the Early Modern period, as a dynamic and complex contact point between cultural and economic spheres on the border between the North Sea and the North Atlantic.

More information about the research, the exhibition, as well as visual content can be found at: https://www.dsm.museum/en/press-area/looking-in-from-the-edge.

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