

# 1. Introduction

What can Ribe tell us about the early history of the towns of Denmark? Were the earliest towns a product of top-down planning and of decisions taken by those in power at the time, or was the true driving force of this development the essentially uncontrollable hand of the market? What were the first towns like? Who lived there? How many people, and what were they doing? How did the towns change over time? To what extent were such changes the result of royal decrees – for instance in respect of minting, or the establishment of a castle; or consequences of much higher level political factors such as the division of the Frankish Empire after the Treaty of Verdun of AD 843; or reflexes of wide-ranging changes in the flow of goods between the trading networks such as the opening up of trade routes to the Caliphate via the Russian rivers? Could global climatic conditions also have played a part? This series of major questions is central to research into urban history, and they will be discussed in this book using the town of Ribe as the primary case study.

The earliest Scandinavian towns did not appear in a void but were rather buds which grew on an expanding northern European trading network, the nodes of which, the *emporia*, quite literally rose up on the ruins of the Roman urban civilization in the course of the 7th century. In areas where some elements of Roman urban culture had survived, such as the Upper Rhineland, marked continuity between the Roman towns and the *emporia* is evident (Ellmers 1984), while in other areas only weak connexions, if any, between the older and the newer towns can be seen. The latter situation characterizes the Rhine mouth and the southern coastal regions of the North Sea (Hodges 1989). In Scandinavia, which had not previously had any towns, the appearance of the *emporia* also represents the introduction of urbanization *per se*.

The boundaries of the study are therefore those of the primary phase of the history of towns in Scandinavia, a period in relation to which scholarly research has struggled to achieve any consensus on the character of its town-like trading sites which, like the later towns, were decisively moulded by trade and

craft-production but which appear to a very large extent – in the 8th century at least – to lack the religious and administrative institutions that are typical of the classic medieval towns. The early towns have been labelled *ports of trade*, *proto-towns*, *emporia* or *wīcs*, while here and there one encounters the very general German term *Seehandelsplatz* ‘marine trading site’ or just *trading site*. In this book, which is a product of tradition, the word *town* is preferred – and as the term for both the earlier and the later variants (Skre 2007b). Following the publication of Richard Hodges’s book *Dark Age Economics* (1982; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1989: abbreviated as *DAE*), the early towns experienced a blossoming of research and theoretical study, which the immensely informative evidence from Ribe regrettably played only a relatively peripheral role in. Ribe has rather been discussed first and foremost within the boundaries of the kingdom of Denmark, and was not only a feature of *Projekt Middelalderbyen* “The Medieval Town Project”, which did not have any dedicated theoretical strand, but also of the nationally focussed project *Fra Stamme til Stat* “From Tribe to State”. The Medieval Town Project was attached to the sub-discipline of Medieval Archaeology and was focussed upon the slightly later, classic medieval town, while From Tribe to State was attached to Prehistoric Archaeology, and town-formation played a minor part in it. For structural reasons, the field of research into early urbanization thus fell between two stools: a problem of approach that has also affected research in the other Nordic countries (Skre 2007a, 47). The Kaupang Project of 2000-2 and the publications it produced, the publication of *Ribe Studier I: Det ældste Ribe* (Feveile ed. 2006), and a new generation of internationally oriented scholars has, however, revitalized this field of research in the last two recent decades (Sindbæk 2007; Kalmring 2010; Arents & Eisenschmidt 2010).

The theoretical discussion in this book forms Chapter 2, *Theory*, which by way of introduction seeks to develop my own epistemological standpoint, after which the focus turns to the *emporia* and the theoretical discussion that they have been part of. Many other topics – the

social structure of the Later Iron Age; the emergence of centralized power; numismatics, and more – are elements of the book, but an exhaustive theoretical discussion of those fields too would burst the banks.

To shed light upon the themes of the book, the focus in the following study lies first and foremost upon the incredibly rich archaeological material from excavations in and around Ribe. The background to the selection is the fact that the archaeological evidence from the town is of wider chronological range than at any other Scandinavian urban site, and also, for the most of the period in question, is of a breadth and density that makes it possible to produce a quite detailed account of the varying topography and economy of the town through time – as shown by the archaeological evidence.

The antiquarian tradition in Ribe is long and extensive, and has, over time, generated a substantial volume of scholarly literature, formally moulded by successive dominant questions or theories – some of which are still current while others have now been set aside. Despite the great quantity of past studies, not until now has a comprehensive history of scholarship been produced. In order to establish a clear view of the shifting paradigms of different ages that have governed the archaeology of the town, this book also presents a relatively comprehensive history of research in Chapter 3.

This book will attempt to answer three key questions:

### 1. Why and how did Ribe emerge?

A primary requirement for this question to be answered must be knowledge of the society in which Ribe emerged around the year 700. Precisely that period of the Later Germanic Iron Age has traditionally stood as an archaeological gap between a rich body of earlier evidence ranging over graves, settlements, weapon hoards and more which runs into the 6th century AD, and after it the Viking Period's equally rich archaeological evidence supplemented by overseas sources, runestones, etc. (Näsman 1991; 2006).

The explosion in the use of metal-detectors in recent years has, however, radically increased quantities of finds, including material from the Later Germanic Iron Age. Particularly in combination with the cartographic evidence that is now available in the form of cadastral ('matriculation') maps and more, a path has been opened for retrogressive settlement studies, which together with palaeoclimatic research and the so-called Church List in the Ribe Oldmoder (= 'Great-Grandmother') manuscript creates the basis for a topographical analysis of society and settlement in West Jutland throughout the first millennium AD. This constitutes Chapter 4 of the book, *Topography*.

### 2. How did Ribe develop in the period AD 700-1050 – in both topographical and economic terms?

The earliest Ribe is known only through excavations, and all of those have been constrained by the fact that there is still a living town above the layers from earlier periods. South of the river, the cathedral itself is the oldest surviving building, founded around 855, while the street plan around it was laid out in the 11th century and has survived pretty much unchanged to the present day, even though the town has, in the intervening centuries, risen up to 5 metres higher because of the deposition of thick culture layers within it. The sequence of culture layers is generally well preserved, and has outstanding potential for tracing the history of the urban zone through stratigraphical excavation. On the other hand, all of the traces of the Viking-period land-surface are hidden below the thick layers, and knowledge of what that landscape looked like has to be gained through excavation.

On the northern side of the river, where the original Ribe was sited, there are no surviving structures, and the area has generally had the character of a suburb ever since the Middle Ages, and been used in a wide variety of ways (Fig. 1). Some parts have been farmed intensively, leading to the complete destruction of the underlying stratigraphy, while others were sealed below culture layers as early as the Middle Ages and so have been extremely well protected from damage. Proximity to the town is thus, for better or worse, the factor which means that the state of preservation of the earliest elements of Ribe varies hugely, in stark contrast to the conditions that are typical of the other Viking-period towns of Scandinavia. An understanding of the taphonomic factors is of fundamental importance for any assessment of what the archaeological evidence tells us.

It will be clear, that Ribe as an entire Ancient Monument is both massively complicated and extremely rich in information which has allowed the town's archaeologists to develop a very intimate grasp of the development of the town and its inhabitants. The most recent overview of the archaeological evidence was published in 2006, but a great deal of new information has come in since then. In connexion with this study, the evidence from Ribe has been reviewed and analysed, and so forms the basis of the most substantial chapter of the book, Chapter 5, *Ribe 700-1050*, in which the development of the town from the *single-street along the river bank plan* of the 8th century to the 10th-century *D-shaped enclosure* to the 11th-century *civitas* is examined against the background of the archaeological excavations.

Through the archaeological discoveries in Ribe it is possible to document unbroken urban development



Fig. 1. Techt's map of Ribe from 1858 was the source for the town plan in the first edition of Trap's Statisk-topographisk Beskrivelse af Danmark. In addition to the information provided on the map itself, numbers in red mark a series of key components of the town's essential topography. 1: the cathedral, south of the river; 2: the north side of the river; 3: Ribe Østerå (East River); 4: Ribe Vesterå (West River); 5: River Tved; 6: the Stamping Mill Leat; 7: the Dam. After the original held by the national Geodata Agency with additions by the author.

from around the year 700 onwards. The town changed radically several times over. A church was founded as early as the 9th century, and this provides us with an as yet unique opportunity to observe how the town responded to its presence. As will appear, the town continued to stand, unaffected, where it had been all the time, until some time in the 11th century, and was, amongst other things, at a certain provided with defences where the church had already been located on the other side of the river for a considerable time. Only around the year 1050 did the town relocate towards the church, and so conformed to the *civitas*-model that is typical of the classic medieval town. That concurrently defines the later chronological limit of this book.

### 3. Can a model for the development of Ribe be applied to other early towns in southern Scandinavia?

In Chapter 6 of the book, *Urbanization in southern Scandinavia AD 700-1050*, the angle of view is widened to include the other early towns of southern Scandinavia. This section focuses on Denmark, which means that the Swedish emporium of Birka is omitted in what follows, along with other trading places on the southern Baltic shores which can scarcely have been under the control of the Danish kingship: Ralswiek, Wolin, Truso, and more (Kleingärtner 2014).

At a basic level, this study distinguishes between two concepts of the town: the *emporium model* and the *civitas model*. The emporia served as the primary nodal points in the maritime trading network and were from the outset – or very rapidly fell – under royal control. On the merchants' sailing routes there were a number of minor stopping places, landing sites, of varying size and character, the larger of which might also be trading sites, probably controlled by local powers. These provided a basic root for what would later grow into the classic medieval town, and are represented by the towns of:

- Ribe
- Reric/Hedeby/Schleswig
- Åhus
- Kaupang
- Aarhus

The so-called 'central places' of the Iron Age provide another basic stock root for a later group of towns, whose role was to serve as religious and administrative centres for the Christian monarchy. These towns emerged after the Conversion in the decades either side of the year 1000 and are referred to collectively in this book as the *civitas model*, a Christian notion of the

urban phenomenon, inspired by an idealized model of the heavenly Jerusalem, *Civitas Jerusalem*, which in the 11th century came also to transform the earlier emporia. The central places appear in some cases to have their origins right back in the Earlier Iron Age, and they share the characteristics of being centrally located in relation to land-traffic; of apparently having been the home sites of a chieftainly dynasty; and of being the sites of religious or political central functions organized around sacrifices and feasts – in other words, a way of life rooted in the pre-Christian religious sphere (L. Jørgensen 2014). They vary greatly in size and presumably also in importance. Gudme, Tissø, Lejre, Uppåkra and Sorte Muld are the largest known sites in historical Denmark. In this book, towns such as:

- Viborg
- Odense
- Roskilde
- Lund

are suggested to be representatives of this model. A number of further towns could have been included in the analysis. Aalborg clearly goes back to the 11th century, but the most recent, important excavations have yet to be published. Næstved too has archaeological features from the Viking Period, but these finds are not adequately published either. Other towns with early finds or mints such as Randers, Horsens, Slagelse and Copenhagen could have been included as well, but it is considered that the towns selected sufficiently illustrate the structural development of urbanization.

References within the volume are given in brackets in the text, and every effort has been made to keep footnotes to a minimum. The bibliography follows the style guide used in Danish Journal of Archaeology. Unless otherwise indicated, the figures and tables have been produced by the author, and the maps are oriented with north to the top. All levels are in meters above sea level following the Danish DNN standard.

The Danish chronology used in the text is as follows:

- Neolithic (c. 3900-1700 BC)
- Bronze Age (c. 1700-500 BC)
- Pre-Roman Iron Age (c. 500-1 BC)
- Early Roman Iron Age (c. AD 1-200)
- Late Roman Iron Age (c. AD 200-400)
- Early Germanic Iron Age (c. AD 400-550)
- Late Germanic Iron Age (c. AD 550-800)
- Viking Age (c. AD 800-1050)
- Early Medieval (c. AD 1050-1250)
- High Medieval (c. AD 1250-1400)
- Late Medieval (c. AD 1400-1550)
- Early Modern (c. AD 1550-1800)
- Modern (c. AD 1800-)



## 2. Aspects of the theoretical discussion of towns and their origins in northern Europe

What has happened will happen again,  
and what has been done will be done again,  
and there is nothing new under the sun.  
(*Ecclesiastes 1,9*: New English Bible)

### 2.1 Starting point

My own position in respect of archaeological theory is that I do not find it difficult to see inadequacies in all sorts of theoretical approaches, whether or not one can attach the labels of ‘culture history’, ‘processual archaeology’ or ‘post-processual archaeology’ to them. The two latter waves, which particularly emphasize the importance of archaeological theory, are very nearly the worst, having emerged as they did as reform movements, whose primary *modus operandi* would always be to create a platform that is based on attacks on the current state of affairs. Archaeological research that leans very firmly upon a theoretical attitude will all too frequently prove to be the range of literature which most rapidly appears dated. Paraphrasing the Danish author Tom Kristensen, I would say: ‘Fear theory and nurture it not, for it is a load upon your back.’ And it is also a theory dependent upon my own highly empirical starting point whose utility I hope the following text will demonstrate.

While such a critically negative view of theorizing comes rather naturally to me, it is certainly harder to try to formulate a better or more precise theoretical alternative. This reveals my own existential doubt about how realistic that project is at all, and at the same time my (theoretical) association with the post-modern/post-processual tradition. I cannot refute the proposition that knowledge and theory are social constructs which a critical perspective can reduce to being subjective products of the producer’s consciousness – formed by that subject’s experiences, desires and cultural background. As a reluctant constructivist, I likewise have no wish to deny that the language spoken and written does to a certain extent shape what we call

‘reality’, even in respect of Prehistory. But the world is not purely a linguistic or social construct. It exists in reality, where the human body and senses are also found. There is therefore more than language there, but the obscure relationship between language and reality constitutes a real set of problems which lead to relativism and solipsism (Foucault 1966).

As a philosophical movement, this position can be followed down through the ages from the Sophists of Classical Greece onwards. In the second half of the 20th century it has had major influence on sociology and anthropology, with the French philosopher Michel Foucault as a core figure. From there, archaeological theory has been influenced too.

Social constructivism claims that human cognition is a social construct that is tied to the language. In its current incarnation social constructivism was supposed to be a politically left-leaning liberation project that aimed to break down and completely transform the inherited, supposedly bourgeois, conceptual systems concerning sex, power, sexuality, normality, and more. The debate has changed many western societies and sharpened the perception of how language does to an extent form reality, but the deconstruction of scientific conceptual systems has in recent years proved apt to exploitation from different corners of the political playground in order to sow doubt about well-established ‘truths’ of the natural or social sciences, on the subjects of climate change, social economy, migration, etc. The so-called post-factual society – *perception is reality* – can thus be said to be a product of social constructivism. And here, the revolution has ended up eating its own children.

Motivation-hunters might allege that this position of resignation is born of a contemporary recognition of the fact that the relationship between the research and the object of study is at best suspect (Foucault 1966; Latour 1991), and the current perspective is rather that a range of geopolitical constructs and systems appear ever more uncontrollable, whether that be global financial markets or political structures

such as the United States, the European Union, or the Russian Federation. The world, both then and now, does not appear to contain some hidden order, purpose or regularity, but rather a so-far generally growing human population whose past presence in the world is the archaeologist's field of study. This population has always been resourceful, and through the work of hands and spirit turned itself in new directions and away from others.

The frequently criticised 'culture-historical' archaeology formerly developed a series of methods for working with the evidence of the populations of previous ages in the form of typological classification, analogies and distributions. The understanding that lay behind those was that human behaviour is not purely random but rather is meaningfully structured in various ways. Through the interpretation of archaeological remains it was possible to generate knowledge of life in Prehistory. These methodological approaches are still the building blocks of archaeology: inductively, they can be put together and interpreted to produce narratives of the past, and they will continue to serve in that way even while new scientific methods produce new archaeological data.

This book is concerned with the Late Germanic Iron Age (550-800 AD) and the Viking Period (800-1050 AD) in northern Europe: a period of time which scholars connected to different university disciplines and different theoretical traditions have worked on. Prehistoric archaeology swiftly absorbed inspiration from processual archaeology and so from anthropology, and with that orientation came a long series of interesting works concerned with the structure and development of prehistoric societies. As a new concept, a deductive approach was applied as well. Because society was assumed to conform to various laws, these over-riding theories could be applied to the empirical evidence and advance the interpretations beyond what traditionally that evidence had seemed able to provide information on. That the deductive method would be successful, however, is not a given; rather it stands or falls with the quality of the theory applied and the representativity of the archaeological evidence in relation to the specific issue.

The inspiration provided by anthropology meanwhile also introduced the use of various social models that differed greatly from, for instance, historically known conditions in Europe. Access to these marked a clear new break in relation to previous scholarship, and silently and willingly constructed a beguiling prehistoric Otherness, in which social codes reduced prehistoric people to pale shadows, devoid of free will and governed by an alien set of norms. *The past is a foreign country. They do things dif-*

*ferently there* (Hartley 1953). This social-constructivist narrative is still a powerful one in archaeological theory, and cannot be denied some degree of validity – for instance if the object of study is some form of 'tribe' or a culture group that cannibalistically had its own kind on the menu, or put all of its efforts in to hewing colossal sculptures, as on Easter Island; but if the premiss of Otherness is accepted, it is also necessary to ask, how did it come about, then, that *they* became *us*? Here, we move into disputed ground concerning the relationship between the 'I' and the world, one end-point of which is solipsism: the destructive view that one can only really be certain of one's own existence.

Is the supposition of Otherness valid in the case of northern Europe in the Viking Period too? And if *they* were something different, what are *we* then? This problematization of the relationship between the researcher and the object of study (Latour 1991) or, in terms of phenomenology, the relationship between the Self and the Other,<sup>1</sup> has only been pursued in Danish archaeological theoretical discussions to a limited extent, although it occupies a key place in sociology. In recent years, Bruno Latour in particular has problematized the relationship between the researcher and the object of study, and of the other pairs of opposites which form the building stones of structuralist-influenced research traditions, and pointed out that the analytic division into binary opposites rests upon a non-existent basic premiss of separation. The position is emblematically summed up in the title *We have never been modern*, which thus directs attention to the view that the assumption of contrasts of nature/culture, ideal/reality, language/reality and objectivity/subjectivity, which have been key pillars of the Western philosophical tradition since the Enlightenment, is, according to Latour's reading, an illusion.

The university disciplines of Medieval Archaeology and History have been concerned with rather less distant periods of time, and have been furnished with a corrective in the form of written sources, which are quite profuse for the more recent periods but reduce the further back one goes. From the very nature of the evidence, one is often working retrospectively, and much available information about both society and its individuals has made anthropologically derived models less convincing. The view of people in the distant past has emphasized the similarities between then and now more than the differences. In a more or less pure form, this fundamental and epistemologically based difference in views of the past runs throughout most studies of the Viking Period, and for that reason I shall attempt to clarify the position that I am seeking to work from.

The colossal and continually growing body of archaeological evidence from Denmark (for reasons of preservation, primarily Jutland) clearly shows that the overwhelmingly dominant agrarian society was characterized by a high degree of continuity from at latest the emergence of the villages in the Earlier Iron Age down to the Early Modern Period. There is a strong correlation between the fertility of the land, the level of population, and the relative wealth of the region as it is reflected in the archaeological evidence. At especially favoured places in the landscape chieftain's farms appeared, and/or central places in many cases, and these aristocratic sites can be traced from some time in the Iron Age through to the post-medieval period. Despite changes in climate and in the style of farming, these differences remained, irrespective of whether they were functioning within a heathen or a Christian conceptual world. There is more on this in Chapter 4 of this book, *Topography*.

Throughout the first two millennia AD, far and away the predominant basis of economic production seems to have been the farm, the architecture of which leaves no room to doubt that these were operated by families. Concurrently, the evidence from the cemeteries of various periods, and other archaeological remains, are consistent with this image of an agrarian society structured around family-operated farms, for which natural boundaries in the landscape imposed a framework upon separated, agricultural village communities, which would later be known as village lands (*ejerlav*). This situation effectively constitutes a long-lived and fully comprehensive social structure, which in turn produced the continuous undertone of southern Scandinavian society. There was no original system of social equality or inequality, but, just as now, some were more successful than others. In contrast to nowadays, kinship apparently meant more for the opportunities for social mobility an individual had. The social and the religious frameworks were closely inter-woven despite the far from insignificant changes in religious practice within the period, both before the Conversion (Fabech 1991) and of course following it. The religious centre at Uppåkra was succeeded by the religious centre at Lund. The discussion about social strata in the Iron Age and Viking Period is a complex one, but the simple models of processualism, involving a social pyramid divided into a certain number of layers, fit ever more poorly with the archaeological evidence, and in Chapter 4, *Topography*, a model is proposed which is inspired to a greater degree by the better known conditions of the (Christian) Middle Ages, when different groups within society – the aristocracy, farmers and craftspeople – are also known each to have been internally highly variegated social units, with great differences even within a given status.

Throughout this book, there runs a sense of history as continuity, in which attempts are made to illuminate earlier situations through retrogressive analyses starting from better understood later conditions. For this 'search for the same' to overlook other crucial elements is a risk, but the method does also reveal a series of slow-moving, coherent structures in the society of western Jutland that it can be proposed will also be discoverable in other regions of Denmark.

Evolutionary biology appears not to question that there is only one human being, irrespective of skin colour, head-shape, place of residence or dates of life. For the same reason, we can also assert at the outset that prehistoric people were like us, and not an Otherness of social constructivism. This does not mean that we can necessarily understand or act our way into the thoughts of the merchants who sailed to Ribe in the 8th century; but the challenge of understanding others is to a high degree also a contemporary problem. Humanity then was just as capable of everything as now, and has never been 'modern' (Latour 1991).

## 2.2 What is a town?

The question which forms the title of this section is a necessary part of a book on just this subject, and represents a discussion which can expand very widely or be narrowed down considerably. The urban phenomenon appears in different cultures throughout the panorama of Prehistory, and is difficult to understand other than as a form of organization that arises when a certain proportion of a society's agrarian surplus produce is redistributed to other sections of the society which are not primarily engaged in agriculture. The result in such a case will usually be towns or town-like structures, such as emerged independently in various parts of the world: for instance, in different periods, in the Middle East and Central America.

If the view is focussed in upon European contexts, there has also been a long discussion of the definition of what is 'urban' (Hodges 1989, 20ff; Hohenberg & Lees 1995; Kleingärtner 2014). Early on, this discussion was led by historians, geographers, economists and sociologists, and was concerned with the history of the towns as known from existing examples and written sources. The topic was either the Roman towns or the northern European towns from around the year 1000 onwards. The *Dark Ages*, the period AD 500-1000, was regarded as essentially without towns.

With the gradual discovery of Carolingian, Frisian, Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian trading sites during the 20th century a phenomenon was revealed with an archaeological footprint that did not fit into the established classificational system, and a series of

other terms were developed instead, which in their variety reflect a basic consensus that *Dark Age urbanism* was indeed a form of urban life, albeit different from that of later periods. There was, however, no agreement over how those differences should be understood. The early towns were called *ports of trade* (Polanyi 1963), *proto-towns* (Clarke & Simms 1985; Näsman 2000), *emporium* or *wīcs* (Hodges 1989), together with the general expression *Seehandelsplatz* ('marine trading site') or just *trading site*. To complicate matters even more, terms such as *central place* have also been used in the debate over the towns of this period, albeit embracing two different senses of the term: the first the geographical sense deriving from Walter Christaller, and the other as a term for a Scandinavian elite residence (Hodges 1989, 16f; Skre 2007c, 335ff).

Against this slightly confused background, I shall attempt here to explicate the terminology that I shall be using in respect of Ribe and the other southern Scandinavian sites which are the topic of the present book.

### 2.2.1 Central places

It seems to be agreed that the Germanic 'tribal' areas in north-western Europe had no true towns even though their elite circles were widely familiar with Roman urban civilization. In southern Scandinavia there were, instead, what are known as central places, housing elite residences within which social and religious leadership were closely inter-woven. In the case of Scandinavia, the term 'central place' is synonymous with an elite residence of the Iron Age or the Viking Period, while in cultural geography it is a component within a hierarchical model of (medieval) towns (Højlund Nielsen 2014). These twin senses have, to greater or lesser extents, been merged in several works, but in this book I shall restrict myself to the sense of *an elite residence of the Iron Age or Viking Period*. As a type, these seem to evolve early in the 1st millennium AD, some of them possibly even earlier; amongst the early examples can be noted Uppåkra, Gudme and Dankirke (L. Jørgensen 2014). They must have been nodal points in the aristocratic networks that brought Roman imports and other luxury goods to the North, and were presumably also centres of specialized craft: particularly metalworking in copper alloy and the precious metals. The central places could consist of just one farm, as seems to have been the case at Dankirke, Toftum Næs and Tissø (Jarl Hansen 1990; Fiedler Therkildsen 2015; L. Jørgensen 2014), or to have been larger complexes of farms, as seems to have been the case at Gudme, Lejre and Uppåkra

(Østergaard Sørensen 2010; L. Jørgensen 2014). The central places of West Jutland are examined in more detail in Chapter 4, *Topography*.

The central places have several urban characteristics: not only religious but also political central functions, alongside specialized craftworking and evidence of trade. On the parallelism between central places and a number of the towns that were established by the royal power from the end of the 10th century onwards there is more in Chapter 6, *The urbanization of southern Scandinavia, AD 700-1050*. The majority of the central places, however, appear to have been elite residences, and so to have more in common with the manorial or estate centres of later periods. For that reason, these are not treated as towns in this book. The natural location of the central places on the nodal points of communication routes in the landscape meant that many of them were obvious locations for the centres of, in particular, the Christian monarchy that was established by the Danish king from the end of the 10th century. In Chapter 6, towns of this type are grouped under the term *the civitas model*, and an attempt is made to demonstrate that heathen central places formed the root stock of this type of town.

In the period before the year 700, trade was, of course, not unknown. Considerable quantities of copper alloy must have come to southern Scandinavia for the manufacture of the many brooches which were regularly deposited in graves, sacrificed or lost, and so could not be re-used. Blown glass, glass beads, and presumably other goods as well also came to Denmark in considerable quantity, although the archaeological reflex of this trade in luxury items is limited. Only at Gudme do we know of the landing place at Lundeborg, the impressive size of which reflects the equally high significance of Gudme in the Later Roman and Earlier Germanic Iron Ages, while at many other places minor landing sites with activity from before the year 700 are known, albeit at an apparently low level (Ulriksen 1998; 2014). It would appear that the trading system before the 8th century can be characterized as highly decentralized, and that the system of exchange rooted in the central places carried on long after the appearance of the first proper large trading sites, the *emporium*.

### 2.2.2 Emporia – the king's trading sites

The emergence of large trading sites in the southern North Sea region at the end of the 7th century represents a marked turning point in relation to the trade and exchange that had gone on before. In a short period, a number of large trading sites adapted to shipping appeared on both sides of the English Channel (Lebecq 1992). Because of their

practically explosive growth (and decline), they have been called *mushroom towns* (Theuvs 2004; Hodges 2012) or *non-places* in light of their almost complete absence from written sources and manifest lack of religious or administrative central functions (Hodges 2000; 2012 after Augé 1998). Despite these casual and rather dismissive terms, however, they represent a very significant increase in ship-borne exchange of goods in the period c. 650-850. Along with the emergence of these sites there was also a marked growth in monetary activity. A partially monetized economy based upon coins of the *sceatt* type is now a characteristic feature of the emporia.

A fascinating and frequently recurring feature of the emporia is that they seem not to have direct links back to the preceding Roman towns in the area around the English Channel. Anglo-Saxon *Lundenwic* was located immediately west of the then still partly standing Roman town of *Londinium*, while even the most important emporium, Dorestad, appears not to have made use of a nearby Roman frontier fortress. This symbolic rejection of the heritage of the Roman Empire may, however, also be culturally governed, and in the areas further south, where the Roman culture had survived to a greater extent, the slender traces of urban life in the 7th and 8th centuries appear still to be found within the framework of the old Roman towns (Wamers 2007).

The term *emporium* in the sense of a trading place and used of this group of sites appears to have become the conventional one thanks to Richard Hodges's book *Dark Age Economics* (DAE: 1982), which is discussed below. It refers to a word which is linked to some of these sites in a few sources of the 9th century, while other sources of that date used the terms *vicus* or *portus*. In DAE the term 'emporium' is used practically synonymously with 'trading site of the period 600-1000', and is applied to a large number of sites in north-western Europe, large and small, with the result that one can scarcely imagine any other scholars to have used the term with any different senses in other contexts. More recent research, however, appears to have reinforced the impression that the trading sites can be ordered hierarchically and underwent various courses of development, determined by their location and political history. Only trading sites in the uppermost stratum of this hierarchy are referred to here as emporia (Sindbæk 2007).

An emporium is, therefore, a large trading site, organized for marine transport, under royal control and often also with a monetized economy. Emporia are not located in the centres of the kingdoms of their time but rather in the border zones against other kingdoms or population groups. In the case of southern Scandinavia, this means that we know of three emporia of the 8th century:

- Ribe from around the year 700, located in the border zone between the Danish and the Frisian areas.
- Reric (Groß Strömkendorf) from around the year 730, in Wismar Bay, located in the border zone between the Danish, Saxon and Slavic areas.
- Åhus in Skåne from the first half of the 8th century, located in the border zones against Blekinge and in a wider perspective Östergötland and the kingdom of the Svear.

An attempt will be made to show that these three sites constitute a meaningful group of royal trading sites controlled by a king of the Danes in Chapter 6.

The variable political history of the lands around the North Sea meant that the emporia too, linked as they were to the central power of the relevant kingdoms, developed very differently. The Frisian-Carolingian and Anglo-Saxon emporia, Dorestad, Quentovic, Dömburg, Lundenwic, Hamwic and Ipswich, collapsed entirely on a number of occasions while the Scandinavian sites had a different history, which is also the subject of Chapter 6.

With the relocation of the traders from Reric to Hedeby enforced by the Danish king in 808, a process was initiated which in the course of the 9th century concentrated trade in Hedeby, while the other emporia, Ribe and Åhus, stagnated or declined. Despite their clear lack of both administrative and religious central functions (Hodges 2012, 93) the three emporia noted above are treated as towns in what follows, and they form a second root stock to the later medieval towns which in this book is referred to collectively as *the emporia model*. Because of the relocation of Reric to Hedeby/Schleswig all three can also be said to have had a further life as important towns later in the Middle Ages.

### 2.2.3 Minor trading sites

All around the coastlines of southern Scandinavia a number of landing or trading sites with evidence of activity back to the Roman and Germanic Iron Ages have been identified. These are the remains of the decentralized and limited trade of that era (Ulriksen 1998; 2014). With the introduction of the royal emporia in the 8th century, transport by ship increased markedly, and along the sailing routes which followed the west coast of Jutland, through the Limfjord and the internal Danish navigable waters leading to the Baltic, a series of stopping points were established at natural landing sites. They are represented by scattered finds from specialized crafts and trade, and often consist of sunken feature buildings (SFBs) or slender traces of light structures, although their extent and



organization varies greatly – from well-structured sites with hundreds of SFBs such as Henne or Sebbesund (Ploug et al. 2012; J.N. Nielsen 2004) down to next to nothing. This massive variation could mean that they lay outside the range of the royal power but rather were subject to various local aristocrats or other unions like the large number of ‘illicit harbours’ which the much stronger monarchy of the Medieval Period sought to deal with with only partial success. This topic too is discussed in respect of a range of details in Chapter 4, *Topography*.

Several of these landing or trading sites lie at favourable places in the landscape, where well-suited natural harbours and roads met: in other words, places which could also become the location for a proper medieval town. The discovery of much older SFBs several centuries older than any other urban features below towns such as Skive and Aalborg (E.F. Christensen et al. 1984; C.V. Jensen & Klinge 2016) is probably evidence of an earlier role for these sites as non-royal trading places.

Aarhus belongs in an intermediary position between the minor trading sites and the emporia. As the archaeological image of the history of town appears at present, it arose around the year 800 as a minor trading site which neither in size nor activity appears any different from many other sites (H. Skov 2008). The brutal fortification of the town in the 10th century sealed in the main street of the town along the river and must be due to a royal order, so that Aarhus from that time on has to be counted as one of the royal emporia. The minor trading sites are not considered as belonging to the category of towns in this book.

#### 2.2.4 Centres of the Christian monarchy from around the year 1000: the *civitas* model

A typical feature of the emporia is their lack of monumental reflections of a royal presence, while in respect of religion both large heathen cemeteries and early churches show that they functioned as religiously mixed zones where both a range of pagan and Christian traditions and models co-existed. Despite the pervasive coin economy there are no signs of minting, while amongst the many graves excavated both at Reric and Ribe none have yet been found which stand out as being manifestly richer than the others. The demand for royal tolls must have been entrusted to the *comes vici* (‘town reeve’) who is referred to in the case of Dorestad, Hedeby and Birka. Concrete evidence of this official is still wanting, but it can be assumed to lie somewhere in the vicinity of the emporia (Skre 2007b; Kalmring et al. 2017).

Also despite the huge quantities of finds from the emporia, the absence of high aristocratic finds is a consistent feature around the North Sea. This may indicate that the functions referred to above continued, in the 8th to 10th centuries, to be located elsewhere: plausibly at nearby or more distant central places, understood as elite residences.

After the Conversion of Denmark, a new set of towns was established which in this book are treated as *centres of the Christian monarchy*. These are towns such as Viborg, Odense, Roskilde and Lund, and earlier scholars have also noted their common features. In Swedish research they are referred to as administrative central places (E. Cinthio 1973; Andrén 1985), emphasizing the royal interests; in this book, however, the assumption is that the now Christian monarchy was fully inter-woven with a religious ideology and legitimization of the office, so that royal and ecclesiastical interests went hand-in-hand (Staecker 1999; Gelting 2007). Down to the middle of the 11th century, on the whole we have no finds from this group of towns other than churches and churchyards, and evidence of trade is still concentrated at the emporia. This new group of towns thus housed those features of administrative and religious character which the emporia lacked, and several of them brought about the abandonment of a nearby pre-Christian central place.

In the Danish towns it is only from the middle of the 11th century onwards that one can trace the combination of religious, administrative and trading functions which is reflected, inter alia, in the expansion of the urban spaces in Lund and Viborg and in the relocation of the old emporia of Ribe and Hedeby. The former shifted first across to the church on the other side of the river, while it is suggested that it was the existence of a church on the Schleswig peninsula which drew Hedeby over to that location.

In this way, the classic medieval town was created: a central church building with a nearby royal manor surrounded by a street plan occupied by craftspeople and traders. Towns of this type are collected under the term *the civitas model*, inspired, in fact, by the word which most towns used for themselves on their seals.

### 2.3 Henri Pirenne and the trade model

The Belgian medieval historian Henri Pirenne has given his name to the Pirenne thesis – which is not in fact a thesis, but rather an attempt to synthesize historical development in western Europe in the period from the fall of the Roman Empire to

Charlemagne: *the Dark Ages*. In contrast to earlier historians, Pirenne emphasized that the fall of the Western Roman Empire in AD 476 was far from bringing about the complete collapse of the existing social structure, but rather, to a greater extent, involved the continuity of a series of organizational structures and institutions with the Church as the source of strength (Hodges & Whitehouse 1983). The Germanic peoples did not destroy Roman civilization but rather appropriated it. Pirenne was of the view that the decisive changes in western Europe came about first in the wake of the expansion of the Umayyad Caliphate in the Mediterranean area during the 7th century and down to the Battle of Poitiers in 732. The Islamic rule over the Mediterranean lands cut the Merovingian courts off from their connexions with the East, and in particular the long-distance trade in luxury items, and brought about a stagnation that was the true end of the Western Roman Empire. From this nadir the Carolingian Empire grew up as a distinct, western European phenomenon. A famous quotation that has become virtually synonymous with the Pirenne thesis is, in English: *It is therefore strictly correct to say that, without Mohammed, Charlemagne is inconceivable* (Pirenne 1939, 234).

Since the 1920s, the archaeological data which shed light upon these matters have grown astronomically, and parts of Pirenne's argument had been superseded both in historical research and by the archaeological evidence already thirty years ago (Lebecq 1992; Hodges & Whitehouse 1983) – but that is the constant risk faced by syntheses of huge amounts of material. The overall approach, and the attempt to understand the structures behind a sequence of historical events, were nonetheless an inspiration for the *Annales* school, and the essential premiss, that trade and exchange can be the driving forces in social change, is still one of the preferred explanatory models of scholarship (Hodges 1989; McCormick 2001). In this way, Pirenne was an exponent of the *trade model*: trade and exchange as the underlying motor of historical development.

## 2.4 Karl Polanyi and trade in the 'pre-modern' society

The economic historian and anthropologist Karl Polanyi was one of the first to point out that there must have been a significant difference between trade and exchange in what are known as 'pre-modern' societies and their counterparts in 'modern', market-based societies. In the book *The Great Transformation* (1944) on the industrialization of England and the emergence of markets as price-regulating mechanisms, the key

idea was that trade in 'the old days' was not regulated by market forces such as supply and demand but was rather governed by social contracts concerning reciprocity and redistribution between those involved in exchange, following the principles of, for instance, gift-giving which were observable through anthropological fieldwork with so-called primitive societies. Polanyi's postulate was that trade in the old days was therefore *embedded* in social relationships and not subject to price-negotiation following the principles of supply and demand. Polanyi himself labelled this view of the economy of earlier societies *substantivism*, in contrast to the traditional understanding of social economy, which he called *formalism*.

The observation that trade and exchange had formerly been extensively governed by social contracts had great impact in archaeological studies of trade and exchange, but in my view contains an erroneous assumption at its core, in that it is silently posited that trade and exchange in modern societies are not also embedded in the social context and to a considerable extent directed by social mechanisms. We are all (also) substantivists. Polanyi forced a view of price-setting mechanisms before and now, and created an image of a radically different past. But even in the past, market forces were operative, and regulated to a considerable extent the basic resources of the society in the form of agricultural production, while other categories of goods, typically those of a more luxury character, were not subject to competition to the same degree. Throughout time, gift-giving has followed its own socially defined laws, and it continues to do so today (Theuvs 2004).

## 2.5 Dark Age Economics

The work which has had an impact beyond any other in research related to the emporia is Richard Hodges's *Dark Age Economics: The Origins of Towns and Trade AD 600-1000* (1982; 2nd ed. 1989; here *DAE*): a textbook specimen of processual archaeology which combined anthropological models with sparse historical sources and sparse archaeological data in an attempt to synthesize the re-emergence of towns and trade in north-western Europe in the period following the fall of the Roman Empire. *DAE* identifies Henri Pirenne as its key inspiration, and locates itself as a continuation of the *Annales* school's studies of social history and long-term economic developments. A new departure is the combination of this approach with inspiration from another major source, the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, whose study of the Trobriand Island group in Papua-New Guinea at the beginning of the 20th century revealed that apparently primitive societies employed an advanced economic practice built

upon *Kula*, a system of trade governed by ceremonies and rituals – in other words, *embedded* within social relations as Polanyi would describe it.

Based primarily upon Anglo-Saxon and Carolingian development, Richard Hodges constructed a typological scheme for the emporia which he attempted to apply also to the Scandinavian situations, but which does not sufficiently take account of the very different courses of history in the various regions (Hodges 1989, 47ff; 2012, 91ff). Even a site such as Helgö in Mälaren is classified as an emporium although it should rather, not least in light of the name, be classified as a central place (elite residence) with a core religious component (Herschend 1995). Unfortunately, Hodges's model of the emporia has since been carried further, now with the concept of the central place added in, albeit in the Scandinavian sense of the term which is not the same as Hodges's definition (Skre 2007c). The classification also attaches great importance to whether or not the emporium in question can be identified as a non-permanent or a permanent settlement; in the case of the Scandinavian emporia, however, at the very least their population levels must have fluctuated massively with the seasons and market periods. Neither Hodges's nor Skre's classification incorporates crucial factors concerning the economic systems of the emporia – such as, whether or not the trading site in question used a monetized or a weight-based economy – which are made use of in this study.

With reference to Anglo-Saxon and Carolingian documentary sources, it was pointed out in *DAE* that long-distance trade was a royal privilege, and that the emporia were located in the border zones in order to maximize contact with other regions. This observation does not appear to have been disproved.

With regard to the traded goods themselves, the archaeological evidence has advanced considerably since Hodges undertook his research. The range of goods in the emporia was thought to have been directed towards the aristocracy and to have consisted of 'prestige goods, scarcities, and, on occasions, slave labour' (Hodges 1989, 53). As the following chapters will show, however, really top-level aristocratic finds are absent from the emporia, and the wide-ranging production at these sites was directed towards a broader stratum of society, which metal-detecting in Denmark has shown to be represented in what is thought to be every part of the country. A discussion of the definition of aristocracy and the customers of the emporia consequently follows in Chapters 4 and 5, below.

The style of argument in *DAE* is determined by various models derived from economic theory, anthropology or sociology, which are combined along with the archaeological data available in 1982. To put it summarily: at times this works well, but often not so well, as is typically the case when models are evaluated

against a non-representative data-set. Nonetheless this book, like Pirenne's works, is a classic, which managed to grasp the special character of the emporia at an early stage in research and which has to some extent retained its fascination. One important reason for that is that the use of anthropological models gave a mystique to the emporia and turned them into sites at which social codes, defined by various Dark-age aristocrats, reduced the inhabitants of the emporia to actors with very little freedom. This strongly class-structured basic model has a natural background in recent English history, but does not seem to find much support in the very extensive archaeological evidence from Ribe, amongst other sites.

The 'making strange' of the emporia forms its own quite distinct research tradition, which has led to more recent discussions of what some individuals regard as the practically complete separation between the emporia and the agrarian economy of the hinterland (Saunders 2001). However that separation too seems unsustainable when one looks in more detail at the range of goods in Ribe and connexions with the surrounding territory. This discussion is taken further in Chapter 4, *Topography*.

## 2.6 The Viking Age in Denmark

Klaus Randsborg's book *The Viking Age in Denmark* (1980) was an early and, for its date, a successful attempt to demonstrate the potential of processual archaeology. Its sub-title, *The Formation of a State*, reveals the social perspective, and the principal thesis of the book – that state-formation in Denmark proceeded from a western centre at Jelling, with Kings Gorm, Harald and Svein subordinating the lands that became medieval Denmark – is developed through analyses of documentary sources, runestones, climate and rural settlement, towns and fortifications.

Classic archaeological methods such as distributions in time and space were combined with the models of processualism and deductive approaches. For the same reason, it is interesting to compare the book and its argument with the powerful influx of new archaeological evidence since it was written, in order to test the durability of the hypotheses applied, and so to give processualism a taste of its own medicine.

The section on the chronology and geographical distribution of the runestones draws upon a theory of the stones as symbolic property markers and as testaments to a major redistribution of land in the period, while the 10th-century weapon and equestrian grave horizon draws upon theories of conflict and aristocratic stress rather than the simple marking of status as the background to the militarization of burial practice. Common to both sections is the fact that

the empirical evidence has not changed significantly since the book was published, and the interpretation of the material which is used to represent the extent of the embryonic Jelling dynasty still stands as an unopposed proposition concerning 10th-century political history in Denmark. In the case of the rest of the book – climatic studies, rural settlement, towns, fortifications and hoards – one has to note that the archaeological material has now left this book a very long way behind. On this basis, one may conclude that primarily empirical hypotheses formulated on the basis of representative evidence are more durable in face of the processes of erosion than others. Fundamentally, then, not much has changed since the era of Sophus Müller (Müller 1884).

## 2.7 The Medieval Town Project

The Medieval Town Project (*Projekt Middelalderbyen*), which was initiated in 1977 by the National Humanities Research Council, was a major research project directed by Olaf Olsen, the objective of which was to ‘increase our limited knowledge of the age and initial topographical development of the Danish towns through inter-disciplinary work, in which historians and archaeologists will work closely together to define the current status of knowledge of the towns and to look for new methods in urban research’ (*Ti byer* 1980). In order to achieve this aim, ten towns were selected for closer examination: Aalborg, Horsens, Køge, Næstved, Odense, Ribe, Roskilde, Svendborg, Viborg and Aarhus, while the National Museum (NM) undertook as part of the project to investigate the abandoned borough of Søborg. In the first phase, an attempt was made to collect all of the documentary, cartographical, archaeological and geological evidence, which are systematized in an ingenious punch-card system, the information in which was plotted in the second phase within a series of uniform maps. The cartographical component was inspired by the report *The Future of London’s Past* of 1973, the beautiful, transparent and colourful maps of which were an inspiration to the project participants.<sup>2</sup>

In the third phase, areas were selected in various towns in which minor excavations were undertaken (‘postage-stamp trenches’), which in the view of the project were conceived of as pin-point operations that, on the basis of limited field archaeological work, should be able to answer fundamental questions relating to the individual towns. On the excavations of this project in Ribe and the publication *Middelalderbyen Ribe* (‘The Medieval Town of Ribe’: I. Nielsen 1985), there is more in Chapter 3, *Research History*. More recent experience has shown, however, that small,

scattered trenches in a thick sequence of culture layers often generate more questions than they answer, and this was likewise the outcome of most of the excavations carried out under this project. A number of cases did hit the spot: for instance the trench at Viborg Søndersø which uncovered the well-preserved and waterlogged culture layers from the section of the town on the lake shore (Krongaard Kristensen 1987). But here too it was only the later, major excavations that made it possible to interpret what had been excavated in a more satisfactory manner (Hjermind et al eds. 1998).

Many of the planned monographs on the individual towns were a long time in the making, and some – Horsens, Roskilde and Søborg – have never appeared. Nonetheless, the project left its mark on a whole generation of town archaeologists and brought about major methodological advances in urban archaeology generally: not only in terms of excavation techniques but also in respect of ways of working with source material. The Medieval Town Project involved a plan for some form of final synthesis, and the project was also completely uninfluenced by processual archaeology and could consequently ignore this movement’s demands for theorizing and the use of models. Concurrently, there was a comparable project in Sweden, *Medeltidstaden* (The Medieval Town), which was, however, unconnected with the Danish project.

## 2.8 From Tribe to State

Another major project financed by the National Humanities Research Council was From Tribe to State (*Fra stamme til stat*), which began in 1984, the goal of which was to ‘draw a clearer picture of economic, social and political development in Denmark from tribal societies or chieftainships to the kingdom or state’ (Mortensen & Rasmussen eds. 1988, vol. 1, 7). Two out of four planned publications have appeared as *Fra stamme til stat* vols. 1 and 2, while the synthesis intended was published by Ulf Näsman (2006). This project, the chronological scope of which was the period from the 3rd century AD to the 10th, had as its aim to understand the society and the structures which conditioned historical development: in other words, processually. As one of many results, the date of the formation of a Danish kingdom could be assigned to the 8th century (Näsman 2006), a perspective which the present study seeks to qualify further by including the archaeological evidence from the emporia. Altogether, however, urbanization played only a minor part in this project, although Stig Jensen discussed the site of Dankirke and its relationships with Ribe within it, and this topic is examined here in detail in Chapter 4, *Topography*.

## 2.9 The urban stage

Anders Andrén's thesis of 1985, *Den urbana scenen* ('The Urban Stage') remained, until 2016 (Krongaard Kristensen & Poulsen 2016), the only synthetic work on urbanization in Denmark since Hugo Matthiesen's *Middelalderlige Byer* ('Medieval Towns') of 1927. Andrén's background lay in the town archaeology of Lund, and his dissertation was written while both the Swedish and the Danish Medieval Town projects were underway and so was inspired by the discussions going on within both. Unlike the major projects, Andrén did not keep within modern national boundaries but rather worked on urbanization within the whole of the medieval kingdom of Denmark with the aim of discovering, through analysis, the underlying structures of the development. In accordance with the tradition deriving from Pirenne and the *Annales* school the purpose was to write a synthesis which, on the basis of a formalization of the urban source data, could work methodically through to a new understanding of urbanization in Denmark. *Den urbana scenen* was written against the grain of a tradition which emphasized the importance of trade in urbanization and the autonomously evolutionary nature of the towns – in other words, a perspective shaped by continuity; through studies of the parish churches of the towns in particular, however, Andrén tried to show that the towns were rather royal foundations which marked a clear break in the course of historical development in which the king played the absolutely central role.

This discontinuous view of history was a feature of the Marxist-structuralist historiography, and was inspired by the philosophical 'rock star' Michel Foucault, whose works – primarily *Les mots et les choses – une archéologie des sciences humaines* ('The Words and the Things – An Archaeology of the Human Sciences': 1966), published in English translation as *The Order of Things*, shook the foundations of a whole range of human sciences.

According to Andrén, 'the urban churches can thus be seen as a very central ideological expression of medieval town life, and the factors in the town's ecclesiastical structure can therefore reveal how both the concept of the town and the urban context were changed' (Andrén 1985, 18: translated). As an analytical position, the number of churches is used to divide the towns into three classes:

- Plurality: towns with three or more churches
- Duality: towns with two churches
- Unity: towns with a single church

Meanwhile the criterion of whether the town's land included rural settlements or not was used for a bipartite division:

- Open: town land including rural settlements
- Closed: town land without rural settlements

The classificational system was used for a division into six groups which could be seriated against time. From several angles, criticism has since been voiced concerning whether this method really unpacks the evidence or rather confuses discussion by creating a system of classification that is actually uninformative (Nyborg 2004; Krongaard Kristensen & Poulsen 2016, 31). Nonetheless the dissertation has the great quality of being one of the few attempts to *understand* urbanization in Denmark rather than just to describe it.

Since this work is dependent upon the churches, it follows inevitably that pre-Conversion urbanization – in other words the emporia and so trade – are not captured by this method, and this is reflected in the dissertation's starting horizon chronologically, which is around 1050. Furthermore, the number of churches in the oldest towns also seems to be determined by whether the ecclesiastical order was oriented to Hamburg-Bremen or to Canterbury (see Chapter 6) and so not to be a direct reflection of the size or importance of the town in question.

## 2.10 A theory concerning the emporium of Ribe

Fortunately, archaeological evidence has increased radically since *Dark Age Economics* was published in 1982. If one were to formulate a theory concerning the emergence and development of the emporia in southern Scandinavia on the basis of the present knowledge of Ribe – which will be presented in the next chapter of this book – it might run like this:

In the years following AD 536, northern Europe was gripped by a climatic disaster caused by a series of volcanic eruptions in the years 536, 540 and 547, the effects of which were global and led to a cold period in the northern hemisphere: the Late Antique Little Ice Age (LALIA: Büntgen et al. 2016). This cold period, which lasted for about a century, first brought about a massive horizon of votive offerings in northern Europe followed by a clear fall in population levels (Axboe 2001). It also provided the historical background for the Norse myth of *Fimbulvetrinn*. Only in the course of the 7th century did the population start to recover.

During the 7th century, a growing population in northern Europe and the re-discovery of the ship with a sail led to greater interaction and trade, and the emporia appeared with more or less close links to their Roman predecessors, dependent upon their geographical location. As an outpost of Dorestad, Ribe was established around the year 700 as a result of an



agreement between the local elite of south-western Jutland, a king, possibly of the Danes, and maritime merchants. This relationship may have been formed in Dorestad. The first phase of Ribe appears not to have been closely managed, and the range of goods covered a broad range of things which for good reasons were exotic but which were able to find their way to what appears to be every part of Jutland. Only a minor proportion of the trade was in real luxury items. The experiences with Ribe were good, so that after a few years the town came under the control of the Danish king. Following an overseas model, a system of taxation was introduced based on a monopoly coinage, the Wodan/monster sceatt, which remained the only coin that was used in the town down to around 800. A high proportion of the economy was based on barter.

The town's trade flourished, and before the middle of the 8th century the king had founded new emporia in Reric and Åhus, and the stopping places along the routes which the travelling merchants needed emerged inevitably along the tracks of their ships. Some of the landing places grew into minor trading sites in their own right. At both Reric and Åhus the Danish king's Wodan/monster sceattas were used, although apparently only in limited quantities in the case of Åhus. The production of goods in Reric and Åhus was also directed at a broad circle of customers, for the most part residing at farms in the hinterland of the towns.

The population of the towns was both ethnically and culturally mixed, as is the rule in ports, and as free men the traders and craftspeople could try their luck at a new site if they chose to. The population figures have not yet reached the pre-536 level, and there was a need for all hands on the farms. There is little evidence of crowding or conflict over resources, which could explain why a slave trade was of limited significance, even if other emporia in the North Sea network evidently did see dealing in slaves.

With the evacuation of Reric and the growth of Hedeby from AD 808, the trade route across the neck of Jutland grew in importance at the expense

of Ribe's trade. New, larger coins were introduced both in Hedeby and in Ribe, but this did not alter the fact that the dramatic growth of Hedeby had serious consequences for Ribe.

In contrast to Hodges's glum Marxist theory of the emporia, this narrative is more liberal and rather a story of continuity, which is of course open to debate – in content, though, it corresponds more precisely with present archaeological facts. A range of issues have virtually undergone 180° turns. The proposition that the emporia must have been the closed network provisioning the elite, providing the courts of western Europe with luxury items through long-distance trade but with no significant contact with the hinterland, lacks support in the Danish archaeological evidence and has now to be rejected. The idea seems to have been inspired by the trading stations of the colonial period such as Danish Trankebar in India, but it cannot be found in the archaeological material from the 8th and 9th centuries.

Likewise, the relationship between the aristocracy and the lower strata of the social pyramid in Hodges's model has been exploded by metal-detecting and rural settlement archaeology, which in Denmark have revealed a very widespread and level 'aristocracy' with what can be quite a number of representatives in practically all of the later ecclesiastical parishes: a society, in other words, in which the differences between rich and poor do not seem to have been anything like as pronounced as Hodges assumed.

The range of goods on offer in the Scandinavian emporia matched what one would expect to find with the widespread jewellery-wearing stratum of society that metal-detecting has uncovered. Here too, it is essentially equivalent products which have more in common with the later classic medieval towns than with the provisioning network of a royal house. Rather than being Suppliers to the Royal Court, Ribe and the other emporia were the *supermarkets* of the age, while in the course of the 9th century Hedeby grew into the kingdom's only *hypermarket*.