1. Introduction

Many of 'the classic medieval towns' of Denmark, Scandinavia and Europe (Pirenne 1925; Mumford 1961; Hohenberg & Lees 1995) emerged during the period 1050-1250, but archaeological knowledge of this expansive phase is surprisingly limited, as the processes and urban structures of the time have been largely concealed or destroyed by later changes. In retrospect, the research has had a tendency to describe the emergence and development of Danish medieval towns as phases of a linear, national development, from administrative centres to the classic, mercantile medieval town based on the Hanseatic model (Andrén 1985). The archaeological source material, however, indicates that a large and important trading network existed prior to the emergence of Lübeck and the Hanseatic towns in Northern Europe. The most important Scandinavian nodal points of this network were Visby and Schleswig, closely followed by Ribe, Lund and perhaps Roskilde. Finds of Nordic-built cargo ships in Danish waters also testify to the existence of specialist traders during the period, but their urban environments are largely unknown (Ulriksen 2000; 2008; Carelli 2001; Vogel 2002; Andrén 2012; Jahnke & Englert 2015).

Amongst the best source materials in quantitative terms for the urbanity of the period in Scandinavia are those from several large excavations in Ribe during the 1990s. These were undertaken in the western part of the town, which was established in the second half of the 11th century, and where by the mid-12th century at the latest a quarter had been established which was inhabited by specialised traders – the merchants. The largest of these excavations, at the Danielsens Tømmerhandel site, uncovered two almost complete medieval plots.

The purpose of this publication is to present some of Scandinavia's largest – and unpublished – urban excavations in order to explore the pre-Hanseatic network in the physical urban environment of Ribe in the years 1050-1250, and thus to challenge the common perception of the formative phase of Danish urbanisation. Based on a thorough investigation of Ribe's role in relation to Lund and Schleswig, the publication will show that the urban network in South Scandinavia functioned on different premises than the later Hanseatic one, and that this influenced the physical and social environments of the towns. The financial systems and the municipal government were still weak, and thus probably early on the merchants organised themselves into communal guilds. On this basis, they increased their influence on the government and shaping of the towns in order to strengthen their position in the trading network.

The main axis of the network ran from the rivers of the northwestern European lowlands to Russia, with Hedeby/Schleswig and Visby as intermediate links (Fig. 1.1). This axis constituted 'the northern arc' in the revitalization of European trade in the Early Middle Ages (McCormick 2001). As an integral part of the network of the northwestern European area, Ribe underwent a mercantile flourishing. From here, the large Western European urbanised societies were supplied with Danish agricultural products and probably goods from Norway, in exchange for primarily luxury goods, such as textiles and wine, but also imperishable materials like building stone and ceramics. A significant proportion of long-distance trade in the Danish kingdom was thus concentrated in Schleswig and Ribe, as a continuation of the emporia, until Lübeck and Hamburg gradually took over Schleswig-Hollingstedt's position on the main axis during the 13th century (Matthiessen 1927; Jahnke 2006). This contributed to Schleswig's mercantile crisis in the 13th century, whilst due to its position in the Western European network, Ribe experienced a more gradual decline. The development provided an opportunity for a broader social group of merchants, as can be observed in the changes to Ribe's urban environment and in the establishment of a homogeneous group of new Danish small towns – the market towns (*købstæder*).

At the end of the 13th century, Ribe was restructured or modernised so that it resembled a classic South Scandinavia or North German medieval town, which

Fig. 1.1. The main axis of long-distance trade between Eastern and Western Europe, 'the northern arc'. This was, until the 13th century, a direct continuation of the Scandinavian-dominated trading system of the Viking Age. Denmark's medieval borders are shown with red lines.

was clearly delimited by moats and prominent town gates, with well-defined squares and closely-placed gabled houses. The town's mercantile heyday did not, however, follow these changes, but preceded them.

The theoretical discussion in this book can be found in chapter 2, *The theoretical and research history background,* which contains my considerations on the archaeological and theoretical basis as well as the classic theories about the medieval town. The first of the aforementioned involves theoretical inspiration from semiotics, whilst the classic theories about the medieval town are supplemented by more recent research into the relationship between institutions and trade in medieval Europe. The chapter also contains a brief presentation and assessment of the research into the Danish medieval town, including the archaeological monographs.

Chapter 3, *The legal and financial conditions for Danish rescue archaeology until 2002,* provides a comprehensive account of the development of Danish legislation and archaeological tradition for readers outside Denmark, so that the excavation results can be assessed in the context of other Scandinavian and European material. Legal and economic conditions are of crucial importance to rescue archaeology throughout Europe, although it is somewhat perplexing that archaeological publications rarely mention the associated prioritisations and limitations to the material. It is also relevant to emphasise this in the present publication because the excavation of the Danielsens Tømmerhandel site was one of the contributing reasons for the change in the funding principle behind Danish rescue archaeology. It was at the time the most expensive excavation that had ever been undertaken in Denmark, and clearly exposed the problems in the relevant legislation. The current Museum Act from 2001 has resulted in extensive development of archaeology in the open countryside, and is the main reason why Danish archaeology today is primarily focused on agricultural settlements within large cultural landscapes, including those dating to the Middle Ages. In contrast, the incentive structure of the legislation has resulted in a reduction in the number of large archaeological excavations within the cores of medieval towns and cities. Moreover, the results of a large number of earlier urban archaeo-

logical excavations are not available to researchers. These are to a greater or lesser extent unexamined in the archives of Danish museums, and considerable resources are required to make suitable and analyse the materials from the complex urban excavations. It is hoped that this publication will illustrate the perspectives involved in investigating early unpublished excavations.

The large corpus in chapter 4 constitutes the empirical basis of the publication. *The excavations in west Ribe: ASR 1015 Dagmargården, ASR 1200 Bakelitfabrikken and ASR 11 Danielsens Tømmerhandel.* Here, the results of a comprehensive contextual analysis are presented. Information-rich and extensive urban archaeological investigations are particularly challenging to present in a physical book format, which is probably the reason why major publications are rare. It is difficult to decide upon an appropriate level at which to simplify and focus upon the large amount of material, with all the interpretative reservations that are associated with archaeology. I have decided to describe the chronological development of the settlement down to the level of the individual house. The chapter is in its very nature descriptive, but I would like to point out that this is based on much more observations and analyses than those which are included in the text. Further simplification would, in my opinion, sever the connection with the original material, so it would no longer be possible to check my interpretations without extensive analytical work. The analysis especially focuses on functional determination of the structures of the plots based on their layout, location and associated activities. The elevations that are referred to are given relative to Denmark's current elevation DVR90.

Chapter 5, *The finds,* constitutes the second part of the corpus, and contains a presentation and analysis of most of the artefactual material, with special focus on what the artefacts reveal about network connections, crafts and social environments. It also includes the function, quantity and provenance of the artefacts. Such subject-based examination of artefacts is common in Scandinavian archaeology, rather than analysis based on the materials and technology. The advantage of this approach is that it increases the focus on the cultural-historical narrative. However, the disadvantage is that it can exclude artefact types whose function is currently not known. All the objects that are referred to are publicly available by searching by case and general finds registration number in Museum West's digital collection SOL – Samlingen OnLine (http://sol.musvest.dk/). For example 'Journalnummer': ASR 1015 and 'søgeord': x0001.

Chapter 6, *Ribe and Danish urbanisation,* examines and puts into perspective the excavation material, based on the connection between the mercantile network, the physical environment of the town and the identity of the merchants. In this chapter, the excavated plots are associated with Ribe's topographic development. The artefactual material is related to the known, historical accounts of the trading networks and the urban environment. Finally, there is a comparative analysis with the other large Danish towns, such as Lund and Schleswig. The book will thus attempt to answer the following questions:

- Where, when and how did the merchants settle in Ribe? Was there a connection between the dating and function of the individual parts of the town in terms of crafts, trade, agriculture and administration? Did the settlement, for example, correspond to agrarian building traditions, was it of mercantile character which meant that goods could be stored in cellars, or was the settlement primarily residential? What geographical and social models do the structures reflect?

- Who were Ribe's new merchants and what was their role in the mercantile networks? Did they act as part of the aristocracy and the rural population, or as an independent social class? Were they involved as a combination of craftsmen, sailors and specialised traders? Does the archaeological material reveal the dynamics and intensities of network connections which are not known from the written sources?

- What were the merchants' conditions like and what did they do to maintain the networks? Was there a connection between large investments in the town's infrastructure and its privileges?

Even in a small country like Denmark, there is a lack of agreement about the chronological terms. In the text, a Danish chronology is used which reflects an increasingly synchronous development between South Scandinavia and Central and Western Europe. However, the Danish term 'Early' or 'earlier Middle Ages' is not used for the period c. 1050-1200, as this may have caused confusion. The book's chronological framework involves the English and approximately also German High Middle Ages, which chronologically corresponds with the secular settlement in the western part of Ribe. It is, however, the establishment of the Franciscan monastery around 1250 which has determined the chronological framework of the publication.

Late Germanic Iron Age (550-800)
Viking Age or Early Middle Ages outside Scandinavia (800-1050)
High Middle Ages 1050-1350
Late Middle Ages 1350-1525
Renaissance 1525-1650
Early Modern 1650-1800

2. The theoretical and research history background

2.1 The theoretical starting point

Historical archaeology in Denmark, which has to a large extent been shaped by Medieval Archaeology at Aarhus University, has been criticised by colleagues in neighbouring Scandinavian countries for being disinterested in archaeological theories. Instead, the traditional research questions of the discipline of history and the written sources have been focused on and subjected to an almost positivist historical source criticism. In other words, the subject of medieval archaeology in Denmark has functioned as a support discipline, whose purpose is to confirm or refute theories formulated by discipline of history, rather than focusing on independent research questions derived from the archaeological source material (Christophersen 2002). There is, in my opinion, quite a lot of truth in this. When I studied Medieval Archaeology at Aarhus University in the 2000s, the teaching of archaeological theory had only just been introduced by a young lecturer. It was also almost taboo to focus on the magical world or popular beliefs of the Middle Ages. This may sound strange for a subject that deals with the understanding of medieval society, but the underlying attitude was that such a focus was beyond the limits of the archaeological source material and that assumptions should simply be made about the world of beliefs in the past. Prehistoric Archaeology at the same institute was, on the other hand, much more open to dealing with this subject. The theoretical differences between the two archaeological subjects were probably mainly because, apart from its close association with history, when medieval archaeology emerged in Denmark, it had a strong focus on the essential building up of object typologies, whilst the rest of Danish and Scandinavian archaeology was influenced by American and English theoretical directions (Roesdahl 1993). Nor was it helpful that there was an atmosphere of opposition towards Prehistoric Archaeology, in which Medieval Archaeology had been treated quite unfairly or neglected (Roesdahl 1997). Even though several of the new medieval archaeologists came from prehistoric archaeology, there was only very limited methodological or theoretical exchange between the two, apart from in connection with experimental archaeology. This resulted, for example, in a division between town and countryside in archaeology, in which the new urban archaeological discipline became largely synonymous with medieval archaeology, whilst settlement archaeology in open landscapes was mainly associated with prehistoric archaeology. This is therefore probably why, since the turn of the millennium, Danish urban archaeology has taken a very long time to realise and exploit the great opportunities offered by databases and GIS to reconstruct the early structures of the towns and cities based on cartographic, written and archaeological source material (Dam 2002; Søvsø 2024).

What I would like to state in my somewhat subjective appraisal of Medieval Archaeology at Aarhus University, which no longer exists as a separate department, is that I have not been trained in theoretical discussions, and actually prefer an approach that initially allows the empirical information to lead the way. Having said that, theoretical discussions are of course essential for describing major historical and cultural changes. On the other hand, no theories are stronger than the quantity, quality and multifaceted nature of the empirical basis, and one of the strengths of Medieval Archaeology at Aarhus University was its strong focus on knowledge of the material. Archaeology should not, however, refrain from dealing with the mental history of the Middle Ages, including identity and communities, which are currently very topical subjects in urban archaeology. This is a difficult question, which is susceptible to circular arguments, especially if it becomes a criterion for defining a town or city (Wienberg 2024, 175-176). I believe that the empirical basis of identity is found

in specific archaeological material in general. One example is Anders Andrén's use of iconography on coins and town seals as providing evidence of urban municipality in the early 12th century (Andrén 1994). It would, however, be a stroke of luck if general archaeological material from a random excavation in a Danish market town were to provide evidence of identities or communities. There are, on the other hand, various opportunities for qualitative statements about social environments and material urban culture.

Archaeological theory should be based on the specific archaeological source material, which in its nature and conditions differs significantly from the source materials of all other humanistic or social science disciplines. In Danish archaeology, this view can be traced back to Sophus Müller, but has also had exponents in other European countries, and has been called "archaeology as itself" (Müller 1897; Trigger 1989, 357-369). The history of archaeology includes numerous examples of more or less successful introductions of theories from other disciplines as well as from the general development of mental history and the history of ideas. Since the 1960s, however, a reformist theory has emerged which has been theoretically inspired by, for example, anthropology and sociology, and has followed two distinct theoretical directions: *processual* and *post-processual archaeology*. Both of these directions involve certain inappropriate approaches to the character and specific conditions of the archaeological source material.

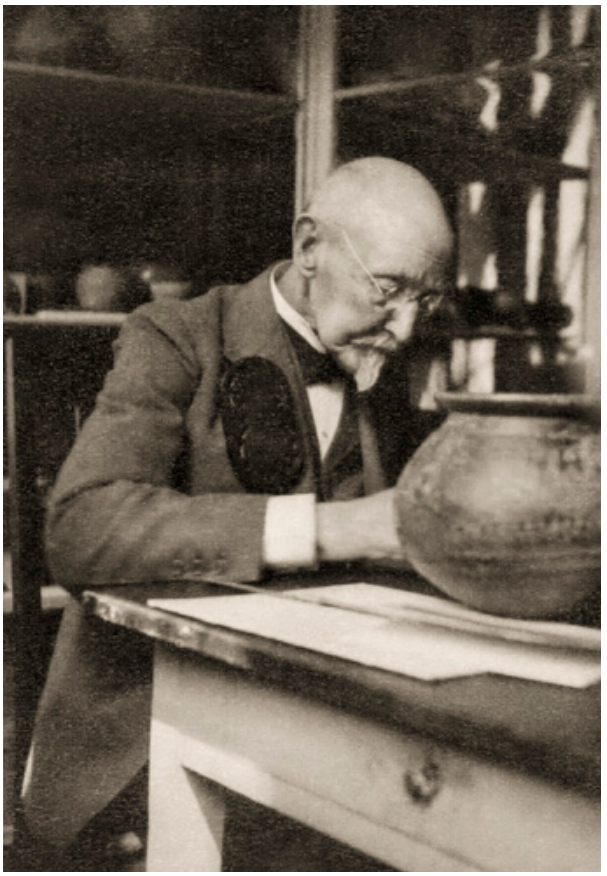


Fig. 2.1 Sophus Müller 1846-1823. Head of the 1st department of the National Museum (Prehistory) from 1892. In 1895-1921, director of the National Museum. Photo: the Royal Danish Library.

Processual archaeology's almost epistemological reaction to cultural-historical archaeology, and its insistence on hypothetical, deductive conclusions inspired by scientific positivism is an approach that has certain limitations in archaeology. It is a condition of the subject that source material continues to accumulate as a result of various activities in society, which are beyond the control of archaeologists. The formation of archaeological theory must therefore be based on experiential contexts until the exceptions to the rule become so numerous that a new theory can be proposed. Archaeology is thus a subject that is based on available empirical evidence, current method and the theoretical considerations of the time.

One of the most important arguments of post-processual archaeology against processual archaeology is that material culture is not a passive reflection of past events, but that it was active and in its time was meaningfully used to, for example, cultivate social interests (Hodder 1992, 84-85). An important contribution is also Ian Hodder's concept of contextual archaeology, which highlights the dialectical relationship between object and context, in which the context both gives meaning to and itself acquires meaning from the object (Hodder 1992, 14-15). Hodder's partial comparison of text and material culture is, however, problematic. Here, he uses the metaphor of material culture as a text to propose that the archaeological source material is intentional and that it is subjectively interpreted. It is true that archaeological source material is associated with subjective interpretations, and that material culture in the past was most likely used as a social marker, but most of the archaeological source material (apart from images and pictograms) are not intentional, unlike written sources.

In semiotics research, there are theories that explain the fundamental difference between intentional pictorial representations or 'icons' (images), intentional textual representations or 'symbols' (language text) and unintentional 'indications'. The latter are regarded as 'indications of something', such as symptoms or observations (Togeby 2005). A very large part of the archaeological source material belongs to the latter group. A number of interpretations of indications and causal relationships are thus required in order, for example, to identify a number of archaeological traces as being part of a house from the Middle Ages. Although the traces are remnants

of past human actions, they are, however, without intentionality defined as something that states something which it is intended to state (Togeby 2005, 31). If inside a house there is a brooch with a motif of an animal in Urnes Style, it is thus an intentional pictorial representation. The brooch has conceptual motif content that we can recognise, but its meaning is ambiguous. Is it, for example, a religious motif or is it a statement of social affinity, or perhaps both? In addition, it does not lose meaning if part of the motif has broken off, unlike text. This is because textual statements are intentional representations of symbols that they are divided into discrete, repeatable parts, which are combined into units with either/or meaning. If a sentence has a correct structure, it has an unambiguous meaning (Togeby 2005). This does not, of course, mean that the intentional statement in a text cannot be incorrect or directly untruthful, but in this case the source criticism of history must take over. I therefore do not suggest that text is unambiguous, but instead that it is always intentional.

These examples are intended to show how multifaceted and complicated the interpretation of archaeological source material is, and that it is the large amounts of non-intentional sources that differentiate archaeology from other humanistic disciplines, especially history. It is also these that give archaeology its almost old-fashioned, empirical character, with the archaeologists' sensual and experiential recognition of the traces of the people of the past. Traces which are objectively present in the world. This brings me back to the relationship between archaeology and history, which for the previously mentioned reasons, I regard as not just complementary disciplines, that have different preconditions and approaches to understanding past societies. They are also disciplines which in their negative correspondence and disparities create new and different views of the past (Andrén 1997, 150-182).

This publication has a cultural-historical theoretical core, with a strong emphasis on the interaction between theory and the empirical evidence. Cultural-historical archaeology continues to be highly relevant and useful in relation to post-processual archaeology, which has not developed a methodology of its own, as it is not an attempt at a coherent theory about the past or the archaeology (Shanks 2008).This also applies in relation to processual methodology, which with its deductive testing of models, contradicts the premises of the accumulation of archaeological data. Archaeology's fundamental methods in the form of typology and stratigraphy were developed in cultural-historical archaeology, and have since been refined and revised by dendrochronology, radiocarbon dating and actual stratigraphic excavation techniques. The classic cultural-historical theory developed in Europe, in which cultural development was explained by diffusion, could not explain prehistoric processes, as at the same time archaeology gradually also developed on other continents (Trigger 1989, 294-302). Cultural-historical development and change are, however, not necessarily the result of a single process, but of several, such as diffusion, environment, migration, technology, social conflicts, disasters and changes in climate. In my opinion, the core of cultural-historical archaeology is that different groups of people live in cultural communities that share a common material expression, which develops, both quickly or slowly, over time.

2.2 Theories about the medieval town

The classic medieval town (c. 1050-1500) is of considerable conceptual importance to research into European urbanisation, as a very large number of the continent's towns and cities emerged during this period, and neither has there been a fundamental change in Europe's large, regional urban centres. The medieval town has therefore been an important subject in research into urbanisation, and it has been examined and theorised about in a number of social science disciplines, such as geography, demography and sociology, as well as humanistic subjects like history and archaeology, and especially aesthetic subjects such as architectural history. The architecture of the medieval European town is usually characterised as a very dense settlement that is clearly delimited by its walls and gates. The silhouette of the town houses is interrupted by the monumental architecture of churches and monasteries, and between the houses, twisting and narrow alleys run like arteries towards larger streets, which eventually end in the heart of the town, the square, at the foot of the citizens' somewhat ostentatious town hall.

The almost organic description and explanation of the medieval town which grew by itself is typical of the earlier cultural-historical research (Matthiessen 1922). It is a very attractive description, which describes very well the immediate impression a visitor gets when they walk around one of Europe's well-preserved medieval towns or cities. But if this is investigated in more detail, it becomes apparent that the town that has grown up with winding streets is the result of a long and complicated development that lasted half a millennium, which in the following centuries also changed in response to new needs and urban ideals. In some cases, this has occurred to such an extent that only parts of the street network and churches still remain. Even in the best-preserved medieval town, upon closer examination, it will probably become

evident that it is the product of numerous historical developments, which have gradually removed its earlier historical layers, and that this process has given the town its organic character. The description of the medieval town above can best be generally applied to the medieval town at the end of the era. Research into the emergence and topographical development of the medieval town is thus a complex task, although it is nowhere near as challenging as the overall medieval urbanity, including the town's economy, network, governance, communities, architecture, social environments, urban culture and identities.

The early theorisation about the European medieval town was approached from economic, social-historical and geographical perspectives, and was represented by the major works *Die Stadt* (1921) by Max Weber, *Medieval Cities. Their Origins and the revival of Trade* (1925) by Henri Pirenne and *Die Zentralen Orte in Süddeutchland* (1933) by Walter Christaller. Despite the fact that they are primarily based on legal and economic documents, these works still constitute the theoretical core of research, certainly into the Danish medieval town, whether this involves the question of central place compared to network theory, or the consumer versus the mercantile town (Christensen 2004). As well as assessing a number of the classic theories about the medieval town, the following sections will take into account a new economic-historical work by Sheilagh Ogilvie, *Institution and European Trade. Merchant Guilds, 1000-1800* from 2011, which provides an important new insight into the premises of medieval trade in Europe.

2.2.1 Long-distance trade and the middle class

Pirenne used a quite categorical definition of the medieval city as characterised by its middle class of traders and craftsmen, and its municipal organisation (Pirenne 2014, 34). This is probably too narrow a definition for explaining the Scandinavian towns and cities in the 11th century, even if the municipal organisation is interpreted more as an oath-bound community than a developed organisation, like that which existed in Schleswig from the 1130s at the latest (Radtke 2002, 57). Whilst Pirenne's explanation of urban development in Western Europe in the High Middle Ages remains unchallenged, it has proved to be incorrect in relation to the urban development in the Early Middle Ages in England, Scandinavia and the Baltic. Here, the absence of textual evidence was interpreted as indicating that towns and cities were not present, until the archaeological excavations amongst World War Two ruins identified remains which suggested the opposite was the case (Hodges 1989, 20-21). Richard Hodges' major work *Dark Age Economics* (1982), inspired by Pirenne and Karl Polanyi's *The Great Transformation* (1944), was thus a comprehensive revision of the development in the years 600-1000 based upon both anthropological models and archaeological sources. Although *Dark Age Economics* with its processual method has long since been superseded by numerous archaeological discoveries, it remains the most important archaeological, theoretical contribution about the urban origins in northwestern Europe and Scandinavia. The earliest towns, emporia, were based on long-distance maritime trade, which was a royal privilege. The towns were located in the border zones between the kingdoms of the period in order to achieve the best possible contact with other regions. Despite an enormous increase in empirical material over the last 35 years of excavations in the North Sea region, Hodges' deductive model still remains valid (Søvsø 2020, 229-231).

For Pirenne, long-distance trade was also the most important cause of the increased economic activity and urbanisation from the 11th century onwards. The underlying mechanism was as follows: the longer the distance, the greater the profit (Pirenne 2014, 78). It was thus personal ambition amongst groups of merchants and a high degree of risk-taking that drove long-distance trade, which today could be described using the term 'agency'. It could also be called social ambition, in which trade offered one of the only routes for social elevation in medieval society. As a result, a new middle class of traders and craftsmen emerged, who established themselves in geographically advantageous places, where fortifications or towns were already located. From their earliest settlements on the periphery of episcopal cities, they gradually settled in the centres of the cities, and through communal organisation were able to increase their privileges and control these urban centres, firstly in relation to the aristocracy and the bishop and later, in the largest cities, with respect to the princes (Pirenne 2014, 87-91, 116-119).

It is important to point out that recent economic history emphasises that the early research overestimated the extent of medieval long-distance or international trade. Short-distance, either local or regional, trade, was in fact the dominant type from around 1000, and the main reason for the growth in the medieval European economy (Ogilvie 2011, 198). Although long-distance trade only constituted a small element of the overall economy, it was concentrated in certain cities and may therefore have continued to function as an important catalyst for other trade and the relatively sudden and significant growth in the number of European towns in the 12th century.

Finally, it should be noted that Pirenne's model is based on large maritime towns of a markedly mercan-

tile character in Western Europe and northern Italy. It is not necessarily as relevant for European inland towns, whose emergence and development can perhaps be better explained by central place theories. At the periphery of Europe, such as in Scandinavia, the towns were also much smaller, which must have influenced the size of the new middle class and its ability to acquire privileges from, for example, the Danish king, who was the ruler of most of and the largest Danish towns (Kristensen & Poulsen 2016, 94, 152).

2.2.2 The consumer city, the producer city and the trading city

Max Weber shared Pirenne's view that the 'medieval city' was like a 'municipality' from the beginning. It was thus a kind of medieval democracy of specialised traders, which like the city government and democracy of antiquity, was a unique European or occidental phenomenon compared to the cities of the East (Weber 1966, 99, 201). However, unlike Pirenne, Max Weber viewed the subject from a global perspective, and his universal definition of the city as a "market settlement" can be applied to urbanisation in the whole of Europe during the Early Middle Ages, as well as the High and Late Middle Ages, and to large urban centres as well as less intensively urbanised areas:

"Thus, we wish to speak of a "city" ('Stadt' also meaning 'town') only in the cases where the local inhabitants satisfy an economically substantial part of their daily wants in the local market, and to an essential extent by products produced which the local population and that of the immediate hinterland produced for sale in the market or acquired in other ways. In the meaning employed here the "city" is a market place. The local market forms the economic center of the colony in which, due to the specialization in economic products, both the non-urban population and urbanites satisfy their wants for articles of trade and commerce." (Weber 1966, 66-67).

Weber's definition is one of the strongest attempts at a generally applicable urban definition up until industrialisation. Based on the market, Weber proposed kinds of archetype cities, which were rarely found in their pure form. The early medieval towns emerged because they benefited from the opportunity for monetary revenues from the princes and an increase in their content of precious metals. In the Early Middle Ages, the towns most often emerged in the context of large princely households, which were the market's most important buyers or consumers. In a similar way, merchants in some European cities during the High Middle Ages were dependent on major consumers, such as the aristocracy and secular or ecclesiastical administration. The city was thus dependent on the political income in the form of interest from the land, which gave the large-scale consumers their purchasing power. Hence the term 'consumer city'. This was in contrast to a 'producer city', where craftsmen and traders shipped out their goods. Here, the consumers in the local market consisted of a large group of workers and craftsmen, merchants and landlords. In a 'trade city', the purchasing power of large-scale consumers came from the retail trading of foreign goods in the local market, the export of local goods obtained from domestic producers or the resale of foreign goods (Weber 1966, 67-70).

Weber's urban models are still very useful as they can help us understand the dominant characteristics of the individual city, an urban region or possibly a chronological phase of urbanisation. They otherwise differ from the network and central place theories in that they explain the connection between the function of cities and the social groups that inhabited them.

2.2.3 Central place or network theory

Walter Christaller's geographical central place theory is a static model, which presupposes that there are homogeneous geographical and political conditions. According to the theory, the primary economic basis of cities is to offer goods and services to the hinterland, which is why they are centrally located and evenly distributed to ensure as short a transport distance as possible. Each city is placed in a hierarchy, from small and less specialised to large and more specialised. If the economic basis is not sufficient to enable a high degree of specialisation in the smaller town, it has to receive services from a larger town. The rural population of the smaller town does not attempt to travel to the large town or city in order to trade, but is instead served by the town hierarchy (Christaller 1966, 152-166). This theory is associated with a number of obvious problems in terms of explaining medieval urbanisation due to the very clear division between town and countryside and also its lack dynamism in the town hierarchy. The model may be more well suited to explaining cities in large inland regions than in the European coastal zones, where network functions were more prominent and sailing offered better opportunities for moving outside the local town hierarchy. Danish peasant farmers in the Late Middle Ages thus preferred to sail past the local town and instead directly on to the large German towns to sell their goods (Kristensen & Poulsen 2016, 359). The theory cannot simply be rejected, however, as it is very difficult to ignore the fact that the medieval towns functioned as commercial central places within a town hierarchy. I would, following Weber's

Fig. 2.2. View of Groningen as an example of a medieval town in the lowlands of northwestern Europe, surrounded by substantial ramparts and roundels dating to the Late Middle Ages or Renaissance in response to the development of artillery. In the High Middle Ages, Danish towns were also typically fortified with ramparts and palisades rather than town walls. Published in Braun & Hogenberg's Civitates orbis terrarum c. 1577-1588. From original in the Royal Danish Library.

town definition, go so far as to say that all medieval towns functioned as commercial central places for a specific hinterland, even the earliest ones. In the Late Middle Ages, when there are numerous historical sources, the trade with the hinterland was important for the Danish towns, which at that time were part of a city hierarchy centred around Lübeck. The city hierarchies were, however, dynamic, because as an alternative to Lübeck emerged, the Danish towns and cities increasingly orientated themselves towards the Netherlands (Poulsen 2004, 225-227). The dynamics of the trade route can therefore be better explained by the network theory.

The network theory is today the prevailing theoretical direction in urban archaeology in Denmark, especially in relation to research into the earliest towns, including Ribe, where it provided the theoretical basis for the research excavation SJM 3 Posthustorvet 2017-18. The excavation demonstrated for the first time that around 700 the narrow plots were already densely built up with somewhat insubstantial houses, which clearly differed in terms of their preserved form from the agrarian dwellings of the period. It also documented how the composition and intensity of the imported goods changed in precise chronologies during the following centuries, and within a single plot (Croix et al. 2020, 71; Sindbæk 2022, 435-463). In relation to the earliest towns, it is important to point out that 'central place' in the Scandinavian context is also used as synonym for regional, elite centres in the Iron Age and Viking period, 'elite residences', which, like towns and cities, had religious and political central functions as well as well as some level of specialised crafts and trade (Larsson & Hårdh ed. 1998; Wienberg 2020). Network theory differs from both central place theories in that it considers the system of cities as linear and without a proper centre. Where networks cross other networks, 'nodal points' or 'gateways' emerge. The theory is not as preoccupied with town hierarchies, but it can reasonably be argued that the more networks that pass through a town, the more important it must be in the system. One of the strengths of the theory is that the networks are dynamic over time, so the nodal points can move from one town to another. Another significant contrast with central place theories is that it is the network towns which create growth in the hinterland, and not the other way around (Christensen 2004; Sindbæk 2007). Long-distance trade is the clearest indication of the network theory, which is why Pirenne's model can be regarded as an expression of the network theory. The weakness of the network theory is that the network system supposedly functioned more or less independently of the political structures, in a closed system, separate from the local market (Sindbæk 2007). It is, however, hard to imagine how it could have been possible to maintain a system of long-distance trade for a number of centuries without a significant amount of trade with either the hinterland or elite environments. There was no evidence of the latter in Ribe during the 8th and 9th centuries, nor in the production of goods, so the town probably also functioned as a market for a hinterland (Søvsø 2020a, 171-175). It is therefore reasonable to doubt whether such a system of pure network towns ever existed. Poul M. Hohenberg and Lynn Hollen Lees have also proposed a 'dual perspective', in which for each town, as well as for the phases of urbanisation, a distinction is made between 'network towns' associated with long-distance trade and a 'central place' associated with local trade. But how

much further can we come in terms of understanding the processes behind medieval urbanisation using cultural-geographical models. Another approach might be to instead focus on the social groups and institutions which carried out the trade.

2.2.4 Trading institutions

What central place theory and network theory have in common is that the exchange of goods in their systems is economically rational, so towns appear relatively freely where there is a natural break in the journey and traders cross routes, or where there is a vacuum in the demand from the hinterland. This reflects modern economic thinking with roots in the Enlightenment, in which free competition benefits trade and society as a whole. In the Middle Ages, there was no central power or political institutions that effectively ensured free competition, which was instead often circumvented by rulers and institutions such as merchant guilds. Sheilagh Ogilvie therefore convincingly argues against the traditional view of merchant guilds as effective institutions that solved economic and security problems and made the overall economy function better. They instead created a mechanism whereby merchants and rulers could work together to secure more resources for themselves at the expense of the rest of the economy. With privileges, the rulers gave the merchant guilds the opportunity to make monopolistic profits out of other traders, and in return, the merchant guilds enabled the rulers to receive additional incomes from their subjects, which is why the guilds were so successful:

"Merchant guilds existed in so many economies for such a long time not because they were efficient in solving commercial problems in ways that benefited everyone, but because they were effective in enabling influential social groups to transfer resources to their own members, at the expense of the wider economy" (Ogilvie 2011, 418)

Such alliances, and the resulting competition between rulers and merchant guilds, must have had an important influence on international, regional and local trade in the High Middle Ages, as well as on the dynamics of trading networks. Was it simply the ability of rulers and groups of merchants to control trade to their own advantage that was the driving force behind the city hierarchy and trading networks? Personal relations and marriages were probably vital to the merchants' networks, as was also the case in late medieval Denmark, where there was close contact and a considerable amount of movement of merchants and craftsmen between the North German and Danish Baltic towns (Poulsen 2013). Under all circumstances, it is relevant from an archaeological perspective to focus on the social environments of the merchants, and the material traces of their networks, in order to determine how these correspond with the previously mentioned economic and social-historical theories of Weber, Pirenne and Ogilvie.

2.3 Research into the Danish medieval town

The story of the formative phase of the Danish medieval towns is associated with a number of discrepancies, due to the fact that the two most important cities in the High Middle Ages, Schleswig and Lund, are located outside present-day Denmark. They represent the outer points in the relationship between the mercantile and administrative driving forces of urbanisation, which is reflected in the two most important syntheses: Hugo Matthissen's complete history *Middelalderlige byer. Beliggenhed og Baggrund* from 1927 and Andrén's thesis *Den urbana scenen. Städer och samhälle i det medeltida Danmark* from 1985.

Matthiessen's geographical model had a one-sided, mercantile focus, in which traffic connections and trade drove urbanisation. Most important was Schleswig's location on the main axis of trade between

Fig. 2.3. Hugo Matthiessen 1881-1957. Curator of the 2nd department of the National Museum (Middle Ages) 1914-1929. Photo: the National Museum of Denmark.

Western Europe and Russia, in which Gotland was the second, important nodal point (Westholm 1999). Change occurred as a result of new traffic routes and competition along the main axis of the trade, such as when Schleswig was replaced by Lübeck as a nodal point during the 13th century. Now there was room for the older Ribe to once again flourish through its old connections between Western Europe and Denmark (Matthiessen 1927, 73).

Schleswig has not been focused to any great extent in recent Danish research, even though the archaeological finds support the theory that, as the heir to Hedeby, it was the nodal point for the transit trade between the Baltic Sea area and northwestern Europe (Radtke 2002; Vogel 2002). This is largely due to the less favourable conditions for archaeology in Schleswig in comparison with those in Scandinavia. Archaeological excavations have also been concentrated around the harbour, which has provided a good insight into the exchange of goods (Vogel 1999; Rösch 2018). The merchants did not live in this area to any significant extent, however, so the material is less well suited to shedding light on their urban environments. These were probably found in the Schild excavations, which were undertaken at Rathusmarkt in central Schleswig in 1971-1975, with some of the large amounts of artefacts from these thoroughly examined and published in the series *Ausgrabungen in Schleswig* (Fig. 2.4; 2.5). The built environment, on the other hand, has unfortunately only been very summarily described (Vogel 1997).

Swedish research has had a considerable influence in Denmark, both because of the archaeological approach of the museum Kulturen in Lund, and the early publications of the Thule excavation in 1961 (Blomqvist and Mårtensson 1963) and PKbanken in 1974-1975 (Mårtensson 1976 ed.), but also because of its recent attempts to produce a synthesis, which have been quite rare in Denmark (Andren 1985; Larsson 2000; Carelli 2001). *Den urbana scenen* has been especially influential, with its interrupted model of medieval urbanisation in three phases. The earliest towns in 1000-1200 were administrative centres (consumer towns), whilst they were later on mercantile in the sense that the economic foundation of the towns was no longer based on the ecclesiastical and royal administration. This was in deliberate opposition to Matthiessen and interpreted medieval urbanisation as a stage in Christian state formation (Christensen 2004; Kristensen & Poulsen 2016). There was a clear tendency to regard Lund as a model for Danish urbanisation, even though it was a religious centre for the whole of Denmark. The clergy played a decisive part in formative urbanisation, on the basis of the ecclesiastical structure, despite the fact that it primarily reflects phases of the ecclesiastical organisation (Nyborg 2004). Peter Carelli's doctoral dissertation *En kapitalistisk anda* from 2001 is a brave attempt to write a Danish complete history of the 12th century based upon Lund. The form is postmodern, but it is otherwise a mixture of many different archaeological studies, based on a varying empirical foundation. It has been suggested that the geographical distribution of coins in Lund reflects the development of trade in the urban environment from the 10th to 16th centuries (Carelli 2001, 195). Significant problems are, however, associated with the direct interpretation of coin finds from different excavations as providing evidence of trade in the urban environment. For example, where are the numerous coins from the Danish civil wars? One of the work's most important observations concerns the general changes in Lund's cadastral structure, which is based on the results of a number of archaeological excavations and explained in chapter 6 (Carelli 2001, 109-124).

The Danish research has been characterised by monographs for towns. From the mid-1970s, the national project *Middelalderbyen*, led by Olaf Olsen, was an attempt at a collaboration between the universities and local museums to map and describe the Danish medieval towns. The project, which only covered 10 towns, involved thorough analysis of the overall archival source material (written, cartographic and earlier archaeological source material), so that *Middelalderbyen Ribe* by Ingrid Nielsen (1985), for example, is still relevant. It was originally planned that each town would be published in a separate volume, after which a comparative analysis and synthesis would be undertaken. In the 1980s and 1990s, descriptions of seven of the 10 selected towns were published, and the eighth in 2013. A proper synthesis of the work was never produced, at least not until Hans Krongaard Kristensen and Bjørn Poulsen's *Danmarks byer i middelalderen* in 2016, which was, amongst other things, based on the considerable amount of knowledge that had been collected in the project *Middelalderbyen*. The rescue archaeology undertaken in Svendborg during the 1970s should also be mentioned. The interdisciplinary results of this were published in English by Svendborg Omegns Museum and Odense University Press (later University Press of Southern Denmark) in the series *The Archaeology of Svendborg* and in *Journal of Danish Archaeology* (Jansen, Hatting & Sørensen 1987).

Danmarks byer i middelalderen greatly emphasises 'trade' as a driving force in early urbanisation (1000-1150) combined with a strengthened royal power and the development of ecclesiastical organisation. Here, the great mercantile breakthrough is associated with the many new towns that were founded around the Baltic Sea in 1150-1350 based on a uniform concept

Fig. 2.4. Houses dating to the 11th and 12th centuries at the Schild excavation in Schleswig 1971-1975. After Vogel 1989.

Fig. 2.5. The two largest towns in high medieval Denmark, Schleswig and Lund, are located outside Denmark's modern borders, and therefore the research has been influenced by different academic traditions. The research on the large amount of material from Schleswig has primarily involved detailed studies in the Ausgrabungen in Schleswig *series and has not been related to broader, cultural-historical topics. The Swedish research on the equally large amount of material from Lund has, on the other hand, taken the form of general, but interim, publications as well as syntheses. Both towns still await a detailed presentation of their built environment and its development.*

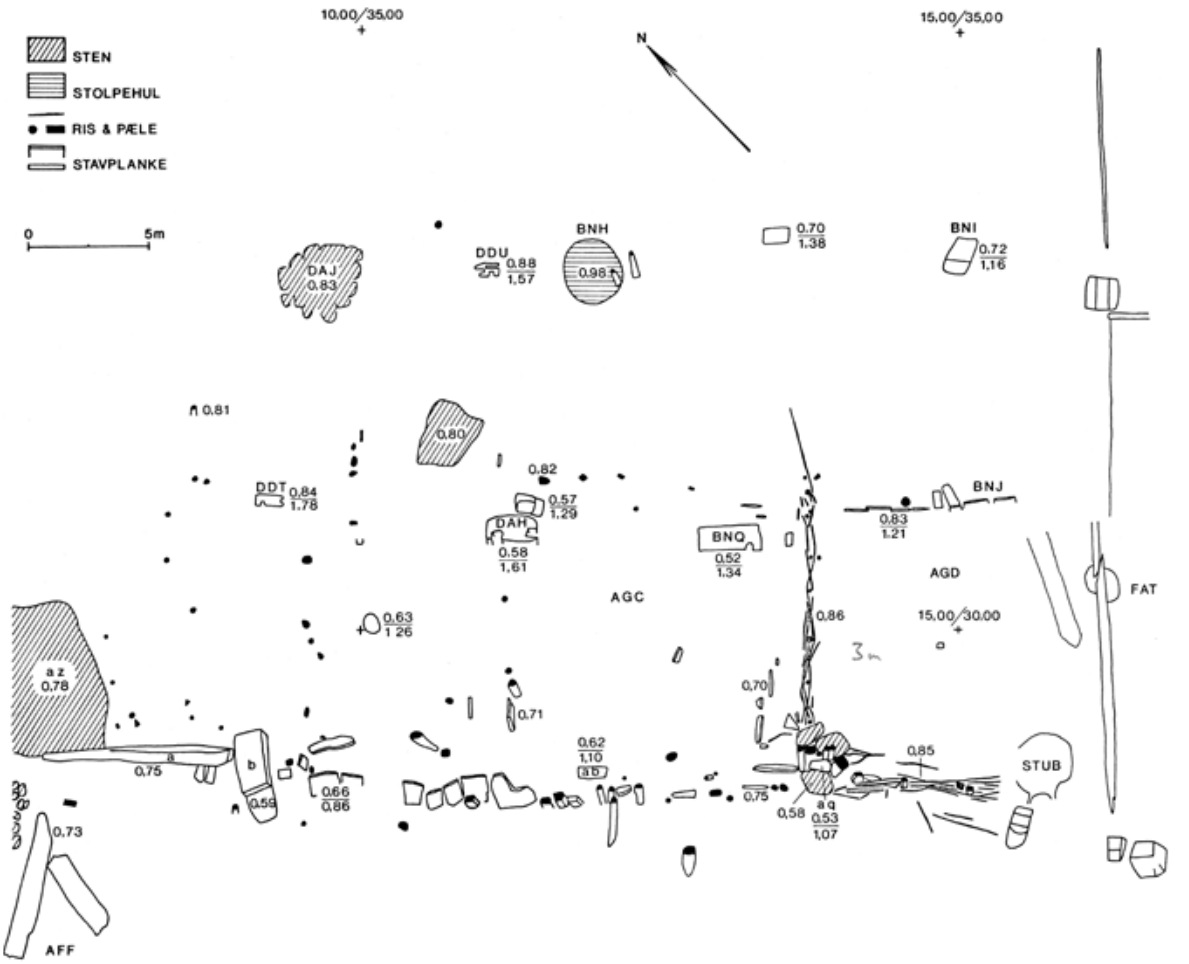


Fig. 2.6. Photo and recording of house from the rescue excavation Aarhus Søndervold 1963-1964. The house probably dated to the 13th century, as it was related to arbitrary horizons which were dated based on their ceramic contents. After Hellmuth Andersen, H., P. J. Crabb and H. J. Madsen 1971.

with 'the square' as the centre of the town, with the church finally placed some distance away from this in the Late Middle Ages. The publication is based on a large number of archaeological sources, although it mainly focuses on the historical sources and ecclesiastical structure. Its authors probably found it quite difficult to select new discoveries from the hundreds of primarily small archaeological investigations undertaken in the Danish medieval towns since the 1980s, as only a fraction of these have actually been published.

Poulsen has previously divided Danish shipping during the period 1100-1500 into four phases. The first phase was a continuation of the Viking Age trade routes via Schleswig, in which the Danish towns were important to the trade in the Baltic area. The second phase, in accordance with Matthiessen, began around 1220, with radical new trading patterns resulting from, for example, the new German cities located on the Baltic coast, which were part of the general growth of cities in Europe. The annual Scania markets became the most important new element in Danish trade, via which up to half of Danish imports were transported. The third phase, from the beginning of the 15th century, represented a crisis for Danish trade in general and in relations with the Hanseatic League, and resulted from the decline of the Scania markets. The fourth phase began around 1500, when Danish trading once again turned to Western Europe, with support from the state, which resulted in increased internal trade, but also more trade with the northern German cities (Poulsen 1999).

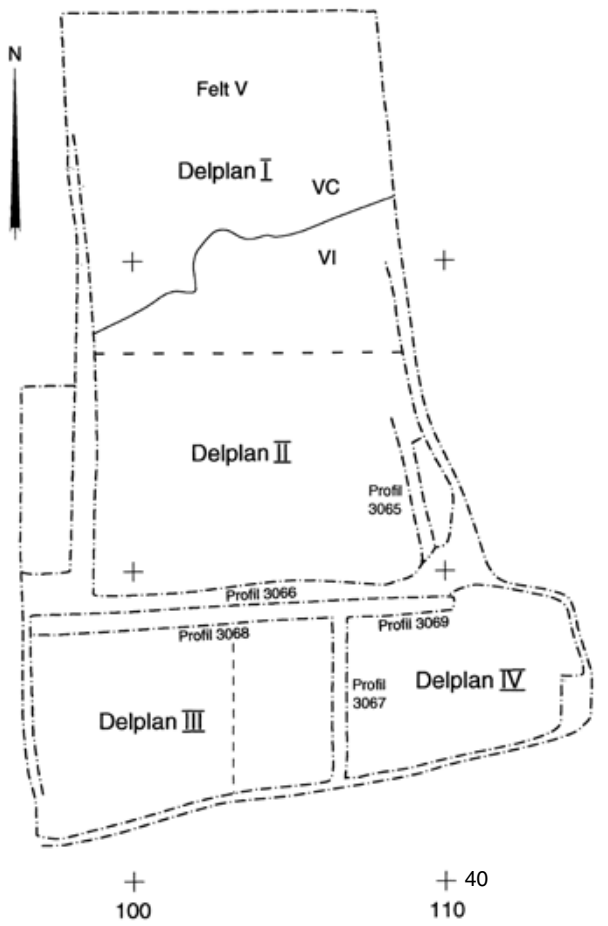
2.3.1 Monographs

There are a handful of monographs about major urban archaeological excavations in present-day Denmark: Århus *Søndervold* (1971), *Viborg Søndersø 1000-1300* (1998), *Viborg Søndersø 1018-1030* (2005), *Ribe Studier. Det ældste Ribe* (2006) and *Northern Emporium* (vol. 1 2022, vol. 2023). In addition, the series *Ribe excavations 1970-76,* was published in six volumes between 1981 and 2010.

Aarhus Søndervold, which was one of the earliest urban archaeological excavations in Denmark in 1963-1964, included an excavation area of 320 m^2, just over 50 m from Aarhus Cathedral, at the edge of the city's southern rampart. It involved horizontal excavation of arbitrary layers, with the structures and artefactual material associated with three ceramic horizons dating from the 10th to the 14th century. The remains that were found included two relatively well-preserved houses, probably dating to the 13th century, with walls consisting of planks and wickerwork (Fig. 2.6). The two houses, which were c. 3.5 m wide, were perpendicular to one another and may have been contemporary (Andersen, Crabb & Madsen 1971, 52, 55). This was a pioneering work in Danish urban archaeology, which is unfortunately now difficult to use due to its methodology, but still includes an important finds catalogue, that probably represents the typical urban culture of medieval Denmark.

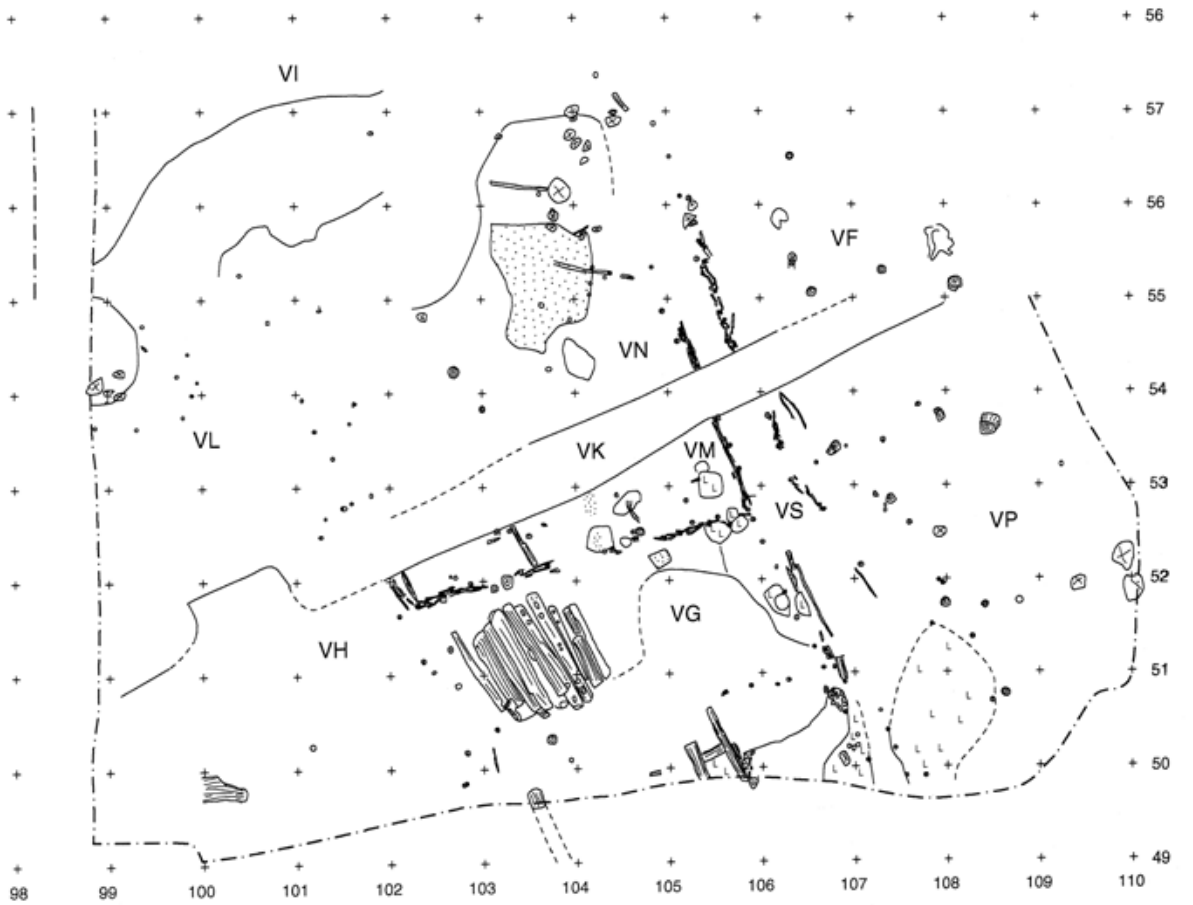
The excavations at Viborg Søndersø in 1981 and 1984-1985 were amongst the first urban archaeological investigations in Denmark, which were undertaken stratigraphically around the same time the method was introduced in Ribe. The excavation, which was undertaken by the local museum, Viborg Stiftsmuseum, largely though involved trenches, with the exception of two main open areas, which together covered just over 300 m^2 (Fig. 2.7). The investigation, with favourable conditions for the preservation of organic matter, revealed a part of the town dating from c. 1000 to 1300, which was founded some distance away from the later cathedral. Judging by the finds, the inhabitants had mainly worked with crafts involving bone, metal and wood. The excavations were not large enough to draw definite conclusions about the arrangement of the plots and street patterns, but suggested that a uniform and systematic division into plots had been undertaken in the earliest phase. In some of the excavation areas the houses were located in the same place for three centuries, whilst other plots were subsequently divided up. None of the houses, which were 3-5 m wide, were fully uncovered. The majority were lightweight constructions with wickerwork walls, but from around 1100 there were also more solid houses with staved walls and in the 13th century also plank walls. The latest house from c. 1300 had posts placed in postholes with a sill of bricks in between (Kristensen 1998b, 333-348). With the help of the project Middelalderbyen and much more successfully than at Aarhus Søndervold, the results were placed in the context of the historical and cartographic sources, as well as the numerous excavations which had been undertaken by the local museum since the 1960s (Nielsen 1968; Kristensen 1998c, 349-358).

In 2001, the Viborg Søndersø area was revisited in the research project of the same name, which was a collaboration between Viborg Stiftsmuseum and the National Museum of Denmark. The research excavation focused on environmental archaeology and involved a wide range of scientific methods. All sections of the publication also included English summaries. The project consisted of an open excavation area of c. 70 m^2, which was located in an area where there was a preserved 1 m-thick deposit and very favourable conditions for the preservation of organic material (Fig. 2.8). For the first time in Denmark, the excavation was carried out using 'single context' recording and all intact archaeological contexts were sieved. The excavation area contained a single, small house (3 x 5 m) in several phases,



which was dendrochronologically dated to the first decades of the 11th century. In its earliest phase, the house was constructed of wickerwork and functioned as a smithy, where steel, cast silver and copper alloy were also produced (Jouttijärvi & Andersen 2005). In addition, a large amount of comb debris was found in contexts in and around the house (Linaa 2005). The main conclusion of the project contradicted the previous publication by interpreting the settlement at Søndersø as a single unit, and perhaps a royal manor. One of the most important arguments in support of this was that the settlement within the excavation area ceased around 1026 (Jesper Hjermind, Mette Iversen & David Earle Robinson 2005). However, the empirical evidence that the settlement actually ended at the site around 1030 seems very unconvincing. In the recorded section what resembles a dug-out horizon is visible, followed by a very homogeneous layer containing traces of deep truncations (Thomsen 2005, 64, 80). In other words, it seems more likely that the apparent early cessation of the settlement was instead the result of later disturbances.

Fig. 2.7. Part of the largest area of the Viborg Søndersø rescue excavation in 1984-1985. It was one of the first in Denmark to be undertaken as a stratigraphic excavation. After Kristensen 1998.



2.3.1.1 Ribe studier (Ribe studies)

Since the 1970s, Ribe has played a much less important role in relation to medieval urbanisation than in the case of the Iron Age and the Viking period. This can be explained by the considerable amount of excavation activity on the north side of the river and the particularly good preservation conditions compared to those of the other emporia. It is probably also due to the relatively early international outlook of Mogens Bencard, as reflected by the publications in English of the Ribe excavations 1970-76 (Bencard 1981-2010; Feveile 2006; Søvsø 2020; Sindbæk 2022). Due to its historic buildings and abundant written sources, Ribe has also been an important case study for research into the Danish market towns in the 16th and 17th centuries, which many historians interpret as the zenith of the town (Degn 1997). Ribe has, as an urban phenomenon, thus been divided between different academic disciplines, even though the town is the only one which contains all phases of Danish urbanisation until industrialisation.

In the 1990s, the responsibility for archaeology in Ribe was divided into periods, with prehistoric archaeologists responsible for the Late Germanic Iron Age and the Viking Age, whilst medieval archaeologists were responsible for the Middle Ages and Renaissance (Søvsø 2020, 52). This was a direct continuation of Medieval Archaeology's opposition to Prehistoric Archaeology at Aarhus University, and as previously mentioned, it prevented the joint implementation of methods, which proved to be beneficial within the

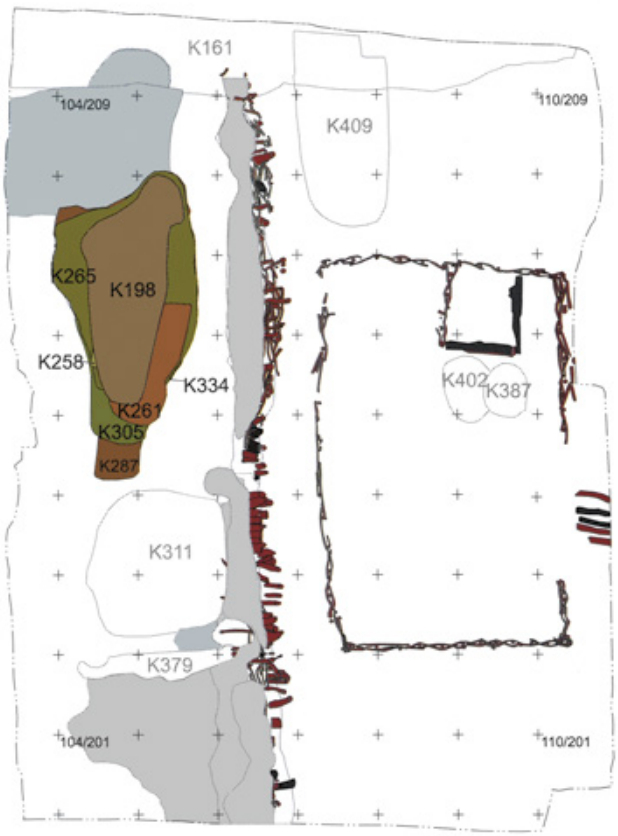


Fig. 2.8. The research excavation Viborg Søndersø 1018-1030 in 2001. Single context recording was used, which was partly digital. The initial recording was analogue, after which the records were then digitised and processed using GIS. After Thomsen & Iversen 2005.

Fig. 2.9. The research excavation SJM 3 Posthustorvet in 2017-2018. The excavation was undertaken using single context recording combined with laser scanning. All contexts dating from the Late Germanic Iron Age to the Renaissance were wet sieved, which was one of the more important achievements of the excavation, along with effective analysis and publication.

Viking Age town on the north side of the river as well as in the countryside. This division of responsibility probably helped reinforce the perception of Ribe as an urban phenomenon that was interrupted in the 10th and 11th centuries, which was one of the conclusions of *Ribe Studier 1. Det ældste Ribe* from 2006, along with a number of important and much better supported observations, such as the systematic parcelling into small plots around 710, where specialised crafts were undertaken. The chronological break was, however, based on the very limited archaeological evidence from the 10th and 11th centuries compared to that from the 8th and 9th centuries (Feveile 2006 1.1, 86). This interpretation can be criticised for not adequately taking into account the later town's effect on the taphonomy as well as the methodological problems associated with a number of common artefact types. Excavations have since shown that the remains from the Late Viking Age were very likely destroyed by cultivation, probably as early as the Middle Ages and at the latest in Early Modern times, as is also suggested by historical maps (Jensen 2013; Søvsø 2020a, 131-133; Sindbæk 2022, 456). It was, however, the much more important discovery of the churchyard from the 9th-11th centuries at the Cathedral of Our Lady in 2008-2012, which finally made it necessary not only to reconsider the situation in Ribe during the 9th to 11th centuries, but to completely re-assess the town's emergence from Iron Age society and its role in the Viking Age and in the change in religion. The excavations coincided with a change in generation amongst the medieval archaeologists at the museum, with the younger staff not respecting the previous archaeological divisions of the town in the 1990s (Søvsø 2019).

Morten Søvsø's second volume of Ribe Studier, *Ribe 700-1050. From Emporium to Civitas in Southern Scandinavia,* consists of an analysis of the extensive and complex archaeological material, which has been found in Ribe as well as its hinterland since the 1960s. Through a comparative analysis with the other towns of the period, Ribe, with its hinterland, constitutes the basis of a synthesis of the earliest urbanisation in South Scandinavia. The work traverses the traditional academic boundaries of Danish archaeology by including long, continuous perspectives on the basis of agricultural resources and the trading networks of the Iron Age in the discussion of the change in religion and creation of the Christian kingdom. Søvsø

concludes that the emporia, which were established as royal trading towns in border areas, became international meeting places and therefore the basis for the introduction of Christianity in Denmark. A new type of town, *civitas*, emerged around 1000 as Christian foundations, which functioned as administrative centres for the Christian royal power and as religious centres for a large hinterland. The town model with the church at its centre became a new urban ideal, which is why Hedeby was moved to the other side of the Schlei and Ribe also to the other side of the river. Around 1050, there were major topographical changes in both the older and new types of towns, which corresponded with a fusion of administration, religion, trade and production (Søvsø 2020, 253-255). The main weakness of the work is possibly its strong empirical starting point in Ribe, as there is a danger of projecting specifically local conditions onto the general patterns, as has to some extent been the case with Lund.

Ribe Studier 3, *Northern Emporium vol 1.* and *2.* from 2022 and 2023 are rare examples of rapid and effective analysis and publication of a precisely and systematically undertaken urban archaeological investigation, published in English. This was undertaken as a research excavation, in a collaboration between archaeologists from Museum of Southwest Jutland (now Museum West) and the Centre for Urban Network Evolution at Aarhus University. The excavation of the 125 m^2 open area containing up to 2.6 m-deep cultural deposits took place in 2017-2018 using single context recording combined with 3D scanning and wet sieving of the combined series of remains dating from the 8th to 17th centuries (Fig. 2.9.). The project is an example of 'the Third Science Revolution', and utilised numerous new scientific methods (Kristiansen 2014; Raja & Sindbæk 2020, 11-23). It is, however, the combination of careful stratigraphic excavation undertaken by experienced archaeologists, the complete wet sieving and comprehensive use of scientific dating methods, which along with its very precise and well-defined stratigraphic phases, make the project unique in a Danish and Scandinavian context, and mean that it will probably be a methodological ideal for many years to come.