

North-Sea trade and the proto-urban sequence

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This paper starts with the premisses that towns are specialized settlements and that settlements are essentially economically adapted artefacts. Accordingly, evidence of interlinked trading systems in and around the North—Sea zone in the Late Roman and Migration Periods, long—distance and local, north—south and east—west, by land and by sea, is reviewed first, together with the social implications of these connexions such as prestige—goods exchange and the status and organization of specialized craftsmen (mostly metalworkers). It then relates these points to the question of urbanization, taking as a starting—point Richard Hodges's claim that there is no "place" for proto—urbanism. It considers the nature of the town as a site for specialized exchange, and, on the basis that not all sites for specialized exchange are towns, argues that there is a place for the concept of proto—urbanism. The historical emergence of ports of entry and trade around the North Sea is then reviewed, after which the recent discovery of several large and rich centres of production, redistribution and/or consumption is discussed. It is noted that in England the functions of such sites are eventually transferred to refounded cities. The conclusion is that the development of towns in this area and period is the outcome of a processually logical but not evolutionary sequence; their appearance represents the strategic union of the immediate interests of the political authorities and, variously, the producers/traders and the Church. It is precisely because these parties preceded the towns, in some cases by a long time, that the analysis of a proto—urban sequence is justified.

KEY-WORDS: Early Middle Ages, North Sea, trade, urbanism

INTRODUCTION

For some decades now, our understanding of the history of the North—Sea area in the Early Middle Ages has benefitted from a fruitful growth of evidence on all aspects of settlement, rural and urban. This is the result of post—war urban excavations, large—scale rural—settlement and landscape research projects, a certain amount of maritime archaeology, and most recently the introduction of the metal detector (for the latter topics see, *e.g.*, Kossack, Behre and Schmid eds 1984;

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Crumlin—Pedersen ed. 1991; Nielsen and Petersen 1993). Scholarly processing of these finds, from straightforward cataloguing and descriptive publication to the most theoretical speculations, has generally kept up surprisingly well. At the very least, there has for many years been no shortage of new information and new ideas coming into the public domain for discussion (for recent English—language publications on the topic of towns and trade see Hodges 1988, 1989; Clarke and Ambrosiani 1991; Näsman 1991).

Settlements are essentially economically — adapted artefacts, and one reason for the relative success story of settlement archaeology — which has certainly not been matched in, say, cemetery studies or art history — is presumably the universal importance attached to economics in the modern world. Marxism is (or now, perhaps, has been) just one especially powerful embodiment of the conceptual fusion of economic relations with all social life — “political economy” — that has become so dominant over the last two centuries. Economic theory, with a diachronic, in some cases evolutionary, dimension, is thus available to us in abundance. In the case of the study of early medieval economics, from subsistence to long—distance trade, this situation has accentuated the tensions that there always are between theory, when it predicts or prescribes that the data should fall into certain configurations, and the data, which may not be so well—behaved and can compel theory to develop. Historical models strive for efficiency, and this in practice means simplicity and lucidity as well as explanatory effectiveness. Reality is invariably messier. It is not the job of the general principles of any science to account for all the caprices of reality. However my own inferences from an empirical study of certain aspects of early medieval production, distribution and consumption point to some consistent discrepancies between what appears to have been happening at this time and the currently dominant general models of economic history. My small contribution to this debate is an attempt to summarize and present these inferences as an integrated new model.

ON MIGRATION-PERIOD TRADE

Before the Migration Period (the later 4th to later 6th centuries AD), the areas around the North Sea were already energetically involved in various forms of trade; it appears, however, that the North Sea itself played at best a limited role as a trade route. Trade between Britain and the Continent was apparently solely cross—Channel trade, and was thus almost entirely contained within the Roman Empire; a small amount of Late—Roman British pottery (Oxfordshire Ware), however, found its way into Frisia (Fulford 1978, 1991). Free Germania, in modern Germany, the Netherlands, Scandinavia and north—eastern Europe, imported

selected goods in profusion from the Roman Empire, both East and West. The major items coming into Scandinavia were high—quality tableware (ceramic, glass, silver and bronze), which appears to have been used for circulation in a prestige—goods system, precious metals, particularly in the form of coin, and some weaponry. This general topic has been richly studied (*e.g.*, Eggers 1951; Hedeager 1978, 1988; Lund Hansen 1987, 1988; Lønstrup 1988; Näsman 1991). Specialist studies have postulated separate sea routes from the Rhine mouth to the Stevns area of Sjælland (Denmark) and to southern Norway respectively, but the case for these, especially the latter, is still regarded as rather tentative (Lund Hansen 1988; Magnus 1990). What the North gave in return we have to deduce from history and geography. Raw materials, most of them perishable, such as wax, honey, pelts, hides and amber, are attested to; individual military service and friendship would also have been factors.

The redistribution of imported goods is one means by which we can start to observe patterns of internal trade and exchange within the Germanic communities around the North Sea. The quality and quantity of the surviving evidence from Scandinavia makes this a much easier area to study in respect of this topic than northern Continental Europe east of the Rhine. In Scandinavia, there was supplementary local production of special artefacts, such as works of art and status—marking items, which were often influenced by Roman models and styles. This is most evident to us now in the form of metalwork: dress—accessories, both male and female, and weaponry (Hedeager 1992:45—7; Ilkjær 1990:336—9, 1993). The general economy of Late Roman—period Scandinavia, and, no doubt, northern Germany, must then have included specialist craftsmen whose products were distributed amongst a fairly limited elite.

This is not the place to attempt any comprehensive summary of economic activity in Roman—period Germania. One general point that has to be emphasized, however, is the perfectly comprehensible one that below the level of long—distance importation and elite material exchange we can see at least the outlines of a system of more and more local circles of production and exchange, running down to subsistence agricultural production and some other basic local needs being dealt with at the village or farmstead level. An economically important activity for which we now have direct archaeological evidence is iron—smelting. In western Jutland there appears to have been a specialized iron—smelting area, with its own associated coppices, in regular use from the Early Roman Period to beyond the Migration Period (Lund 1991; Voss 1991, 1993). How large a region this may have served we can only guess at, but the level of production is regarded as having been considerably more than even a small group of villages could have required, and to have been sufficient to make it uneconomic for farmsteads to attempt to smelt their own iron. Both smelting pits and smithies seem, however, to be quite regular finds in the excavation of contemporary Jutlandic villages, though most of these

excavations have been in areas where bog-iron is readily accessible (*cf.* Hvass 1983). That a village could smelt some of its own iron does not, of course, mean that it provided all of its iron for itself.

The settlement site of Feddersen Wierde, Kr. Cuxhaven, Niedersachsen, seems to offer more helpful insights into local economic specialization, and therefore exchange, especially in the Late Roman Period. Haarnagel (1979) notes that agricultural work and textile production seem to have been undertaken at every farmstead. The village, however, seems to have had one or two specialized boneworkers and a carpenter, while metalworking (iron and bronze), and perhaps potting too, was for several generations undertaken on a particular site within the bounds of a *Mehrbetriebsgehöft* (a multi-farm conglomerate) with a hall building that Haarnagel quite reasonably interprets as belonging to a local chieftain. The final point to be emphasized is that such stratified economic systems seem to have been stable over many decades, and must therefore have been organized, presumably either by means of central control or through the operation of reciprocal interests.

In the range and distribution of forms, the material culture of the Migration Period in northern Europe was substantially different from that of the Roman Period although the continuities between the two periods are quite substantial. The whole artefactual range was revised rather than radically replaced at this watershed; distributions tend to shift, and to expand or contract, rather than to make random leaps. In light of the drastic changes history tells us of in the later 4th and 5th centuries, it is surprising how well the provision of imported goods from the western Empire and its successor in the Merovingian kingdoms seems to have been maintained. Bronze bowls and glassware still find their way to Scandinavia from the west. Such is the nature of depositional practice that we now find most of these in Norway rather than Denmark (Dahlin Hauken 1984, 1991; Straume 1987). Supplies of coined precious metal had to come in from the eastern Empire, coinage being one of the victims of the fall of the Empire in the west. Åsa Dahlin Hauken's study of the imported Vestland cauldrons in Norway indicates that they were distributed — in a visible period from the 4th century to the early 6th — in a socially-redistributive pattern that reinforced elite positions and power in a perfectly straightforward way (1984:121–65). In the uniform military gear deposited by groups at Ejsbøl, Nydam, Sösdala and Sjørup through the 5th century, we have clear evidence of the specialist craftsman continuing to supply a restricted group, just as in the weaponry of the Late Roman Iron Age discussed by Jørgen Ilkjær (1990, 1993).

But the Migration Period was a period of radical change in precisely the terms that its name implies. People were moving, permanently, within and from both Scandinavia and northern Germany, as in much of the rest of Europe. Thus groups of people moved out of areas where there were organized systems of production,

procurement and distribution into areas where there may either have been other existing systems or no surviving systems of this kind. It is obvious that in such a process, important pieces (*i.e.*, people) could have been lost from the homeland systems. What impact emigration actually had on organization in the homelands is hard to say. The actual level of migration is a highly controversial question, as is the question of whether or not certain economic changes we can see around this time in the homelands were the result of migration or of some other process. Potentially the most serious of these changes is the widespread shrinkage and/or abandonment of rural settlements. Feddersen Wierde, Flögeln and Wijster all seem to have been abandoned, after a period of shrinkage, in the 5th or 6th century (Haarnagel 1979; Zimmermann 1974; van Es 1967). But where (if anywhere) did their last inhabitants go, and why? In the artefactual sequence, there is no evidence of abrupt failures or the breakage of craft traditions at this time. We may in fact be able to gain a realistic understanding of what was going on by looking at a wider range of concurrent changes, in the whole archaeological picture.

The level and character of material deposition in northern Germany and Scandinavia underwent radical changes between the later 5th and the later 6th century. Furnished cemeteries became rare and eventually practically disappeared, first in northern Germany and Denmark, and gradually in Norway and Sweden. It is now considered naive to attribute this to simple depopulation (the people supposedly having migrated westwards), not least because over much of the area forms of deposition, in particular votive hoarding, testify not only to continued activity but also to the production and circulation of costly, high—quality artefacts. The usual view of this situation has been well expressed by Lotte Hedeager (1992:27—82): the competitive consumption (=deposition) of valuables became functionally redundant as the elite consolidated its position in a secure social structure; even sacrificial gift—giving to the gods became less and less important. I myself would argue, however, that even if this accounts for the overall picture, **at the same time** other symptoms of a social instability are still reflected. Where, up to the mid—5th century, votive hoarding had been an elite group activity, it became an individual activity; gender correlations are abandoned, and funeral consumption may be pre—empted by ritual sacrifice, in an attempt to increase, for some, the opportunities for this sort of display (Hines 1989). The membership and the privileges of the elite may well have become fixed. Now, perhaps, was the time for the elite to compete amongst themselves. It is not, however, necessary in this view for a later Migration Period phase of competition to have been restricted to members of the existing elite. One question we can pertinently ask, is whether this apparent competition was stimulated by examples of how personal power, wealth and honour could be improved by the exercise of individual enterprise that the migrations themselves could have provided.

This is not just a military and political issue but possibly — indeed probably — an economic one as well. The postulated period of competition of the later Migration Period was heralded by a general burgeoning of productivity. Over large areas (especially in Norway, Sweden and England), the volume of material deposition increased very substantially, creating a demand that had to be met by production: ancient stores were not raided for material to consume in this way (although Roman scrap is thought to have been an important source of metal for Anglo—Saxon bronzecasters: *cf.* Brownsword and Hines, forthcoming). Creativity is seen in the emergence of new art styles (Style I; the Sjörup Style), and in a proliferation of artefact—types, some short—lived, others that became established. Presumably a decline in the availability of imported valuables helped to stimulate local production, though interestingly Germanic art of the middle to late 5th century actually shows the transference of Roman techniques such as “chip—carving” (cast relief ornament) into the Germanic territories and traditions. One wonders whether this could have been achieved without some transfer of craftsmen (*cf.* Haseloff 1981:3—17). Of particular interest too is the fact that around this date we start to find increasing indications of the social status available to skilled craftsmen. A small number of “jeweller’s graves” are known, from Scandinavia and the Continent, a type that reappears within the Migration Period after having been virtually absent since the middle of the Roman Period (Müller—Wille 1977:160—68). These consistently show that the same claims for status, in the form of weapons and rich dress—accessories buried in the grave, could be made for the jeweller as for other well—off members of society.

Competitive consumption, to sum up, probably increased demand, which in turn would stimulate production. Unless all production were tightly and repressively controlled by a personally non—productive elite, craftsmanship would thus be one direct route to the achievement of some social success in the form of wealth and status. The creation of Germanic settlements in Britain could well have contributed its own particular stimulus to economic enterprise. There is no dispute that the decline of the economic systems of Roman Britain that preceded these settlements was thorough. Symptomatic is the disappearance of industrial pottery production, probably by about 425 AD, and the sharp reduction of occupation and activity on special sites such as towns and villas around the same phase. There has never been any reason to believe that lowland Britain (the area of early Anglo—Saxon settlement) went through a phase of general depopulation, and it is thus to be supposed that subsistence agriculture continued there — not necessarily uniformly, nor over the whole area — and indeed various pieces of evidence for continuity in both the agricultural landscape and farming practice have been identified (Welch 1992:39—42). The possibility of continuity in saltmaking in Britain attracts recurrent attention but is still unproven (Sawyer 1986:62; Clarke

and Ambrosiani 1991:16). Evidence for the adaptation of surviving Romano—British craft traditions to the new Anglo—Saxon culture is both localized and generally limited. The most substantial phenomenon is the emergence of “Quoit Brooch—style” metalwork in south—eastern England, born of Roman metalworking traditions, around the second half of the 5th century.

It is perfectly possible that the Germanic colonization of Britain in the 5th century caused and/or coincided with some serious disruptions in the existing economic patterns amongst the Germanic source communities concerned. Let us also posit that the incoming settlers did not arrive as self—sufficient economic units — certainly not self—sufficient in respect of the whole range of production and exchange we can see in the homelands. Given the current preference for assuming low levels of immigration this can hardly be regarded as an unreasonable hypothesis. The previous Romano—British economy was not only a quite different system; it was in terminal decline if it had not already expired. Not only, therefore, might the immigrant communities have **randomly** removed key parts of the economic system in the homelands; they were **generally** likely to have established new communities in which there was a widespread lack of producers of a kind they were used to. Unless, then, the earliest Anglo—Saxons themselves abandoned their demand for specialized products (which is quite contrary to what the cultural—historical evidence indicates, although there may have been a transitional 5th—century phase in which the supply, circulation and consumption of such products was distinctly low), the embryonic English communities would have been a magnet to pull in suppliers and craftsmen from elsewhere. And this would have been a situation in which successful enterprise would be likely to bring considerable rewards, irrespective of whether or not similar opportunities were opening up in the homelands, as suggested, above, for southern Scandinavia.

The observable history of specialized metalwork in late 5th— and 6th—century England seems to fit such a hypothesis well. This hypothesis, quite simply, is a model that adds an attractively realistic element to otherwise unexplained instances of “influence” or “relationship”. Kent, in the south—east, initially maintained the material traditions of and drew upon developments in the Jutlandic homeland of her earliest reported settlers. Soon, however, models were drawn instead from the flourishing material culture of Merovingian Gaul and the Rhineland, just across the Channel, and there is considerable archaeological and historical evidence for individual Franks moving in Kent, though not for any substantial Frankish colonization (Hawkes and Pollard 1981; Hawkes 1982). The other major source of influence on England was Scandinavia. *De luxe* square—headed (*alias* relief) brooches were introduced from here to all of the rest of early Anglo—Saxon England, both Saxon and Anglian areas; and the Anglian areas (in the Midlands and eastern England) continued to share innovations with

Scandinavia, especially Norwegian types, through to the end of the Migration Period around the 560's (Hines 1984:110–98 and forthcoming). Other **expensive** artefact—types came in too: bracteates to the Upper Thames and Anglian England; scutiform pendants to Anglian England; radiate—head brooches from the Continent to southern England (see, *e.g.*, Hines 1984:199–243).

The geographical and chronological pattern of influence is unambiguous in all of these cases. But a general and peculiar feature of all of this material is that definitely imported artefacts are very elusive. The extant material is dominated by pieces that we can confidently identify as “English” products — Anglo—Saxon continuations of traditions introduced from outside. Even on the relatively few occasions that, according to its form, materials and technique, an item **could** have been made abroad, it is often difficult to be confident that it actually was imported; there are examples, for instance, of square—headed brooches found in England on which most of the features support a foreign origin but one element looks distinctly local; one can cite, too, a unique piece like the Undley gold bracteate, which is formally quite foreign and stands quite isolated in the English bracteate tradition, but which carries a runic inscription which many believe to be decisive evidence of an English place of manufacture (see Hines and Odenstedt 1987; Hills 1991). On the evidence we have, then, the long—distance exchange of such specialized finished products cannot be regarded as frequent or even usual. On the basis of the same evidence and indeed some further considerations that I shall not detail here (*cf.* Hines, forthcoming), it appears that in the process of manufacture, the use of mechanical means of reproduction — in the form of templates and hard models — played a fairly small role, and that in their place we have to postulate the personal skills and experience of a craftsman. Altogether, this gives us a very clear idea of how important the (travelling?) craftsman could have been, and how therefore such an individual could be honoured with a rich burial such as that at Vestly, Hå, Rogaland in Norway (Müller—Wille 1977:166–7). Incidentally, Scandinavian—derived square—headed brooches also appear in quantity on the Continent, especially in what is now southern and western Germany. Haseloff, in his compendious study of this material (1981), was perfectly content to talk in terms of Scandinavian craftsmen working on the Continent.

These hypothetical contacts, however, would not have been the only form of exchange constituting North—Sea trade at this date. Amongst the goods Scandinavia was still importing in the Migration Period were bronze bowls and glassware. It seems that England eventually begins to supply glassware too, in the form of “Kempston beakers”, claw beakers, and blue glass bowls, possible examples of which have been found over much of Scandinavia and the western Continent. There are difficulties here in being sure, in most cases, that any given piece is of English manufacture, and then over how early this material exchange may have

begun. Nevertheless the Kempston beakers may well take the story of an English glass industry back into the 5th century, where continuity in the craft from the Roman Period cannot be ruled out (Evison 1972, 1987). Actually there seems to be more 6th—century English influence to be identified on the Continent than in Scandinavia. Again, real exports are elusive, although an exceptional cemetery at Herpes, Charente, France, produced many “Kentish” brooches (Delamain 1892; discussed by James 1977:161—70, 201—2). A detailed study suggests that Haseloff underestimated the degree to which the English traditions mediated influences between Scandinavian practices and the Continental products in respect of the square—headed brooches (see above), but again only one example of a brooch of this type probably exported from England to the Continent can be identified (a brooch found at Herpes), together with an enigmatic lead model of a distinctly English brooch found in Geneva (Hines, forthcoming).

England was, however, importing, and it has to be assumed that the balance of trade was largely maintained by repayment in the form of the archaeological invisibles: perishable goods and friendship or loyalty. Like Scandinavia, England received bronze bowls and glassware from the Continent. It was noted above that imported brooches are very rarely identified, but with the large increase in artefactual material that metal—detecting and field—walking are creating one notes an increasing tendency for what appear to be individual imported brooches to turn up — from relatively unusual sources such as Frisia, the Visigoths, *et al.* (e.g. Ager 1992; Ager *et al.* 1993). While these modify the picture, they do not seriously affect the point made by cemetery evidence that the importation of dress—accessories seems to be marginal and abnormal. This “trade” with the Continent provides a context for North—Sea trade but is not itself any form of North—Sea trade. The one special commodity (or raw material) that could point to a substantial North—Sea trade alongside the metalworking connexions already noted is amber. Amber occurs in very large quantities in later Migration—period Anglo—Saxon grave assemblages, especially in Anglian England. At the otherwise undistinguished cemetery of Fonaby in Lincolnshire, for example, amber beads occurred in twenty—two out of forty—nine identified graves, and only one grave had a bead necklace lacking amber (Cook 1981). On the whole, the wearing of amber is correlated with social status in Anglo—Saxon England in that the richer graves tend to contain the more amber, though amber was clearly not an exclusive symbol of the very rich. In Kent and Saxon England it is less ubiquitous, and correspondingly rather more clearly correlated with richly—furnished graves (Huggett 1988:64—6).

Amber was being used in this way in Migration—period England before the end of the 5th century, but the great majority of datable finds are 6th—century graves, indicating that the necessary organization of the supply and distribution of amber developed around the late 5th century was then sustained for several decades

through the 6th. Baltic amber does occur naturally on the east coast of England, but in small quantities, and since England has never, to my knowledge, in any other period supported an amber industry, it is scarcely credible that it could have done so to meet the abrupt and voracious demand of the later Migration Period (*cf.* Beck and Shennan 1991:16–27). Even if it did, it would have to have been backed up by a substantial distributional system for such large quantities of amber to be supplied for use and burial at sites as far west as the Warwickshire Avon, the Upper Thames, Wiltshire and Hampshire. There is no reason why this inland system should not be an extension of a distributive system that imported the amber to England. The core source of the amber was the Baltic; amber was used here, and in Scandinavia, northern Germany and Frisia around the North Sea, where again it can occur naturally. Cassiodorus records *Hesti* from the Baltic attempting to market amber in Theoderic's Italy around 500 AD (quoted in Kazakevičius 1992). There was thus both an eager supplier and substantial markets around the connected North and Baltic Seas. It seems likely that amber came “down—the—line” to England, in increasing quantities from the late 5th to the middle to later 6th century.

Archaeology in fact can give us further insights into long—distance trade in 6th—century England (though not in the North—Sea zone), through the evidence of “traders” graves with touchstones and sensitive balances for testing and weighing precious metals, together with the strikingly congruent distribution of early (actually Merovingian) coin finds in Britain. It is insignificant, in this context, that the coins themselves could easily shift from being valuable instruments of trade to valuable objects of exchange. The graves with scales and weights have recently been surveyed by Christopher Scull (1990). He shows that they become a consistent feature in various (limited) areas from the first half of the 6th century onwards. Above all, their distribution defines a coherent area running from the Upper Thames, through Kent, to the Continent, especially the Rhineland. This area may be both a substantial trade route and a common area in which particular methods of trade and burial practices coincided. The finds, however, do not extend to the Midlands or the North before the late 6th century — the earliest date that could be put to a grave group from Barton—on—Humber — and thus again only provide a comparative context for our study of North—Sea trade. In Kent, Sarre has been identified by Sonia Hawkes (1982) as a very probable port site of at least the 6th century onwards through the coincidence there of a suitable location, a contemporary cemetery with a high proportion of sword and other weapon graves, and indeed one of the graves with scales and weights — in this case a man's grave. Interestingly, about half of the total number of English graves with scales and weights identified by Scull are women's graves. It is tempting to speculate that this range across both of the sexes represents both the buyers and the sellers in

trade, with the provision of scales and weights in a woman's grave emblematically underlining the important role of housekeeper that women could be attributed with at this time: a point also made by the quite widespread occurrence of both real and symbolic keys as women's grave goods in early Anglo—Saxon England.

“REAL” TOWNS AND A “PROTO—URBAN” SEQUENCE

The text for the next section of this discussion is Richard Hodges's (1989:23) statement: “It is not possible to sustain proto—urbanism; a site is either urban or it is not”. It is unfortunately not clear whether “proto—urbanism” in the first half of this sentence means proto—urbanism as an actual past state or proto—urbanism as a modern analytical category. The second half of the sentence is happily unambiguous, and its truth is equally unambiguously dependent upon its being read in terms of modern analytical categories. If you have a precise definition of a “town”, then indeed any site will either fall inside that category or outside it.

Satisfactory definitions of a town, however, have proved elusive. The most substantial definitions we have, have for many years been variants of the “bundle of criteria”, whereby a town is identified by virtue of possessing some specified number of a set of specified characteristics, some of them material, others not — for instance a given minimum size; communal structures like defences, a market—place or a regular street—pattern; a mint; specialization in work and production; a juridical role and status (Hodges 1989:20—5). It is clear that many of these criteria have to be culturally relative to be effective — *e.g.*, the minimum size, the nature of economic specialization and the characteristic structures. Thus what is potentially urban and what is a town in one context need not be so in another.

It appears to me that there is a common factor in the criteria usually cited which in fact renders the concept of proto—urbanism meaningful and important. All of the criteria can be regarded as either primary or secondary manifestations of the functional character of the town as a specialized site for exchange both material and social. Not all sites for specialized exchange are towns, and this is why proto—urbanism is an appropriate concept. Minimally, a town has to be such a site that is both permanent and built; and — a more elusive feature to identify — it has to have the capacity to grow, both demographically and structurally, beyond a range characteristic of non—urban contexts. It is in these terms that I shall argue we can see a proto—urban sequence associated with the social and commercial development of the North—Sea area in the Early Middle Ages. The sequence is, I shall argue, processually logical, but should not be conceived in evolutionary terms.



In the previous section, we reviewed the evidence for vicissitudes in, but the general maintenance of, a hierarchical structure of different levels of local and long-distance trade. Such little as we can see of the organization of local exchange has come from excavations of rural settlement sites (villages) and, not surprisingly, therefore indicates that the village structure was adequate for some proportion at least of local exchange needs. This fits very pleasingly with the inferences drawn concerning the importance of travelling craftsmen, though one should resist the temptation of assuming that this is a very comprehensive picture. Regular long-distance trade, on the other hand, involves reliable trade routes and will thus automatically tend to generate fixed sites — anchorages on sea-routes; “ports of entry”, either landlocked or coastal — which are likely to develop their own exchange functions: thus the port of entry becomes a port of trade. Our earliest found port of this kind in the North-Sea zone is Lundeborg on Fyn; a site associated with the rise of Gudme and south-eastern Fyn to pre-eminence in southern Scandinavia in the Late Roman Period, at the expense of the Stevns area on Sjælland, and therefore not the earliest inferrable port of entry (Thomsen 1989, 1991). The emphasis on ports in the later sequence of urban development around the North Sea is well known. In England, Sarre remains a hypothetical 6th-century example; in the 7th century London, Ipswich, Southampton and probably York re-emerge; on the Continent, in the same phase, Quentovic and Dorestad appear; early in the 8th century Ribe is founded on the south-western coast of Jutland (reviewed in Clarke and Ambrosiani 1991:11–36, 52–4).

One thing that has seemed to be particularly puzzling about this famous series of North-Sea ports is that the archaeological (and rather less certainly the historical) evidence for their foundation, or refoundation in some cases, is so very distinctly later than the evidence for the sort of flourishing and regular long-distance contacts and exchange they must have been designed to serve. They do not symptomize the emergence of this trade, though they may well be concomitant with a significant intensification of trade, reflected too by changes in the quantity and individual value of coins available around this region (Grierson and Blackburn 1986:95–6). They represent one stage in a process of development that had already been long underway. We have to presume that they were preceded by intermittently used landing and lading places, with no or impermanent structures: sites like that suggested by a wide range of detritus at Bantham in Devon, serving a British not an Anglo-Saxon community, and of a type that could still appear much later, as at Skuldelev Vig *et al.* on the Roskilde fjord in northern Sjælland (Hodges 1988:67; Silvester 1981; Ulriksen 1990).

A recurrent feature of the 7th- and 8th-century foundations that have been extensively excavated is the evidence for regularity of layout on the site — thus Dorestad (at least in a second, 8th-century phase), Hamwih (Southampton) and

Ribe. This archaeological phenomenon, in light of the historically known social circumstances, leaves us in little if any doubt that these sites did not gradually evolve to meet the collective needs of those involved in trade but were founded on the authority of some socially/politically central power: a king. They not only reflected his control, but also allowed him to enforce and exercise self—enriching and self—aggrandizing control by exacting dues. Interestingly, we also see on these sites a union of trade and production from the start: pottery (and iron—working) at Ipswich; metal- and bonework at Southampton; and a wide range of crafts at Dorestad and Ribe (Clarke and Ambrosiani 1991:18—23, 27—8, 53—4; Morton 1992:55—7; van Es 1990:173—5; Bencard *et al.* 1984, 1991a, 1991b). Focussing on the evidence for regular, periodical use of these plots at Ribe, and variation in their use, Mogens Bencard derived a picture implying a contractual relationship between craftsman and the royal authority, with plots being “hired” to their tenants: the craftsman are thus portrayed as being in a certain state of clientage towards the royal authority but are emphatically free, rather than bond, just as burgesses were so characteristically to be in the later medieval town, within an otherwise deeply feudal society (Bencard *et al.* 1991b:144—8). The successful founding of these towns, then, is to be attributed to a marriage between the interests of the aristocratic political centre and those of the well—established artisan and trading community.

Substantial and important archaeological finds of recent years have added a new element which fills this picture out very helpfully. Lundeberg on Fyn, already mentioned, has to be understood to be a subordinate adjunct to the nearby, inland site of Gudme. Discoveries at Gudme have progressed over the last dozen years from spectacular metal—detector finds of precious metal hoards and quantities of other find metalwork to the identification and excavation of a large number (about 50) of house— or hall—sites that form what is already being referred to in Danish as a “town plan” (*byplan*), and which include one outstanding hall, measuring about 47 m by 10. Crafts pursued at the hall—sites around this outstanding hall but apparently not so much at that outstanding hall—site itself, seem to have included fine and precious metalworking above all (Kromann *et al.* 1991).

As the hoards, the broken, lost and abandoned objects, and the range of production based on imported and recycled material all indicate, Gudme was sited and functioned as a centre for consumption and redistribution rather than for the entry of goods like the sites discussed just above. It was thus a “solar central place” in terms of central—place theory. The superior hall bears comparison for size with Charlemagne’s palace buildings at Aachen, and now justifies earlier speculation that Gudme was the site of a *villa regalis*. Gudme may very well have been a religious cult centre from its first dominant phase too, though we must not forget that one cannot certainly date the name *Guð—heim, “home of the gods”, that early (see Hines 1989).

Gudme thus represents an administrative impulse to establish a permanent site for specialized exchange — one, indeed, that became especially large — long before the North—Sea ports noted above. Gudme, however, had its Lundeberg, and while in a relational sense Gudme can be perceived as having preceded Lundeberg, chronologically the two sites may have had to be established simultaneously. Metal—detector finds, and some excavation, generally support the view that there were other sites similar in basic character to Gudme in contemporary Denmark — even perhaps on Fyn itself — though these were not necessarily of exactly the same wealth and status (Jensen and Watt 1993).

The Gudme—Lundeberg discoveries compel a substantial revision of the evolutionary sequence from Type—A gateways to Type—C solar central places that Hodges (1982) had worked with, which historically located the Type—C sites much later in the Early Middle Ages. In England too, the Gudme archetype seems to have potentially important reflections in a number of newly found and significantly early sites. Excavated high—status sites of a structure beyond that of the normal village, hamlet or farmstead include Flixborough, South Humberside, and Burrow Hill and Brandon in Suffolk (Webster and Backhouse eds 1991:79—101; Carr, Tester and Murphy 1988; Fenwick 1984). The unusual structural character of these sites, together with the wealth of finds, including *styli* for writing, and inscribed objects, has encouraged several scholars to discuss their possibly monastic character. This is not an unrealistic idea, but the discussion could be seriously misleading if we then suppose that any such monastic status governed and explains the peculiarities of the sites. Bede, in the year 734, wrote a letter to the Archbishop of York complaining of how noblemen were obtaining legal privileges by having their households classified as monasteries (Whitelock ed. 1979:799—810). The difference between a special secular site and a special religious site (a monastery) in late 7th— and 8th—century England could have been so small as to be archaeologically invisible. Conversely, as Peter Sawyer has shown (1986), even “genuinely” monastic sites had an innate tendency to become foci for market exchange — though a **market** character is not what is being suggested for these special rural sites.

A further possible development for such special sites is the emergence of a defensive capability. With this feature in mind, it appears to be possible to associate the unusual enclosed site of Eketorp, Öland, with the more general taxonomy of sites, and indeed certain *Burganlagen* of the Netherlands, northern Germany and the Celtic West and North of Britain (Borg, Näsman and Wegraeus eds 1976; Heidinga 1990; Alcock 1971:209—38).

English place—name evidence is encouragingly supportive of the view that is emerging. One of the few widespread English place—name types that we can be confident belongs mostly to a given, and early, chronological slot (the late 6th/7th

century) is the *—inga—*, *—ingas* type, a name containing a suffix which creates a group name on a root that is usually identified as a personal name: hence *Sunningas*, *Woccingas* (modern Sonning, Woking), “the people of Sunna/Wocca”; *Woccingahām* (modern Wokingham), “the *hām* (home) of the people of Wocca”. As group names, these have an intrinsically political character, and the occurrence of many *—ingahām* names gives us a clear indication of the designation of a site at this period as some sort of group centre (for a classic study of these names, see Dodgson 1966). A rare parallel to this name—type with a religious character is a pair of recorded *—inga hearb* names, *Besinga hearb* and *Gumeninga hearb*: “the ‘temple’ of the Besingas/Gumeningas”. As yet, however, we have no evidence to associate such sites especially with material exchange rather than with the immaterial forms of social exchange embodied in administration, organization and religion. Sawyer again notes that special terms to designate markets are rare in English place—names (1986:66). Many such sites were apparently referred to just as *stowe*, “place”, a word that as a place—name element seems not to be in use before the mid—8th century (if not later) (Cox 1976).

But the Flixboroughs, the Brandons, and even Gudme, apparently lacked the potential for exponential growth that is taken to be characteristic of the real town. They declined and were abandoned, and that is why, as archaeological sites, they are now so legible to us. In respect of England, it is not difficult to explain the demise of these sites in relation to a general relocation of administrative and ecclesiastical functions, which came to be increasingly concentrated in refounded cities: sites inherited from Roman Britain. Thus Winchester emerges in the later 7th century as the capital of Wessex, with the bishop’s seat transferred there from Dorchester—on—Thames by the 660’s. At London and York, sites of such character coincided with port sites on navigable rivers. Canterbury, and probably Lincoln too, were revived in this way (see Clarke and Ambrosiani 1991:5—15, 31—42).

The city sites were inherited from Roman Britain, but it was not in any sense a Roman heritage that directed this development in England. It was more the combination of England’s own social and religious conditions that did that. By the 7th century, England had a well—established set of kingdoms, and even perhaps a concept of overkingship, in a way that Continental Saxony certainly did not and one cannot be sure that Frisia or anywhere in Scandinavia did, at least so early. Christianity, curiously, divided the administration of religion from the secular state but then immediately reunited the two in mutually supportive alliances of Church and Crown. Gudme is apparently an early example of an administrative and religious central place, but the administrative and religious town/city did not develop around the North Sea until Christianity was introduced. The growth of Groningen, Bremen and Hamburg from the beginning of the 9th century has an

ecclesiastical element prominent in all cases (Knol 1993:134–6; Wulf 1991:359–64); the Danish towns like Viborg, Århus and Roskilde are in Danish terms early medieval (*i.e.* post–conversion; even “feudal”) rather than late Viking–age; it was the Christianizing Óláfr Tryggvason who founded Niðaróss (modern Trondheim) to contrast with and supersede the nearby centre of the pagan Earls of Hlaða (modern Lade) (see Clarke and Ambrosiani 1991:46–89). The case of Utrecht, however, apparently shows that the establishment of an ecclesiastical centre did not itself guarantee immediate development into a town (Sarfati 1990:184). As with the “planned ports”, urban development in these cases seems to have been directed by a collusion between the political centre and another powerful institution.

Unlike on the Continent or in Scandinavia, Early Anglo–Saxon rural settlement sites before the 7th century show no sign of even incipient hierarchical differentiation. This creates an egalitarian impression which is quite startling in light of the circumstantial evidence for growing social stratification and social and economic specialization throughout the 6th century and the deeply stratified society evident from history and archaeology from the beginning of the 7th century. It is true that we have evidence of 6th–century activity, and the presence of some degree of wealth then, in the vicinity of some sites that developed in the 7th century or later as sites of specialized exchange: a rich collection of 5th- and 6th-century artefacts preceding a spectacular series of 7th–century coins has been recovered by metal–detectors at Coddanham, Suffolk; a mid–6th–century square–headed brooch was found unstratified at Flixborough; Ipswich has three cemeteries (Hadleigh Road, Boss Hall and Buttermarket) running from the early/middle 6th century into the 7th. But this does not (yet) provide us with anything either consistent or substantial enough for us to regard as a normal pattern. I would suggest, alternatively, that to deal with the conundrum of the “missing” specialized settlement sites of the 6th century satisfactorily, we have to broaden our perspective once again and consider the totality of Early Anglo–Saxon culture as reflected archaeologically. Our early conclusions on the character of Early Anglo–Saxon production and trade were based on the details and distribution (chronological and contextual) of the artefacts themselves. Early Anglo–Saxon artefacts are virtually all recovered from furnished graves in cemetery sites. It is a very neat solution to suggest, simply, that the pressures within Early Anglo–Saxon culture drove competitive material display overwhelmingly into funerary consumption, so that only after the Migration Period did the settlement site become a site for detectable investment and consumption. This in itself does not wholly obviate proto–urban development, because growth could presumably have taken place on the basis of centralized production and redistribution without consumption. But it has already been argued that the existing social organization of power and production was fully satisfied by an uncomplicated village structure.

CONCLUSIONS

This model proposes that “real” towns were created from the collusion of forces: variously the Crown (= the political state) and traders and producers (which very nearly = skilled labour and capital), and the Crown and the Church. This collusion took place because it served at least the immediate interests of both parties concerned; in the longer term, conflicts over particular rights can see power shift significantly between the parties, but not necessarily permanently nor in any fixed direction. All of these parties were established in the community before the towns were created; of these parties (if we treat the Church as a version of institutionalized religion) the latest arrival seems to have been the kingship — and this indeed is the common factor in both alliances. This is a significant point in the case for regarding towns as essentially politically strategic creations rather than products of economic or material—cultural evolution. The town has been characterized here as a special type of site for specialized exchange. Specialized exchange (material and social) I would regard as presupposing marked social differentiation; the specialized site is a site where such differences can co—exist and be bridged without their collapsing. This perspective on early urban history is not an evolutionary one, but it can nevertheless be claimed that we can best understand the real emergence of towns by studying and understanding a precisely definable proto—urban sequence.

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