

Facts about the empirical basis of the dissertation

The empirical basis for the dissertation is made up of archaeological source material from the large-scale excavation at Rådhuspladsen (KBM 3827) conducted in 2011-12 by the Museum of Copenhagen. Other archaeological material from Copenhagen, as well as relevant written sources are brought into different parts of the study in various degrees. Lastly, archaeological source material from other Danish towns and villages are used as comparative material in the different case studies.

About Hanna Dahlström

Hanna Dahlström is an archaeologist and curator at Museum of Copenhagen. She produced her PhD dissertation at the Department of Archaeology and Heritage Studies, Aarhus University, where she has been part of the History, Archaeology and Classical Studies PhD programme and the DNRF Centre of Excellence: Centre for Urban Networks Evolutions (UrbNet).

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Time and place for the defence

1 May 2019 at 13.15

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TOWARDS THE MAKING OF A TOWN PEOPLE, PRACTICES AND INTERACTION IN EARLY MEDIEVAL COPENHAGEN

PhD dissertation by Hanna Dahlström



AARHUS UNIVERSITET



TOWARDS THE MAKING OF A TOWN. PEOPLE, PRACTICES AND INTERACTION IN EARLY MEDIEVAL COPENHAGEN

Summary of main points from the Ph.D. dissertation *Towards the making of a town. People, practices and interaction in early medieval Copenhagen* by Hanna Dahlström, School of Culture and Society, Aarhus University. The dissertation examines societal and social processes involved in the formation and early development of Copenhagen and studies how urban life formed by investigating the material remains of daily life and practices, mainly from the centrally located archaeological site of Rådhuspladsen.

Driving forces for early Copenhagen

A new understanding of the formation and early development of the town has been reached through an analysis of the actors, networks and processes behind events and development. The study has used new archaeological information together with established archaeological and written sources as well as high resolution dating methods. The results show a dynamic first period with the involvement of many actors. The study emphasises the need to use both top-down and bottom-up perspectives to reach as full an understanding as possible.

The shaping of urban life seen in social practices

The view of material culture as remains of actions and practices gives new insights into life in the town. The analyses of practices related to organisation of settlement space, waste management, iron production and consumption of basic goods show that daily life in some respects was different already from the first phase of the settlement. With this view, medieval urbanity can be seen in the quotidian expressions of daily life, which concerned everyone

in the town, before it was displayed in more exclusive personal attire and architectural monumentality.

The town as a meeting place

The analyses of daily practices related to economic activity and organisation of settlement space indicate that even the early phase of Copenhagen was a place for increased social interaction. The material remains reveal co-location of activities, meaning both cooperation between actors and a competition for space. In the dissertation, theories from Urban sociology and phenomenology are used to argue that the social aspect of town life must have been an important factor in the creation of an urban way of life in the medieval period, much as it is today.

High definition and low resolution

The source material used in the dissertation is of fragmentary character. The need for using thorough contextual documentation methods and high definition scientific analysis to qualify the discussion is therefore fundamental. On the other hand, there is a need for pragmatism, to develop methods to activate material with lesser contextual information. Focusing on the daily life of people in the town has aided in bringing materially vague and ambiguous archaeological evidence into play and has presented a way to focus on the role of different actors in the urbanisation process.

Towards an urban way of life

The development of early medieval Copenhagen brought forward in the dissertation involves a range of actors and puts the formation of the urban settlement in a new societal context. The study of social practices in the daily life indicates that some aspects of life changed already in the early phase of towns. Even if the early town does not seem well connected of wealthy, basic aspects of daily life were different from rural places. These results can be used to argue that the first steps of medieval urbanity was shaped in the day-to-day actions of a wide variety of actors, instead of being in the hands of elite groups.

Urbanity as human experience

The new economic, social and physical framework for daily life resulted in changes in both the practical and mental aspects of the townspeople's existence. The thesis brings forward the town's role as a meeting place as an important factor in this development. The involvement in external networks as well as the amount of intra-urban social and economic interfaces have been of significance. The dissertation suggests that urbanity studied as human experience and lived practice give new perspectives to the theme of urban development.