



## Viking Studies Dissertation.

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### Introduction

Randsborg remarked that by 988 Denmark was ‘a country which now was different in every important institution from the Denmark of King Godfred’.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it is clear that the period of the ninth and tenth centuries was one of a great deal of change in Denmark, with regards to a variety of factors such as religion (with conversion to Christianity and the changes this brings), trade (with the ebb and flow of silver from the east), warfare (with raiding, invasion and settlement) and the development of coinages and mints. However, this essay shall focus on just two factors: the development of towns and emporia and the change in royal power. The former shall be examined with a focus on Hedeby and Ribe, though with some consideration given to other sites such as Aarhus, examining the development in function, significance and occurrence of towns and emporia throughout the period. Change in royal power will be considered with regards to several factors such as degree of control, extent of authority, with particular attention given to the Jelling dynasty and examining the changes they caused, and examining Harald Bluetooth’s assertion that he ‘won all of Denmark for himself’. This essay shall approach both elements from an interdisciplinary perspective, with emphasis placed on the interpretation of both archaeological and written evidence, and the rune stones that bridge the gap between the two. Indeed, this is particularly necessary given the dearth of written historical documents from within Denmark for the period, and any essay that did not give due consideration to the archaeological evidence would be one written from a foreign perspective and in the words of Skapti the *lögsögumaðr*, ‘a story told by one person is always only half told’.<sup>2</sup>

### Towns and Emporia

Before discussing changes in towns throughout the period, we must first consider what is meant by a town. There has been much discussion over the definition of a town, and what is urban in the context of both archaeology and history. However, for the sake of brevity I shall not go into depth now and discuss the best definition of a town. Rather, in the context of this essay (and given its focus in time and space and the relative scarcity of towns therein), I shall use a simple and broad definition for a town, defining it as a site where production is not focussed on agriculture, but rather craft and trade, often featuring a symbiotic relationship with its hinterlands.

To observe the changes over the ninth and tenth centuries, we must first consider the state of Danish towns and emporia at the start of the period. Even operating under such a broad definition for towns, there were very few towns in Denmark at the start of the ninth century. Indeed, only two non-agricultural settlements are known at the start of the ninth century with a possible third market site in western Skane (though not only is this not

<sup>1</sup> Claus Randsborg, *The Viking Age in Denmark: the formation of a state* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1980), p. 166.

<sup>2</sup> Anonymous, ‘The Saga of Grettir’, in *Three Icelandic Outlaw Sagas*, ed. by Anthony Faulkes, p. 167.

confirmed as a town, it is not entirely certain whether Skane fell under the Danish realm at this time or not, a matter which shall be discussed in the section on royal power).<sup>3</sup> Similarly, only Ribe and Hedeby are attested in writing for the duration of the ninth century. The first written evidence for Ribe is seen in Frankish Annals in the 850s;<sup>4</sup> however, archaeologically it dates to the eighth century, with excavations of the market place and grave sites as early as the first half of the eighth century.<sup>5</sup> However, until c. 770-780 the market place was only used seasonally. Thus at the start of the period in question, Ribe was a relatively young settlement, particularly with regards to year-round use. Indeed, in the year 800 Ribe was smaller, with less craft working and trade occurring than it would see over the next hundred years; even the first of the ditches that defined the town limits was not built until later, though this was one of the first changes to the town in the early ninth century.<sup>6</sup>

Hedeby is similarly dated to the eighth century archaeologically,<sup>7</sup> with the first written evidence for it in the entry for the year 804 in the Royal Frankish Annals.<sup>8</sup> The Royal Frankish Annals also provide us with some evidence for the change in Hedeby, describing how King Godfred took merchants from the Slav town of Reric and transferred them to Hedeby to work there in 808.<sup>9</sup> This provides us with much information about Hedeby at the time. Clearly it shows a great degree of royal power and interest regarding Hedeby, which shall be examined later. Moreover, for Godfred to feel the need to forcibly move foreign merchants to Hedeby, it could not have had sufficient merchants prior to this and we might expect a significant increase in trade after such an event.

The fact that the Danish king felt the need to forcibly migrate merchants to Hedeby implies that Hedeby specifically, and possibly towns in general, were seen as important at the start of the period. However, I would argue this is not totally the case; rather, they became more important over the next two centuries. Doubtless Godfred would have been keen to tax Hedeby and his actions in 808 would have been designed to increase this revenue; however, I do not feel the importance of towns at this point went any further than this. If towns truly were important in Godfred's eyes, then one might expect him to have founded a town, but there is no evidence of this. Moreover, while Godfred is willing to move merchants he captured there, Hedeby was still at the time separated from the rest of Denmark by the Danevirke, and it was not until the second half of the tenth century that the Korvirke was built to include Hedeby into the defences of the Danevirke. (There is some debate over whether the Korvirke was built by Godfred or the Jelling dynasty, as the Royal Frankish Annals refer to Godfred refortifying the Danevirke in 808;<sup>10</sup> however, this is the only evidence that it was built by Godfred, and the great stylistic and architectural similarities to the Trelleborg type fortresses, particularly with regards to the deep V ditch shape, indicate that it was built by Harald Bluetooth.<sup>11</sup>) Nonetheless, it is apparent that both Harald and Godfred were involved in the development of Hedeby.

Throughout the period the number of towns and emporia throughout Denmark increased, with towns such as Aarhus, Odense and Roskilde all dating to the tenth century. It has been suggested that many of these towns, and Aarhus and Odense in particular, were royally planned from the very start due to factors such as their street layout. This royal

<sup>3</sup> Randsborg, *Viking Age*, p. 77.

<sup>4</sup> Clause Feveile, 'Ribe', in *The Viking World*, ed. by Stefan Brink and Neil Price (Oxford: Routledge, 2008), pp. 126-30 (p. 126).

<sup>5</sup> Feveile, p. 126.

<sup>6</sup> Feveile, p. 129.

<sup>7</sup> Volker Hilberg, 'Hedeby: An Outline of its Research History', in *The Viking World*, (Oxford: Routledge, 2008), pp. 101-11 (p. 104).

<sup>8</sup> Hilberg, p. 101.

<sup>9</sup> Anonymous, *Royal Frankish Annals*, <http://www.deremilitari.org/RESOURCES/SOURCES/charlemagne3.html>, trans. by P. D. King, p. 808.

<sup>10</sup> Royal Frankish Annals, trans. by King, p. 808.

<sup>11</sup> Claus Randsborg, 'King's Jelling: Gorm and Thyra's palace, Harald's monument and grave – Svend's cathedral', *Acta Archaeologica*, 79 (2008): 1-23 (p. 13)

planning is indicative of the importance of towns in the tenth century, which can be seen particularly in the positioning of Jelling, Harald Bluetooth's 'base', so that it might be close to as many towns as possible. Throughout the period the importance of towns grew, and as it grew the successive kings sought to exploit this and found more towns in order to reap the rewards such as taxes and goods.

Despite the increase in importance and number of towns in the tenth century, it is surprising that Ribe, which was one of the oldest and most important towns in Viking Age (c. 793-1066) Jutland actually receded in the tenth century. Archaeologically speaking there is a great dearth of information about tenth century Ribe, with very few finds of single items and no buildings or constructions such as wells and houses. Indeed, Feveile claimed that archaeologically 'the town disappeared or at least diminished considerably' in the tenth century.<sup>12</sup> Whilst this may be the case archaeologically, there is evidence for continuity and adaptation in the presence of a Bishopric (which is evidenced in the 948 synod of Ingelheim wherein a bishop Leofdag of Ribe is mentioned).<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that whilst this is the first written evidence for the existence of a Bishopric in Ribe, there may have been one earlier. Either way the Bishopric in Ribe would have grown out of the church already set up by Saint Ansgar in 860, and as such it may be considered more a continuation than a development.<sup>14</sup>

The stagnation of Ribe is surprising in light of not only the growth of new towns and emporia in Denmark, but also the continued success of Hedeby. Growing throughout the ninth and tenth century, finds from Hedeby indicate healthy trade with a great deal of imports such as Swedish iron, Norwegian Soapstone, ceramics from the Rhine lands and Western European glass, weapons and jewellery, whilst the *Vita Rimberti* mentions a slave market as well.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, in the ninth century Hedeby was the only mint in Denmark, and it continued this function into the tenth century, minting a variety of different coin types, mostly based on Carolingian coins.<sup>16</sup> The mint developed slowly, with other towns also becoming mints, and the style of coins changing, by the end of the tenth century featuring both the head of the king and the name of the moneyer.<sup>17</sup> It is worth noting that Hedeby may not have been the first Danish mint, however, as it has been suggested the Wotan Monster coins were minted at Ribe, though this is a matter of some debate.<sup>18</sup>

However, it is interesting to note that towards the end of the tenth century there was a new style of coin imitating the byzantine style which is not found in southern Jutland or Hedeby, indicating that its role as primary mint had been superseded.<sup>19</sup> It is also worth considering that whilst Hedeby was the premier town in Denmark in the ninth and tenth centuries, it rapidly went into decline in the eleventh century and all but disappeared by 1100.<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, it is possible that the struggles of Ribe and Hedeby are due to the various silver crises of the ninth and tenth centuries. Silver supplies were at their highest in the first half of the ninth century, which could also be considered to explain the growth of Ribe and Hedeby in this period. However, after c. 850 there was a reduction in amounts of silver, which predominantly came from the Middle East. In 890 there was a brief peak, followed by a sharp reduction in silver and nigh total disappearance of Arabic silver by 950.<sup>21</sup> The

<sup>12</sup> Feveile, p. 128.

<sup>13</sup> Feveile, p. 126.

<sup>14</sup> Rimbart, *Vita Anskarii*, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/anskar.asp#lifeans>, trans. by Charles H. Robinson, ch. xxxii.

<sup>15</sup> Randsborg, *Viking Age*, p. 90.

<sup>16</sup> Randsborg, *Viking Age*, p. 149; P. H. Sawyer, *Kings and Vikings: Scandinavian and Europe 700-1100* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 34.

<sup>17</sup> Randsborg, *Viking Age*, p. 151.

<sup>18</sup> Feveile, p. 129.

<sup>19</sup> Randsborg, *Viking Age*, p. 151.

<sup>20</sup> Hilberg, p. 109.

<sup>21</sup> Randsborg, *Viking Age*, p. 153.

diminishment of Ribe in the tenth century, seen through archaeological records, could very much be explained by the collapse of silver trade from the east, whilst Hedeby would have been similarly weakened by the continuous silver recession. This is particularly the case if we consider that the rise of both Ribe and Hedeby coincide with the greatest amounts of silver, indicating an economy reliant upon it. This also appears increasingly likely when we look at other Scandinavian analogues such as Kaupang in Norway and Birka in Sweden; the former 'did not survive the late ninth century decline in silver' whilst the latter 'certainly did not live out the drastic mid tenth century depression'.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, towns like Odense and Aarhus, which were founded only after the silver decline, were able to continue through and even thrive with the decline of rival towns such as Ribe and Hedeby.

Indeed, the importance of silver trade is clear, and Randsborg considers it the best gauge of economic strength;<sup>23</sup> however, the development of towns cannot be solely based on the proliferation of Arabic silver in the first half of the ninth century. Indeed, the fact that many towns were only established during the silver recession of the tenth century indicates that there were other factors involved in the development of towns. Roesdahl considers strong international trade conditions to be an essential factor in the development of towns in Scandinavia,<sup>24</sup> and if this is the case then clearly such strong international trade conditions must have been maintained, even after the silver recession in order for the towns of the tenth century to develop, as can be seen with the various imports found at Hedeby from North and Western Europe as mentioned above.

While foreign trade may be accepted as important in the development of towns in Viking Age Denmark, it has also been argued that foreigners themselves were of paramount importance with regards to such developments. Dobat argues that towns only came about in Southern Scandinavia after embracing foreign ideas (which he sees represented in the adoption of continental female dress and the Jelling cavalry graves mimicking the Ottonian cavalry).<sup>25</sup> As such, he suggests that towns developed under external influence as opposed to any internal factors. Dobat also notes the position of Hedeby prior to the building of the Korvirke wall in the tenth century and suggests that, until this point, Hedeby was not truly incorporated into Jutland.

However, this author is inclined to largely disagree with Dobat's assertions. Whilst there is undoubtedly some external influence on the development of towns given the presence of foreigners there (such as the merchants Godfred moved to Hedeby, but also foreign traders), and certainly there were some developments to towns that were due to external influence, for example the fortification of Aarhus in the 930s and contemporary refortification of Ribe can be seen as a response to the German attacks of 934.<sup>26</sup> However, it is erroneous to assume such an influence was the driving force behind all developments to towns. Dobat's argument neglects to discuss Ribe, which was from its inception incorporated into Denmark and Jutland and was an active town from the late eighth century and in fact declined during the period of external influence in the tenth century that Dobat focusses on. Similarly, though his argument is perhaps more applicable to the development of Hedeby than many other Danish towns, Hedeby cannot be thought developed by foreign influence under the Jelling dynasty as it had developed by this period already, and in fact would enter a decline by the start of the eleventh century. Likewise, Hedeby cannot be thought to develop under external influence before this as, despite the position of the Danevirke, Hedeby was

<sup>22</sup> Randsborg, *Viking Age*, p. 154.

<sup>23</sup> Randsborg, 'King's Jelling', p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> Elsa Roesdahl, *Viking Age Denmark*, trans. by Margeson and Kristen Williams (London: British Museum Publications, 1982), p. 68.

<sup>25</sup> Andres Siegfried Dobat, 'The State and Strangers: The Role of External Forces in the Process of State Formation in Viking Age South Scandinavia (900-1050)', *Viking And Medieval Scandinavia*, 5 (2009): 65-104 (p. 75).

<sup>26</sup> Randsborg, 'King's Jelling', pp. 14-15.

quite clearly Danish, held by the Danes, defended by the Danes and developed by the Danes. This is visible in the numerous Hedeby runestones, such as the D 3 runestone, detailing Danes who lived in, and died for Hedeby.<sup>27</sup> Thus, while foreign influence did have a role in the development of towns in southern Scandinavia in the Viking Age, it should be argued that Dobat overemphasises the significance of this influence

In a similar vein Roesdahl suggests a link between the development of towns and early churches, on the grounds that 'the earliest reference for a church or more precisely the seat of a bishop coincide chronologically with the oldest archaeological evidence for a settlement at that place'. While this is the case in Aarhus, with both historical details of the first church and archaeological details of town settlement dating to the early tenth century, it is not always the case. Ribe, for example, has settlement evidence dating to the early eighth century, and non-seasonal evidence dating to the late eighth century,<sup>28</sup> whilst the first written evidence for a church is in 860.<sup>29</sup> However, even with Ribe and Hedeby, Roesdahl is right to correct that the earliest churches were in the earliest towns, even before the conversion to Christianity under Harald Bluetooth. However, this could be argued to be due to the presence of foreigners in towns, and thus there would have been both a greater acceptance of foreign culture and religion and a greater need for churches in towns, which would have made them easier and safer targets for building of churches by foreign missionaries, rather than Christianity influencing the development of towns.

In each case it was a king that gave permission for the building of churches in these towns, and as mentioned with regards to Godfred and Harald Bluetooth, royal impetus certainly affected the development of towns in the ninth and tenth centuries. In the case of Godfred, he developed it by bringing merchants; in Harald's case it was by the building of the Korvirke. Yet each Jutish king would have had a role in the development of towns as they are reliant upon the king for protection. Hedeby is particularly in need of defence due to its position on the border of the Danish lands; however, Ribe also would have required protection, both from raids and for its foreign merchants. Indeed, Olsen argues that from its very inception Ribe would have needed royal support and protection, regardless of whether it owes its origins to a king or not.<sup>30</sup> This would suggest that royal impetus is crucial to the development of towns. Indeed, Olsen goes so far as to argue that the presence of archaeological data of Ribe dating to the eighth century is indicative of a strong king on a level with Godfred and Harald Bluetooth, illustrating his opinion on the importance of kings in the development of towns.<sup>31</sup>

### Royal Power

From the start of the eighth century to the end of the ninth, there was a great deal of change and growth in royal power, as would be expected given that this time frame is generally considered to be the period in which the formation of the state of Denmark occurred.<sup>32</sup> However, not only is there a degree of uncertainty about who exactly ruled and when between Godfred and Gorm, there is a disproportionate amount known about some kings compared to others, particularly in relation to their role in the development of royal power.<sup>33</sup> As such the discussion will be limited to fewer monarchs in order to make proper

<sup>27</sup> Judith Jesch, *Ships and Men in the Late Viking Age: the Vocabulary of Runic Inscriptions and Skaldic Verse* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2001), p. 109.

<sup>28</sup> Feveile, pp. 126-27.

<sup>29</sup> Rimbart, ch. xxxii.

<sup>30</sup> Olaf Olsen, 'Royal Power in Viking Age Denmark', in *Syvende tværfaglige Vikingesymposium* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1988), pp. 7-20 (pp. 13-14).

<sup>31</sup> Olsen, p. 14.

<sup>32</sup> Randsborg, *Viking Age*

<sup>33</sup> Saxo Grammaticus, *History of the Danes: Books I-IX*, trans. by Peter Fisher, ed. by Hilda Ellis (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 1998), p. 278.

use of the historical and archaeological evidence. The picture painted by such evidence is one of a period of great change for royal power, though perhaps not quite as much change as may initially be thought, with evidence such as the dendrochronological dating of the Danevirke indicating a greater degree of continuity with the Vendel period.

To discuss change in royal power in ninth and tenth century Denmark invariably involves discussion of the Jelling stone and the proclamation on it that Harald Bluetooth ‘won all of Denmark and Norway for himself and made the Danes Christian’. Olsen considers the Jelling stone representative of the first time we can definitely see Denmark as unified.<sup>34</sup> However, there is much debate as to whether this is true. Indeed, given that the cavalry and carriage type graves, along with the Trelleborg fortresses, form a ring around Jelling which it has been suggested marks the borders of a Jelling state, it would not be impossible to argue that the Denmark Harald Bluetooth won for himself did not include Zealand.<sup>35</sup> However, this is unlikely to be the case given the archaeological and historical presence of the Jelling dynasty east of Jutland, and as such shall not be discussed at length.

It is likely, however, that Harald Bluetooth was not the first king to unify Denmark. It has been suggested that Harald’s achievement was in reunifying Denmark<sup>36</sup> or that he literally won the whole and unified Denmark for himself.<sup>37</sup> Regardless, there is some degree of consensus that Harald Bluetooth was not the first king to rule over a unified Denmark. King Godfred is a candidate for such an honour for several reasons. He was clearly a powerful king, but also the *Annales Regni Francorum* refer to him as ‘Rex Danorum’, indicating he was king of all of Denmark as opposed to just Jutland.<sup>38</sup> However, it is possible to argue that the Carolingians considered Jutland and Denmark one and the same, that they were not particularly well informed about the Danish kingdoms or they simply wished to paint their opponent as more threatening. Nonetheless, as Lund notes, the Royal Frankish Annals mention an ‘Osfrid de Scanaowe’ (Osfrid of Skane) in the year 810, indicating that the Danish king’s retinue included members from as far afield as modern day Sweden.<sup>39</sup> This would indicate that the Danish kingdom at the time stretched from southern Jutland to Skane, and would thus have been unified by 810 at the latest. However, Sawyer is quick to note that the retinues of medieval rulers often contained men from far afield, and this should not necessarily be taken as representative of Danish rule over Skane at the time.<sup>40</sup>

However, Saxo Grammaticus, writing in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, does discuss King Godfred subjugating and exacting tribute from the Swedish (as well as Norwegians, Saxons and Frisians amongst others) in book eight of the *Gesta Danorum*.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, Saxo Grammaticus describes Godfred being recognised as overlord in southern Sweden, indicating that his realm did indeed stretch from southern Jutland to Skane. However, the historical veracity of Saxo Grammaticus’ account is somewhat debatable. He is clearly biased towards the Danes, seeking to show them in a positive light, so he may be more inclined to record Godfred as a conqueror, especially given the fact that writing in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries affords him little information regarding ninth proto-historic kings such as Godfred. This can particularly be seen in the kings around Godfred in the *Gesta Danorum*, such as the portrayal of Ragnar Loðbrok, comparable in historical accuracy to his

<sup>34</sup> Olsen, p. 12.

<sup>35</sup> Randsborg, *Viking Age*, pp. 127-29.

<sup>36</sup> Olsen, p. 12.

<sup>37</sup> Elsa Roesdahl, ‘The Emergence of Denmark and the Reign of Harald Bluetooth’, in *The Viking World* (Oxford: Routledge, 2008), pp. 652-64 (p. 652).

<sup>38</sup> Anonymous, *Annales Regni Francorum*, <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/annalesregni francorum.html>.

<sup>39</sup> Niels Lund, ‘Viking Age Society in Denmark – Evidence and Theories’, in *Danish Medieval History: New Currents*, ed. by Niels Skyum-Nielsen and Niels Lund (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1981), p. 29.

<sup>40</sup> Sawyer, p. 53.

<sup>41</sup> Saxo Grammaticus, pp. 271-73.

portrayal in The History Channel's *Vikings*. As such any evidence we draw from Saxo Grammaticus regarding the unification of Denmark should be examined cautiously.

Regardless of whether Godfred unified Denmark in his reign, it is entirely possible that neither he nor Harald were the first to unify Denmark. In fact, both Olsen and Lund have posited that Denmark was first unified c. 737 under King Ongendus, on the basis that the earliest dendrochronological evidence for the Danevirke dates to this year.<sup>42</sup> They argue that the Danevirke is such a large undertaking, similar in nature and magnitude to its Mercian contemporary Offa's dyke, that its construction would have necessitated a powerful king, likely of a unified Denmark. If this is in fact the case, then the extent of rule with regards to royal power clearly did not change over the period (though the realm likely fractured and reunified at points throughout the period); rather, we must conclude there was deal of continuity from the eighth century onwards in this respect.

However, it is impossible to verify whether Ongendus did unify Denmark and without more evidence such an argument is likely little more than conjecture. Likewise, while it is likely that Godfred did unify Denmark with a similar extent of rule to Harald Bluetooth, we must conclude as Olsen did, that Harald Bluetooth is the first king we can be sure unified Denmark, but he was likely not the first.<sup>43</sup> Such a conclusion shows that royal power changed with regards to extent of rule over the period in that it is unlikely to have been Ongendus that unified Denmark; rather, it is much more likely that unification was either achieved early in the period under Godfred or later in the period by Harald.

While it is not clear whether it was under the rule of Harald Bluetooth that the whole of Denmark was first unified under one king, there is much evidence to indicate that the Jelling dynasty was very much different from its predecessors. Indeed, the Trelleborg type fortresses provide exemplary evidence for this. These fortresses, such as Fyrkat, Nonnebaken, Aggersborg and Trelleborg itself, are ring forts with four entrances at each cardinal point with a road dissecting it along the north-south and east-west axes, cutting the fortresses into four segments. In each segment are nine identical buildings, organised into blocks, with four per quadrant in the case of Trelleborg itself, with some additional buildings not in blocks. Outside of this there is some variation, such as the outer defences at Trelleborg, but all fortresses of the Trelleborg type are distinctly similar, adhering to a strict 'architectonic master plan' the centralisation of the state and the monopolising ruler.<sup>44</sup>

These Trelleborg type fortresses were originally assumed to have originated under the reign of Harald's son King Svend Forkbeard, being used as barracks to train and house the armies of the king in preparation for the invasion of Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, it was originally thought that each building would house the crew of one *lið* boat. However, more recent archaeological studies of the fortress at Fyrkat have unveiled that only one quarter of the buildings would have been used for dwellings, with fireplaces, benches and beds, whilst the rest were split between stables, smithies and workshops.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, Randsborg estimates that Trelleborg had an average population of only around 100 people, based on the numbers of graves there, indicating that were these fortresses used as barracks the standing army would have been less than a thousand men, and likely closer to five hundred, arguably an inadequate amount of men to conquer England.<sup>47</sup> However, it should be noted that Randsborg calculates his estimate of the population of Trelleborg using the same formula as he uses for towns, which is likely to misrepresent the results as fortresses would not have had the same inhumation practices as seen in towns such as Hedeby.

<sup>42</sup> Olsen, pp. 13-14; Lund, p. 28.

<sup>43</sup> Olsen, p. 12.

<sup>44</sup> Dobat, p. 74.

<sup>45</sup> Randsborg, *Viking Age*, p. 99.

<sup>46</sup> Randsborg, *Viking Age*, p. 100.

<sup>47</sup> Randsborg, *Viking Age*, p. 81.

Nonetheless, dendrochronological dates for the Trelleborg fortress indicate a date of 980 for repairs, with construction likely slightly earlier. Similarly there is little evidence for extended repair on any of the fortresses, which would have been necessary were these fortresses to be used for more than a generation. Likewise, Fyrkat was not rebuilt after fire, indicating the fortresses had a very short period of use. In fact, it is likely that these fortresses were completely out of use by the time Svend conquered England in 1016.<sup>48</sup>

The date of the Trelleborg type fortresses, and the reduced evidence for their use as barracks, indicate they may have served a different purpose. Indeed, Randsborg compares them to the Anglo-Saxon burhs initiated by Alfred the Great, arguing that while they served as defensive centres they also had a role in collecting tolls and storing goods.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, Sawyer suggests that the Trelleborg type fortresses were centres for revenue collection and were more used as displays of royal power than for any real defensive or military function.<sup>50</sup> Roesdahl, meanwhile, considers them as more practical military defences with a secondary purpose as monuments and symbols of power.<sup>51</sup>

It is worth noting, in this regard, that the period during which the Trelleborg type fortresses were in use was one where Harald's royal power was at its weakest, with German attacks threatening from the south and a rebellious son that ultimately toppled him to contend with.<sup>52</sup> Thus we must consider the Trellebogs in light of this, and consider that if they were built primarily as displays of royal power, it was not because Harald had power in abundance, but rather it would have been in order to appear strong.

Moreover, the tumultuous nature of the period would have given Harald ample cause to build the Trelleborg type fortresses for defensive purposes alone. This, in addition to the positioning of the fortresses (forming somewhat of a defensive perimeter, with the Danevirke, around the Jutish centre of Harald's realm), is indicative of a prominent defensive nature to the fortresses. As such we can read the Trelleborg type fortresses, not as indicative of strength of Harald's royal power, but as the weakness of it, having deteriorated over the last decade of his reign.

Contrarily, Dobat argues that the Trelleborg fortresses have little to do with Royal Power in Denmark, or even Denmark itself, asserting that the distinct nature of the fortresses is indicative of foreign inspiration. Dobat exemplifies this with stylistic analogues such as similarities between a section of the ramparts and ramparts in Holstein, whilst he notes the similar overall shape to Slavic forts.<sup>53</sup> The former example is somewhat selective, with an analogue to one minor element of foreign forts, whilst the latter example can be summarised with Tolkien's words: 'both ring[fort]s were round, and there the resemblance ceases'. As such, Dobat's argument is not compelling with regards to the Trelleborg type fortresses; indeed, Roesdahl considers them a Danish innovation, with a basis in previous Danish forts and architecture.<sup>54</sup> Cohen examined the foreign analogues of the Trelleborg type fortresses in more detail, however, and found many similarities with foreign forts, such as with Byzantine barracks and ruined Roman camps. Yet again, he found that these similarities were not overwhelming and were likely only from contact with these cultures, or in the case of Romans, the remains in Anglo-Saxon England, rather than any kind of foreign architect or impetus as Dobat suggested.<sup>55</sup>

While there may be limited evidence for the direct external influence that Dobat discusses, there clearly was a degree of external influence affecting royal power in ninth and

<sup>48</sup> Randsborg, *Viking Age*, p. 99.

<sup>49</sup> Randsborg, *Viking Age*, p. 96.

<sup>50</sup> Sawyer, p. 55.

<sup>51</sup> Roesdahl, 'Emergence of Denmark', p. 662.

<sup>52</sup> Roesdahl, 'Emergence of Denmark', p. 657.

<sup>53</sup> Dobat, p. 81.

<sup>54</sup> Roesdahl, 'Emergence of Denmark', p. 662.

<sup>55</sup> Sidney Cohen, *Viking Fortress of the Trelleborg Type* (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Badger, 1965), pp. 39-59.



tenth century Denmark. As Thurston notes, foreign forces encroached both economically and militarily on Denmark throughout the period, which he suggests acted as a catalyst for internal developments in Denmark, such as the centralisation of royal power.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, the Arab silver crisis affected royal power as well as towns. Before the crisis Scandinavian kings relied upon silver and luxury goods to maintain their retinues, the importance of such royal generosity for Germanic kings seen through kennings such as ‘sincgyfan’ (ring-giver) in *Beowulf*.<sup>57</sup> However, after the collapse of the Arab silver trade in the tenth century such a relationship became increasingly difficult to maintain, as such Danish kings had to look to other methods of paying their retinues and military forces. For some kings such as Svend, this was accomplished by raiding, while for Harald Bluetooth this was accomplished by replacing payment of moveable goods with grants of land. While the latter may appear more representative of a state with centralised royal power, Randsborg suggests that wealth acquisition via raids necessarily accompanied state formation and the centralisation of royal power.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, Hodges suggests that the recession and collapse of Arab silver provided the ‘impetus for the formation of the Viking state in Denmark’;<sup>59</sup> however, it is important to note there is a difference between a state and a ‘Viking state’, although it could be argued that the development of a ‘Viking state’ is an important part of the formation of the state of Denmark.

External influence also had a significant influence on religion, with the conversion to Christianity in the tenth century; however, this is exemplary of increase in royal power. While there is some minor debate regarding the veracity of Harald’s claim that he ‘made the Danes Christian’, there is sufficient evidence to accept this for the sake of the brevity of this piece. Indeed, the fact that Harald Bluetooth was able to make the Danes Christian is an impressive feat, indicative of the great power he wielded as king. Indeed, Harald’s royal power, and the development of it, is particularly evident in light of King Harald Klak, who ruled in the early ninth century. In the *Vita Anskarii*, Rimbert, who is keen to emphasise that King Harald is acting of his own volition, describes him receiving baptism in Frankia and seeking a missionary or priest to return to Denmark with him to evangelise the Danes.<sup>60</sup> However, there is no record of a successful conversion to Christianity, indicating that Harald Klak failed, where Harald Bluetooth succeeded over a century later. This indicates a great deal in the growth of royal power over this period.

However, such a conclusion is accepting Rimbert’s account without question. While Rimbert is writing nearly contemporarily with Harald Klak, and his position within the church would likely afford him first-hand accounts of his baptism should he have searched for them, Rimbert is writing a Saint’s life, not a historical piece. As such, his focus is primarily upon showing Ansgar in a positive light, with less regard for fact or historical truth. With this in mind, it does not seem infeasible that Rimbert may have mentioned Harald’s attempt at Christianisation of the Danes to afford Ansgar, the apostle of the north, a positive comparison — Ansgar succeeded where the king failed. Such a hypothesis is supported by the fact that, while there are many reports of Harald’s baptism, such as the Royal Frankish Annals, Rimbert’s account is the only one in which Harald attempts to convert the Danes.<sup>61</sup> In light of such contradictions, it seems likely that Harald accepted baptism due to his political machinations, needing the Franks as a strong ally in order to help him back onto the

<sup>56</sup> T. Thurston, ‘Historians, prehistorians, and the tyranny of the historical record: Danish state formation through documents and archaeological data’, *The Journal of Archaeological Theory and Method*, 4 (1997): 239-63 (pp. 239-40).

<sup>57</sup> Anonymous, *Beowulf*, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/beowulf-oe.asp>, l. 1012.

<sup>58</sup> Randsborg, *Viking Age*, p. 5.

<sup>59</sup> Richard Hodges, *Dark Age Economics: The Origins of Towns and Trade, A.D. 600-1000 (New Approaches in Archaeology)* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 182.

<sup>60</sup> Rimbert, ch. VII.

<sup>61</sup> Anonymous, *Royal Frankish Annals*, <https://classes.v2.yale.edu/access/content/user/haw6/Vikings/RFA.html>, trans. by Bernhard Walter Scholtz, p. 826.

throne, as opposed to a genuine conversion of faith and subsequent evangelism as Rimbert describes.

However, it is noteworthy that tenth century Saxon chronicler Widukind of Corvey mentions that ‘the Danes were of old Christian’. However, in saying so he does not mean they were truly Christian: rather that they worshipped Christ alongside their own pantheon until Harald converted them (as he goes on to describe). This suggests that, while Harald was the first to truly make the Danes Christian, they had already accepted Christ as a God, implying that there had been some effort beforehand to convert the Danes. This could have been Harald Klak’s attempt as described by Rimbert; however, it is just as likely this was from Ansgar’s own attempts. Similarly, Christ may have been accepted as a God without any real missionary work; rather, it could be seen as a degree of acculturation through contact, such as with the Danelaw and Denmark’s own Christian neighbours. As such, it remains unlikely that Harald Klak attempted to convert Denmark; however, we may see Harald Bluetooth’s role in the conversion somewhat mitigated by an earlier establishment of some degree of Christianity amongst the Danes.

Nonetheless, regardless of whether or not a previous king had attempted to convert the Danes, it is still a feat of royal power that Harald was able to convert Denmark. However, Roesdahl hypothesises that Harald’s role in the conversion is not quite of the magnitude that he affords himself on the Jelling stone. She posits that, just as in Iceland, the conversion of Denmark would have necessitated the assent of various magnates and the approval of several regional þings.<sup>62</sup> However, Roesdahl does not provide any evidence for this, other than analogues in Iceland. While it is likely that Roesdahl is correct, she is somewhat overzealous in asserting that this ‘undoubtedly’ was the case. While both nations were Scandinavian and had very similar cultures, customs and laws, it is difficult to draw conclusions regarding the role of the king and royal power in conversion from evidence of Iceland, given no monarch held sovereignty over it until after the Viking Age.

Moreover, it should be considered that even if there were magnates and þings that had to give assent to the conversion of the Danes, Harald’s role in the conversion is not necessarily lessened, and thus neither is the royal power it displays. Indeed, one could argue that Harald and his men could have been responsible for ‘whipping’ these magnates and þings into giving consent to the conversion. Should this be true, it could be seen as suggesting that it takes a greater degree of power to force the conversion through various assemblies than it would to impose it unopposed, though this represents the difference between royal power of the individual kings and the royal power of the office of the monarch itself.

While evidence for the development of royal power may primarily be found in the tenth century, Olsen argues the cause of such developments dates to the start of the period. He argues that the development of the ‘Viking ship’, propelled both by oars and sails, led to much greater mobility amongst various Scandinavian groups, resulting in greater political contact between petty kings from farther afield, as opposed to only having relationships with neighbouring chiefdoms beforehand. This, he suggests, led to amalgamation of petty kingdoms through both peace and war. Similarly, he suggests the adoption of such technology by neighbours such as the Slavs, Carolingians and Norwegians led to a greater external threat, creating alliances of necessity within Denmark to fight against them.<sup>63</sup> As such, according to Olsen, the development of new types of ships led directly to the development and centralisation of royal power, as well as to the formation of the state. Thurston’s suggestion that neighbouring societies encroached upon Denmark both economically and militarily, which acted as a catalyst for internal change, is similar to Olsen’s description of the result of changes in boat technology, although without the emphasis on the

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<sup>62</sup> Roesdahl, ‘Emergence of Denmark’, p. 656.

<sup>63</sup> Olsen, pp. 18-19.

importance of boats.<sup>64</sup> This could be seen to support Olsen's hypothesis; however, Thurston suggests that such external influence was being exacted from as early as the sixth century, before any evidence for 'Viking ships'.

However, it should be noted that while the development of such technology likely does have an effect like this to an extent, the actual development of the 'Viking ship' seems to predate the Viking Age, with the Salme ships (which were discovered twenty years after Olsen was writing) dendrodated to the early eighth century and runestone evidence of ships with sails even earlier, indicating any effect that such developments had should have been felt earlier than Olsen suggests.<sup>65</sup>

Nonetheless, whilst Olsen was not able to place any consideration on the 2008 discovery of the Salme ship, he still emphasised that the key factor for 'Viking ships' affecting the development of royal power was not so much the development of the new ship technology, but the widespread adoption of it. In light of this, his argument remains potent, as one might hypothesise the relative lack of evidence for 'Viking ships' prior to the Viking Age, with only the Salme ships indicative of this, connotes a period between development of the ships in the eighth century and the widespread adoption of them in the ninth century. With this in mind, it seems likely that Olsen's original conclusion on the effect of 'Viking ships' on royal power is correct.

Thus it is evident that while royal power changed greatly over the period, developing significantly from that of Harald Klak, who sought foreign support to supplement his own power, to Svend Forkbeard, who sought to impose his royal power upon foreign kingdoms. However, it is also apparent that this change occurred from the very start of the period, with the power of Godfred's rule and the economic, technological and social changes that facilitated the development of royal power. However, while there were various factors that affected royal power, it is this writer's opinion that the most important factor was the individual king. This would explain why royal power changed so much between the end of Gorm's rule and the mid-point of Harald's rule, and likewise why Godfred was so powerful, to a certain extent becoming a rival of Charlemagne, early in the period, whilst other kings between him and Harald seem to have done little to develop royal power, such as King Hemming, Godfred's successor, who died in 812, and Gnupa, who was defeated by Gorm.<sup>66</sup> However, it is worth noting that Harald's royal power had dissipated somewhat by the end of his reign, especially given his rule was successfully toppled by his son's rebellion. Nonetheless, it should be considered that Svend's royal power was great also, perhaps as one might expect given he was able to topple Harald, and royal power remained strong throughout the rest of the period and into the eleventh century and beyond.

## Conclusion

In light of the above it is apparent that Randsborg's proclamation was mostly correct, that by the end of the tenth century Denmark was 'a country which now was different in every important institution from the Denmark of King Godfred';<sup>67</sup> however, there was some continuity. Indeed, under King Svend at the end of the period the king once again ruled by maintaining wealth through plunder and taxation, leading raids abroad. Nonetheless, much changed, with an increasingly powerful king and with the centralisation of royal power and land and estates replacing territory and followers as the source of power.<sup>68</sup> Such

<sup>64</sup> Thurston, pp. 239-40.

<sup>65</sup> Marge Kõnsa, 'Rescue Excavations of a Vendel-era boat-grave in Salme, Saaremaa', in *Archaeological Fieldwork in Estonia* (2008), pp. 53-63 (pp. 61-62).

<sup>66</sup> Royal Frankish Annals, trans. by Bernhard Walter Scholtz, p. 812.

<sup>67</sup> Randsborg, *Viking Age*, p. 166.

<sup>68</sup> Ross Samson, 'Fighting with silver: rethinking trading, raiding, and hoarding', in *Social Approaches to Viking Studies*, ed. by Ross Samson (Glasgow: Cruithne Press, 1991), pp. 123-33 (p. 133).

developments in royal power, along with external influence, international trade links and the silver crises, also had an effect upon the development of towns and emporia such as Ribe, Hedeby and Aarhus. Indeed, by the end of the period there had been a great deal of change regarding towns, with an increase not only in the number of towns and the rate of their formation, but in the roles of these towns and the importance of them. However, by the tenth century the two earliest and previously most important towns, Hedeby and Ribe, were both in decline, arguably due to the collapse of the silver trade that had supported their rapid development. Whilst the latter had been for the better part of a century by this point, the former now started the decline which would see it all but disappear by the twelfth century.<sup>69</sup> Nonetheless, in the period from the start of the ninth century to the end of the tenth, we see the development and formation of Denmark as a nation, epitomised by the development of both its towns and the power of its monarchs. Indeed, this period traces the change from petty kingdoms and chiefdoms to the verge of an empire under Svend and later Cnut the Great.

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<sup>69</sup> Hilberg, p. 109.

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