

Dwellings and communities in 8th-9th century Ribe

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[New research]

Besides being places for trade and craft production, the Viking-Age emporia in Scandinavia were also places where people settled, dwelled, and died. Major contributions to our understanding of the living conditions of the inhabitants of the emporia have been made in the past thirty years, with large excavation projects in Kaupang and Birka, and with the continuous efforts put into the analysis of the excavation data from Hedeby. How Ribe was occupied and inhabited from its emergence in the early 8th century and onwards has, however, appeared to be more elusive.

In 2017 and 2018, the Northern Emporium Project investigated most parts of one plot at Ribe's emporium and part of a second one. The combination of the capturing of a settlement unit in its full width and nearly full length, its good preservation conditions, and an ambitious excavation strategy, has revealed that the plot was used more or less continuously throughout two centuries for hosting buildings, thereby contributing to the discussion of Ribe as a place where people dwelt from the start.

In this paper, I will explore the architecture of these buildings, their internal use of space, and what it reveals about the households that occupied them. Most buildings appear to have been multi-functional structures, designed for specialized craft production, as well as for dwelling. The ephemeral character of their architecture and the quick-pace of the changing activities that took place at the site does not necessarily contradict the proposal of a permanent occupation in Ribe from the early 8th century and onwards. Rather, it calls for further integration of different temporalities, with implications not only for our understanding of the local life-style, but also more generally of the character of the site and its development. Jointly, this approach provides an entryway to increasing our knowledge of the communities like those later established in Hedeby, Dublin or York, their way-of-life, their social relations, and their cultural affinities.