

Ribe and the making of the Viking Age: The Evolving Networks of a Northern Emporium

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Excavations in towns and emporia provide some of archaeology's most significant contributions to the history of the Viking Age. During 2017-20 the Northern Emporium project has explored the development of connectivity in South Scandinavia from the 8th to the 10th century based on a large excavation in the heart of early Ribe, Denmark. A detailed approach to Ribe's fine-meshed stratigraphy has allowed the site to be read in high chronological definition. Over the course of the eighth and early ninth century, buildings were renewed or replaced on a five to ten years cycle. Artefact finds and workshop debris, often numbering thousands of items, reveal distinct patterns of activities associated with each building. They mark a rapid succession of specialised craft activities, and, presumably, inhabitants. This paper shows how the results outline the emergence of the Viking Age in the context of urban networks. A new chronological framework provides a detailed timeline to proxies for long-distance communication with Western Europe, Norway, the Baltic Sea Area, and the East, and reveal important corrections to societal developments and interactions. From the vantage point of Ribe, the Viking Age maritime expansion unfolded from a characteristic ecology of nodal trade, outfield economies, and new niches of social opportunity.