The First Sparks and the Far Horizons
Stirring up the Thinking on the Earliest Scandinavian Urbanization Processes – Again

BY MATS MOGREN

The author stresses the need for new input into research on Early Medieval (6th–11th century) urbanization processes in Scandinavia. A multi-pronged approach is suggested, where the societal structure of the region and period must be re-evaluated using hitherto relatively untried theoretical tools, such as a heterarchical perspective, the heterogenetic-orthogenetic conceptual pair, and a deconstruction of the bewildering concept of central place. It also includes a necessary critique of the "power paradigm", current for 30 years. It is further stressed that comparative material should be sought globally. The Swahili coast of East Africa and maritime Southeast Asia are presented as the most operative comparison regions, due to a number of similar traits shared by the three areas. Network building with the chosen areas aims at a shared future understanding of the causes of the first sparks of urbanization.
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The paradigmatic nature of research sometimes bears a certain resemblance to the labours of Sisyphus. An understanding of a field of inquiry is gradually built up through lots of individual and collaborative work until it acquires the shape of a paradigm. After a while the debates enter a lull, most participants acknowledge the understanding as valid, and Sisyphus himself, who has just reached the crest of the hilltop, has a discreet smile on his face, thinking that perhaps this time the task is accomplished. That is the appropriate moment for Zeus, if he values the dynamics and freshness of research, to push the stone downhill again.

The paradigms sometimes seem to have an astonishing longevity, without really being questioned. Such a paradigm, or at least a line of thought with certain paradigmatic features, is the idea that the societal elite was decisive for the emergence of the earliest urban centres in Northern Europe. This understanding is part of a wider one, seeing society *as a whole* during the period in question as explicitly hierarchical.

The line of thought was launched among historians in the 1970s and gathered considerable momentum within archaeology in the 1980s after the publication of a number of influential dissertations and articles by historical archaeologists in Lund and by the members of the research group connected to the project *Fra stamme til stat* (Mortensen & Rasmussen 1988, 1991) in Denmark, to mention just a

few of the most important advocates. Still, many take the hierarchical society and the active role of the societal apex more or less for granted. That situation has to be stirred up a bit.

So much qualitative research has been carried out on the societal structure and especially the Early Medieval[1] aristocracy during the last 30 years or so, that any criticism may seem utterly quixotic, but there are several aspects of the paradigm that need questioning.

Three main aspects of early urbanization are at issue here. First of all, there is the concept itself and its temporal parameters and trajectories in the Scandinavian context. Secondly, we must once again discuss the relationship of urbanization to power and societal structure. And finally, we must find a new way forward.

An elusive concept

This is not the place to repeat the well-known history of definition attempts in urbanization research. I trust that readers are well acquainted with this more than century-old discussion. Suffice it to say that the main distinguishing features of the discussion have been the varying hypotheses on the *causes* of the emergence of urban sites and the *criteria* for urbanization.

Urbanization is not seen here as a monolithic, unilinear concept. We must reckon with multiple urbanization processes, with differing characteristics, at work simultaneously or one after the other. The primary parameters are *function*, with its connected concept of *agency,* and another factor of paramount importance is *communication* (e.g. Sindbæk 2007a; 2007b; 2008). Parameters such as morphology and structure should be regarded as secondary.

Population size, on the other hand, cannot have been decisive. Large Danish Iron Age

sites like Hodde, Vorbasse, and others may have had a population of up to 200 inhabitants at any one time, which is equivalent to many smaller towns with charters from the Late Middle Ages and the Early Modern period in Scandinavia. Certainly, just a few non-agrarian households will not make an urban setting, so scale has some importance, but urbanity cannot be quantified in this way. It is a very qualitative concept.

For reasons of the comparison methodology chosen in our study we also want a concept that is operative outside of our limited cultural setting. Urbanization as a concept may sometimes seem elusive if we strive for a globally valid definition, and many researchers have pointed out that trying to find the lowest common denominators for phenomena called urban in widely different parts of the world is futile, but I maintain that we must keep trying; we must finally rid ourselves of the spectre of Max Weber before we can leap forward. This is also the reason why I avoid criteria lists, which more often than not are utterly Eurocentric. Towards the end of this text an operative level of comparison is suggested.

For these reasons, my own definition is kept simple. A place or area is becoming urban *when a substantial number of people move together to meet two or more non-agrarian needs, in a context of social plurality*. The latter parameter is of special importance in the Early Medieval period for distinguishing sites that are in some respect urban from magnate's residences, which will be apparent later on in the text.

In downplaying morphology and structure you open up for the possibility of an urban site being seasonal and/or agglomerated/polymorphous. This is necessary if you are on the quest for the very first ignition of the process of urbanization in a certain region, the first sparks.

Another conceptual straitjacket can be avoided by regarding urban sites as not neces-

sarily permanent features. The reason why we tend to think about permanence as natural and put all our efforts into explaining discontinuities is of course the High Medieval stone- and brick-built town and the inertia it provides, but a more fruitful approach to early urbanization would be to turn the discussion upside-down and regard discontinuities as a state of normality and instead try to explain relative permanence when it occurs. This implies that, while I more or less agree with Mateusz Bogucki (2010) that the northern trade and craft sites were not one leap in a long trajectory from the urban centres of Antiquity to the High Medieval town (hence no "proto-towns"), but part of an independent urbanization process,[2] I tend to disagree with his statement that they were a cul-de-sac. Interrupted development was the natural state of things. What needs to be explained, again, is the fact that the establishments of the 10th–12th centuries lingered on. All this being said, it is evident that, at the end of the day, urbanization and urbanity are very abstract concepts. Maybe that is why we sometimes mix them up with other phenomena.

A bewildering concept

Some decades ago, it became evident that medieval urbanization did not start at the earliest stratigraphical levels of the still existing towns. A plethora of sites popped up that posed a problem. The long-known sites of Birka, Hedeby, Kaupang and a few others could previously be treated as phenomena apart. However when the excavations in Gross Strömkendorf, Ralswiek, Åhus, Löddeköpinge, Fröjel, Janów Pomorski and many more all around the southern Baltic provided evidence for long-distance trade preceding the well-known emporia by at least half a century, when excavations in Gudme-Lundeborg (e.g. Nielsen *et al.* 1994), Uppåkra (Larsson 2004, among

many other publications), and other sites with evidence for ceremonial activities provided us with an embarrassment of riches never before seen in Scandinavian archaeology, and when one magnate's residence site from the Early Medieval period after the other enriched our record, then the need to include this in a general discussion of the transformation of North European society became evident, and the term *central place* was coined. We have all used it, but do we know what it means?

It may seem that my criticism of the concept is like preaching to the choir. Certainly, a well-informed and creative discussion has been current for some time (e.g. Näsman 2011), and I make no claim to originality in criticizing the concept, but it is important for all of us to establish a benchmark by repeating the critique. "Central place" is the sort of cautionary term that comes to mind when you understand that you have to widen your scope, but actually do not understand fully what you are talking about. No harm in that, at the outset of the discussion, but when the term continues to be in use one long decade after another it will bewilder your thinking. It is high time to deconstruct this concept and instead try to understand what it comprises and define its parts, at least if it is urbanization that is our concern.

Analytically, urban sites, magnates' residences and ceremonial/religious centres are three different phenomena. Sometimes, and indeed quite often, they combine. A magnate's residence can develop into an urban site if people in the trades and crafts, forming separate households, move in and settle there. The same goes for ceremonial centres. An urban centre can acquire a magnate's residence if a member of the societal apex moves in. A ceremonial centre can also have its magnate's residence. But to understand the incentives for urbanization the three must be kept apart. In fact, *all* sites must be seen as unique; it is very difficult to categorize 8th–9th-century sites.

That may be the main obstacle to attaining an understanding of the earliest urbanization processes.

The pooling of trade and craft sites, with ceremonial centres and magnates' residences, most probably has its implicit roots in the notion of a pyramidal hierarchy with no room for independent actors.

The top(pling) of the pyramid

In Scandinavian first-millennium studies, and especially in archaeology, the hierarchical, pyramidal understanding of society that bloomed in the eighties and early nineties still stands unchallenged, like dried flowers in an old vase. In the nineties the central places were starting to become differentiated, but only scale-wise. They were ordered in a three-tiered hierarchy; local, regional and supra-regional, but there were few attempts to understand their diversity as regards function and agency.

The existence of hierarchies during the first millennium is not an incorrect assumption, of course, as a multitude of archaeological finds indicate. A major leap in complexity is evident at the end of the 2nd and beginning of the 3rd century. Chiefly centres appeared, some of them seemingly out of the blue, most conspicuously so Himlingøje on Zealand with its wealth of Roman import items. Major ceremonial centres, as in Uppåkra, were created by erecting structures that must be considered to be temples.

The structure with a societal base, a middle tier and an apex is very evident in many regions of Scandinavia. It is also shown in building traditions, where very large houses are found from the last century BC and on. They are generally larger in Scania than west of the Sound all through the first half of the millennium (Artursson 2008; Carlie 2008), which indicates a distinct socio-cultural border during that period.

The problem with the pyramid is its implications. When society is presented as a pyramid it is easy to convey the implicit notion that it represents society as a whole, and that the pyramid "covers the map", meaning that the apex can, at least indirectly, control everyone beneath. The step from this notion to the idea of "confederations" and trans-regional sovereign kingdoms, maybe even early state formation, is a short one (e.g. Näsman 1991; 1998b).

Most probably, everyone outside the royal retinue and vassalage in the Middle Ages felt the political structure to be an exogenous implant in their local society. Apex-level politics, and the polity, might perhaps be seen as a kind of "enterprise", not as something organic in society.

What this research needs is a heterarchical perspective. As Carole Crumley has emphasized, hierarchy is a "pervasive structural metaphor for order itself", hence the mistaken assumption of the pyramid being equal to society, but a hierarchy is just one of many patterns in which elements can be ordered (Crumley 1995, p. 2).

Heterarchy is not the opposite of hierarchy, as some tend to believe. Hierarchy is a structure, while heterarchy is a perspective. With such a perspective it becomes evident that elements in a society can be unranked, or ranked in various ways, and that the hierarchies that do occur are always parts of a greater context. There is order without hierarchy, and we must be wary of using hierarchy as a reductionist metaphor for society at large. The application of hierarchy as a concept in archaeology has been totally out of proportion up until now. The opposite of order is chaos, which nobody wants. We must therefore acknowledge the possibility of any societal unit having a self-organizing capacity.

When the hierarchical thinking is applied to urbanization studies, its reductionist character becomes very evident. Most of the ar-

gumentation regarding the emergence of the first trade/craft sites in southern Scandinavia and elsewhere has built upon the assumption that the sites were founded by the societal apex groups, kings no less (e.g. Jensen 1991, p. 80). This in turn seems to build on the astonishing assumption that commoners are incapable of putting huts in straight rows.

Until Claus Feveile published his very sobering and clarifying summary of decades of archaeological work in Ribe (2006), it was more or less taken for granted that the small area of lots laid out in a regular pattern in the area of present-day Sct. Nicolaigade, maybe 34–35 lots in two parallel rows on a sandbank by the marsh (Feveile 2006, fig. 10), was an initiative by some regal actor. This assumption has been taken up wherever there is evidence of parcellation. Thus, for the last few decades in Scandinavian research, parcellation has been seen as valid evidence of elite groups at the supra-regional level, and an early unified kingdom has been postulated.

The societal mastic

If everyone favours order, and if we question the role of early kingship, what was it that created societal coherence and peaceful conditions? We must not forget that Scandinavia in the 8th and 9th centuries was *not* part of Europe. Europe as a concept got its first definition in those centuries, being equivalent to Merovingian/Carolingian Latin Christendom, which was very different in many respects. For one, Scandinavia did not share the European system of political thought.

The difference is most easily explained by referring to the judicial sphere and it can be illustrated by the concepts of *descending* and *ascending* government. "Europe" i.e. Latin Christendom, had descending government, meaning that the king ruled by the grace of God, his subjects were treated more or less as

under-age minors, peace was guaranteed by the king, and the law was *given* to the subjects. The key concept was *munt,* meaning protection. The king protected his subjects, as parents protect their children, whether they want it or not.

In Scandinavia there was ascending government, meaning that the king ruled with the sanction of his subjects. Peace was guaranteed by the people and the law was *made* by them (Ullman 1965, p. 56 f.). At least this was the general nominal idea; in reality influential magnates could certainly manipulate the judicial system in their favour, but even then they had to play according to the rules. Anyhow, I suggest that this is one reason why we should *not* attempt political analogies with the continent for this period (cf. Näsman 1998b).

The existence of a Scandinavian judicial system, well established already in the 8th and 9th centuries, is evident from the Forsa ring, with its runic inscription telling about a set of legal sanctions against persons who neglect their duties in the maintenance of a *vi*, a sacred site. The ring's inscription has been linguistically dated to probably the 9th century (Liestøl 1979), no later than the 10th,[3] and it appears to refer to a well established societal structure, so we may surmise that the judicial system was considerably older.

The existence of such an "ascending" legal system is, I believe, also corroborated by Stefan Brink's detailed analysis of the much later Hälsinge Law (2010a), where he elucidates early "folk" layers which are not to be found in the Uppland Law, on which the Hälsinge Law otherwise was modelled. The judicial system must be considered to be the mastic that gave coherence to Scandinavian society, not the odd aristocrats, as revealed by archaeology.

How should we comprehend early medieval kingship in Scandinavia? The term "king" has no other meaning than a societal leader who has no sovereign. All other meanings are contextually dependent. That means that we

must be ready to imagine kings without country, and the possibility of multiple kings in a given region, of which there in fact is textual evidence. Early Medieval kingship in Scandinavia depended totally on the retinue, the *lith*, and ultimately on plunder, tribute and war – perpetual violence. Kingship was predatory.

In 1988 Thomas Lindkvist launched the distinction between external and internal appropriation. There are theoretical stances in that text that have lost some of the following they had then, but this part still has a considerable explanatory value and could be developed further. The power of the elite being built on the appropriation of the primary producer's surplus seems as good a definition of the emerging state as any. The Viking Age kingdoms lacked the capacity for internal appropriation, and most of us see them as chiefdoms in the traditional anthropological sense.

In southern Scandinavia kings that were acknowledged at a supra-regional level are impossible to discern before the mid-10th century and the Jelling dynasty. Before that there is reliable evidence for a short-lived (about three generations or slightly more) realm probably comprising Funen and south Jutland during the earlier and middle parts of the 9th century (most probably also in the latter half of the 8th century, judging from the earliest datings from Danevirke). It probably also included overlordship over some areas (we know about a tributary relationship with Vestfold), but it must be regarded as nominal and meant little apart from the paying of tribute; no real control could be upheld and thus these areas cannot be regarded as parts of the kingdom. The Funen-South Jutland realm ultimately dissolved and left the ground open to various petty chieftains for probably more than half a century (cf. an interesting view from a philological vantage point by Gazzoli 2011). The polity was the stage for one of the classic figures of early Viking Age Scandinavia, King

Godfred. We can learn a lot from studying what is known about him.

What's your racket?

Hedeby had its roots in the 8th century, as the archaeological record tells us. Then it mainly consisted of what is today called the *Südsiedlung*, south and outside of the 10th century rampart (Hilberg 2009). It was a relatively small, open settlement, maybe a little bit like Ribe or Gross Strömkendorf. Hedeby then got a coercive boost by the events of 808 CE, as they are related in the Royal Frankish Annals.

That year a Danish military force attacked and destroyed the relatively large trading settlement of Reric in the land of the Slavic Abodrites, and forced the traders there to resettle in Hedeby. Reric is now generally identified with Gross Strömkendorf. This is more or less corroborated by archaeological evidence which gives the years around 810 as the start of the decline (end of building activities) at Gross Strömkendorf and a simultaneous increase in building activities in the central settlement at Hedeby. The end of Gross Strömkendorf is archaeologically set at *c*. 835 (Hilberg 2009; Jöns 2009).

I propose that 808 is the iconic event for understanding Scandinavian kingship of the period and indirectly for understanding the trajectories of the 8th-century trade and craft sites around the southern Baltic. If the perpetuation of kingship necessitated perpetual violence, these events may be likened to a protection racket; perhaps it would be better to compare Godfred to Al Capone than to Charlemagne, in order to better understand both him and the nature of kingship in general. Godfred probably had heard of the political ideas of Charlemagne's empire, and about *munt*, and thought it was a good idea, but

he had to interpret and implement what he heard within the confines of his own context.[4]

We must understand settlements like Ribe, Reric, Åhus, and others, as founded by self-organizing groups of traders and craftsmen. This assumption is shared by other researchers such as Callmer, who states that no aristocratic presence is discernible in the archaeological record of several Scanian sites (Callmer 1998b), and by Carlsson, who has investigated several sites around the coasts of Gotland, all of which lack traces of apex structures (Carlsson 2011).

These settlements could have continued on a self-organizing basis for maybe two or three generations. Later apex groups, when they became aware of the source of wealth possible to tap at those sites, elbowed in, just like the Mafia, and created their own interpretation of *munt*.

It has been postulated over and over again in the literature that trade must be protected by power. This has in fact been regarded as one of the cornerstones not only of the criteria for urban sites but also for the factors behind the emergence of the sites (cf. Blomkvist 2001). Certainly, trading sites became "protected" by power after awhile, not in any benign, fatherly sense of the word but as a racket. I propose that urban sites did not need the protection of power, but they could be struck by it.

Now we have put the kings in place, but the question about what created order in the earliest trade and craft sites remains to be answered. If we postulate that the presence of some kind of power is not a necessity, are there any sources indicating that we are justified in doing so? Yes, in fact, there are. But this requires us to look far beyond the horizon.

Trade is the magic…

Alfred Russel Wallace travelled and studied for eight years (1854–1862) in the Southe-ast Asian archipelago. The first half of 1857 was spent in the Aru Islands, just west of New Guinea. He describes the seasonal trading site of Dobbo as situated "on the small island of Wamma, upon a spit of sand which projects out to the north, and is just wide enough to contain three rows of houses" (Wallace [1869] 1994, p. 432).

His description of Dobbo immediately brings to mind our earliest Scandinavian and West Slavic trade and craft sites of the first half of the 8th century, Åhus, Gross Ström-kendorf/Reric or Ribe. There was also seasonal occupation on sandbanks or in river estuaries. But there is more to Wallace's observations than just topography.

He describes how at his arrival in January only a handful of families occupied the simple houses, but with time passing more and more people came, repaired their houses and started trading with each other and with the local population. Some of them brought commodities mainly for the trading community itself. After a few weeks the site had lively activity which lasted until May when activity trickled off, the traders started to leave and soon the site was abandoned again. The traders who came and went were of different origin, from all over the Southeast Asian archipelago: Chinese, Bugis, Javanese, Ceramese, Timorese and others; Dobbo was truly a poly-ethnic society.

Perhaps the most astonishing fact about this site was that there was no power to keep order. No police, no military units, in spite of the presence of pirates in the waters surrounding the islands. The Dutch colonial government sent a commissioner from Amboina once a year, at best, to hear complaints, and the native chiefs lived far inland and showed no presence at Dobbo. The leading traders formed a court ad hoc to condemn thieves. The small heterogeneous and seasonal community of Dobbo was *self-organizing*. Wallace also finds this astonishing, and towards the end of the account of his stay he provides us

with his interpretation for this situation:

> Trade is the magic that keeps all at peace, and unites these discordant elements into a well-behaved community. All are traders, and all know that peace and order are essential to successful trade, and thus a public opinion is created which puts down all lawlessness (Wallace [1869] 1994, p. 444).

Wallace's description has caught the imagination of researchers like Miksic as being a role model for early urbanization in 10th–14th-century Southeast Asia, and it certainly has an interest for us in the Scandinavian 8th-century context. It may suffice to remind the reader what Callmer writes about the coastal sites of first-millennium Scandinavia. He finds it reasonable to assume that trading sites also in fairly close proximity to aristocratic centres were difficult to control entirely, that trading sites had their own life, their own meanings and rationality, and that they were not necessarily linked to power centres at all (Callmer 1998b, p. 35).

The far horizons

This brings us to the widening of the horizons, so necessary if we are going to find a way forward from the treadmill of rehashing our own limited data over and over again. We must break out of the confinement of a narrow North European sphere in making our comparisons (cf. Andersson 2009). The Scandinavian discussion could surely benefit from a better familiarity with urbanization research in other parts of the world.

First of all, concepts used in one setting can have a very high explanatory value in another. Such is the case, for researchers on Medieval Scandinavia, with the conceptual pair orthogenetic and heterogenetic.

This analytical dichotomy was launched by the anthropologists Redfield and Singer around six decades ago, and has in our time been taken up by John N. Miksic in his work on Southeast Asia (Miksic 2000). Orthogenetic sites are associated with stability and ritual. They are placed in areas of surplus agricultural production, are always in some respect central, are populated by a civil, religious and military bureaucracy, might have an aristocratic/royal presence, and are distinguished by some form of monumentality, so they are usually easy to discover.

Heterogenetic sites are associated with change and entrepreneurship. They are often liminally placed, between ecological zones, ethnic or political regions, or differing transport systems. They often lack monumentality, which can make them archaeologically invisible on the surface. Production and trade of commodities is the most distinguishing feature.

The two categories are actually opposite poles on a continuous scale; most sites have traits of both. As is evident from the discussion above, this conceptual pair has a very high explanatory value also outside of Miksic's Southeast Asian context, and not least for Early Medieval Scandinavia. In trying to disentangle the very unsatisfactory bundle of elements of the central place concept it comes in very handy.

In choosing comparative material we cannot pick it at random. Many attempts to study urbanization comparatively on a global scale have ended up in a mere catalogue of case studies that really do not relate very well to each other. But if societies that share several traits are chosen for comparison, as in the case elaborated on below, advances can be made in the general understanding of the emergence of urban sites, and the widely differing geographical setting can be used to our advantage.

We must look beyond the ancient river civilizations and their successor states, i.e. search for areas without earlier urban tradi-

tions (but exposed to influence from such areas). We must look for areas with similar socio-structural and technological conditions, areas that were part of long-distance trade networks and preferably also subject to fundamental ideological shifts, like Scandinavia.

Two such attempts are being made at present. At the universities of York and Århus, a group of researchers is building a network of research contacts in Europe, Africa and Asia, known as the *Entrepot Project*.[5] At Lund University, another group of researchers is doing exactly the same thing, and until recently these two groups worked without knowledge of each other. The important fact about this parallelism is that it makes it evident that the time is ripe for a general understanding of the necessity for widening horizons.

The work in Lund has taken shape as seminars on the issues covered here, but also as network building with colleagues in East Africa and Southeast Asia. A triangle is taking shape with Lund, Dar-es-Salaam and Singapore at its corners (and naturally with a link to *Entrepot*). Why these three?

It is not only a case of contemporary urbanization processes (the Scandinavian and East African processes are almost entirely contemporary, while the Southeast Asian ones seem to be slightly later, but fully comparable). The three areas have early urban sites sharing many traits. Partly dependent on the heterogenetic nature of the early sites, they all display marked discontinuities, all three areas are exposed to contacts with areas of earlier urban development, all three have experienced processes of religious change, and all three areas are markedly maritime, with advanced ship technologies.

Along the East African coast from Somalia to Mozambique, an area which later experienced a process of ethnic genesis resulting in the Swahili culture, trading sites are known from Roman Antiquity. The earliest ones are archaeologically known only in Somalia at present, but the search is on (Chami 1994; 1999).

During the 7th and 8th centuries new urban sites emerged along the central parts of the coast that were oriented towards long-distance trade, sites which are pre-Islamic, lacking masonry architecture and having discontinuous trajectories. Good examples are Unguja Ukuu in Zanzibar (Juma 2004) and Tumbe in Pemba (LaViolette & Fleisher 2009). Several other sites are still awaiting the archaeologists. Later on, during the 10th and 11th centuries, the coast was gradually islamicized, masonry architecture with sometimes monumental characteristics started emerging and during later centuries stone built cities with mosques, palaces and city walls were created, from Mogadishu in Somalia to Mahilaka in Madagascar, representing the classic Swahili urban culture.

The parallelism with Scandinavia is very evident. The only major difference is that in Africa the Medieval urban centres became independent city-states, while in Scandinavia they became integrated into larger territorial kingdoms. Research regarded these sites for a long time as exclusively detached from the surrounding countryside, but modern research with extensive survey work has proved the opposite (Fleischer 2010; Wynne-Jones 2007).

In the maritime parts of Southeast Asia (the Austronesian cultural area), urban sites related to long-distance trade generally, and following Anthony Reid (1988–1993), have been regarded as a very late phenomenon occurring during the 15th to 17th centuries. However it has recently been claimed by several researchers (Christie 1998; Miksic 2000; Wade 2009) that there was an earlier age of commerce in Southeast Asia, during the 10th to 14th centuries, and, in fact, evidence of long-distance trade goes back to the centuries around the beginning of the common era (Ardika & Bellwood 1991).

Several sites with heterogenetic traits have been presented by archaeology in the area, such as Tumasik (present-day Singapore), Kota Cina (literally the stockade/fort of the Chinese), Ladong and Barus (a craft and trade entrepôt with wide-ranging connections all over the Indian Ocean and all the way to Egypt), all in Sumatra, and Banten Girang in Java.

There was also the trade "empire" of Srivijaya, notoriously difficult to study for reasons of topography as well as building technology, but also because it differs very much from state structures in India, China or Europe; it was probably more of a network of trading sites, acknowledging a nominal overlordship, rather than a territorial polity. Inscriptions indicate that its capital was at present-day Palembang in Sumatra. The sphere of influence of this thalassocracy or trade network comprised areas from southern Thailand to Java.

Working with this rich material within a comparative framework will certainly elucidate the urbanization processes of all three areas. Logistics are made easier by the fact that the University of Dar-es-Salaam works as a hub in an African network for archaeology, previously sponsored by the Swedish agency Sida, and many East African archaeologists know each other personally and have long-standing contacts with Swedish researchers. Researchers in the Entrepot Project have also been active along the Swahili coast. In Southeast Asia, the National University of Singapore has worked, more informally, as a similar hub for archaeology from Burma to Indonesia. Prospects for the future could be worse.

The first sparks

All three of these areas are well suited for studying the causes of early urbanization, the ignition of the first sparks. Returning to the Scandinavian context, we are inclined to ask ourselves: why the 8th century? Would it not have been more natural for trade emporia to emerge during the first half of the millennium, when there was a major trading partner in the south with whom to exchange goods on a large scale? So far only Lundeborg is well known from that period, a site that appears anomalous in its context.[6]

The post-Roman era was a period of relative peace, while the very troubled Roman Iron Age was not, as Ulf Näsman has shown so eloquently in a simple diagram (Näsman 1998, p. 261). But the "war indicators" in South Scandinavia had been at a very low level already from and including the 6th century, so peaceful conditions cannot be the triggering cause, only a precondition. In the same text Näsman also stresses the important fact that around the start of the 6th century the patterns of exchange of luxury goods shifted from the Carpathian-Black Sea region to the Rhineland-North Sea region, due to political unrest and ethnic transformations in the former area. One implication of this is that a mainly overland and river-based communication system had to be replaced by a seafaring system, which must have put emphasis on developing nautical technology.

Knowledge about the development of nautical technology has taken enormous strides forward with the ship finds especially from Skuldelev and Roskilde but these ships belong to a later age, from the 10th century onwards. For the earlier periods very much of our understanding is still built on the three-stage development represented by the Hjortspring boat (a paddled, sewn canoe) of the Pre-Roman Iron Age, the Nydam boat (a rowed, riveted boat) of the Late Roman Iron Age, and the grand Norwegian ship burials at Oseberg and Gokstad (the iconic Viking ships par excellence, propelled by sail) of the 9th and 10th centuries. Many ship finds on both sides of the Baltic have been investigated in recent years (see a good overview by Indruszew-

ski 2005) and several replicas have been built and evaluated at sea. Detailed knowledge of hull-building techniques has been obtained, but until now the most important question related to our concern here, the introduction of sail in Scandinavia, has not been addressed at all (Indruszewski 2005), or answered only within a very wide time frame (Crumlin-Pedersen 1999). It seems to have been sufficient to frame the period of introduction by referring to the early and late Gotlandic picture stones; the former from the 5th century have vessels without sails, the later from the 8th century have vessels with sails.

Why is the introduction of sails so important to us? Simply because in a rowing boat of the Nydam type very little cargo can be carried; the crew and their provisions take up most of the space (see the discussion by Englert 2009 for a later period). Urbanization built on trade requires a certain volume of commodities to get out of the starting blocks, so the sails are important as markers.

In a forthcoming dissertation Ulla Isabel Zagal-Mach Wolfe narrows the date of introduction considerably. She maintains that the introduction of sails had a tentative beginning at the very outset of the 8th century, and that the really large sails emerged during the 9th century together with a considerable development in sailing techniques (Wolfe pers. comm. & 2013). The beginning coincides with the establishment of Ribe, Åhus and Gross Strömkendorf/Reric, so definitely there must be a connection.

The problem is that the peoples of the Baltic must have known about sailing ships long before that date, but without taking up the technology. Thus there must be another factor that caused them to apply the technology in their own home waters, one which also lay behind the emergence of the beach and estuary trading sites of the early 8th century.

One starting point is of course to consider the classic binary concept of supply and demand. What had Scandinavians to offer in the greater European trade system? And what did they want from abroad? It is well known from historical anthropology that supply and demand can alter society at large. The demand for European commodities changed the economy of the local populations in North America and the supply of the goods changed political and military patterns. The same happened in West Africa, in the South Pacific and elsewhere, and the European demand for Chinese silk totally transformed not only the economy but also the landscape of South China in the 16th century.

It has long been understood that Early Medieval trade communities in the Baltic were multi-ethnic. The presence of Frisian traders has been suggested (cf. Callmer 1998a), but also the Saxons, Slavs and Scandinavians themselves were active traders. If we have a notion of who was supplying, we must also give those demanding a bit of thought. Was it only the local aristocracy? Who wanted the complete dress outfits produced at Åhus in the 8th century? And furthermore, what did these demanding Scandinavians have to offer in return? Furs, as in North America? Or were these sites actually turned into slave markets, as in West Africa, when they had nothing else to sell? By formulating relevant questions like these we may proceed towards a better understanding of the processes.

You do not move what is sacred

Finally, the question of permanence must be addressed. Uppåkra existed for more than a millennium, from the 1st century BCE to the 11th CE. At the end of the 10th century Lund was emerging as a competitor just two kilometres away, and now Lund has had permanence for a millennium. During the 11th century the situation in the area was characterized by five sites with central or even urban

features, Uppåkra, Lund, Dalby, Lomma and Borgeby/Löddeköpinge, and it was in the balance which was to live on and which was to fade away. We know in retrospect that Uppåkra after *c.* 1100 CE was a mere agrarian village and that Lund from that date developed into the *Metropolis Daniae*, a major royal and ecclesiastical centre, but avoiding teleological reasoning we must try to understand the causes of the development. This is in itself a formidable research task, which has only very recently been tentatively addressed (Sjöbeck 2012), and we may surmise that the causes were multiple, but one of the probably decisive ones has been indicated by research elsewhere.

Frans Theuws (2004) points out the importance of inalienable possessions. He stresses the quality of markets as "total social events", where three main spheres of exchange share the same space, the exchange of gifts, the exchange of commodities and the *keeping* of inalienable possessions, which are mostly of a sacred nature. In comparing Dorestad and Maastricht, the former having a relatively short span of life, while the latter is still in existence, Theuws notices the lack of inalienable possessions in Dorestad. The possessions brought to Maastricht, relics of Saint Servatius, on the other hand, provided the "cosmological authentication" necessary for creating permanence.

The material presented by Theuws can serve as an excellent model for explaining the extreme longevity of Uppåkra as well as the site's demise and the rise of Lund. In Uppåkra a pagan temple which was rebuilt several times, but representing permanence on the same site for at least 700 years, must have filled the requirement of "inalienable possessions". When the religion ultimately changed, Uppåkra had lost its quality of inalienability.

Permanence was created almost instantly at the new site, where the cathedral of Saint Lawrence was provided with no less then 417

relics of named saints, plus a number of nameless relics and 79 relics of other types. By comparison it may be mentioned that Uppsala cathedral had 64 named relics and a number of unspecified ones. The Lund collection was not quantitatively within the range of some continental relic collections, like the ones in Halle, Braunschweig or Prague which numbered thousands, but in the Nordic context it was outstanding. The cathedral of Saint Lawrence claimed to possess various relics connected to Jesus Christ and Saint Mary, Saint John the Baptist, Saint John the Evangelist, assorted parts of the 11,000 virgins and even a part of the tree of paradise, not counting numerous saints that are less well-known to latter-day readers (Axel-Nilsson 1989). These were inalienable possessions, indeed.

Countervailing the canon

This article has presented no new material. It is rather a crude sketch of a framework for future research which aims at showing alternatives to the prevalent canon. It has proposed a number of theoretical preconditions that oppose the orthodoxy of Scandinavian early urbanization studies:

- Function, agency and communication are the important elements in defining urban sites.
- There are many paths to urbanity; sites are different, also within the broad analytical categories used here.
- Discontinuity is the rule; permanence requires explanation.
- The concept of central place must be replaced by a more exact set of definitions.
- Urban sites *can* emerge acephalously; kings are not a requirement.
- Communities of traders and craftsmen are perfectly capable of self-organization.
- Kings and other members of the aristo-

cracy played a role mainly as tappers of the wealth, through "protection rackets", which conforms well with the concept of external appropriation. Kingship was predatory.

- Heterarchical perspectives must be introduced in urbanization studies; hierarchies are only part of the story.
- New input can be had from comparative global studies of similar cultural areas.

This must be seen as a working hypothesis. We have still not identified the first sparks and what ignited them, but we have perhaps narrowed down the range within which we have to search. So, let us hope that there is now a long push upslope before the next lull to anger Zeus. After all, isn't it the duty of all researchers to try to imagine Sisyphus as happy?

Notes

1   In this text a continental periodization is used. It is the author's conviction that there is no need for a separate Scandinavian chronology (Mogren 2005, p. 21f). Thus Early Medieval here means the period *c.* 550−1100.

2   Colleagues criticizing the reintroduction of trade and crafts into the discussion sometimes take it for granted that the advocates of these two factors work teleologically from the vantage point of the High Medieval town, which "makes us again fall into the trap of the Frühe Stadt-concept" (Näsman 2011, p. 190). Nothing could be more mistaken; if there is anyone today who considers these early sites as predecessors of the High Medieval town, he or she deserves criticism, but there are no such proponents that I know of. The 8th-century trading/craft sites, the 9th/10th-century emporia and the late 10th/12th-century towns represent three separate processes and trajectories. But they all represent urbanization.

3   Carl Löfving's recent "dating" of the ring to the High Middle Ages (2010) has been effectively refuted by Brink (2010b).

4   Very tentatively, there are, in fact, several traits defining the (alternative) societal structure

of the Mafia (*camorra, cosa nostra, 'ndrangheta,* etc.), that are shared by Early Medieval Scandinavian kingship as we think we know it: concepts like honour, loyalty oaths, religious connections, generosity/philanthropy, protection, client relations, and violence. The Mafia is organized as "families", it has a *capo* (king), who can aspire to become *capo di tutti capi* (overlordship), and who has a number of *consiglieri* (members of the lith) around him (some with their own aspirations, which gives unstable conditions), who in turn command *soldati* (warriors). Further studies of these apparent similarities may prove to give us a new interpretative model for the Early Medieval period.

5   The project runs in collaboration between York and Århus universities. It focuses on the expansion of maritime communication and network urbanism in the period *c.* 500–1200 AD through comparative studies of material flows (http://www.york.ac.uk/archaeology/research/current-projects/entrepot/).

6   A site, or rather agglomeration of sites, which may provide key evidence for understanding not only the early chronology and functions of the trading sites, but also their relationship to centres of various types, is the Ravlunda-Haväng-Maletofta complex on the east coast of Skåne (Riddersporre 1998; Fabech 1999; Helgesson & Paulsson 2008). Artefact datings give a chronological range from the 2nd century into the High Middle Ages, but so far with a clear dominance for finds from the 6th to the 11th centuries. There are indications of a cult-judicial centre but the district itself is liminal in many respects. The sites are still relatively unknown but research is underway and reports from recent excavations are pending.

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