The Town of Randers

An archaeological-historical Study of its Formation and Development, Viking Age to 1536

Thomas Guntzelnick Poulsen[1,3] and Bjørn Poulsen[2]

[1] Museum Østjylland, Stemannsgade 2, 8900 Randers, Denmark.
[2] School of Culture and Society, Department of History, Aarhus University, Jens Chr. Skous vej 7, 8000 Aarhus C, Denmark.
[3] Corresponding Author (tgp@museumoj.dk).

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the medieval Danish town of Randers, which first emerged at a strategic crossing of the river Gudenå and developed into a key urban centre, beginning in the late Viking Age. Both archaeological and written sources reveal that the town's growth was driven by its role as a communication hub, supported by specialized trade and crafts. It relied on its geographical location and its networks. By the twelfth century, the town had fortifications, multiple parish churches, and a Benedictine nunnery, reflecting its regional prominence. Its growth continued throughout the late Middle Ages, marked by urban expansion and the construction of both secular and ecclesiastical buildings of high status. By the fifteenth century, Randers ranked among the leading towns of Jutland. The town's international connections initially focused on Norway, but subsequently shifted to Lübeck, which became its primary trading partner, while regional trade centred on Northern and Central Jutland. This study highlights Randers as a case for understanding medieval urbanization in Denmark as driven by local wealth, consumption of goods, trade networks, and strategic geography rather than administration and ecclesiastical power.

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Introduction

Randers is a medieval Danish town. The earliest written evidence of the town's name, RANDROS, appears on coins minted by Canute the Holy in 1085 (Poulsen T.G. 2016, JY4c). Although the earliest record of the town is thus, if not set in stone, at least struck in silver, the discussion and definition of what constitutes a medieval town remains a challenging exercise, as the spectrum of medieval settlements resists easy categorization under unifying concepts (Carelli 2001, 100; Kristensen and Poulsen 2016, 13-18; Søvsø 2018, 13-23). Randers does not fit neatly into a framework of concepts such as the eighth-century emporium (Hodges 1982), locally rooted proto-towns (Runge and Henriksen 2018; Runge *et al.* 2021, 129), or the cathedral towns referred to in contemporary Latin texts as *civitates* (Andersson 1971). Instead, it belongs to the broader category of market towns that spread across Europe from the eleventh century onwards (Hohenberg and Lees 1985, 22).

Randers is located on a major communication hub where numerous roads intersect near Denmark's largest river, the Gudenå. It emerged here as a robust urban community built on a foundation of specialized trade and crafts, supported by well-established networks (*sensu* Sindbæk 2007, 2022). In a Danish context, the early town of Randers shows parallels to other market towns with Viking Age roots such as Næstved and Horsens (Kristensen and Poulsen 2016, 69). Numerous other early Danish medieval towns saw trade and networks play a major role in their development (Dahlström, Poulsen, and Olsen 2018; Rösch 2016, 2018).

The article takes as its starting point the assumption that Randers in the period between the Viking Age (700-1000) and the Reformation in Denmark in 1536 represents a form of urban development driven by communication networks and by crafts and trade. The case of Randers allows us to explore dynamic factors in urban development more broadly and specifically to contextualize the town's growth in relation to other

medieval towns in Northern Jutland, particularly Viborg and Aalborg. Randers constitutes a worthy subject of study because of the wealth of previously untapped available data, both archaeological and written. This article is the first comprehensive presentation of Randers' medieval development based on the archaeological and the historical evidence.

We argue that Randers can serve as a case of a market town where urbanization was not primarily driven by the actions of kings and by lay and ecclesiastical lords (Christaller 1933; Andrén 1985, 79). This is explored through our integrated analysis of archaeological and historical records. Using insights from central place theory, we argue that the "central place" of Randers provided goods to surrounding market areas (hinterland) as well as to wider regions, hereby forming part of a hierarchy of settlements. The "higher-order place" of Randers served not only "lower-order central places" but also itself formed part of a larger North European town network (Christaller 1933; Hohenberg and Lees 1985, 49; Lösch 1940; Skre 2011; von Thünen 1875). This allows us to shed light on the interaction between the town's growth during the Middle Ages and its hinterland, as well as the relationships between its regional and interregional urban communities.

Methodology and Sources

A first stage in examining the dynamics behind the town's development is to reconstruct Randers' medieval topography and settlement growth. The primary basis for this reconstruction is the archaeological material collected by the local museum, today Museum Østjylland. The topographical archive at Museum Østjylland served as the foundation for the gathering of archaeological data, supplemented by information from Poul von Spreckelsen's two-volume historical work, *Randers Købstadshistorie* (Spreckelsen 1952) as well as Jens Vellev's comprehensive survey of urban archaeology in Randers (Vellev 1977). The appendix to this article includes a full list of archaeological sites and recordings from the town (Appendix 1), along with detailed descriptions of significant excavations (Appendix 2-16).

The results presented in archaeological reports have generally not been re-evaluated, and the artefact material was not revisited. However, for excavations concerning the earliest material from the Viking Age, the excavation data have been reassessed: drawings were examined, objects revisited, and datings checked and corrected where necessary. This primarily applies to the material from Brødregade 25 (KHM 290), but also to settlement traces from the late tenth century, which have likewise been revisited. Consequently, the quality of the recordings has played a significant role in determining which objects were included in the analysis, which remains limited by its reliance on archive reports from rescue excavations. We acknowledge that a systematic re-examination of these assemblages could significantly affect some conclusions, especially regarding the early date and development of the town.

This methodological limitation also affects the artefact material, where a more thorough analysis of the museum's collections is required for quantitative studies, as experiences from other Danish medieval towns such as Aarhus demonstrate that current documentation often provides insufficient information about excavation techniques and the scope of individual excavations (Linaa 2016, 38-42; Linaa 2024, 5).

The archaeological material from Randers consists of 137 recordings from the medieval town, of which thirty-seven are proper excavations and forty-seven are monitoring activities. There is an overlap among these recordings, and significant results have been obtained during the monitoring of construction work. Additionally, nineteen stray finds and thirty-four archaeological observations were recorded.

Most excavations and all monitoring activities consist of relatively narrow trenches, meaning that only small sections of the observed archaeological features have been documented. Larger excavations, offering better overall perspectives, are almost exclusively limited to investigations of the town's monasteries. Furthermore, few of the excavations undertaken have reached subsoil levels, leaving the picture of the earliest levels of the stratigraphy incomplete.

All written source material has been reviewed. The town is mentioned in narrative records from

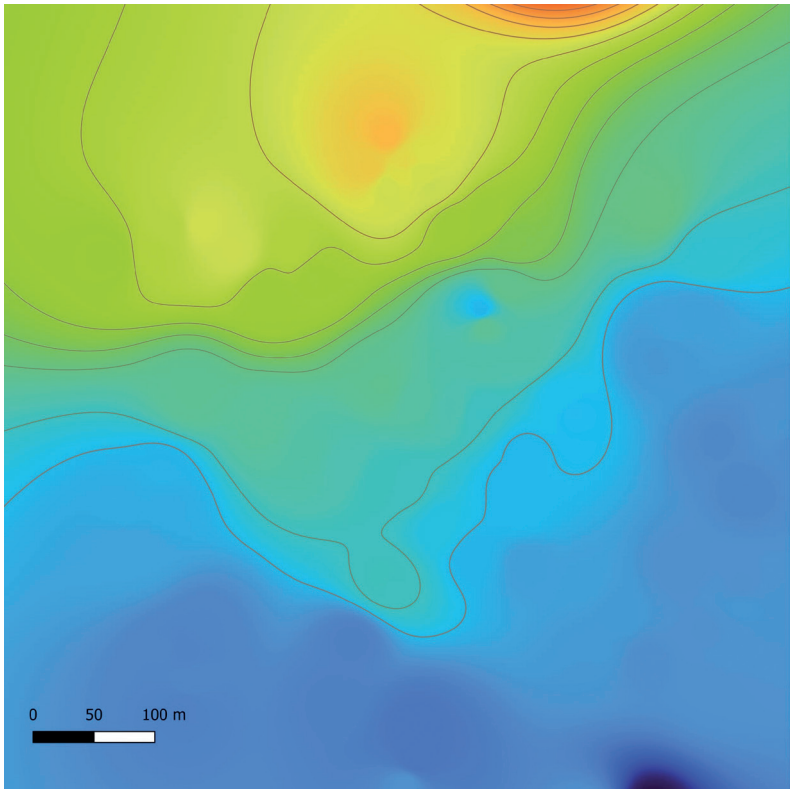

Figure 1. Topographical map with colour-coded elevation and contour lines. It was created using bore samples and levels from excavations (Museum Østjylland).

the twelfth century onwards, as well as in King Valdemar's Survey (*c.*1231) and later royal fiscal records. The medieval town archive of Randers is itself poorly preserved, with many records surviving only as nineteenth-century copies. However, some of the original royal privileges have been preserved (Rep. 1, vol. 4, 97; Rep. 2, vol. 8, 208), along with parts of the guild archives and those of the Helligåndshus institution. Additionally, foreign sources, mostly Hanseatic, mention the town and its townsmen.

Topography

Randers is located on the north side of the river Gudenå at the point just before it flows into Randers Fjord. The town sits on a large, low-lying marine foreland, with a narrow headland extending into the Gudenå Valley, thus enabling the crossing of the river. The landscape, the crossing of the Gudenå, and the navigability of the river were crucial to Randers' emergence, serving as a strong centralizing factor in the town's development.

All travel within a large radius of Randers required crossing the river at this particular point. The relatively short crossing distance suggests that a bridge existed at an early stage. Based on the topography, the bridge was likely located at the same site as the modern Randers bridge. No archaeological traces of medieval bridges have been found, as they were likely removed by later constructions, but early written records frequently mention the bridge. The first mention is in the *Knytlinga Saga*, when in 1157 King Valdemar I crossed via Randers bridge, *Randarússbrú*. As the king had the bridge thrown off (*skjóta af brúnni*), this must have been a plank bridge (Ægidius 1977, 116). The bridge is also often mentioned in connection with fishing (DD 3rd series, vol. 3, no. 393). It appears that the construction of major bridges in Danish towns was typically overseen by the king's regional representative, with the rural population providing labour. In 1551, for example, a royal steward in cooperation with Øm Monastery sent carpenters and oak trees to build Randers bridge (KB, 104).

Bore samples and archaeological excavations indicate that the course of the river Gudenå has not changed since the Middle Ages.[1] They also reveal that the areas around the river were swampy and unsuitable for settlement during this period, which is crucial for understanding the town's harbour conditions (Figure 1). The medieval town was located about 200 metres from the riverbank,

Figure 2. Road network in northern Jutland based on the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences map from the late eighteenth century. Red = Viborg, blue = Randers. The background is derived from De høje Målebordsblade (1870-1899) (Museum Østjylland).

meaning ships could not unload directly into the town. Instead, goods were likely transported via walkways, though no traces of these have been found. A 1736 map shows ships docked at a small island, part of the bridge crossing, which suggests that, even by that time, unloading still occurred on the island before goods were transported into town (Gylliam, L. and Brock, A., Danish National Archives). This practice is documented as early as 1457, when the Danish king ordered that trading should take place *fore browen*, by the bridge (DGK, vol. 2, 241-242). Smaller ships, barges, and boats are mentioned as sailing up the Gudenå in 1443 (Rep. 1, no. 7331), and in 1445, the inhabitants of Randers were granted free access to sail barges on the fjord and river (DGK, vol. 2, 240-241).

In the early stages, parts of the town's trading probably also took place on the islands, before Torvegade took over this function. Randers did not have a formal market square until the dissolution of the Benedictine nunnery of Our Lady in 1462 (Rep. 2, 1489). In other market towns, trading also took place at the harbour (Kristensen and Poulsen 2016, 192).

In addition to being the most significant crossing point of the river Gudenå, Randers was a central hub for land-based traffic in Jutland. To the west of the Hærvejen (the road along the watershed that divides Jutland), all north–south roads converged at Randers bridge (Figure 2). This demonstrates that Randers relied not only on its maritime network, but also significantly on its land-based connections.

Randers: From Viking Age Settlement to Medieval Town

The Oldest Settlement, up to 1150 (Figure 3)

The earliest traces of settlement in Randers consist of a wattle fence found in a backyard at Brødregade 25 (KHM 290, Appendix 6) (Figure 4). This fence has been ^{14}C-dated to 655–878 (95.4%, BP age 1280 ± 55, K-6547), with a 70% probability of falling within the period 655-779. The cultural layers associated with these settlement traces are

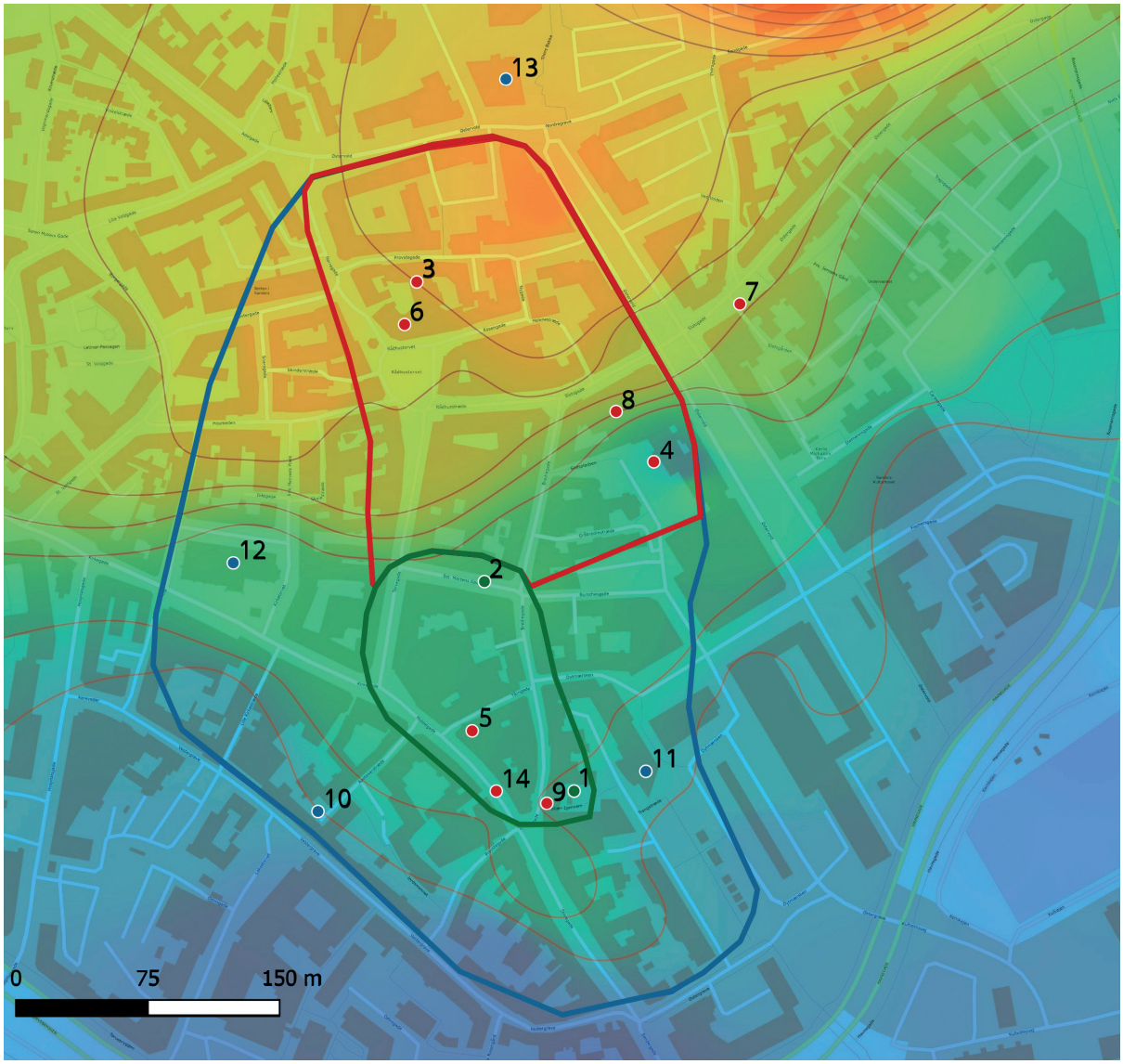

Figure 3. Phases of urban expansion in Randers from the Viking Age to the Late Middle Ages. Viking age is green, early and high medieval red, late medieval blue. 1: Brødregade 25, wattle fence dated to 655-878 (KHM 290), 2: St. Mortensgade, wattle fence dated to 894-1152 (KHM 912), 3: 11th century settlement and workshop (KHM 326/84), 4: Slotspladsen, workshop dated to 1150 (KHM 884), 5: St .Clement's Church, 6: St. Peter's Church, incorporated into the convent of Our Lady in the second half of the 12th century, 7: Slotsgade, building dated to 994-1154 (MOE 01029), 8: Franciscan friary, 9: Timber-framed *bulhus* dated to around 1200 (KHM 65/68), 10: Apotekerstræde, building dated to around 1400 (KHM 178/78), 11: Tanning vats dated to 1420-1440 (KHM 1413), 12: Monastery of the Holy Spirit, 13: Refuse dump at Thors Bakke (MOE 01223), 14: Oak palisade dated to the 1120s (KHM 281; 54/76).

approximately 20 cm thick. Contemporaneous with these finds are two well-preserved swords (KHM 234 and KHM 1257) from the ninth century (Petersen 1919, 89, 117) (Figure 5). One was found in the river Gudenå, the other in the meadows near the river, about 500 metres west of the earliest known settlement traces.

No other traces of settlement from the early Viking Age have been found, and the wattle fence from Brødregade is overlain by cultural layers from the second half of the eleventh century. Settlement traces from the late tenth century are documented in a sewer trench in Skt Mortensgade (KHM 912, Appendix 10), with settlement phases recorded along an east-west parcel boundary, roughly along the middle of the street. A wattle fence has been ^{14}C dated to 894-1152 (95.4%, BP age 1035 ± 40, K-6916), with a 74.1% probability of falling within the period 946-1049. Older settlement traces beneath the fence were observed but not examined further. This indicates that by the late tenth century, a permanent structure had

Figure 4. Wattle wall or fence found in the backyard of Brødregade 25. The earliest trace of settlement in Randers (KHM 0290, Museum Østjylland).

Figure 5. Sword found during diving in the river Gudenå. The sword shows traces of silver and copper inlays on the hilt (KHM 1257, Museum Østjylland).

already been established around what would subsequently become the town's main streets, Torvegade and Brødregade.

Two runestones have been found at Storegade 5 and Vestergrave 46 (KHM 290/72) (Figure 6). Both were incorporated into later buildings. They are dated to 970-1020 (runer.ku.dk: MJy 59 Randers-sten 1; MJy 60 Randers-sten 2). Both the runestones and the earliest settlement traces are located in the southern part of the town, on the headland in the low-lying areas. This suggests that the earliest town likely developed around the crossing point itself.

From the mid-eleventh century onwards, there is a significant increase in recorded archaeological evidence. This increase is interpreted as an actual growth in settlement. The bulk of settlement traces from this period are still concentrated in the southern part of the town (KHM 54/76; KHM 281; Appendix 5, KHM 290; KHM 2314), but settlement traces are also recorded to the north-west of the nunnery of Our Lady, in the northernmost part of the town (Mikkelsen 2002, 31). The first coins were also minted in the town during this period under Canute the Holy in 1085 (Poulsen T.G. 2016, 133-134).

Figure 6. Runestones found in Randers: 1. found in Storegade 5: *Spǫrr raised this stone..., a very good þegn.* 2. found in Vestergrave 46: *Tóki raised this stone in memory of Þorsteinn, his brother, and Ingi, his father* (Museum Østjylland).

Based on the distribution of the archaeological observations, the town seems to have expanded northward but not westward, as no finds from the early medieval period have been discovered in this direction. The expansion, combined with minting, indicates significant activity in the second half of the eleventh century. This continued steadily into the twelfth century, with evidence from sites such as Slotspladsen (KHM 884, Appendix 9) and the convent of Our Lady being of particular importance (326/84, KHM 901, KHM 1201, KHM 2396).

In addition to the traces of settlement, the town's earliest churches also date to this period. St Clement's Church, located in Tårngade where the earliest settlement traces have been recorded, is typologically dated, based largely on the west portal, to the mid-twelfth century (KHM 45/72; Hyldgård 2025). Town churches dedicated to St Clement often date to the 11th or 12th century (Crawford 2006, 246-250; Møller 2023, 62), but it is not possible to date the foundation of the church in Randers precisely. St Peter's Church, later incorporated into the convent of Our Lady, is similarly difficult to date, as its oldest part has not been excavated. Several stylistic and material traits suggest that it may date to the late eleventh century. A burial associated with the church can possibly be dated to around 1100 (Mikkelsen 2002, 27, 32).

The town had two further parish churches, neither of which has been excavated. The predecessor of the current St Morten's Church is first mentioned in 1346, but its founding date is unknown (DD 3. series, vol. 2, no. 315). The foundation date of St Laurentius Church, mentioned in 1470, is likewise unknown (Rep. 2, no. 2781).

Around the same time, a palisade fortification was erected. It is dendrochronologically dated to

the 1120s, although its extent and relationship to the later town boundaries remain uncertain. It is uncertain when a more fully developed system of fortifications defining the later town boundaries was established, as early examples of settlement outside these boundaries have been uncovered. A comb maker's workshop at Vestervold (KHM 1273) is stylistically dated to 1000-1100. At Slotsgade, just beyond Østervold, traces of a building were found (MOE 01029, Appendix 14). This building, located at the edge of Udbyhøjvej, has been ^{14}C-dated to 994-1154 (95.4%, BP age 980 ± 30, Beta - 566830). This points to a less consolidated settlement structure, with boundaries not yet firmly defined.

In summary, archaeological excavations suggest that the town emerged in the late tenth century around the important crossing point of the river Gudenå. The eighth-century settlement traces do not appear to be directly linked to the later town. By the late eleventh century, the settlement had extended towards the northern part of the town.

Taking into account the uncertainty regarding the dating of the churches, Randers fits within the Danish group of large older towns with three or more churches, indicating a high degree of centrality and significance in the region based on its church structure (Andrén 1985, 21). The town had a substantial palisade fortification, and a mint. Seen in the light of central place theory, Randers could now be characterized as a higher-order town, occupying a central position in the Danish town hierarchy.

Settlement 1150-1350 (Figure 3)

A defining feature of this period is the establishment of two monasteries: the Benedictine nunnery of Our Lady in the latter half of the twelfth century, and the Franciscan friary in 1236.

The precise founding date of the nunnery of Our Lady remains uncertain, but the earliest record mentioning the nunnery is from the central third of the twelfth century (Weeke 1884-1889, 242). Its architectural history and dating have been discussed in detail (Mikkelsen 1990, 1996, 1998, 2002). Numerous residential and workshop buildings in and around the monastery complex suggest that it served as a significant growth generator in the town (Mikkelsen 2002, 292; Haase and Bjerregaard 2022, 15). With its establishment, much of the town's activity shifted to its northern end. A record from 1170 mentions the king's manor in Randers (Snorre, *Magnus Erlingsson's Saga*, chapter 29). It has been suggested that this may be a precursor to the nunnery of Our Lady (Spreckelsen 1952, 67), as monasteries were often founded as royal donation and received land for construction on that occasion.

The slightly later Franciscan friary has been excavated multiple times, and its architectural history revisited in more recent analyses (Hyldgård 1996; Kristensen 2003). There is no evidence of secular buildings around it, unlike the nunnery of Our Lady (Kristensen 2003, 61-62).

Numerous settlement traces from the latter half of the twelfth century, as well as the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, have been uncovered. In Trangstræde, the remains of a corner post from a timber-framed *bulhus* dated to around 1200, along with workshop traces, have been found (KHM 65/68, Appendix 2). Supposed *bulhus* structures with uncertain datings were recorded elsewhere in the town during earlier excavations (Bay 1904-1905, 2; KHM 226/72 and KHM 214/72).

In contrast to the preceding period, no settlement traces have been found beyond the boundary defining the medieval town. A fixed legal and probably fortified boundary had apparently been established.

Randers was presumably among the largest towns in Jutland in this period. The so-called Income List from King Valdemar's Land Register (in Danish, *Kong Valdemars Jordebog*, *c.*1231) provides some context (Ulsig and Sørensen 1981). A tax, possibly in lieu of military service, records a levy of 900 marks of silver from Ribe, followed by Kolding (280), Aalborg (170), Randers (160), and Grenå (60) (KVJB, 1, 53). The foundation of the Benedictine nunnery of Our Lady also places Randers among significant Danish towns such as Aalborg, Viborg, Ribe, and Lund, which also saw the establishment of Benedictine nunneries in the twelfth century (Kristensen 1999a, 71). Further evidence of the town's significance comes from a 1322 agreement in which the Prince of Rügen was to receive payment in Aalborg, Aarhus, Horsens,

or Randers (DD 2 series, vol. 8, no. 416). In central Jutland, these must have been the most influential towns.

Settlement 1350-1550 (Figure 3)

The late Middle Ages marked a period of growth and transformation for Randers, characterized by expansion and changes to its urban layout. Settlement traces from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, such as floor layers, wells, and wattle fences, have been uncovered in the western parts of the town (KHM 246, KHM 738, KHM 1448). Excavations in Klostergade and Kirkegade have reached subsoil at depths of 2 to 2.5 metres, testifying to the preservation of massive cultural layers. No layers predating the mid-fourteenth century have been identified, however. This suggests that the lack of older finds in the western part of the town is likely a reflection of the actual historical landscape, rather than just a result of excavation depth.

To the south, the town expanded into the low-lying, wetland areas of the fjord through land reclamation. This activity is documented through infill and the construction of embankments. The scale and apparent coherence of these works suggest a coordinated expansion effort, likely involving centralized planning (KHM 271/87, KHM 431, KHM 1814, MOE 00936, and MOE 01102, Appendix 15; Mikkelsen 1989). Similar planned developments have been documented in Aalborg (Jensen 2009, 82-85). Alongside this, new buildings were erected in Apotekerstræde (KHM 178/78, Appendix 3) and in Dytmærsken, where a backyard area with tanning vats dated to 1420-1440 was found (KHM 1413; Hyldgård 1990).

During this period, several stone houses were also constructed in the town. Among them, the house of the Påske brothers from the 1460s still stands today. The archaeological records of stone houses are relatively thorough (Marstrand 1984, 77; Spreckelsen 1952, 110-112; Spreckelsen 1955). These stone houses were typically gabled houses, located near the city gates and along Torvegade. The house of the Påske brothers exemplifies how a wealthy merchant class consolidated its presence in the town during this period through the use of stone architecture.

Religious construction was equally significant. In 1484–85, the monastery of the Holy Spirit was founded, repurposing the old St Morten's parish church. The monastery soon began work on a new, grand church – today's St Morten's Church – which was completed in 1494 (Bondesen *et al.* 1994, 19-29). The associated monastery complex remains poorly documented (KHM 1448 and MOE 00679), but the surviving Helligåndshus, dating to around 1500, still stands.

In 1451, the nunnery of Our Lady was dissolved and its properties transferred to the newly founded Bridgettine nunnery in Mariager, freeing up large areas in the north-eastern part of the town (Mikkelsen 2002, 13-14). In the streets surrounding the monastery, several building traces dating from after the dissolution of the monastery have been found (KHM 326/84, KHM 681, Appendix 7). Of major significance for the town was the transfer of parts of the monastery's graveyard to allow for the creation of a town square, Rådhustorvet, where the town was granted the right to hold an annual fair and a weekly market day (Rep. 2. ser, 1489).

A striking example of organized urban planning is the creation of the large refuse dump at Thors Bakke (MOE 01223, Appendix 16). Originally a gravel pit, the site was systematically filled with town waste from the late fourteenth century onwards. Thin ash layers were periodically spread to mitigate odours. This project not only cleared waste but also freed up valuable land within the town for other uses, illustrating a coordinated effort to manage urban space.

The activity at Thors Bakke was most intense between 1350 and 1450, coinciding with a decline in deposit accumulation within the town centre. This phenomenon, observed across Scandinavia (Andrén 1988, 62-63), suggests a shift in urban practices, with densely built areas stabilizing while new zones expanded.

Randers' prominence during this period is underscored by its military and political significance. A list of drafted soldiers from 1471 ranks Randers among Jutland's top towns, alongside Aarhus, Horsens, Aalborg, and Ribe, each contributing eighty men. By comparison, Viborg supplied forty and Kolding twenty-four men, while smaller towns sent as few as six (Danske Magazin 4. series, vol.

2, 144). In 1519, Randers provided twenty-four soldiers, surpassed only by Ribe (40) and Aarhus (30) (Viborg Købstads 1940, 35). Frequent royal visits further highlight the town's importance (Porsmose 2024, 225).

Although the Black Death likely reduced the population and weakened the ecclesiastical institutions, Randers maintained a steady growth. Construction activity – both religious and secular – flourished, and land-reclamation projects expanded the urban footprint. These developments reflect a high degree of organizational and economic resilience, as well as a control of town space not previously seen. By the late Middle Ages, Randers had solidified its position as one of Jutland's most significant urban centres.

Town Fortifications and Castle

The medieval town was surrounded by a rampart and ditch. After a period of civil war 1534-1536, King Christian III (*r.*1536-59) modernized the town's fortifications. This later fortification is well documented not only archaeologically, but also in written records and cartographically (KHM 2342; Marstrand 1984, 15-38; Norn 1949, 48-50; Resen 1677).

The oldest documented fortification, first mentioned above, was found in Middelgade and consisted of a strong oak palisade dendrochronologically dated to the 1120s (KHM 281; 54/76) (Figure 3). Its northern extent and relationship to later medieval ramparts and ditches are unknown. This fortification is contemporary with similar structures in other Danish towns such as Viborg, Roskilde, and Lund, and was likely linked to internal conflicts during the second quarter of the twelfth century, including power struggles among King Niels, Erik Emune, Svend, Knud, and Valdemar (Kristensen and Poulsen 2016, 76-77). While it is unclear how long the palisade remained in use, written records show that these twelfth-century fortifications played an important role during the period of internal conflict (Poulsen 2024, 234-236).

The town's medieval rampart, ditch, palisade, and curtain wall are mentioned in fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century records. These indicate the presence of two ditches on the west side of town, as reference is made to an inner ditch (Marstrand 1984, 15-16). Bore samples from 1944 and 1979, along with archaeological observations, confirmed the course of the ditches and the presence of two ditches on the west side of town (KHM 1417, Appendix 12).

The documented fortifications follow the same course as Christian III's later sixteenth-century fortifications, shown in the Resen's Atlas of 1677 (Figure 7). Although many fortifications are undated, remnants of a bridge in Kirkegade have been dendrochronologically dated to 1470-1516 (KHM 1417). At Nørreport and Østerport, both part of Christian III's fortifications, pieces of curtain wall section without connections to the gatehouses have been uncovered (Marstrand 1984, 22). The bridge found in Kirkegade lies opposite Vesterport, which is part of Christian III's fortifications. The location suggests that the earlier fortification line also included a gate here and that Christian III's fortifications followed the same course as the medieval ones. This is supported by the lack of connection between curtain walls and later gates.

On the south side of town, only ambiguous traces of fortifications have been uncovered. In 1899, two oak posts were discovered at the corner of Hospitalsgade and Kirkegade, spaced six metres apart with an intervening layer of planks, suggesting a palisade structure (Marstrand 1984, 25). Similar timber constructions along Kirkegade (KHM 221/72 and KHM 215/72) also suggest lighter fortifications without ditches in the wet areas towards the Gudenå.

According to the *Chronica Sialandie*, Valdemar Atterdag constructed a castle (*castrum*) near Randers in 1357 using material from eleven demolished churches. This was governed by a royal bailiff but was surrendered to the king's enemies later that year (Olsen 1981, 50). When the king besieged Randers in 1359, he set up siege engines and battering rams around the castle (Olsen 1981, 61). Several bailiffs were recorded at Randershus between 1364 and 1366 (DD 3. series, vol. 7, nos. 116, 328, 462, 464). After this, the castle seems to have fallen into disuse.

The remains of Valdemar's castle have never been located. At the Randers Kloster cemetery, a square foundation of fieldstones with a black-tile

Figure 7. Randers, as shown in Resen's Atlas Danicus, 1677 (Museum Østjylland).

floor has been found. Randers Kloster itself is of later date, founded in 1588, and the buildings at the site today date from the 1860s. An early town history from 1833 suggested that this might represent remains of the castle and published a drawing of a building measuring 6x6 metres, with walls about one metre thick (Neckelmann 1833, 10-11). Between 1925 and 1930, construction work in Jernbanegade, next to the cemetery, uncovered a massive fieldstone foundation (KHM 215/73). However, these remains may instead relate to later buildings in the area, such as the prior's farm of the monastery of the Holy Spirit and the later hospital rectory, making interpretations uncertain (Spreckelsen 1952, 54).

Six Hundred Years of urban Development (Figure 3)

Based on the evidence presented above, it is possible to reconstruct the trajectory of the town of Randers from its inception in the early Viking Age to the Reformation. The character of the eighth-century occupation is unclear, but its location near the important crossing point of the river Gudenå in low-lying wetland areas suggests that it was likely not an agrarian settlement. It is probably more accurate to consider it a small trading post. There is no direct functional relation to the later medieval town, as it also seems to be the case in Aalborg and Aarhus (Linaa 2024, 20-22; Søvsø 2018, 18).

The earliest, more widespread settlement appears to have emerged at the end of the tenth century. The eleventh-century palisade aligns with these older settlement traces and represents their southernmost extent. Skt Mortensgade, Torvegade, and Brødregade mark the boundaries of the settlement areas to the north, west, and east respectively.

In the second half of the eleventh century, the town saw a significant expansion, with the built-up area increasing from around 1.5 to some 4.5 hectares. During this period minting also begins. It is likely that one or more of the town's early parish churches were also founded during this period.

The growth in the eleventh century leads to a consolidation phase in the twelfth century, when the town is fortified, the nunnery of Our Lady is established, and at least two parish churches were in place.

During the following two to three centuries, settlement density increases, expressed through

both the intensity of settlement traces and the accumulation of cultural deposits. Geographically, however, the size of the town remained unchanged. During this period, the town received royal privileges, its own town council, and the inhabitants begin to appear in the records as town dwellers. The earliest royal privilege dates from 1302, given to the town's men, *uillanos* (DD 2. series, vol. 5, no. 179).

The settlement pattern changes significantly in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, as the town expands southward towards the river Gudenå through a series of land-reclamation projects. During the same period, the town also extends westward, covering approximately 11.5 hectares. Simultaneously, there is an exceptionally high level of activity in both secular and ecclesiastical brick constructions. Minting resumes once again in the fifteenth century, having ceased in the 1330s following the death of King Christopher II.

By the end of the Middle Ages, Randers had grown into a nationally significant town. This is clearly evident in the speed with which the large St Morten's Church, along with the associated monastery of the Holy Spirit, were built in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. It is also reflected in King Christian III's decision to modernize the fortifications around Randers. This choice is noteworthy, as Christian III typically situated his castles in strategically important border regions (Norn 1949, 116).

Growth Factors

Solid local Prosperity and royal Power

Building on this overview of Randers' development, we can explore the dynamics that fuelled its growth. Among these, undoubtedly, the existence of power elites should be mentioned, even if we doubt that they constituted central growth factors. Both archaeological evidence and written records highlight their presence in the town. For example, the two swords dating back to the ninth century.

The deposition of weapons in water at significant crossings is well documented (Lund 2004, 203), and parallels the tradition of erecting runestones, often near bridges. Between *c.*970 and *c.*1020, a large number of runestones in the triangle formed by Bjerringbro, Randers, and Hobro were raised and show a dense distribution, with at least one runestone per parish (Nielsen 2007, 125). This high concentration suggests a relatively flat hierarchy in society's upper levels, distinct from Denmark's otherwise aristocratic societal structure (Nielsen 2007, 116). The two preserved runestones from Randers mention the names Spurv, Toke, Thorsten, and Inge – the earliest names associated with the town. These individuals likely represent a local elite of landowners. Prior to the eleventh century, such elite groups were key in shaping the significance and centrality of settlements (Skre 2012, 201-202).

The king's guarantee of peace was crucial to the formation of most medieval Danish towns, and there are traces of a royal presence in Randers, such as the choice of St Clement as patron saint for Randers' early parish church. St Clement was a popular saint for early royal churches, often linked to Denmark's oldest towns, and it has been suggested that such churches functioned in connection with royal manors (Crawford, 2006, 235; Dahlström, Poulsen, and Olsen 2018, 73). On the southern bank of the river Gudenå lay a royal manor in Kristrup, mentioned in King Valdemar's Land Register (*c.*1231) and valued at eighty marks of gold, equivalent to twenty to forty farms (KVJB, 1, p. 8; Rasmussen 2011). In 1320, the manor was described as a distinct jurisdiction, known as a *birk* (DD 2. series, vol. 8, no. 257). Despite this significant royal manor, however, the town developed on the opposite side of the river, where traffic conditions were more favourable for growth.

During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, kings began shifting their residences from rural estates to urban royal manors (Poulsen 2024, 237). Randers is referred to as a royal estate (*kongelev*) in Valdemar's Land Register, indicating the presence of a royal manor (KVJB, 1, 26). The hall of a significant manor is specifically mentioned in 1170 when Valdemar the Great hosted Norwegian king Erling Skakke in Randers, accompanied by eighty men (Snorre, *Magnus Erlingsson's Saga*, chapter 29).

As mentioned above, this royal hall may have been located where the nunnery of Our Lady was founded in the late twelfth century. The nunnery

was under royal protection, and the king had the right to appoint its male prior (Spreckelsen 1952, 67), which suggests that Valdemar the Great may have founded the nunnery (Mikkelsen 2002, 294). The Ommersyssel assembly (*ting*) met on the monastery grounds, further indicating its link with the royal administration (Nielsen 1867, 58).

Following the fourteenth century collapse of royal power and the interregnum 1332-1340, where most of the Danish realm was in the hands of counts of Holstein, Randers briefly became Jutland's administrative centre in 1340 when Count Gerhard III of Holstein made it his headquarters.

The minting of coins in Randers provides further evidence of royal presence. The earliest coins date from the reign of Canute the Holy. Coinage continued under Eric the Good, Niels, Sweyn Grathe, and Valdemar the Great (Poulsen T.G. 2016, 133-142, 2022b, 24, 26, 35). The identification of minting subsequently becomes difficult as there are no longer inscriptions on Danish coins. It is therefore no longer possible to securely attribute coin production to Randers, although a document from 1329 suggests that minting likely continued in the town (DD 2 series, vol. 10, no. 126). During the reign of Eric of Pomerania (1412-1439), the town played a significant role, as his so-called copper sterlings (three *penninge*) were mass-produced there.

Eleventh- and twelfth-century coinage reveals a close connection between Randers, Viborg, and Aalborg, as they issued identical coin series, differing only in the town name (Poulsen T.G. 2016, 133, 136; 2022a, 54). Studies of coin dies from Eric the Good reveal that identical obverse dies were used in production, indicating collaborative or coordinated production (Bendixen 1993, 14). This collaboration likely reflects a cooperative royal administration linking the mints of Randers, Viborg, and Aalborg, a connection further underscored by the association of these coins with major political events such as Canute the Holy's planned campaign to England and Eric the Good's pilgrimage (Poulsen T.G. 2022a, 54).

A medieval Danish town is not conceivable without the presence of a landholding elite or royal authority, as the evidence from Randers also demonstrates. However, the town's location – at a critical crossing of the river Gudenå and at the convergence of multiple roads – provided the logistical foundation for its growth. The expansion of networks, crafts, and trade, combined with its position at this communication hub, became a strongly centralizing factor.

Crafts

The traces of craft activity in Randers can be divided into three categories: those activities identified during excavation, those recognized later through artefact material, and those attested in written records (Hyldgård 2022). The written records, mainly from the late Middle Ages, complement these archaeological findings and provide additional insights into the town's craft economy.

The earliest craft traces are from comb manufacturing (KHM 1273) and leatherworking (KHM 884). The nunnery of Our Lady later became a hub for various crafts, including copper-working, lead-casting, and malting (Mikkelsen 2002, 287–294). Evidence of a needle-maker's workshop and copper-working has also been identified (KHM 128/70), together with textile production (KHM 65/68). Shoemaking is documented from the fourteenth century onwards (KHM 765, KHM 178/78, KHM 681, MOE 01452) (Hyldgård 1984), while tanning in Dytmærsken dates to the fifteenth century (KHM 1413).

The artefact material reveals significantly more traces of crafts. These include two comb-making workshops (KHM 78/76, KHM 290) and twenty locations with finds of worked animal bones. More detailed studies would be required to determine the full significance of this material. The same applies to slag discovered at twenty-three locations across the town. Specific metallurgical evidence comprises clinker shells and furnace slag (KHM 884), a mould fragment (MOE 1223), and a crucible. Textile production is indicated by spindle-whorls and loomweights, commonly associated with Viking age and early medieval contexts, particularly sunken-featured buildings used for craft activities (Haase 2022, 217; Runge *et al.* 2021, 142). Lead waste at eight locations corresponds with written evidence of lead imports, particularly via Lübeck (USL vol. 10, no. 148; Baur

2018). Amber-working may have taken place near Apotekerstræde, where four raw amber lumps (KHM 178/78, MOE 01102) were found at two adjacent excavation sites, a concentration that suggests the presence of a workshop.

The written late medieval records reveal significant specialization, with eighteen crafts represented by personal surnames. These include basic crafts such as baking, tailoring, shoemaking, carpentry, stonemasonry, blacksmithing, and painting, alongside more specialized crafts. Military-related trades include swordsmiths, spur-smiths, and armourers, while blacksmithing shows further differentiation with fine metalworkers, goldsmiths, and cauldron casters. A notable figure was Peter Jensen, a bell-caster active in the early fifteenth century. His bells, inscribed 'Petrus de Randrusia', reflect his high productivity and reputation (Madsen 2012; Uldall 1906, 154). Beer brewing occurs in a 1379 record mentioning brewing equipment (DD 4. series, vol. 1, no. 485). Fishing, another vital craft, is also well documented in the written records.

The composition of the archaeologically identified craft activities in Randers is typical for the medieval period, with traces of comb manufacturing, shoemaking, and textile production. As the written records also indicate, this corresponds to what is found in other larger towns (Poulsen 2009). Bell-casting and amber-working, however, highlight the diversity of crafts practised in the town. Further analysis of artefacts from Randers would undoubtedly yield deeper insights. However, even with the current state of knowledge, it is clear that Randers had a robust and diverse craft economy that was integral to its medieval growth.

Trade and Networks

The communication hub of Randers provided goods, facilitated trading as well as economic and social networks beyond the town and its surrounding area, the hinterland, as evidenced by various sources. Merchants were active in the town, and late medieval records explicitly mention both pedlars and merchants. The merchants of the thirteenth century were likely members of the town's Knud's Guild, and the statutes of the *Købmands- og kræmmerlav* (Merchants and Peddlers Guild) from 1417 have been preserved (Nyrop 1899; Nyrop 1899-1904, vol. 1, 560). Among the identifiable merchant families, the Påske family stands out; it is mentioned in the records as one of its members was killed by a rich local nobleman, Lave Brok, in 1468 (Rep. 2, 2478).

International Connections

Archaeology provides insights into trade and long-distance contacts through non-locally produced artefacts. The oldest reliably identified imports are soapstone from Norway. The amount of soapstone in Randers is modest, comparable to finds in Viborg and Odense but significantly less than in Aalborg (Jensen 2017, 62-63; Kristensen 1998, 358–359; Runge and Henriksen 2018, 52). In the bone material from a comb-maker workshop, reindeer bones have been found, likewise indicating Norwegian contacts (KHM 78/76). These finds have been made exclusively in the southern part of the town near the oldest settlement traces. Both Saxo and Snorre Sturlason suggest that there were close trading relations between Aalborg, Randers, and Norway, including the broader Skagerrak region (Poulsen 2024).

Millstones and numerous whetstones, believed to originate mainly from Norway, have been found throughout the town. Their widespread distribution in medieval towns and villages, however, suggests they are not necessarily as indicative of international networks as other imported items.

Ceramics constitute the most numerous artefacts. A few pieces of imported ceramics from the late Viking Age and early Middle Ages, such as Pingsdorf and Paffrath types, have been found exclusively in excavations around the nunnery of Our Lady. A similar pattern is seen in Aalborg and Odense (Runge *et al.* 2021, 144). The earlier imported material is otherwise dominated by Andenne and especially Rouen ceramic from thirteenth/fourteenth-century Northern France. A connection to Flanders via the Øresund is mentioned in 1324, when merchants from Randers took cloth, salt, and other goods from merchants of Ghent anchored in Copenhagen harbour (DD no. 13240401001).

The most common imported ceramics are stoneware and near-stoneware from the Rhine

region, typically Siegburg. These types dominated Danish imports in the latter half of the Middle Ages (Linaa 2006, 73). In Randers, stoneware is found throughout the town. At the Thors Bakke refuse dump it only constitutes about 1% of the material (MOE 01223). However, the refuse dump generally contains few traces of luxury consumption and import ceramics. In Trangstræde, near the harbour area, stoneware makes up 7% of the ceramic material (KHM 65/68, KHM 271/87). While stoneware dominated imported ceramics in the later Middle Ages, its quantity varied significantly between Danish towns (Haase and Hammers 2021, 18). A comparison of stoneware-find identifications per museum case shows an average of 4.7 identified finds per case in Viborg and Aalborg, compared to 7.6 in Randers.[2]

It is not possible to identify signs of trade in the common grey-fired and red-fired ceramic material, based solely on the descriptions in the museum's records. Thin burnished tankards from the southern Baltic coast around Rostock and Greifswald, however, do suggest eastern connections. These vessels imitate stoneware shapes and are dated to *c.*1300-1450 (Linaa 2016, 213). They can be confused with locally produced Jutland black pots (*jydepotter*) and are rarely recognized at first, meaning the material is likely more extensive (MOE 01223 x1543, KHM7534d, KHM271/87-x/005).

Cloth seals are clear indications of imports. A total of twenty-three have been found in the town, sixteen of which came from the Thors Bakke refuse dump. Of these, six could be identified as originating from the city of s'Hertogenbosch (Liebgott 1975, 38). This is a substantial number, as these seals come from only one location in Randers. For comparison, 117 cloth seals have been recorded in the metal detector database DIME from across the administrative area of Museum Østjylland.

Coin finds reflect the royal monopoly on currency rather than patterns of exchange (Poulsen T.G. 2022a, 59-64), and Randers is no exception. A total of 403 coins has been registered from the town. From the fourteenth century onwards, a few North German coins and a single English sterling have been found, but otherwise all coins are Danish. This predominance of Danish coinage should therefore not be taken as evidence of limited foreign contact, but rather as a consequence of the requirement that only Danish coin was to be used in transactions.

Lübeck appears to have been central to Randers' late medieval sea trade, and it features in numerous sources. In 1388, two citizens from Randers had their ship detained in Lübeck harbour for failing to deliver a previously ordered cargo from Randers. This indicates regular shipping between the two harbours (DD no. 13880713001). The nature of imported goods is evident in a case from the Lübeck court in 1462 in which two citizens from Randers had purchased eight shiploads of lead from a citizen of Lübeck (LUB, vol. 10, no. 148, 151; Baur 2018, 531). In 1598, customs records describe the cargo of a Lübeck ship in Randers harbour: butter, tallow, hides, and skins (Hvidtfeldt 1940, 82). Animal products were undoubtedly major exports from Randers, along with grain. The close relationship with Lübeck is also evident in documents from court cases arising from this contact.

The main North German town was also a major market for oxen, central to Danish trading from the mid-fifteenth century onwards. In 1465, two Lübeck citizens bought sixty oxen in Ribe from a Randers merchant (LUB X, no. 652). From 1497 onwards, the cattle dealer Hans Pedersen from Randers became prominent, sending 979 oxen southward (Enemark 2003, vol. 2, 279, 298). Gradually, the oxen extended their reach beyond Lübeck; by 1542, a Randers townsman had reached a market in Buxtehude south of Hamburg with his oxen (Enemark 2003, vol. 1, 252).

Several immigrants from Randers appear in the Lübeck records, including Thiedeman Rind 'de Randerhusen' (1326-1328) (DD no. 13260525001). Close relations are also expressed through numerous inheritance cases. For example, a Randers citizen inherited half a house and a brewing kettle from his father-in-law in Lübeck in 1351 (DD no. 13510321001). Inheritance cases involving payments between Randers and Lübeck are documented from 1351.[3] Further isolated examples mention relatives of Randers citizens in Wismar. However, Lübeck was clearly the centre of Randers' international sea trade, as emphasized by the unusual number of written records (Baur 2018, 504).

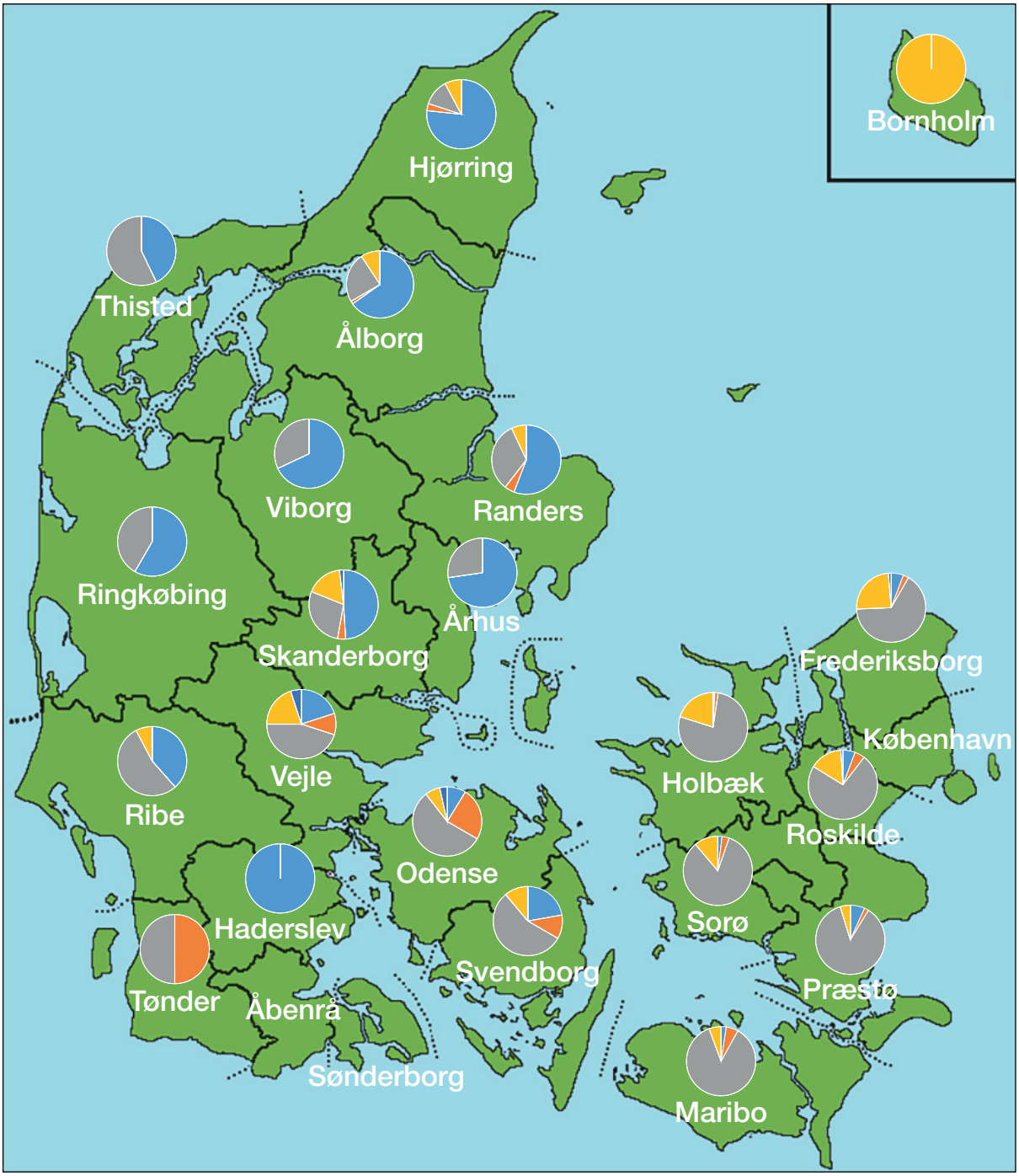

Figure 8. Distribution pattern of 1422 copper pennies in Denmark. The pie charts show the distribution of copper pennies from Randers (blue), Næstved (grey), Odense (orange), and Lund (yellow) across each county (Museum Østjylland).

Taken together, the artefact material suggests that exchange networks were initially directed northwards to Norway and later shifted westwards towards northern France, the Rhine region, and the Netherlands. Rhenish stoneware and cloth likely came to Denmark primarily from Northern German cities. This development is supported by the written records. Records also support the notion of an active sea trade between Randers and these cities.

Regional Contacts

The town was naturally also oriented towards the surrounding region, from where goods arrived via road and by barges and small boats along the river Gudenå.

In the 1420s, large quantities of copper pennies ("*kobbersterlinge*") were minted in Randers. The spread of these coins illustrates the town's regional and national network, but also the export of a

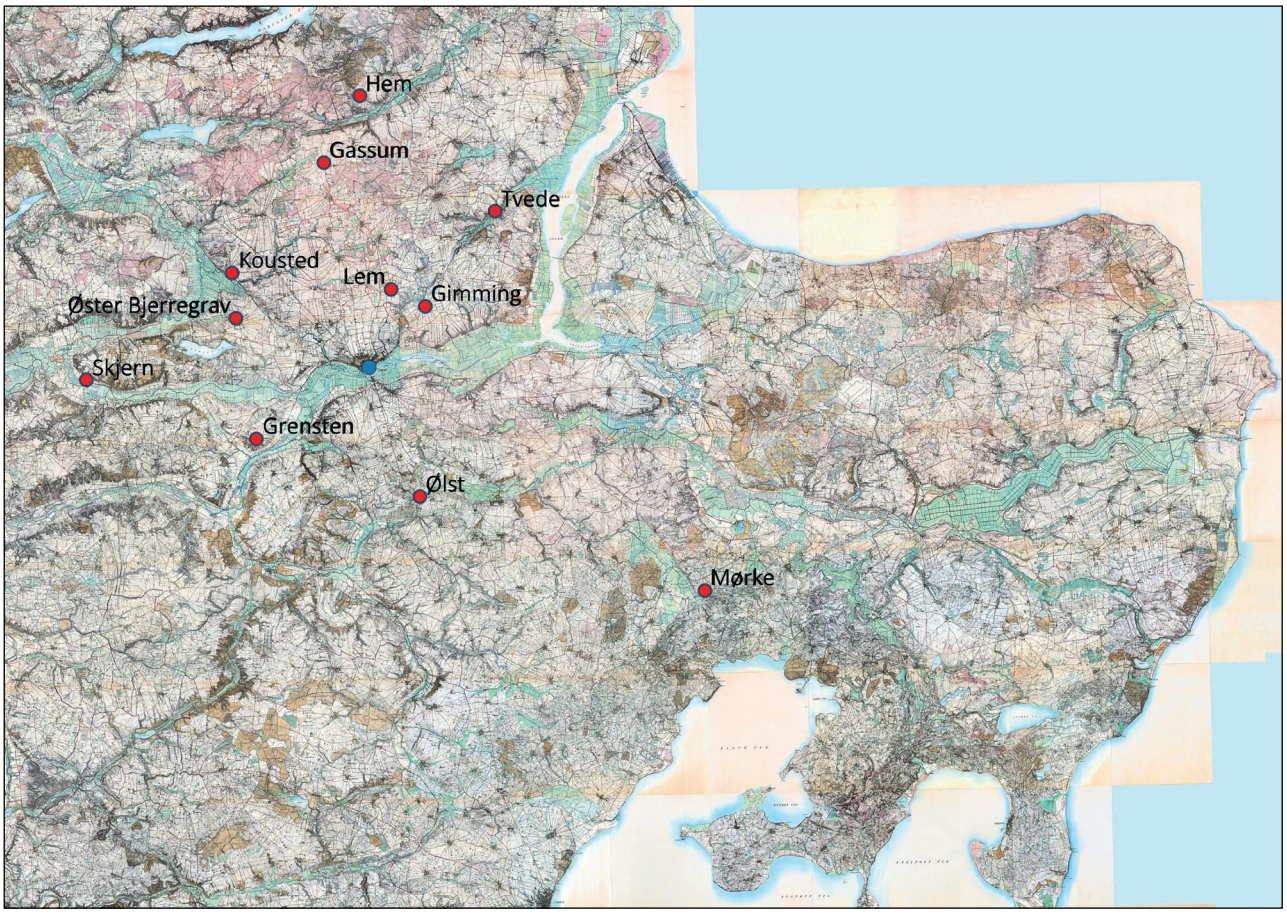

Figure 9. Churches with looped portals (*sløjfeportal*). The churches are centred around Randers (marked in blue). Thirteenth century (Museum Østjylland).

Randers product. Minting was royal, and the coins were part of larger circulation patterns, but the coins were made in Randers and transported out of the town through payment transactions. Therefore, the distribution of the finds clearly represents a contact network related to the town.

The pennies of the 1420s were produced in Randers, Odense, Næstved, and Lund; they constitute the largest group of detector-found coins in Denmark (Märcher 2018, 384). The overall distribution pattern of copper pennies shows that they spread over almost all of Denmark, but with a significantly higher concentration in Zealand than Funen and Jutland (Figure 8).[4] Part of this pattern is likely due to detectorist activity, as finds tend to cluster in intensively searched areas rather than reflecting the true historical distribution, but areas with few finds, such as Western Jutland, also indicate weak commercialization and monetarization. Pennies from Randers have mostly been found in Jutland, with the highest concentration in Northern Jutland around the eastern Limfjord and the northern part of Hjørring county.[5] There is also a large concentration in Central and Eastern Jutland, particularly in Randers, Aarhus, Skanderborg, Viborg, and the eastern part of Ringkøbing county. The distribution of pennies from Næstved, on the other hand, shows that these coins are most commonly found in Zealand and the Southern Islands, with a fairly even distribution across all counties. The distribution of copper pennies from Randers suggests that the town's exchange network was oriented around Central and Eastern Jutland as well as the northern and eastern parts of Northern Jutland. While the former represents regional trade, the concentration in Northern Jutland highlights the significance of contacts with the Limfjord area.

Another object connected to the town's communication network is exported church art in the shape of the thirteenth-century looped portals (*sløjfeportal*) clustered in the churches around Randers (Mackeprang 1948, 23). Architectural details suggest that these portals were produced centrally in a workshop and sold to the churches. Given their

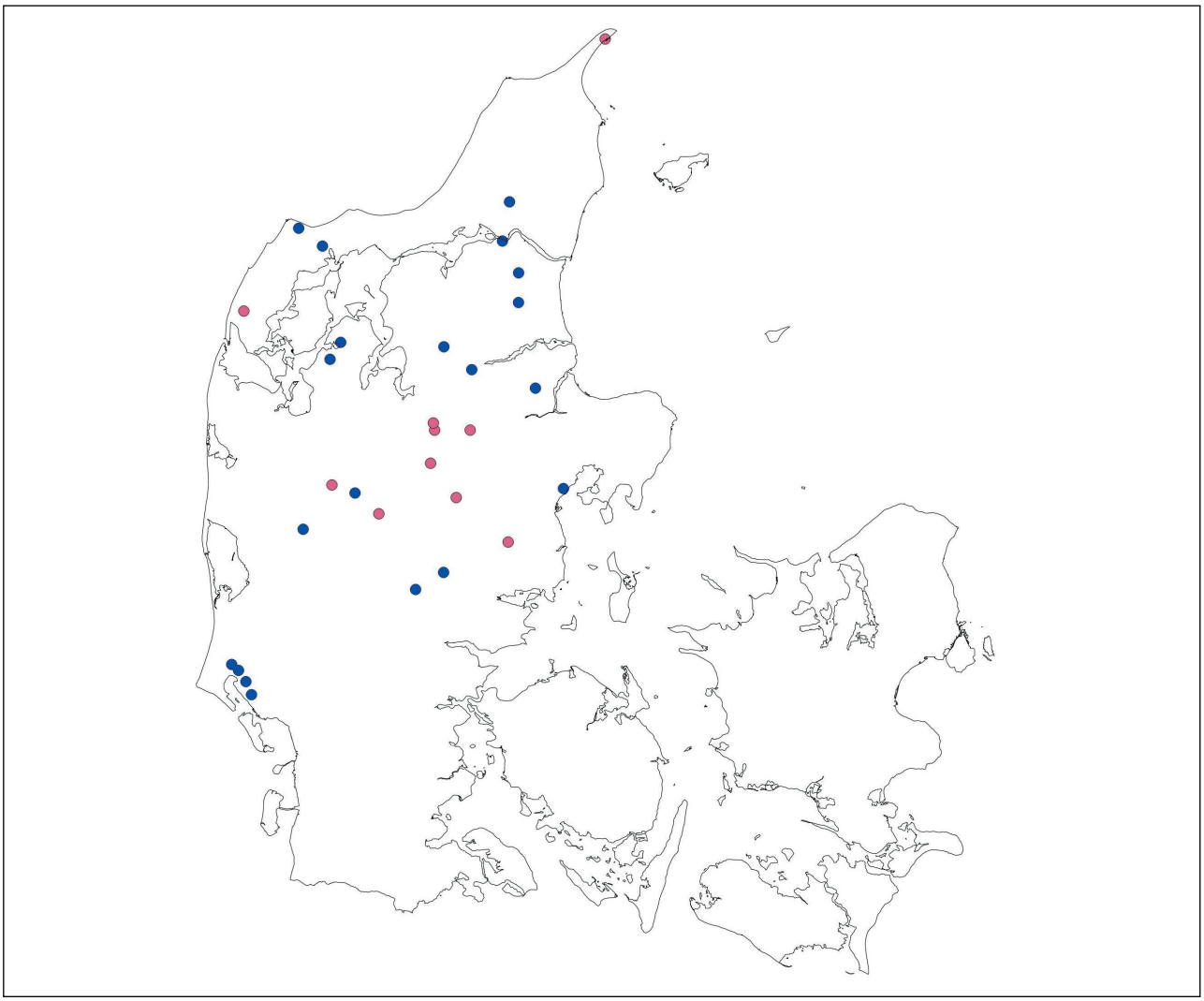

Figure 10. Distribution of church bells by the bell-caster Peter Jensen (marked in blue) and his possible successor (marked in pink). Fifteenth century (Museum Østjylland).

distribution around Randers, it is likely that this workshop was located in the town (Vellev 1981, 48-51). The ten churches with looped portals share no other common factors that could explain the decorative choice (Vellev 1981, 55). The distribution of the looped portals thus almost certainly indicates a market area (or hinterland) around the town (Figure 9). Only the churches of Ølst and Mørke are located south of the river Gudenå; all others are to its north.

A market area is also indicated by the group of church bells made by the bell-caster Peter Jensen and his possible successor. Records exist of twenty bells from Peter Jensen, dated between 1419 and 1459, and an additional ten from his presumed successor, including one dated to 1466 (Uldall 1906, 154-162). The distribution of these bells mirrors that of the copper pennies from Randers (Figure 10). Firstly, the bells are exclusively found in churches in Jutland; secondly, there is a concentration around Central and Eastern Jutland. Bells were also exported to the Limfjord area and Northern Jutland.

The written sources cover a broad range of contacts, from donations to the town's ecclesiastical institutions to commercial transactions. In 1483, the citizens of Randers were granted the royal right to trade at all annual fairs in Jutland, and in 1505, the king decreed that the citizens of Randers should be exempt from fees at Northern Jutland (Nørrejylland) fairs (DGK, vol. 2, 243-244, 249-250). More relevant, however, was the local regional market. A man from Hobro had a stall in Randers in 1421; in 1252, a beggar from Randers had travelled to Viborg. Several late medieval sources document contacts and

migration between the two towns (Olrik 1894, vol. 2; DD no. 14060415001).

The Scania annual herring fair attracted only a few Randers townsmen, as they seem to have been more involved in fishing in the Limfjord. In 1443, the Danish king reiterated that the citizens of Randers had duty-free access to the Limfjord (DGK, vol. 2, 239-240). The duty-free access was again confirmed in 1483 (DGK, vol. 2, 243-244). Further details on Randers' fishing in the Limfjord appear in various letters from the sixteenth century, mentioning activities at locations such as Mov, Hals, and Dokkedal, where merchants' goods and salt were sent in the spring (KB 1551-55, 259, 264).

Randers' role as a communication hub with extensive trade networks is supported by both archaeological and written sources. Regionally, the town occupied a strong economic position within Central and Eastern Jutland, while also maintaining important ties across Northern Jutland, reflected in privileges such as duty-free access to the Limfjord and rights to trade at fairs throughout Jutland. Internationally, its contacts were initially oriented towards Norway, before shifting westwards to northern France, the Rhineland, and the Netherlands, with goods from these regions reaching Denmark primarily through Northern German cities. Lübeck emerged as a central partner in this network, with written sources documenting regular freight and close personal connections between Randers' citizens and the Hanseatic town.

Discussion

Randers had roots in local Iron Age communities. Settlement traces are found from the eighth century, but the town only began to grow in the late Viking Age where it became a commercial centre. This growth was based on exchanges with its hinterland and regional area and was catalysed by its location in a road network and on a river system. The development of the Randers urban society, as we see it, was driven by a bottom-up process, even if other factors involving elite control certainly also played a role.

The presence of a royal manor and elite men provided trade protection and promoted production, furthering the town's growth. Specialized craftsmen, such as comb-makers and coppersmiths, were present in the town as early as the eleventh to twelfth centuries and, judging by the rapid accumulation of cultural layers, significant development occurred in the town in the twelfth century. Growth was also reflected in the establishment of the nunnery of Our Lady and the construction of at least two parish churches, along with the fortification of the town. It is evident that the town was already well established by the twelfth century.

This development took place in accordance with the overall urbanization in Denmark during the eleventh to twelfth centuries, a period in which Randers became part of a network of towns covering the whole kingdom. To put it in terms of central place theory, the town established itself as a central place of higher order, with functions spanning a wide area – a position it would maintain and expand throughout the Middle Ages. Randers shares key characteristics with other Danish market towns of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, such as Næstved and Horsens, where trade and crafts, rather than episcopal or royal institutions, were the primary drivers of growth. This places Randers within a broader category of commercially oriented towns that combined strong regional ties with participation in wider networks. Such comparisons underline that Randers was not an isolated case but part of a general pattern of market-town development in medieval Denmark.

There are as argued indications that Randers early on became part of a Northern Jutland and regionally related cluster of towns formed as a triangle between Randers, the Limfjord area with Aalborg, and Viborg's inland. Together with Aalborg, Randers also had a role in an exchange system with Norway, to the extent that almost no imported goods other than Norwegian are found in the earliest settlement. Later on, Randers assumed a role as partner in a Baltic Sea system with Lübeck as its core. These Baltic connections are reflected in both written and material sources. At a regional level, material sources from the high and late Middle Ages display clear connections to Jutland, especially Central and Northern Jutland. There is little evidence of contact with Zealand and Funen, and only minimal connections to Southern

Jutland. In Randers, this period is characterized by significant urban expansion, evidenced by a doubling of the built-up area and intense activity in both secular and ecclesiastical high-status construction.

Randers was thus a thriving town, characterized by its strong regional ties and its early contact with Norway. The town's character reflects its relative independence, with the absence of a bishop's seat apparently promoting, rather than hindering, the town's ability to develop as a trade and specialized craft centre. At the same time, both written and material sources reveal a town that was also capable of integrating into larger international contexts. The town placed itself in the network of Danish medieval towns, deeply integrated in local regions, and at times, it emerged as one of the most important towns in Jutland.

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Notes

1 Bore sample data has been collected from GEUS's publicly available Jupiter database, as well as from the private Geo-Atlas database. The owner, Geo, has kindly made the database available for the research project.
2 The analysis is based on extracts from the national database, SARA. This material was provided by Christian Vrængmose Jensen and Lars Agersnap, from Nordjyske Museer and Museum Wibergis respectively.
3 DD no. 1350515002, DD 3. series, vol. 5, no. 358. DD 3. series, vol. 8, no. 98. DD 4. series, vol. 4, nr. 553. Baur 2018, pp. 489, 504, 540, 570.
4 For the analysis of the distribution of coin finds, data provided by Helle Horsnæs has been used. The data covers the period from 1970 to 2019 and consists of 5,374 coins, of which 1,528 could be geographically identified (Horsnæs 2020).
5 The obverse of the coinage bears the inscription 'Moneta Rander', while the reverse shows a small ring in one of the cross angles of the central cross. On coins from Næstved, there is a small nettle leaf in the cross angle, while the coins from Odense and Lund only have the inscription indicating the minting location. Thus, the Randers and Næstved coins are the most frequently found, as they are more easily recognizable and therefore particularly well suited for distribution analysis.

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Supplementary Material

Appendix 1: Randers - Archaeological records and excavations
Appendix 2-16: Basic data on relevant excavation cases