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Medieval Roskilde - an Urban-Archaeological Survey

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For many towns evidence of their origins and early development can be gained from the archaeological finds and observations which non-archaeologists through ages have delivered to museums or noted down. This material may, however, be large and difficult to use directly; but it is possible to get some ideas of trends of town development by plotting such finds and observations on to a map. The procedure of mapping all old finds has been tried before in countries where medieval town archaeology is well established, as in England (Can 1934; Jope 1952, 1956; Waterman 1959; Addyman and Biddle 1965; Biddle, Hudson and Heighway 1973), Germany (Lung 1956) or Norway (Fisher 1920; Lunde 1977). In Denmark H.U. Ramsing in 1940 published a survey of the medieval topography of Copenhagen based on a combination of information gained from diggings and written evidence.

In 1977 the Danish Research Council for the Humanities embarked on a programme of research on medieval towns, which was to run for a period of four years. The aim was to investigate the origin and topographical development of towns through all available sources – archaeological, scientific, written, and cartographic, and then follow these studies up by archaeological excavations. As it would have exceeded the available means to study all of the more than fifty medieval Danish boroughs, ten towns were selected: Ribe, Horsens, Århus, Viborg, and Aalborg in Jutland; Odense and Svendborg on Funen; and Næstved, Roskilde, and Køge on Zealand. In addition Søborg on Zealand, demoted from the status of borough in postmedieval times was included. New archaeological investigations in these towns were to be concentrated on sites where the preliminary survey of the sources suggested that particular topographical questions could be answered.

It must be noted that this paper was first written in 1979 when the work had only been in progress for two years and before the phase of archaeological excavations. Hence we have concentrated on the problems and results of the preliminary data collection rather than on the results from the excavations.

For the ten towns old as well as new archaeological data is collected for the purpose of plotting them on maps of the towns. This is not without problems, and the results gathered will be presented here, illuminated by examples from Roskilde.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOURCES FROM ROSKILDE

Roskilde is notable for having a large number of archaeological finds as well as a rich amount of (medieval) written sources. Thus different types of information can be compared and used as supplement to each other. All finds from medieval Roskilde have been registered, whether in Roskilde Museum or in the National Museum. The latter contains medieval objects from Roskilde delivered as far back as 1802. The number of recorded finds, observations, and excavations reaches 541. Archaeological excavations are by far the smallest group. Additional data can be gleaned from the local historical literature and from newspapers. The latter have not been examined systematically in the course of the project, but the local literature has provided some useful information, as, for example, the reference in Pontoppidan's work from 1774 to medieval burials, observed during the building of a house in 1765.

The registration was done by Michael Andersen at Roskilde Museum, and by Gert Posselt under the supervision of Jørgen Steen Jensen at the Royal Coin Cabinet. The museum collections were registered from the accessions ledgers, as an examination of

every single object was judged to be too time-consuming in view of the purpose of the registration. Special problems may later require that specific finds are examined, but for the preliminary survey we have found the method sufficient.

The material falls into three main categories:

1. Stray finds.
2. Reports of observations of buried archaeological monuments.
3. Proper archaeological excavations.

The groups differ in character as well as in the value of information obtainable.

1. *Stray finds* make up the largest category. They were often collected and presented to the museums by interested members of the public who had gathered them from gardens, building sites, sewer trenches, etc. Especially at building sites many objects might be found at the same time. In such cases the finder may have selected for the museum those which seemed most appealing, thereby choosing mainly "nice" things for the collection. When pottery is selected this way there will, mostly likely, be a greather representation of glazed pottery and stoneware from the later Middle Ages than of the grey-black sherds which provide evidence of the early period of the history of the town. This "method" of collecting finds limits, of course, the representativity of the pottery. The same, no doubt, applies to other kinds of objects. Coins are an exception. They are Treasure Trove and must be surrendered to the National Museum. Although many no doubt have remained in private hands, the map, fig. 3, shows that a very large number has been retrieved from the soil of Roskilde and registered.

2. *Reports of observations of buried archaeological monuments* have in the older times not always been checked by experts. The recorded information can be rather scanty, such as "discovery of a wooden pavement in the Town Hall Square" or "discovery of wall, probably from a monastery, running north-south". At best the depth is recorded, but seldom other details which might have helped to establish date and function. The various information about wells, pavements, or building remains does, however, give indications where fruitful excavations may be carried out. Interpretation of this kind of data must, however, be made with great caution in contrast to another set of data, namely information concerning burials or skeletons. These can always be presumed to indicate cemeteries attached to ecclesiastical institutions, important to the understanding of the early topography of the town. Moreover, skeletons are nearly always noticed and probably just as frequently reported.

3. *Proper archaeological excavations* had not been carried out in many Danish towns before the recent decades. In the 50's and 60's few took place in Roskilde, but Roskilde Museum has since 1978 conducted investigations aimed at solving problems of the topography of the medieval town. However, churches and other major stone-built monuments have always attracted attention, and a number of church sites were examined earlier. Excavations around the cathedral, and the churches of St. Laurentii, St. Olai, and All Saints are presented in *Danmarks Kirker, Københavns Amt (1944–51)*. In the 50's and early 60's St. Clemens' Church on Sankt Jørgensbjerg and St. Ib's Church were excavated by Olaf Olsen (Olsen 1960, 1963).

The source material is thus large and varied. Before proceeding further a number of problems have to be considered, especially concerning the location and dating of stray finds and observations.

THE PROBLEMS OF LOCATION

Many of the objects and observations were presented to the museums with vaguely recorded provenance only, often just the name of a street, in a few more fortunate cases with the house or land registry number. When the provenance is the like of "found in gardener Thomsen's garden on Frederiksborg Road" one has to search through old directories. This means that many finds must be plottet with only a general reference to a street or a property without precise location on the property.

Furthermore, information of stratification or of the relative depths in which the objects were found is missing. When objects are presented as a single lot like this they can be distinguished chronologically but not stratigraphically and there is no way of knowing whether the mixture occurred before or after the things were found. When mapping we have marked all the periods represented, but it is important to bear in mind that isolated finds cannot be used as an indication of settlement nor of its date, as they can be in secondary position. Still, it is possible to use the distribution map in its totality to draw broader con-

clusions about the growth of the town in different periods. The map, then, partly demonstrates what has been given to the museums as objects or observations, and we have only few possibilities of ascertaining how the things got there in the first place. Anyway, similar finds from neighbouring plots must bear evidence of the former use of the area. Two groups of finds must be excluded from this uncertainty. Skeletons and coin hoards can safely be assumed to indicate original deposit sites. If they were moved at all they would inevitably be scattered and thus become bones and coins.

HOW REPRESENTATIVE IS THE DISTRIBUTION?

Blank areas on the map may only show the absence of more recent gardening, building work or interested people, so negative evidence is of use only when confirmed by excavations or observations by archaeologists, as done south of the street, Bondetinget. Occupation material missing at this site was probably due to Sømme Herreds Ting; "ting" being the moot of the ancient military and judicial area, "herred", equivalent to the English hundred (fig. 1,1). It is, however, remarkable that no finds have been collected from the area north of the Bondeting, site of the ancient royal manor (fig. 1,2). The land was sold in the 1450's to various ecclesiastical persons. The plot where the royal manor had stood, just north of the Bondeting, became the property of Bo Madsen, a priest. The royal grant described the site as "filled with refuse and rubbish". Bo Madsen himself accounts in great detail the clearing of the site, which was more or less a garbage dump, when he received it:

"... The site was in those days bare and unsuitable for buildings, as it was completely filled by a great mountain of garbage and refuse, gathered from streets and lanes and from the houses of clerks and citizens ... I did not let myself be stopped by such matters but made a concerted effort to clear the land. One day during the first three months I hired more than 40 workmen and used only carts for two horses. Clerks, priests and monks gathered in order to watch the proceedings and each one of them threw off his cloak and joined in the work as long as he was able to. That day three barrels of ale were barely sufficient; they were emptied down to the last drop. On other days during the early summer, I would hire two workmen one day, three another day. I am not able to say exactly how much work has been done, nor how great my costs were in clearing the area. For a period of five years I have often used spare hours for working, along with the young people in my charge, with wheelbarrows so the sweat ran.". (Translated from Petersen 1889–90, p. 356 & p. 339).

One might expect that a clearance of this nature had removed all traces of the royal manor. In 1980 a trial excavation was carried out, and the signs of Bo Madsen's work were recognized. However, the deepest layers remained untouched and could be dated to the first half of the thirteenth century, when workers dug clay at the site. This activity was probably carried out in connection with the construction work on the cathedral, then being rebuilt in brick. The digging could have destroyed still earlier archaeological evidence.

We know that soil from the old town was used as fill at another place in recent times, resulting in the discovery of several coins. An enthusiastic coin collector has left an account with the National Museum's Coin Cabinet. The place was a market garden within the north-west part of the fortifications (fig. 3,1). It had previously been a swamp, but fill had been brought from the town. The collector was allowed to spend a couple of hours every morning, and thus he had the opportunity to observe that one of the workmen kept finding coins in the fill, especially in newly raked beds after heavy rains during the spring. The same gardener found coins in many other gardens in the town. From the registrations of the research project it is apparent that gardeners in particular have turned in coins to the National Museum. The story is a reminder of how careful one must be in considering whether finds derive from secondary or from primary deposits. Despite these examples of deceptions caused by the moving of soil in the past and present, we may assume, however, that finds by and large belong to the place where they were found, especially if they come from deep modern building excavations in the town centre.

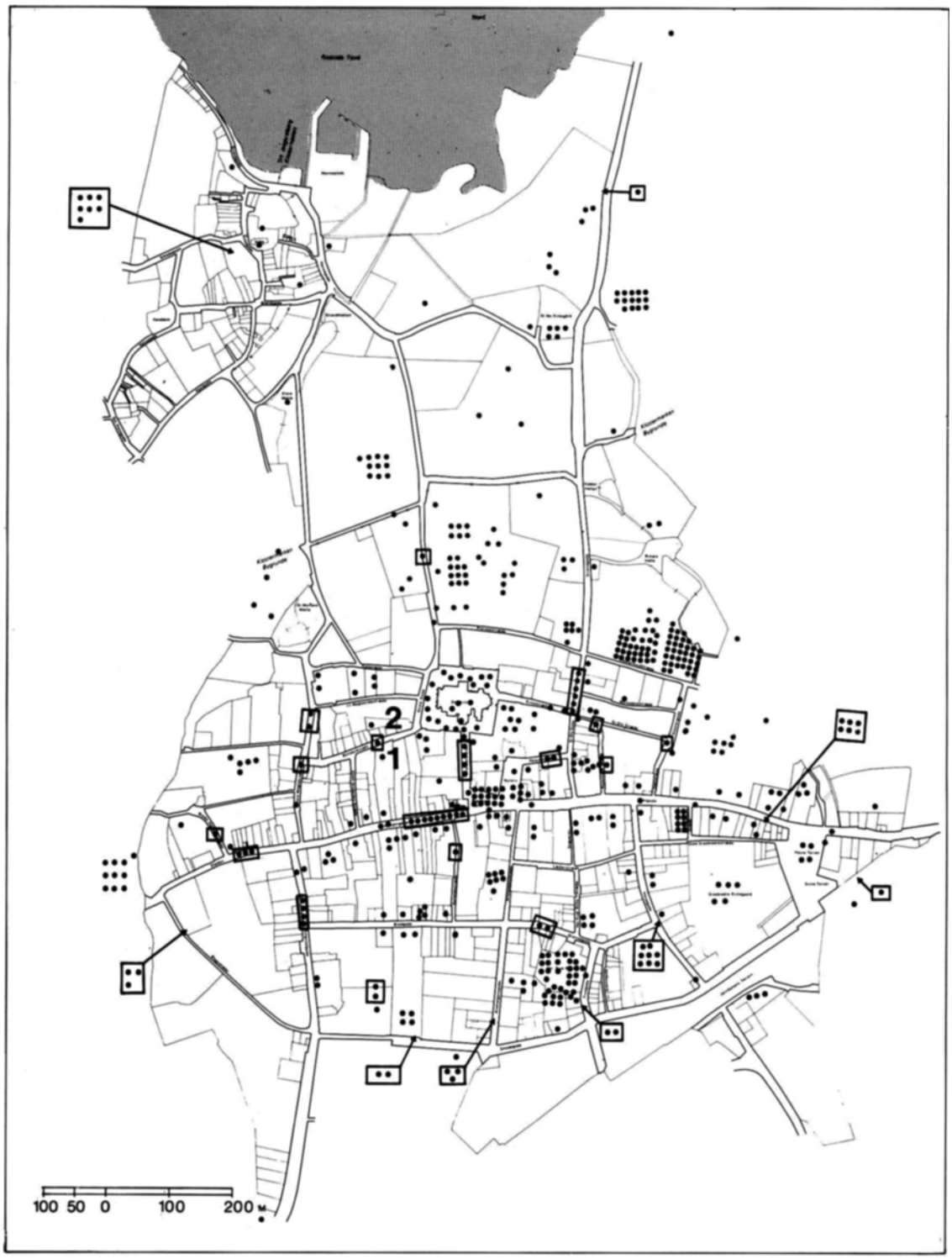


Fig. 1. Distribution of all known sites of finds and observations. Each dot indicates one find complex ranging from a single object picked up and given to a museum to proper archaeological excavations. Frames are used if only a street has been referred to.
The map has been drawn by Matrikeldirektoratet, Copenhagen, especially for the purpose of the project. It is based on the original drawings from measurings in 1887, scale 1:800, in Matrikelarkivet.

PROBLEMS OF DATING

The dating of archaeological finds will always depend on the state of research. Medieval archaeology has earlier concentrated on monuments and structural remains mainly. In Denmark the planned study of small finds has begun only in recent years. This means that a solid typo-chronological foundation is lacking, so one has to begin with the types of object, most studied, and supplement the acquired information with European "standard-datings". Owing to the absence of a fine typo-chronological grid we have divided the finds into three broad groups – viking, early medieval, and late medieval. Dates are determined by the coins characteristic of each period. This use of coins means, however, that the time frames tend to be artificial and excessively rigid when applied to other finds, as in reality a continuous development took place during each period and from one period to the next. An example is the dating of the glazed pottery, based upon the European standard dating of 1250–1350, despite the fact that in some towns in Denmark glazed pottery is found in layers obviously older than 1250. The same applies to "near-stoneware", which appears before as well as after 1241. Despite these uncertainties it is chiefly pottery that provides the measures of dating based upon a number of recent studies of Danish Medieval earthenware (Andersen, Crabb and Madsen 1971; Bencard 1972; Bencard and Roesdahl 1972; Liebgott 1975, 1979; P.K. Madsen 1980). Similarly, we seem to be approaching greater clarity concerning the transition from the viking to the early medieval period.

The viking period is defined by soapstone, conical spindle whorls, ornaments with viking style decoration (except that the Urnes style is sometimes found also in the 1100's), and by all coins struck before 1074, i.e. up to and including those of Svend Estridsen.

The early medieval period is characterised by Baltic pottery, weaving combs, unilateral combs, ornaments in "Romanesque" style, and all coins struck between 1074 and 1241 (from Harald Hen to Valdemar 2.). Baltic pottery and unilateral combs are placed within this period although they also occur during the viking period, but precise dating is difficult without a detailed study. Baltic pottery, which is so important for the earlier periods on Zealand is being studied intensively at present.

The later medieval period is characterised by glazed pottery, stoneware (which is always imported), bilateral combs, and a number of other objects whose style and form show that they belong to the later part of the Middle Ages. To this period belong all coins struck between 1241 and 1559 (from Erik Plovpenning to Kristian 3.).

When in doubt we have placed an object in the more recent rather than the older period. In the following will be given a few concrete examples of how the material can be interpreted.

CONCENTRATIONS OF COINS

Despite the above reservations about the value of scattered finds, noticeable concentrations always call for attention. In St. Maria's Hospital garden exceptionally many coins have been found (fig. 3,2). No less than 71 coins ranging from Harald Hen to Kristian 3. (1074–1559) have been recorded. (The project has not made a count of younger coins that have been found at the site). It was observed that some of the coins were found near the "Apoteker-kilden" (Apothecaries' Well). The chronological range is too great for the coins to belong to a dispersed hoard. The many post-medieval coins show furthermore that they cannot be "church-floor coins" from one of the parish churches demolished shortly after the Reformation in 1536. It is tempting to see the coin deposit as being connected with a cult of a sacred well, despite the scarcity of contemporary accounts of medieval well cults and the absence of accounts from Roskilde (A.F. Schmidt 1926; N.-K. Liebgott 1975). Yet, coin offerings near a well seem to be a distinct possibility. The absence of more definitive documentary evidence makes it difficult to find another plausible explanation. Archaeological research will probably be the only way to solving the mystery.

THE ORIGIN OF ROSKILDE

Some main topographical features may be used as point of departure for the consideration of other problems concerning the town, for example the extension of the built-up area, the boundaries of the borough, the street plan, and the sites of ecclesiastical

institutions and other major buildings like water mills. Here we shall pay attention to two of these issues – the boundaries, and the placement of parish churches both seen in relation to the built-up area. First, a few words about one of the major issues in the history of the town – where was the earliest Roskilde situated?

The first historical sources to mention Roskilde are from the late 10th century, when Harald Bluetooth built the church of the Holy Trinity. Finds from the first two centuries of the town's history have been considered uncommon. It came as a surprise, therefore, when registration of the museum collections revealed 28 finds earlier than 1074 – this despite the fact that Baltic pottery is counted as early medieval and not included. Excavations at the churches of St. Jørgensbjerg and St. Ib have showed that the buildings date to the 11th century. Among the remaining 26 collections were a number of coins.

In a summary of the problems concerning the earliest Roskilde Frank Birkebæk has argued that the first settlement was near the fjord (Birkebæk 1979). The settlement then moved to the area around the cathedral. In 1979–80 excavations were carried out near the old shore-line, revealing scattered settlement from the 11th–12th centuries, contemporary with a settlement near the cathedral, testified by the parish churches of the period. At present we shall merely point to viking and early medieval finds from north-western outskirts of the medieval town, which may show an old area of activity (fig. 2,1). The most remarkable thing is, however, that the finds are distributed all over the area from the fjord in the north to Our Lady's cemetery in the south. At the latter site, a coin hoard from about 1050 has been found (fig. 3,3). The distribution of viking finds demonstrate that there was no restricted town nucleus, rather, that as early as the 11th century activities took place within the entire area occupied by the medieval town.

THE TOWN DEFENCES

Roskilde's defensive works have to be seen in relation to the natural topography. The distance from the present fjord in the north to the southern boundary of medieval Roskilde is about 1500 m, with the land rising to a height of 45 m. The cathedral stands at 38 m more or less at the edge of a plateau. To the East and West the town is bounded by wet areas caused by the many springs that rise out of the edge of the plateau.

Saxo writes that Roskilde was fortified by the mid-twelfth century king, Sven Grathe. In 1978 this dating was supported by archaeological investigations of the northern and north-eastern parts of the fortifications (fig. 6). A bank and ditch were revealed and tie in with the course of the fortifications recorded on the south and west (Birkebæk & Vorting 1979). Further, the written sources – describing the course of "Borgerdiget" ("Burgher Dike") – confirm the result. The fortifications are not likely to have been altered during the later Middle Ages. The sources mention two gates only, one at each end of the major east-west road, now called Algade, Skomagergade, and Støden. Part of this road was the medieval market place. Sources from the High Middle Ages mention settlement outside both gates (Nielsen 1979). Thus the town defences established in the middle of the twelfth century did not make up the limits of fifteenth century Roskilde.

THE MEDIEVAL PARISH CHURCHES

Medieval Roskilde had 14 parish churches shown on the map, fig. 6. The cathedral had no parochial functions. Here we will consider only their dating. The sites of some of the parish churches were previously unknown. Two of these have now been located in the course of the present project. They will be discussed in detail below.

The cathedral is mentioned in written sources from the late 10th century. Traces of one (possibly two) 11th century churches of calcareous tufa have been found below the present building. Three parish churches, namely the two nearest the fjord (fig. 6, 1 and 2) and Our Lady's Church (fig. 6,17), can safely be dated to the same century. At the other eleven churches walls or graves of calcareous tufa have been found. This building material was available at a number of the town's springs. Even if the stone may have been re-used, it must at any rate have been easily accessible. Probably by at latest the middle of the 12th century the majority of the parish churches had been built in this stone. After this date brick succeeded all other building materials.

The two problematic churches are St. Peter's and St.

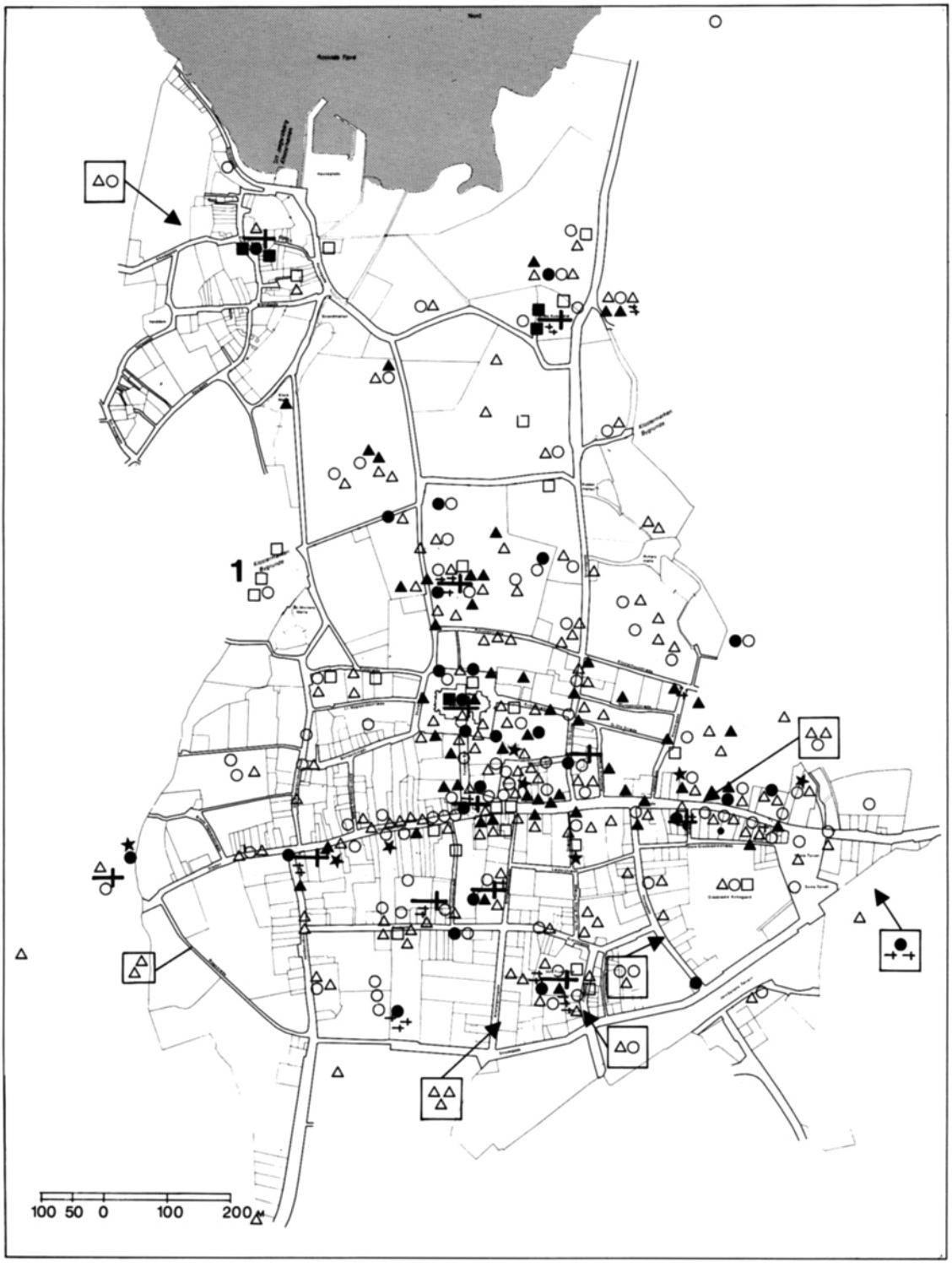


Fig. 2. Distribution of stray finds, observations, and archaeological excavations, dated as far as possible corresponding to the three periods given from the coins, see fig. 3. On each ground plot all period represented are indicated. The solid symbols indicate buried archaeological monuments, ranging from churches and graves (especially marked) to pit houses. Square = Viking Age. Circle = Early Middle Ages. Triangle = Later Middle Ages. Star = medieval well.

Fig. 3. Distribution of finds of coins and their number. The smaller symbols indicate the find of 1 to 5 coins belonging to a certain period at the site, while the often numerous finds from church sites or church floors are shown with larger symbols. Square = Viking Age, i.e. including the reign of Sven Estridsen († 1074). Circle = Early Middle Ages, i.e. from Harald Hen to Valdemar 2. Sejr (1074–1241). Triangle = Later Middle Ages, i.e. from Erik 4. Plovpenning to Christian 3. (1241–1559).

Fig. 4. Foundations of the parish church of St Michael excavated by Roskilde Museum 1980 (photo: Roskilde Museum).

Paul's. Dedications to these saints are mentioned for the first time in a papal letter of 1257, in which they are clearly connected to one church only. As a consequence, this church has been thought to be situated in the area where skeletons have been found (fig. 6,8), but this area must have been part of the cemetery of the Dominican monastery. That there never was any "Church of St. Peter and St. Paul" is confirmed by the fact that all documents of local origin refer to the two saints separately with each his church and parish.

The analysis of the written information concerning some property in St. Paul's parish shows that the parish church was situated south of the eastern part of Algade. Since the beginning of this century a graveyard was known there, but the graves were always supposed to belong to St. Mikkel's cemetery (fig. 6,10). However, when the archaeological evidence is examined, we find two lots of graves with an empty area in between. The existence of a grave-free zone was confirmed by an archaeological investigation in 1978 (Engberg 1979). We have, therefore, two separate cemeteries, of which the more easterly can be identified as St. Paul's with the help of the written sources (fig. 6,9).

The church of St. Peter remains a problem. For this we try to take note of a discovery albeit with scanty information. When the railway between Roskilde and Copenhagen was built in 1846, a "round" foundation of calcareous tufa surrounded by many walled graves was noticed. According to the information available the discovery was made south or east of the square, Hestetorvet. It has earlier been interpreted as the remains of a "round chapel" (*Danmarks Kirker*, p. 141) because the internal diameter of 5–6 m given seemed too large for the apse of a church and too small for a round church like All Saints' (fig. 6,15). With four meters of railway embankment covering it, the site is not likely to be re-excavated. Indeed, it is not certain that an excavation would solve the question of whether the structure belonged to a church or a chapel. However, Roskilde's ecclesiastical institutions are so well documented that it seems unlikely that so old a chapel, furthermore one with a cemetery, could have escaped mention. We should, therefore, like to suggest that the foundations below the railway are those of church of St. Peter (fig. 6,20).

There are several reasons why so much attention has been given to locating the old parish churches. The discoveries of skeletons together with written sources make it possible to establish with considerable certainty the sites of the churches. This information is very useful for the study of the written sources. In deeds houses and plots are often described by the relation to a parish. Furthermore the churches are especially important as centres of settlement areas in early medieval period. But none of the 14 parishes seem to have been totally depopulated during the later Middle Ages. Hence the relation of the churches to the town walls has interesting chronological perspectives.

Fig. 6. The Medieval defenceworks, ecclesiastical institutions, and water mills of Roskilde. – 1. The parish church of St Clemens (now St Jørgensbjerg) with the hospital for lepers. – 2. The parish church of St James (St Ib). – 3. The Dominican nunnery of St Agnes. – 4. The Franciscan nunnery of St Clara. – 5. The parish church of St Martin (St Morten). 6. The parish church of St John (ST Hans). – 7. The Cathedral, originally decicated to the Holy Trinity, later also to St Lucius (a 3rd Century Pope). – 8. The Dominican Friary. – 9. The parish church of St Paul. – 10. The parish church of St Michael (St Mikkel). – 11. The parish church of St Olaf. – 12. The parish church of St Laurentius, and north-west of this the Hospital of the Holy Ghost (Helligåndshospitalet). – 13. The parish church of St Botulf. – 14. The parish church of St Dionysius. – 15. The parish church of All Saints (Alle Helgen). – 16. The Franciscan Friary. – 18. The parish church of St Nicolaus. – 19. The hospital of the friars of the Holy Dove (Duebrødre Hospital), the only institution of this dedication in Denmark. – 20. "A round chapel", or possibly the parish church of St Peter. – a. The Red Gate (Røde Port). – b. St Botulf's Gate. – Observed or excavated parts of the defence works are shown with a broarder line than the reconstructed parts.

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

The main question asked in this paper has been whether use can be made of stray finds in determining the topographical development of the medieval Danish borough, in this case Roskilde. The answer has been affirmative, as the evidence concerning Roskilde shows. In spite of problems in using objects and archaeological observations, the material from Roskilde is so extensive and widely distributed, that it must be considered fairly representative and undistorted by accidental factors. Hence, the plotting of finds and observations on maps of the town will greatly aid in illuminating the development of the town of Roskilde from the viking period through the Middle Ages. The fullest use of the information gathered is not achieved, however, until we include written information, gleaned from contemporary documents. The two different categories of sources reveal different sides of medieval life; they complement each other and both must be utilized in order to gain an understanding of the society, we wish to examine.

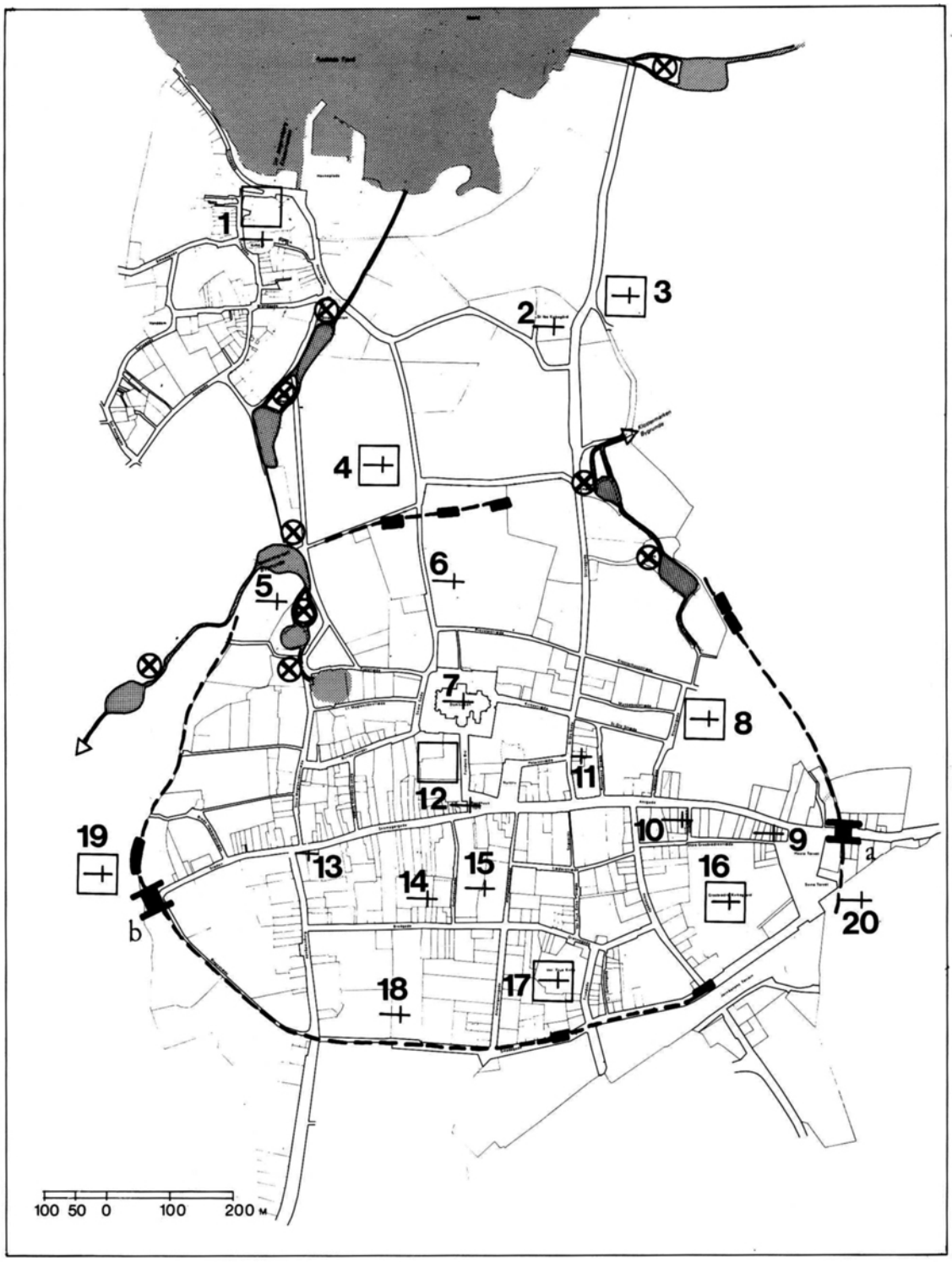
The research project "The Medieval Town" of which the analysis of Roskilde's past is a part, is not yet completed. In this paper, we have discussed the methods of presenting finds and observations cartographically in order to discern the main trends of the topographical development of Roskilde.

The distribution of finds from the viking period suggests that the earliest settlement covered an area as large as that of the medieval town. Although the finds do not indicate a dense population in general, they are scattered over an area of impressive size. The parish churches show that during the Early Middle Ages the town occupied an area, larger than the one enclosed by the bank and ditch in the middle of the twelfth century. Topographical features explain why the two churches situated near the fjord were considered to be outside the physical limits of the town. The reason why the church of St. Peter was not enclosed within the bank and the ditch must be that the latter were fortifications of truly defensive measure, not merely markers of borough boundaries.

In the later Middle Ages the sources still indicate settlement outside the gates. The distribution of the finds demonstrates activity in and around the town during the entire medieval period. It is of particular interest in this case, as it shows that Roskilde was still an important town even after the royal residence was removed to Copenhagen and the economic role of Roskilde was assumed by the new commercial centres along the Sound, noticeably Copenhagen and Køge. This discovery leads to further questions that must be raised, concerning the economic foundation of the late medieval borough. Finally, it underlines the importance of examining the finds of the later Middle Ages and their distribution, not just concentrating, as has generally been the case, on the viking and early medieval periods.

The work of the research project "The Medieval Town" continues, answering old as well as raising new questions. As we have concentrated on major developments in this paper, we should like to point out in closing, that specialized studies have been published,

Fig. 5. A Viking Age brooch found at the church yard of the Medieval Franciscan Friary (photo: The National Museum).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including a survey of the medieval mills and hospitals (Nielsen 1978) and an examination of the settlement along the main street, Algade and Skomagergade, running east-west (Nielsen 1979). An even more important result has been achieved by the mapping: archaeological excavations are being carried out at many of the sites where the plotting has taken shape of a question mark – excavations that already look promising.

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