

Pre-Viking and Early Viking Age Ribe

Excavations at Nicolajgade 8, 1985–86

by LENE B. FRANDSEN and STIG JENSEN

Between 1970 and 1976 large-scale excavations were carried out in Ribe on the north side of the river at the *Kunstmuseum* and in *Dommerhaven* (Fig. 1:1 and 2). This was fundamentally a research project and the aim was to confirm the written sources' testimony of Ribe's great age and the town's important place in the Viking Period. The excavations confirmed that a rich trading place with international connections and diverse craft activities existed here – but long before the written sources' first reference to Ribe in *circa* 860.

A new opportunity to excavate in this intriguing area arose in 1985 when the construction of a cellar covering 90 sq.m. barely 30 metres from the *Kunstmuseum* was planned (Fig. 1:3). Since the building work would probably affect culture layers from the trading site, a trial excavation of some 5 sq.m. was undertaken in the summer of 1985. The results of this excavation tallied well with the data from the 1970's. The uppermost two metres or so consisted of recent topsoil and filled features from the Medieval and Renaissance periods. Below this were layers and finds of a different character. The finds appear principally to date from the end of the later Germanic Iron Age and the early Viking Period. The layers represented workplace activities: extremely find-rich, jumbled layers separated by thin sand or clay layers and spreads of charcoal, which altogether formed a picture of differentiated phases of activity and levelling layers (Figs. 2–3).

After the trial excavation there was no doubt that the whole area of the planned cellar should be dug. The excavation began on April 1st, 1986, and continued for 5 months. The results were no disappointment: several thousand finds and substantial new data and new ideas about the character of the foundation and subsequent development of Ribe.¹

The purpose of this, strictly provisional article is primarily to throw some light upon the relative chronology and development of the site, and at the same time to re-

port some of the artefact-material which has the greatest chronological significance. Thirty-four *sceattas*, moulds for decorated objects and pottery may be mentioned here.

The time dimension is a significant factor. How many years did it take to accumulate the series of layers we have looked at? Did the site have a long or a short functioning period? The upper part unfortunately was dug away, so the nature of the development on the site later in the Viking Period cannot be conclusively determined here (L.B. Frandsen & S. Jensen 1988).

The artefacts clearly reflect the primary importance of trade and craft on the site. Detailed analysis of the site's external connections and of the particular functions of the workplaces must wait for the time being until the whole material has been processed. It may however be mentioned here that wasters and detritus from bronzecasting, beadmaking, combmaking, amber working and more have been found.

THE EXCAVATION

The uppermost layers, from historical times, were removed by machine. The knowledge of the primary culture layer's colour and consistency we had obtained from the trial excavation in 1985 made it relatively easy to stop the excavation at the right level. From here the site was dug by trowel. To the north about one metre of the culture layer was preserved while the southern part – beside the river – was substantially dug away. Layers from historical periods reached the natural here.

As stated, the culture layer was composed of intermittent thin deposits which fortunately were only interrupted in certain places by major interventions such as some Medieval pits which reached the natural. The site therefore was mostly covered by primary culture deposits.

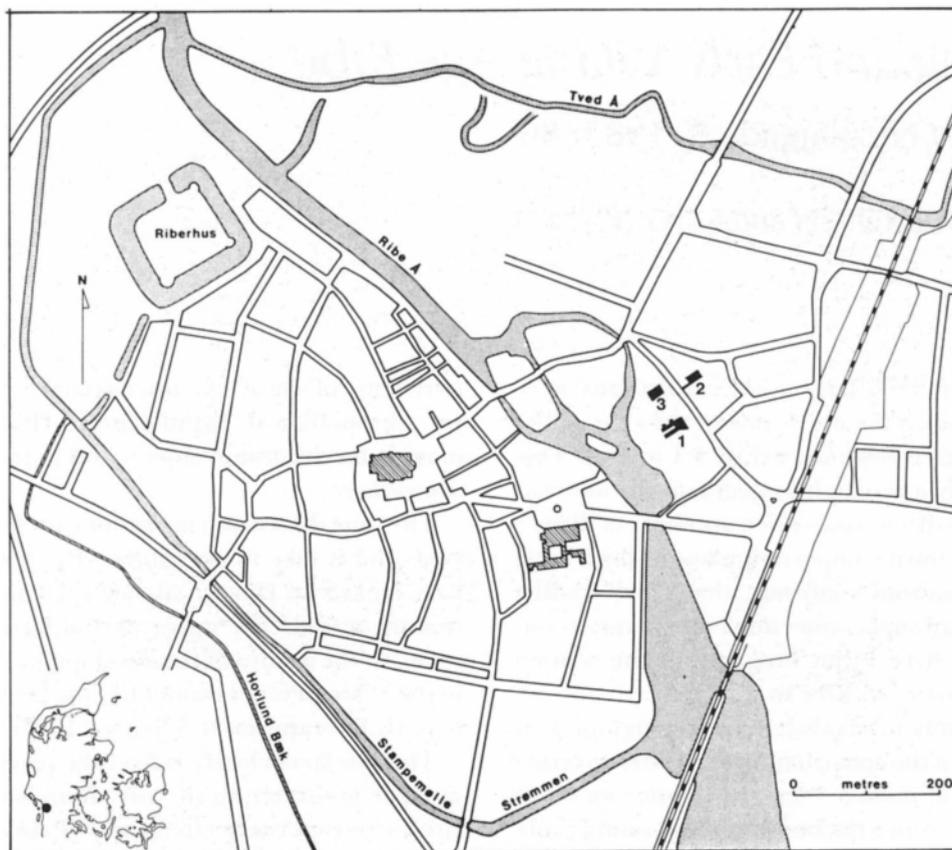


Fig. 1. Map of Ribe with the position of the excavated sites mentioned in the text: 1, the *Kunstmuseum*; 2, *Dommerhaven*; 3, *Nicolajgade 8*.

Our excavation technique was to follow, as far as possible, the natural layers, and we treated the description of the individual layers' internal relationships very carefully so that subsequently all layers could be placed within the relative chronology of the site. In practice the predominantly stratigraphic method of excavation resulted in a very uneven site, where the surface level of the same or contemporary layers could vary by up to half a metre (Fig. 3). This was the result of the means in which the culture deposits were built up. A recurrent sequence of hearths lay one above another around the middle of the site, and here the layers were thickest, diminishing towards the sides. In some places the stratigraphy was quite complicated, not least because some of the layers were narrowly confined, and not visible in the sections.

In order to form a clear picture of the stratigraphy of the site, it was necessary to work systematically and to take as a basis the direct relationship between just two layers at a time, which can only be expressed as one of

four patterns (Fig. 4). It was then possible, step by step, to build up a picture of the interrelationship of all 283 layers. The result is presented as a sequence diagram or Harris matrix (C. Orton 1980). A minor segment of the diagram for Nicolajgade 8 is shown in Fig. 5.

The matrix provides the overview which is needed in order to group the sequence of layers. Firstly those layers are picked out which fall together in some interpretative unit, such as ditches, settlement layers, workshop layers, etc. Most of the layers can be categorized as workshop layers, which can further be divided into a series of workshop levels. The lines of demarcation between the individual workshop levels are put at natural breaks, for example where a sand or charcoal layer runs unbroken across the site.

Everything points to continuous deposits, and given that the functioning period of the site was long enough for typological development in the artefactual material, it should in principle be possible to show a series of development. Before we delve more deeply into the rela-

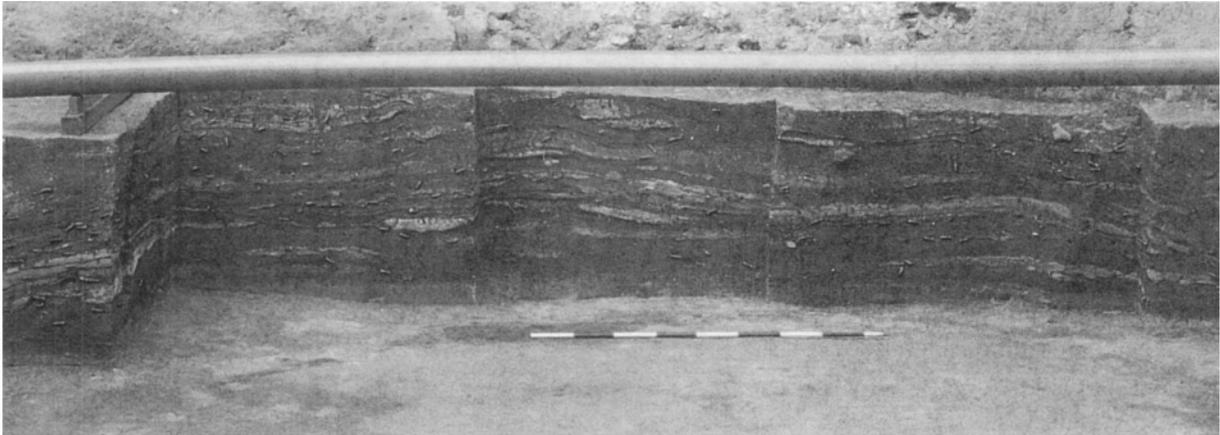


Fig. 2. The northern section of the excavation at Nicolajgade 8. Note how the layers descend on both sides of the middle part of the section. The view is somewhat disturbed by a drain running through the site. Photo by Stig Jensen.



Fig. 3. Photo showing the undulating surface appearing when the naturally deposited layers are uncovered – here a pale clearance layer sloping and disappearing towards the ditch (G2). In the foreground the trial ditch of 1985 is seen at the base of which the turf layer can be discerned. Photo by Lene B. Frandsen.

tive chronology of the finds and the absolute dating of the site we must describe the stratigraphy and development of the site.

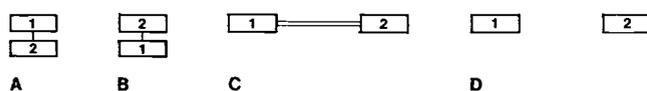


Fig. 4. Illustration of the four possible ways to describe the relationship between two layers: A, 1 is younger than 2. – B, 1 is older than 2. – C, 1 and 2 are contemporaneous. – D, no relation between 1 and 2 is established.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SITE

On the basis of the schematic section-drawing, Fig. 6, which is the principal result of the stratigraphic analyses, our interpretation of the development of the site can be summarized as follows:

The Settlement Layer: Above the natural, which is composed of water-deposited sand, and on top of the old surface level, lies a dark brown, homogeneous culture layer which includes an amount of charcoal, pottery, bones and a few loomweights. This layer, which is de-

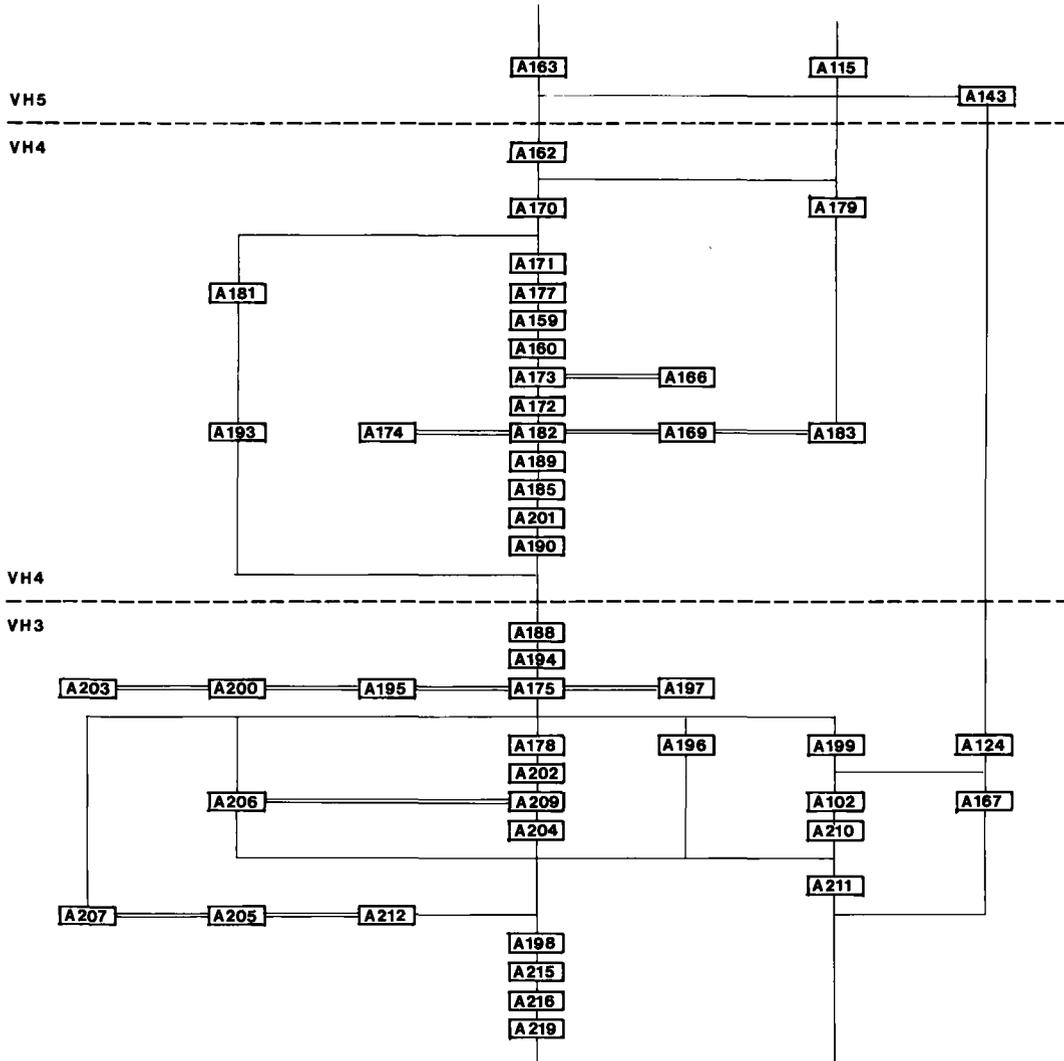


Fig. 5. Part of the sequence diagram for Nicolajgade 8. The limits between the individual phases are indicated by dotted lines. Framed numbers refer to layers and features.

void of finds associated with trade or industry, is interpreted as detritus from a village settlement which was situated here before the site developed into a trading place.

The Turf Layer: In the north-eastern part of the site the settlement layer is covered by a layer of inverted turves. The function of this is a little uncertain, but since the earliest workplace layer lies directly above the turves, which have a place in the delimitation of ditch 1, these turves must have been put in place in connection with the establishment of the trading place. Perhaps they simply reflect the clearance of the site, preparatory to

its development. When we came across the turf layer in the trial trench of 1985 it was suggested that the turves could be a stage in a manuring process called *træk* (G. Lerche & S. Jensen 1986). After the 1986 excavation, however, the theory of a clearance layer seems more probable.

Ditch 1 (G1): As stated, the turf layer is placed so that the turves form the edges of the course of a ditch. This line is interpreted as the boundary of an early tenement-division of the trading place, as is corroborated by the subsequent development of the workshop levels.

The Workshop Levels (VH): Altogether the workshop

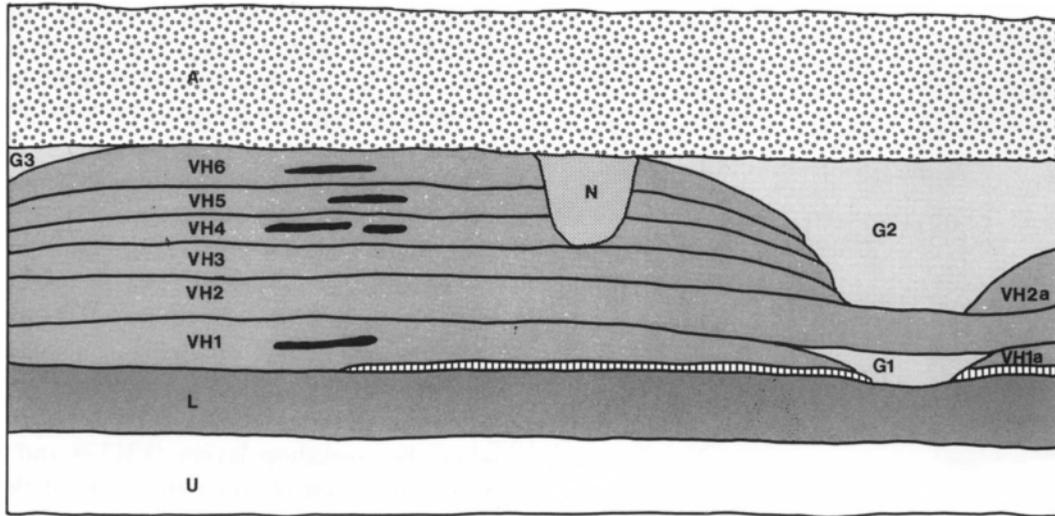


Fig. 6. Schematic section showing the principal stratigraphy of Nicolajgade 8, seen from the south. – U, subsoil consisting of water-deposited sand. – L, the settlement layer. – Vertical hatching: inverted turves. – VH1–6 and VH1a–2a: workshop levels. – G1, the oldest ditch. – G2, the youngest ditch. – N, disturbance. – A, layer representing the levelling of the site in later times.

levels form a culture layer about one metre thick, comprising workshop floors, hearths, levelling and rubbish layers from various workshop activities. The earliest levels, VH1 and VH1a lie directly on top of the turf and the settlement layers, to the west and east of ditch 1 respectively. After some time the ditch was filled up, and in the following phase, VH2, the layers run largely unbroken across the site. Any possible tenement-division at this stage has not left any trace of itself behind. It is difficult to say how long this period lasted, but the character of the site does not otherwise appear to change, in that there are uninterrupted traces of trade and industry in the finds.

Above VH2 the levels VH3–6 are built up. This follows the same pattern as before: the most substance in the centre, around the hearths, diminishing evenly towards the sides. At this phase the ditch is recommissioned. The question consequently arises of whether there were some form of visible boundary which the individual workplace areas respected, since the layers re-appear again and again so precisely on the same place. East of the ditch the workshop layers belonging to the neighbouring area are built up. These are situated so close into the limit of excavation that only the thin outermost layers were revealed. It was not therefore possible to group the workshop layers here, so that everything above VH2 in the eastern area is labelled VH2a.

Ditch 2 (G2): The cavity or ditch which is found between the two workplace areas is filled with collapsed detritus from higher-lying workplaces. Stratigraphically ditch 2 is clearly later than the workshop levels which encompass it. The finds however appear to show that the time between the latest workshop levels VH5–6 and the filling of ditch 2 was short.

Ditch 3 (G3): The course of a further ditch could be detected parallel to ditch 2 at the western side of the site.

LEVELLING OF THE SITE

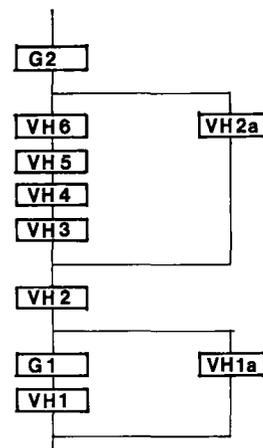


Fig. 7. Schematic stratigraphy of the site.

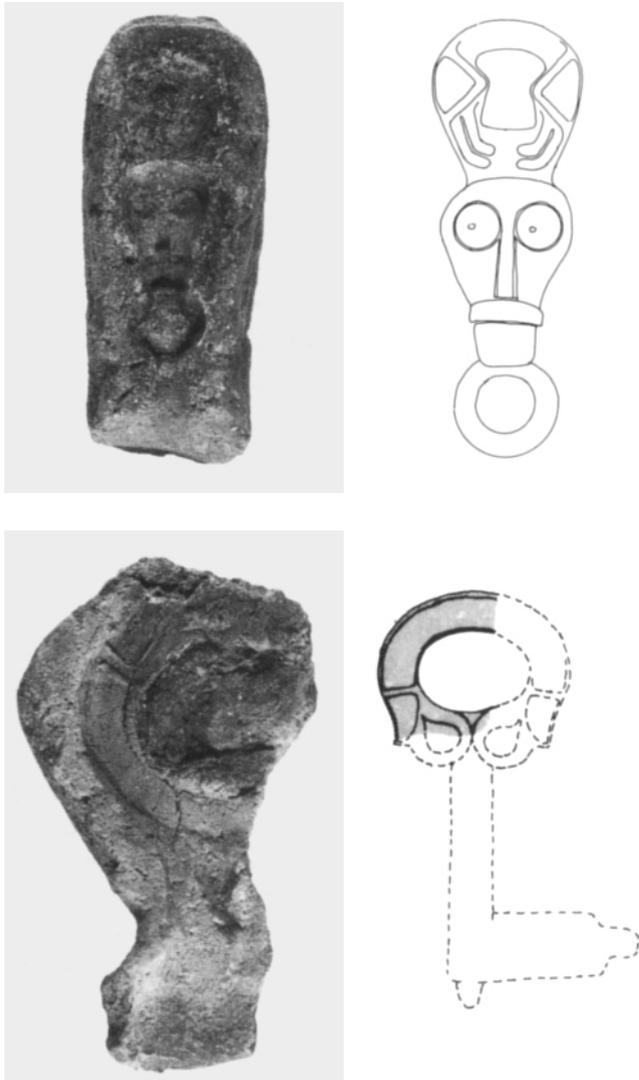


Fig. 8. Moulds for a mask and a key ornamented in style D. 1:1. The metal objects are reconstructed in drawing. Drawn by Jørgen Dich.

Since it was not possible to extend the site further in this direction we were only able to record the edge of this western ditch, G3, and unfortunately no finds came out of it. The distance between the two ditches is six metres.

The Cutting (A): The uppermost workshop level and the top of ditch 2 are sharply cut across. The intrusive layer's mixed contents of Renaissance-period, Medieval and Viking-age pottery renders an accurate dating of the intervention difficult.

Other Features (N): The later periods' activities have naturally left their mark. The site was, as has been stated,

disturbed by individual features of the Middle Ages. Of considerable interest are a few pits in the top of the workshop layers with apparently unmixed Viking-age ceramic material, presumably from the late Viking Period.

In brief the following development took place on the site (Fig. 7). To start with there was an ordinary village settlement placed near the river bank. At some point the terrain was levelled out with turves, and the site divided up by a system of ditches (G1) into a series of working areas (VH1 and VH1a). The site was subsequently levelled again (VH2) and for a short time there are no boundaries between the working areas. Thereafter the workshop layers (VH3–6 and VH2a) again grow up separately on either side of the ditch (G2), which filled up after VH6 was deposited. The workshop detritus in G2 shows that industrial activities were continuing on the site, but for how long is unknown because of the removed section (A).

DATING

We have seen how it was possible to establish a relative chronology of development on the site by stratigraphic means. In what follows an attempt will be made to relate this chronology to the conventional period system. The datings will be based upon the style-forms which are represented in the mould material, after which the coin finds are brought in. Only a selection of the remaining material will be dealt with as we have only had time to analyze a little of it. Having thus established a chronological framework for the development of the site, the pottery is considered – primarily the rimsherds.

Most of the mould finds appear in the workshop layers, especially in VH2 and VH3. Two types are found within this group – keys and anthropomorphic masks – which are decorated in Style D (Fig. 8). This style is introduced towards the end of Phase 2 of the later Germanic Iron Age, but appears most frequently in Phase 3 (M. Ørsnes 1966: 224).

A number of mould fragments were also found in the uppermost, eastern ditch (G2). Amongst these were a few moulds for tortoise brooches of the Berdal type, which may be dated to the early Viking Period (O. Klindt-Jensen & D.M. Wilson 1965: 50). There were also two mould fragments with a virtually identical

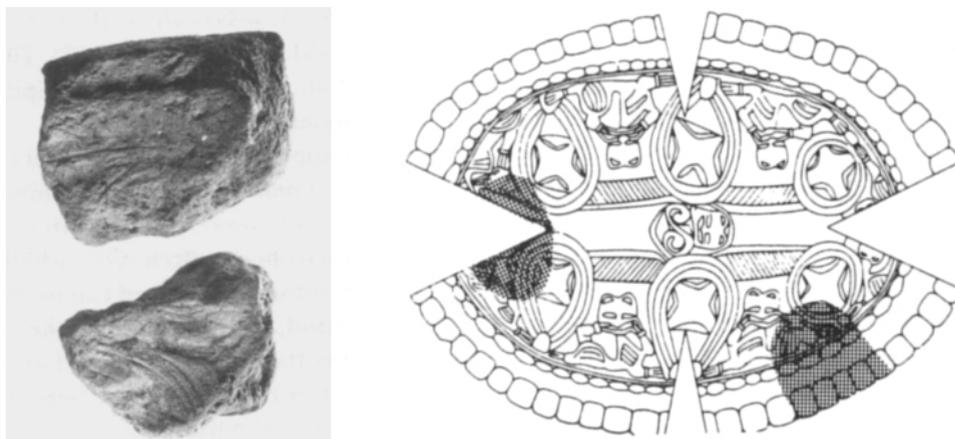


Fig. 9. Two fragments of moulds for brooches of the Berdal Type. 1 : 1. The position of the fragments is shown on the drawing. Photo by Rita Fredsgaard Nielsen.

form (Fig. 9). It has not yet been possible to determine what artefact-type was cast in these, but it seems that both of them included small mask-like animal heads in their decoration. These are similar to the heads on the gripping beasts of the Berdal brooches, but their long ears are more reminiscent of the Borre-style beasts. This style appears in the early Viking Period (O. Klindt-Jensen & D.M. Wilson 1965:62).

From the occurrence of stylistic characteristics, the workplace layers – at least the lower half – can be dated to Phase 3 of the later Germanic Iron Age and the ditch (G2) to the early Viking Period. As will be seen, this tallies well with the coins discovered, which are all *sceattas*.

Sceattas are small Frisian and English silver coins with a diameter of about 12 mm. A total of 34 of these coins were found in the excavations of 1986. These go to the Coin Collection of the National Museum, where they are analyzed by Kirsten Bendixen. At the time of writing only 30 of them have been cleaned, of which 29 are of the Wodan/monster type and one of the Maastricht type.²

Wodan/monster-type *sceattas* are thought to have been struck in the period from *circa* 720 until the currency reform of Pepin the Small in 755, when a larger and thinner coin-blank was introduced (K. Bendixen 1981). Finds in Frisia show no circulation of *sceattas* there after this date. It is however probable that Wodan/monster-type *sceattas* were in circulation for longer in Denmark as they seem to have served as models for the earliest Hedeby coins from *circa* 800 (K. Bendixen

1981; B. Malmer 1986: 70). One may therefore presume that most of the *sceattas* found in Ribe came into the ground within the period in which the type was produced, 720–755, while subsequently they circulated to a lesser and lesser degree towards 800.

Thirty-two of the thirty-four *sceattas* found in 1986 came from the workshop layers, while the two were within a disturbed layer. The thirty-two *sceattas* were distributed with 19 in the lowest third (Fig. 6, VH1–2 and G1), nine in the middle third (VH3–4) and four in the uppermost third (VH5–6). It is therefore reasonable to suppose that the production period of the coins, 720–755, falls within the period in which the lower two-thirds (VH1–4) of the workshop layers were formed, since twenty-eight of the *sceattas* found came from these. The uppermost workshops (VH5–6), where only four *sceattas* were found, may have been deposited in a period with a diminishing circulation of the coins.

The stratigraphy of Nicolajgade 8 in Ribe clearly shows that Pepin the Small's currency reform was not as obviously effective here as was the case in Frisia. If that had been the case one should expect the occurrence of *sceattas* to cease abruptly within a clearly restricted section of the sequence of layers and not, as was the case, to diminish gradually. Now one might argue that all the workshops layers were deposited over a small number of years within the period 720–755, within which the coins are thought to have been struck. The other finds, however, contradict this, especially the pottery. As appears below, a clear development from work-

shop level VH1 at the bottom to VH6 at the top can be demonstrated in this find-class. It appears that the pottery from VH1 is more closely associated with the pottery from the underlying settlement layer (L) than with the uppermost workshop levels. The pottery from these conversely carries great similarities to the material from the uppermost, eastern ditch (G2). The details of this ceramic development are given in the next section, and it simply may be declared here that it undoubtedly represents a period of time which is longer than the 35 years in which *sceattas* of the Wodan/monster type were struck.

As already stated, mould fragments carrying Style D appear a little below the middle of the workplace layers. These moulds can be placed in Phase 3 of the later Germanic Iron Age, which is usually dated 725–800 (M. Ørsnes 1966: 24). Since the moulds with Style D are all included in the series of layers which include the most *sceattas*, it is clear that the datings of the two groups of finds support one another as well as can be.

Amongst the moulds from the uppermost, eastern ditch (G2) appear Berdal-brooch forms, and two forms apparently decorated in the Borre Style. The filling of the ditch can thus be dated to the early Viking Period, the early 800's. It is significant in this context that *sceattas* were not found in this otherwise markedly find-rich fill.

One must be very wary of backing a relative chronology with absolute dates, since such absolute dates are often quoted all too definitely without the qualifications which were originally put to them. Despite this danger we shall try to place absolute dates on the development of the site, but it must however be emphasized that our analyses are still of a provisional character.

The lowest workshop level (VH1) contains no fewer than twelve *sceattas*. Bearing in mind that *sceattas* were not found in the very deepest workshop layers and that many *sceattas* appear in the higher workshop levels, it is reasonable to accept that workshop level VH1 was established in the first quarter of the 8th. century.

The underlying settlement layers do not contain data which lend themselves to a close dating, but it may be emphasized that the pottery from this context is closely linked to the material from VH1. A dating of the settlement deposits to the period around 700 is therefore probable. This dating is supported by the excavation in *Dommerhaven* of 1974 (Fig. 1:1 and 2). Here there was similarly evidence of activities within a rural settlement

immediately before the earliest deposits from the trading site (M. Bencard 1979: 115). The timber from a well which belongs to this settlement phase was felled in 710 (V. Mejdal 1983: 31).

The uppermost workshop level (VH6), as stated, belongs to a period with a diminishing circulation of *sceattas*. Since the pottery from VH6 is closely linked to the material from the ditch (G2), which on the basis of the mould forms it contained can be dated to the early Viking Period, it is probable that the uppermost workshop level was formed in the period around 800. The fill of the ditch is thought to have been deposited in the first half of the 9th century.

The uppermost workshop levels are disturbed by a series of cuts (N) of the later Viking and Medieval Periods. The dating of these activities is dealt with elsewhere (L.B. Frandsen & S. Jensen 1988).

THE POTTERY

A considerable amount of pottery was recovered in the excavation. In this provisional publication we shall concern ourselves primarily with the local pottery and simply add certain comments on the imported ware. The material is in sherd form, and only in a few cases has it been possible to join these into larger pot fragments. We have chosen, therefore, to concentrate on the rimsherds, and have – with some exceptions – sub-grouped them according to the same principles as were used for the more or less contemporary sherds from *Südsiedlung* at Hedeby (H. Steuer 1974).

In all, 189 rimsherds of local provenance which can be associated with a definite phase of the development of the site were found. They fall into three major groups, pots with inturned rims, pots with vertical rims and pots with lightly out-turned rims. There are also a few rimsherds from pots with strongly out-turned rims.

Fifty-five of the rimsherds are *inturned* (Fig. 14), and their distribution through the individual levels is seen in the diagram, Fig. 10. It is immediately apparent that these vessels do not appear in the earliest deposits, and that only one sherd of this type appears in VH2. They are more frequent in the following level, VH3, and subsequently form a greater and greater portion of the material up through the layers. In the uppermost ditch, (G2), 70% of the rimsherds are inturned.

If we look more closely at how the individual types of

	214-	114-	414-	414a	2131	1131	
G2	3	5	5	8	1		22
VH6	1	1					2
VH5	9	5			3	2	19
VH4	3		2				5
VH3	6						6
VH2	1						1
VH1a							
VH1							
L							
	23	11	7	8	4	2	55

Fig. 10. Inverted rims: Distribution and variation within the sequence.

inturned rims are distributed in the sequence of layers we find the following picture. The earliest inturned rims are all tapered (214-). From VH4 and 5 come also parallel-sided rims which can be either rounded-off (114-) or faceted (414-). All of these types also appear higher up, in G2. However a new form also occurs in this ditch – faceted and thickened rims (414-A) (Fig. 14: 3, 7). This type thus does not appear before the early Viking Period.

Six of the inturned rims are provided with a groove beneath the rim (1131 and 2131) (Fig. 14: 5). These types appear in VH5 and G2. As appears in Figs. 12 and 13, such characteristic grooves also appear on pots with vertical and lightly out-turned rims, likewise only in the upper half of the sequence of layers. It can also be stated that generally there are more variants of the inturned rims in the later levels than in the earlier ones.

Although it has not been possible to reconstruct complete profiles, there can be little doubt that many of the inturned rims come from hemispherical vessels. In a number of cases it has been possible to assemble sufficiently large body sherds to form a reasonable image of the profile.

The material also includes 57 sherds from pots with a vertical rim (Fig. 14: 1, 4). Their distribution through the individual layers is seen in Fig. 11. It transpires that the sherds represent a large number of Steuer's rim-forms. Some of these forms are dealt with in groups in what follows, in order to form a better overview. This also results in a reduction of the force of statistical uncertainties.

Pots with the rim continuing evenly into a vertical body (224- and 124-) are found in three examples, all in the lowest workshop level. Such virtually straight-sided vessels have also been found in a sunken hut at Karby on Mors which is dated by brooches to Phase 3 of the later Germanic Iron Age (S. Nielsen 1985: 275). On the

	224-	124-	1211	1213	1212	4211	2211	2213	1231	1233	3233	1232	2233	2231	
G2			1					1		1				1	4
VH6			3					1					1		5
VH5				2			1	1			1	1			6
VH4			2	3			1		1						7
VH3			1			1	2		2	1					7
VH2			1	1	1		1								4
VH1a	1	1	1				1								4
VH1	1		5	6		2	2								16
L			1	2		1		1							5
	2	1	15	14	1	4	8	4	3	2	1	1	1	1	58

Fig. 11. Vertical rims: Distribution and variation within the sequence.

	1313	4313	4311	2311	1311	2313	5311	2331	3311	4312	1312	
												
G2	1			1							1	3
VH6	4			1				1		1		7
VH5			1	1				1	1			4
VH4	1	2		2	2							7
VH3	3			3	2			1				9
VH2	2				2		1					5
VH1a	1		1		1	1						4
VH1	1		1	1	17							20
L	1	1	3	1								6
	14	3	6	10	24	1	1	3	1	1	1	65

Fig. 12. Slightly out-turned rims: Distribution and variation within the sequence.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	
							
G2		13	3	8		4	
VH6		2	2				
VH5		14	8			2	
VH4		5	1		1	3	
VH3		6	4		1	2	
VH2		1			2	2	
VH1a	2						
VH1	1				8		
L							
	3	41	18	8	12	13	

Fig. 13. Selection of chronologically significant pottery elements from Nicolajgade 8.

same site sherds from a similar pot were found in a layer which was cut by the sunken huts. The finds in Ribe indicate that there the type goes out of use in an early part of the 8th century. It is of interest here that pots with almost vertical sides are known from a late stage of the later Germanic Iron Age at Stengården, East Jutland and Darum, north-west of Ribe (S. Jensen 1982: fig. 1,5 and 1987).

Rimsherds from almost straight-sided pots can be hard to differentiate from the rims of hemispherical

pots. The problem is the greater since the earliest hemispherical vessels, for example from Lindholm Høje, seem to be more straight-sided than the later ones (S. Jensen 1982: figs. 4 and 5). This development seems also to be traceable in the finds from Ribe.

Pots with a parallel-sided vertical rim (1211, 1213 and 1212) which goes over into the body with a slight curve form quite a large group, 29 pieces in all. Twenty-six of these appear in deposits below VH5 in which they form a characteristic element in the finds.

Short, faceted rims (4211) occur in four cases from the settlement layer up as far as VH3. Vertical, tapering rims (2211 and 2231) occur in twelve instances. These are evenly distributed through all the layers and do not appear to be chronologically significant.

Nine of the sherds are characterized by the provision of a groove below the rim. These are distributed amongst six different rim-forms (1231, 1233, 3233, 1232, 2233 and 2231), whereby an immediate impression of their diffuse occurrence is gained. If however the group is examined as a unit a clearer picture emerges in which it can be seen that these are found only in the upper half of the sequence of layers, from VH3 upwards.

Pots with a slightly out-turned rim are the largest group of ceramics from Nicolajgade 8. The group comprises 63 rimsherds divided amongst eleven different forms (Fig. 12). The group is very varied, and we shall refrain from commenting here upon the chronological distribution of the individual rim-forms. It may simply be pointed out that only two examples of the group occur in the ditch (G2) above the workshop levels, and thus the group is highly characteristic of that phase of the development of the site. It may also be noted that the group includes three sherds with a groove under the rim (2331). This feature appears, as with the other two principal groups, from VH3 and later in the sequence of layers.

The final major group, *pots with strongly out-turned rims*, is represented by eleven rimsherds. Since this group is both very diverse and evenly spread throughout the sequence of layers it will not be dealt with in any greater detail here.

It is quite evident that the 189 rimsherds certainly associable with particular levels from Nicolajgade 8 can be divided into a series of rimforms of which some occur only in a limited part of the sequence of layers. The distribution of some of the chronologically most significant of these is given in Fig. 13. It may be seen how the straight-sided pots (A) are associated with the earliest workshop level. In the next level (VH2) pots with inturned rims appear (B), a type which becomes increasingly common as the sequence progresses. A particular version of the inturned rim, with a thickened, faceted rim (D) is found only in G2. Rim-grooves (C) are found on pots with inturned, vertical and slightly out-turned rims. This feature appears in VH3 and subsequently is a characteristic element on the site.

The rim-forms in Fig. 13 represent 80 pots, or no less

than 43% of all rimsherds. It is arresting that so great a proportion of this material is attributable to types which only occur in some part of the sequence of layers. The most obvious explanation of this must be that the development from the settlement level up to the uppermost ditch extended over a considerable number of years. The ceramic finds thus corroborate in the best possible manner the dating of the development of the site which was constructed above on the basis of coin finds and style-forms.

Twenty-five *bases* or *basal sherds* can be distinguished in the material. Twelve of these come from vessels with a plane base, and these occur primarily in the earliest deposits (Fig. 13E). In the second group we find round and unstable bases – pots with convex bases. This category can be difficult to distinguish in a collection of sherds since there naturally is no sharp boundary between the side and the base of the pot. It is therefore probable that a thorough sifting of the ceramic finds would increase the number of such bases. Thirteen rounded bases were found in the provisional sorting, and these appear from VH2 upwards through the sequence (Fig. 13F). It is reasonable to link the dominance of the round bases in the upper part of the sequence of layers with the increasing appearance of hemispherical vessels. One must not overlook, however, the point that some of the lightly rounded bases belong to pots with vertical or out-turned rims.

Handles of normal form do not appear at all in the ceramic remains from Nicolajgade 8. Two unusual forms however come from G2, a handle which sat on the inside of the rim and thus was protected from the flames of the fire, and a suspension hole through a lug pinched out of a rim. These two suspension devices are also known at Hedeby, a good chronological correspondence to their appearance in G2 at Ribe (W. Hübner 1959: Taf. 3 and 4).

Only a small percentage of the sherds are *ornamented*. Most common is stamped and simple linear ornament. The most frequent motif amongst the stamps is the cross-in-circle. There are also ring stamps, round latticed stamps and rhomboidal chequered stamps. Although loomweights are not to be dealt with here it should be noted that several of these are decorated, one with the impression of a key.

Imported pottery is as yet only very superficially studied. It appears in all the workshop levels and in G2 but not in the settlement layer. The imported wares divide

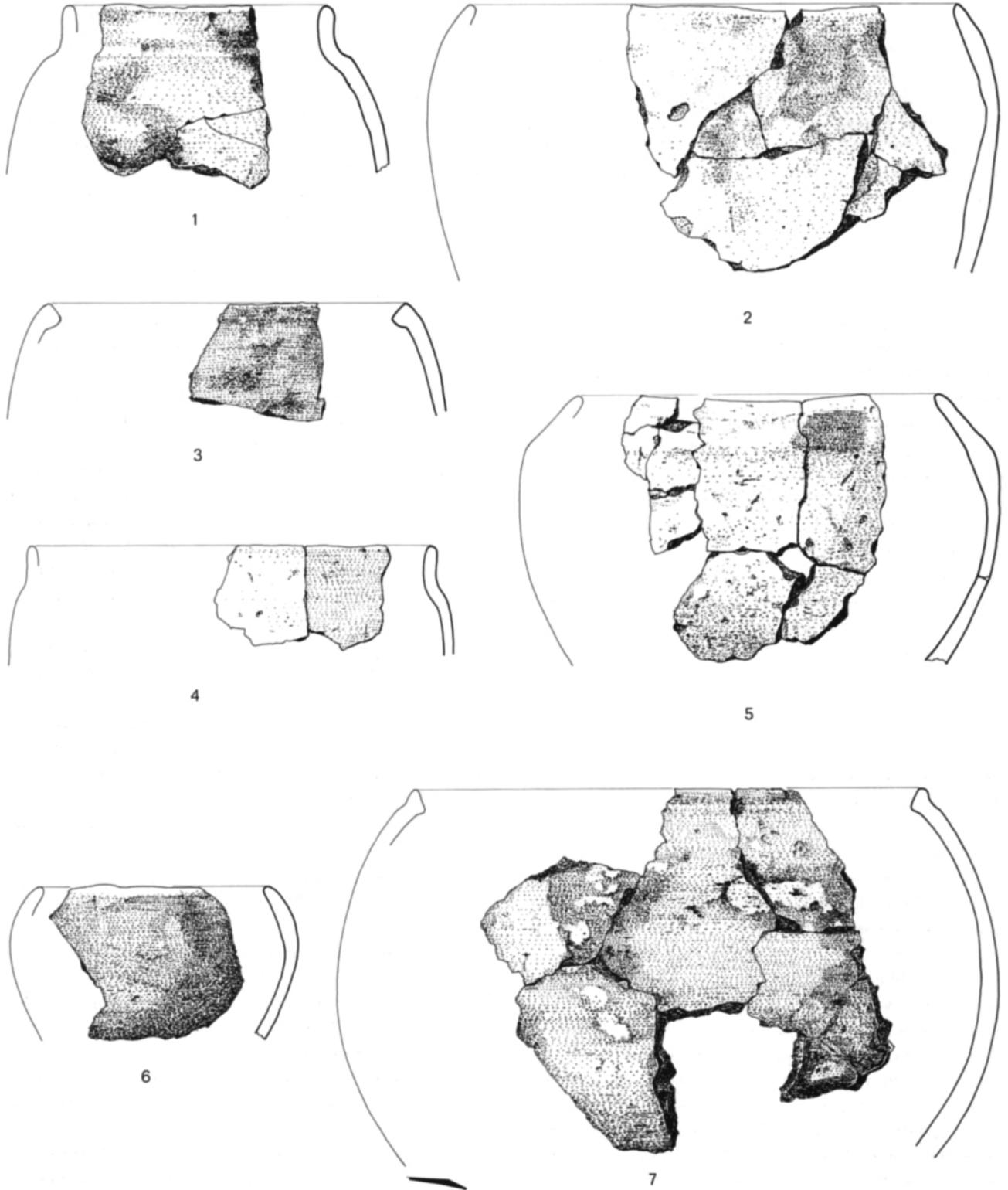


Fig. 14. Pottery from Nicolajgade 8. Drawn by Jørgen Dich. 2:5.

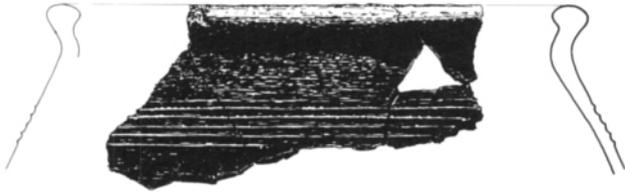


Fig. 15. Sherd of vessel of grey-brown fabric (imported). Drawn by Jørgen Dich. 2:5.

into several groups which are easily distinguishable from the domestic, handmade pottery. There are, *inter alia*, several types of grey and yellowish stoneware-like fabric, including the characteristic Badorf ware with rolled stamp. These occur only in VH6 and G2, which agrees perfectly with the conventional dating of the group to *circa* 780–880 (H. Steuer 1975: 107).

A grey-brown, tempered and medium- to hard-fired fabric was also found (Fig. 15). It occurs in all levels from VH1 upwards, apparently without any essential variation. The basal sherds are flat and carry traces of rotation-grooves, the rims signs of a ledge for a lid. Bands of incised grooves are also characteristic. The type, especially the rim section, has certain similarities with Medieval globular pots and one should in future take heed of the danger of confusion.

THE FUNCTION AND CHARACTER OF THE SITE

The character of the substantial culture deposits, and particularly the finds from them, clearly shows that, with the exception of the settlement layer at the bottom, we are not dealing with any common agrarian settlement. The craft production on the site had a character and range which far exceeds what an ordinary village could take on. The many imported objects similarly show that there has been lively trade on the site.

Most of the manufactured articles have a clearly luxurious character: glass beads, bronze jewels, amber beads, gaming pieces, etc. The glass goods render it quite possible to pursue the beadmaker's craft right from the imported raw material in the form of raw glass lumps and mosaic sticks to various fused, drawn glass claws and threads together with fully made glass beads of varied kinds (Fig. 16). Moulds, crucibles, furnace slag and various lumps of metal can be associated with bronzecasting. Great quantities of amber were also fou-

nd. Most pieces are unworked, but pieces with drilled holes and faceted sides show that some dressing took place here. Besides these crafts there is also detritus from combmaking and ironworking.

A very great quantity of the finds can be linked to particular craftwork, and the remains of individual crafts often lie in concentrated groups. Unfortunately the levelling layers and the dynamic activity on the site have frequently blurred the picture of the size and situation of the individual workplace areas. In three cases it has however proved possible to show delimited workplace floors in the form of clay layers, one with an associated wall ditch (Fig. 17). Alongside these may be considered the many hearths which overlie one another approximately in the middle of the main area.

The good conditions for observation in the light levelling layers between the workshop ensure that we cannot have overlooked remains of substantial constructions such as sunken posts. The general impression is therefore that the workshop were not of a permanent character but were protected by light and simple structures. In some cases the craftsmen may have sat and worked in the open. The major excavations of the 1970's gave the same indications (M. Bencard 1979: 118).

It is therefore reasonable to propose that the workplace layers may have been deposited in connection with certain regularly recurring market situations, where many people have been collected on the site. In this case, the earliest Ribe must have been a seasonal trading place, which does not however exclude the possibility that it existed in association with a permanent settlement and/or a major estate. The phenomenon of the division into areas being maintained through approximately a hundred years is best explained through the presence of some permanent authority, which must also have been able to ensure the peace of the marketplace and access to and from the site. It is also reasonable to conceive that trade and craft activities might have spawned a permanent settlement which gradually evolved into a true Viking-period town.

Ribe is situated where the north-south traffic on the land crosses a water route, the Ribe river, directly connected with the tidal sea. Adam of Bremen describes Ribe as encompassed by a flood, by which ships could steer to Frisia, England and Saxony (I. Skovgaard-Petersen 1981: 51). Although this is a source of the end of the 11th century, it certainly also describes the situa-

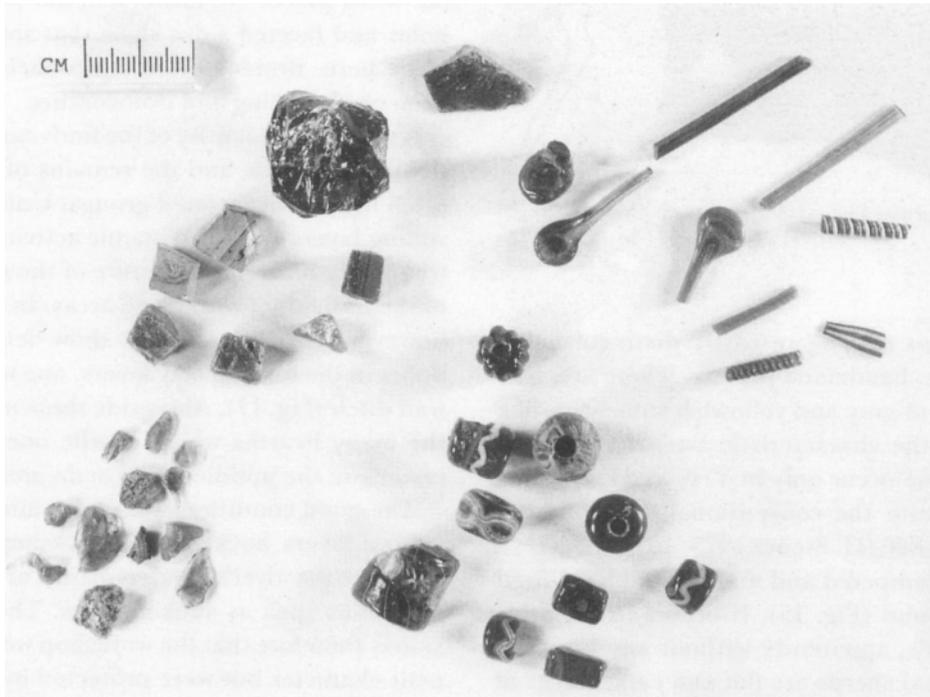


Fig. 16. Raw material, detritus, semi-manufactures, and finished products from the bead production at Nicolajgade 8. Photo by Rita Fredsgaard Nielsen.

tion of the earliest Ribe, a communications crossroad with international connections. The artefact material also reflects these southern contacts. From the Rhineland came glass beakers, pottery and basalt lava quernstones. From the same area we probably get the raw materials for the jewellers, such as raw glass for the bead-maker and bronze and precious metals for casting. On at least one crucible fragment traces of gold have certainly been identified.

The craftsmen seem to have produced their wares for the local market and not for the foreign merchants. Thus the bronzes belong to Scandinavian types. The beads are north-west European types but have local characteristics and are presumably not produced by craftsmen from the south. For whom the imported goods were meant we do not know. Some of the imported goods, especially the basalt quernstones, were traded further out in contemporary rural settlements of the region, but whether Ribe thus served as a transit point for the remainder of Scandinavia is as yet an open question.

The numerous *sceattas* found constitute the particular feature which best shows that Ribe is a most special site in the Scandinavian context. Adding in the *sceattas* from

the earlier excavations there are now 66 *sceattas* found in Ribe. The earlier *sceatt* finds have already given numismatists the occasion for a lively debate (K. Bendixen 1981, B. Malmer & K. Jonsson 1986 and D.M. Metcalf 1986). On the one side, Metcalf has suggested that the marked appearance of Wodan/monster *sceattas* could be explained through the striking of these in Ribe. This is rejected by Malmer and Jonsson who believe that the frequency of Wodan/monster *sceattas* is because this type is later than other *sceattas*. Coin loss in Ribe would then only have taken place after the other *sceatt*-types had gone out of use.

We will not disguise the fact the many of the arguments which have been brought into this discussion lie on the fringes of our particular expertise. However we cannot deny that the situation in Nicolajgade 8 supports Metcalf's case. It is remarkable that there are no instances of Porcupine *sceattas* in the lowest layers or together with the earliest deposits of Wodan/monster *sceattas*. If the *sceattas* found in Ribe came from Frisia one might expect that the currency reform of Pepin the Small in 755 would have a more marked influence here, or that at least some of the coins which replace the Frisian *sceattas* ought to appear. A better basis



Fig. 17. Nicolajgade 8. Clay floor during excavation. The floor continues beyond the eastern section where further examination was not possible. Photo by Lene B. Frandsen.

for the continuation of the discussion will undoubtedly result when the coin finds from 1986 are fully conserved, and the individual coins analyzed by Kirsten Bendixen.

Whether the king had coins struck in Ribe in the first half of the 8th century or not, a series of circumstances indicate that there must have been a central authority present. The tenement division shows that the trading place was a planned site from the first, and that it was possible to maintain the division through about a century. In this context it is reasonable to refer to two great and important constructions which were built in the same period, namely Danevirke, from 737, and the strategically important Kanhavekanal on Samsø from 726 (H.H. Andersen, H.J. Madsen & O. Voss 1976 and H.H. Andersen 1985). Could these be attributable to one and the same royal power?

Translated by John Hines

Lene B. Frandsen & Stig Jensen, *Den Antikvariske Samling*, Overdammen 12, DK-6760 Ribe.

NOTES

1. ASR journal no. 7. The excavation was led by Lene B. Frandsen with the assistance of the following students: Karen Magrethe Boe, Tine Engelund, Claus Feveile, Lene Lund and Ragna Stidsing, together with staff from *Den antikvariske Samling*. The project was carried through with resources from *Rigsantikvaren*. The excavation results were provisionally recorded in S. Jensen 1986.
2. Information kindly provided by Kirsten Bendixen.

REFERENCES

- ANDERSEN, H. H. 1985: Vandt sig hele Danmark. *Skalk* 1985, nr. 2.
- ANDERSEN, H.H., MADSEN, H.J. & VOSS, O. 1976: *Danevirke*. Jysk arkæologisk selskabs skrifter, bind XIII. København 1976.
- BENCARD, M. 1979: Wikingerzeitliches Handwerk in Ribe. *Acta Arch.* vol. 49, 1978. København.
- 1981: *Ribe excavations 1970–76*. Vol. 1. Esbjerg.
- BENDIXEN, K. 1981: Sceattas and other Coin Finds. *Ribe excavations 1970–76*. Ed. M. BENCARD.
- FRANSEN, L.B. & JENSEN, S. 1988: Hvor lå Ribe i Vikingetiden? *Kuml*, forthcoming.
- HÜBNER, W. 1959: *Die Keramik von Haithabu*. Neumünster.
- JENSEN, S. 1982: An East Jutland Occupation site from the Early Germanic Iron Age. *Journal of Danish Archaeology*, vol. 1. Odense.
- 1986: Det ældste Ribe- og vikingetidens begyndelse. *Femte tværfaglige vikingesymposium*. Aarhus Universitet.
- 1987: Et grubehus fra Darum. Bidrag til keramikudviklingen gennem 6. årh. e. Kr. f. *Kuml* 1987.
- LERCHE, G. & JENSEN, S. 1986: A note on Farming practice in the Viking Period: Sod Manure (Træk). *Tools and Tillage*, vol. V:2, 1985.
- KLINDT-JENSEN, O. & WILSON, D.M. 1965: *Vikingetidens kunst*. Nationalmuseet, København.
- MALMER, B. & JONSSON, K. 1986: Sceattas och den äldste nordiske myntningen. *Nordisk Nummismatisk Unions Medlemsblad* no. 4, maj 1986, p. 66–71. København.
- MEJDAL, V. 1983: Viking Age Layers from Ribe, Denmark. *Handbooks for Archaeologists*. No. 1. *Thermoluminescence Dating*. Strasbourg 1983.
- METCALF, D.M. 1986: Nyt om Sceatta af typen Wodan/Monster. *Nordisk Nummismatisk Unions Medlemsblad* no. 6, september 1986. København.
- ORTON, C. 1980: *Mathematics in Archaeology*. pp. 66. Cambridge.
- SKOUGAARD-PETERSEN, I. 1981: The written Sources. *Ribe Excavations 1970–76*. Ed. M. BENCARD. Vol. 1. p. 40. Esbjerg.
- STEUER, H. 1974: *Die Südsiedlung von Haithabu*. Neumünster.
- ØRSNES, M. 1966: *Form og Stil*. Nationalmuseets skrifter, arkæologisk historisk række XI. København.